

Imp Report the Second

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Giant Tracking
Office 37b
Proc. of the Med. & Mag. Soc.

Dear Mngr. Bart Brown,

Hi.

Yours,

the imp of Kabeous Kohg Grumpkin & Bolger

Ok, let us see, let us see, bumpty-ump-bump bum! where was I . . .

Ah, yes. I had told you about the abbey and then quoted Kabeous Kohg. Smashing. She said, if I remember correctly, something about a flesh golem? Hmm, I do not remember the exact words and in paraphrasing I run the risk of revealing information that was not already public, so I will cap the recap there and—I say! “Cap the recap”? I’d better put a cap on this; cap the capped recap, so to speak. Of course, then I’ll end up recapping the recap, but to recap the recap might accidentally reveal information not revealed in the recap itself, so I’d better cap the recapped recap and . . . this isn’t getting anywhere.

Anyway, the next public appearance (cap the recapped recap! What did I think I was saying?) was in the presence of a pair of kinder.

Remembering the hullabaloo the last time there was an article about an unfamiliar creature (I mean, small projectiles (hee hee!)), I will remind you that kinder (pron. kĭn’dĕr (pl. kĭn’dĕr), *not* kĭnd’er) are small furry folk that look kind of like yetis (as in “the abominable snowman”) the size of elves (a.k.a., pixie-kin). They tend to be unhealthily whimsical folk (for their own health, that is) but in every other way robust, almost indestructible. Kinder-speak is a notorious break-tooth tongue (idiom) and I have got to quit these silly explanations before I go batty (more batty, that is, than I already am—than I am already—something). If it doesn’t make sense, look it up in a good adventurers’ lexicon.

As I said, we met up with a couple kinder. I heard them before I actually caught sight of them and, being an imp myself, I understood what they were saying, so I’ll offer a translation.

“Hey, look at that! Missy Kohg herself! If we put some breath in it we can catch up with her. Come on!”

“Uh, master?” I said to gain my master’s attention.

“Yes, imp?”

“We’re being chased by kinder.”

“Oh, great,” she groaned. “That’s just what I needed. Can we twinkle?”

“No use. They called you by name just now.” I decided

not to mention by *what* name; no need to add wrath to annoyance.

My master began to respond, but was interrupted by a sudden “Eee-yaaa Whoopee!” and the entrance of the kinder.

The larger of the two kinder ran three quick circles around us and continued to holler while the smaller one jumped up onto my master and began scrambling up her back. With a single smooth motion my master grabbed the smaller one by the leg and flung it with considerable force at the larger. As they both went sprawling my master whipped out her sword and chopped them neatly in quarters with three quick strokes. There was no blood on her blade as she sheathed it again, and the pieces of the kinder were rapidly reassembling themselves as she walked on.

“The problem with kinder,” observed my master philosophically, “is that even though they are miraculously robust, they aren’t good for anything. See? They haven’t even got strength to walk, and already they are jabbering like so many mating wildebeest.”

“They’re saying it tickles—”

“I don’t care what they are saying.”

“—almost as much as the golems tickled last week.”

“Golems?”

“Last week. Yes.”

“Last week? But it’s been six months since these tracks were . . .” She trailed off and walked in silence for a bit. “Imp!”

“Yes, master?”

“Ask the kinder whether they golems were brass or bronze.”

“Should I shout to them, or go back, or wait for them to come?”

“Eh, alright.” My master spun around and pointed to the kinder, giving a word of command at the same time. There was a brief pause, then the mostly-reconstructed kinder appeared on the ground in front of us.

Now, kinder are pretty particular people, and I knew what I needed to do if I wanted a straight answer.

“Greetings, kinder-folk,” I said in kinderspeak. “I, the nameless imp of Kabeous Kohg, give you my regards. I would relay hers as well, but I think she has already done so. Is there any improvements I could suggest to her?”

“Yeh,” said the larger kinder. “Tell her she’s a gook, and tell her Sparky says so.”

I turned to my master and said, with a respectful bow, “Sparky says you are a gook.” (Lest you think me an idiot for actually relaying this, I should point out that kinder understand most languages, even though they only

speak kinder-speak). I then turned back to the kinder and waited expectantly.

“And tell her Drummer says she doesn’t act her gender,” the shorter one added. “That’s a compliment, by the way.”

“Drummer wishes to compliment your masculine conduct.” Then, to the kinder, “Kabeous Kohg wishes to know of what material the latest golems you encountered were made.”

“Material?” Sparky sounded thoughtful. “Hey, Drummer! Remember that flannel one we met last year?”

“Smelled like old sardines on the inside,” Drummer observed with a frown.

“Yeh. That brass one last week didn’t smell like anything.”

“Most of them don’t, Sparky. Do you know why?”

“Uh, because they’re well aired?”

“Because they don’t have noses!”

I mastered my laughter before they did and managed to relate to my master that the last golem was brass while they were still chortling freely.

“Have there been other golems about lately?” she asked.

“Oh, yes. Swarms of them,” Sparky observed solemnly.

“At least a dozen,” Drummer added.

“Yes, twelve or fourteen this week alone,” Sparky said.

“Boring conversationalists, them golems,” Drummer observed. “You are smart to go the opposite direction.”

I duly translated these comments to my master, after which she began to grill them with questions. It quickly became apparent that over the past several weeks there had been a vast army of golem amassing in the Marzetti marshes. The kinder seemed to believe they intended to attack Gött, though why more than two or three would be needed for such an attack was more than they could see.

Once this was fully explained (and it took some time for it all to come out) my master seemed somewhat peeved.

“Sminoff Case is a fool!” she snapped. “Imp, how far to Gött?”

“Seven and a quarter by the rule, plus change.”

My master spat in disgust, then said to the kinder, “Care to join us? You might be interested in what goes on next.” This statement caught me so off guard that I actually gave outward signs of my surprise.

“Look at the imp startle, Sparky! Let’s not go.”

“Naw, she’s just trying to scare us off, Drummer. Let’s go.”

“You’re boss today,” replied Drummer congenially.

And so it was that a few moments later the four of us found ourselves standing in a smoldering crater that

was slowly refilling with swamp water, tingling with the residual magic that accompanies travel by *portalic strand*. Not a hundred yards in front of us lay the gate of Gött and a dozen feet beyond that the ripped section of wall that once contained it. A huge stone golem was in the process of tearing apart the guard tower just beyond the gate and several other golems were between us and the town, making toward the village as fast as their animated shambles of legs would take them.

There is a reason my master is one of the most famous bounty hunters in the world. With a cryptic battle cry (“Eat more fuzzy cheeses!” if I remember correctly) she charged the nearest group of golems and began to reduce them to the heaps of rubbish they were animated from. I have never met anyone else who could take on even a single golem and win; my master laid waste to all thirty-seven in a little over an hour.

The stone golem that led the attack was the most enjoyable to watch. It was about the size of a large elephant and made of a single well-carved piece of limestone. Where the rest of the golems had found themselves blown to bits within a few minutes of meeting my master, this one didn’t even react to the first dozen blows and incantations. It was remarkably limber and resourceful, leaping about like a trained pugilist and throwing chunks of masonry as often as it threw punches.

However, no matter how quickly it moved, my master was always quicker, dancing around it, tumbling between its legs, leaping over its head; and always from her hands she spun lazer, tying and entangling it in the glowing strands until looked to be made of luminescent marble. Once the golem was fully encased in lazer my master gave a word of might and, grabbing the golem by its foot, swung it over her head and slammed it against the ground. There was a deafening explosion as the entire northeast quarter of Gött was reduced to rubble.

For a full minute there was dead silence. The inhabitants of Gött who had gathered to witness the battle were lying in smoking heaps around the perimeter of the destruction. The wiser inhabitants who had moved away from, not toward, the conflict were too far away to be heard. The kinder had been completely detonated in the explosion; it would be at least a full day before they would be able to speak again. Only myself and a few other souls who had witnessed the battle from a truly safe distance remained standing, and none of us felt inclined to say anything.

As the smoke and dust thinned and drifted away we saw, standing erect in the center of the destruction, my master, smiling her broadest smile. As soon as I saw her I ran to meet her.

“That,” she said with emphasis, “was the best sport I’ve had in years. Best since Gary Bolter and the duster incident, in fact.

“Now be a good imp and go peel those poor villagers. They’ve had more lazer than is good for them.” As she said this she handed me one of SIGS’ new eight-lazer lazer eggs (the model with three separate removable dual-action storage capsules).

As I went to work peeling the lazer out of the people in the ruins my master started sorting through the bits of golem. She enlisted some of the townsfolk in the search and, by the time I had the crowd sufficiently peeled to sit up and move about she had gathered a full score of golem hearts.

“Imp,” she said to me as I came to join her in the search, “It’s been a topping day. With a little luck we can find all three dozen hearts before sundown (I’m afraid the most important one is totally destroyed) and find out what the golems were really about. ‘Tracking down a giant’¹ indeed!”

It seems we had used up all our luck already—it took us three full days before we had found the rest of the hearts. In that time we stayed in Gött, which proved a far more hospitable place this time than it had on our last visit just a few weeks before. Amazing what being rescued from an almost certain doom will do to people’s attitudes! However, nothing of interest was discussed in public while we were there.

Sparky and Drummer, by the way, did reform and prattle about for a bit, but quickly grew bored and left.

My task, as I have set it out for myself, is as an annalist, not an analyst. Further, my annals are restricted to those acts of my master performed with third party witnesses. Please bear that in mind as I relate the next sequence of events, and know that I am not leaving out any witnessed acts of which I am aware.

My master walked into a barren, dungeon-like room occupied by a rock troll, a small gray cat, and a plump man in bib overalls. They all seemed a trifle surprised to see her come in, but only a trifle surprised.

My master addressed the cat. “Pardon me for not knocking, Grumpkin, but I didn’t want to bother Bolger.”

“Very thoughtful of you,” said the man.

Ignoring him, my master continued to address the cat. “I am planning to make a trip into Maliutka Malkh’s ter-

ritory. I understand a large number of golems have been created there and then sent to attack a small, relatively obscure town just this week.”

“Do you know who made the golems?” asked the man again.

“I don’t. Most of them looked to be rather slipshod craftsmanship; I managed to literally dispel many of them. There was one that was of much better, more careful design, though, a large agile stone golem with all the requisite charms and guards.” Again, she was addressing the cat.

“That would be part of Maliutka’s retinue, then,” stated the man. “You knew she had taken to golems lately?”

“I did not. Is she in the building or the buying mode?”

“Building, only, and mostly based on her own designs. Maliutka is too fond of herself to do anything else.”

“Does she sell them?”

“I am not informed, but I find it difficult to believe she would. . . . Why, what was in the city they attacked?” Still the man was speaking, though my master still spoke only to the cat.

“Nothing. At least, nothing anymore. Last summer there was a rather strange sort of mute giant living there, but that’s been six months.

“When did Malkh start making golems?”

“You’re a witch, and you’re asking a cat when a dragon *started* doing something?”

My master gave a noncommittal grunt here and then started to walk around the perimeter of the room. The threesome in the middle turned so they always faced her, but took no other action. After some time, my master stopped her circling and addressed the cat once more.

“I think I still need to visit Malkh. May I borrow Fenderhorn for the trip?”

“I’d need a down payment and collateral, like usual,” replied the man.

“I am prepared to give *Parbey Poe’s Shower* and leave my imp as collateral.”

“Your imp, eh? That will work, but I am afraid P.P.S. isn’t worth the time. How about two castings of *Frisky Chest* instead?”

“Two?”

“You are going to see Maliutka, after all.”

“Oh, very well.”

With that it was settled. My master went off with the troll and I remained with the cat and the man. I am not allowed to write anything that has happened to me here, but have received permission to write and send this letter to the *Proceedings*. My master should be back soon, I hope, but until she returns, I must leave you.

¹see vol. 225 p. 97 — ED.