

# 《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

## 46 Granite hunt 3

Granites only had basic consciousness and didn't have particularly clever thoughts; most of their life was learning what was good and what was bad for them. They would start as pebbles with a drop of lifegem, cut off voluntarily by an older Granite. After that, they would roll around farther until they found a "good spot" and were far enough from other Granites. Finally, they would make their lifegem flow inside them and toward the outside, agglomerating more soil and rocks to grow and refine into more lifegem to circulate.

As protectors of the mountains, they were territorial creatures, and only the older ones would have a true mind of their own to learn by other means than instinct. Elder granites, that could easily be mistaken for whole cliffs, were often able to speak and use magic too.

The one Oakbud copied could be considered a regular adult member of the species, old enough to get to a big enough size and meet humans, beasts, spirits and the like through its life; not old enough however, to have awoken a true consciousness. When it saw Oakbud, the Granite knew that this one was "good" instinctively, so he was friendly to the little spirit. To be fair, when it came crashing after Thani and the drakes' fight, he would have killed whichever was left for breaking the mountain.

With no concept of self, the Granite took the golem for another looking for a fight over the territory and his forest meadow. The golem core was made exquisitely, even imitating the red-ish tone of the lifegem behind the holes serving as eye-sockets. Emitting a growl from source unknown, the Granite stood up completely and bulked its arms in a threat display. Seeing no reaction from its opponent, he put Oakbud down as delicately as it could before taking heavy steps forward; the golem finally started moving in response, obeying the hesitating Oakbud's commands.

The two magical constructs threw themselves at each other without restraint, shaking the earth in a brutal clash. The fight looked like and sounded like an avalanche, rock grating against rock and shrapnel flying everywhere; the Granite's innate magic was demonstrated beautifully, very similar to how Thani healed. Each piece of rock that fell from it, like the pebbles when it opened its "eyes", were rolling back towards his legs and reattaching themselves to the body. Oakbud's golem was a copy of the Granite, but that didn't mean it could copy magic too; the construct only had its own strength and Oakbud's instructions to fight with.

Punch for punch, ram for ram, throw for throw. The upwards avalanche of debris was

seemingly endless, the two creatures being relatively on par with each other. The meadow had lost its beauty, with most of its trees broken, and even the pond a bit farther was being filled with soil and gravel thrown over. Oakbud had to give his all repairing his creation as time passed, because it couldn't sustain by itself. He knew help wouldn't come, as Alice and Thani were unable to harm the creature.

The worst was that the stalemate couldn't be broken with time either. Oakbud's magic reserves were seemingly endless, and the Granite was only benefitting from its own inborn capacities without fatigue. Thinking that the sun was beginning to come down and that the girls wouldn't want to spend the night without a camp, the little spirit finally decided to step up himself to reinforce his golem. After another clash that finished levelling a part of the clearing, he made the golem take a step back, enough time for him to join it and start harassing the Granite with his magic. The aim was to give a strong enough blow to the "head" where lifegem flowed, thing he had been unable to do until now.

A powerful roar, full of bloodlust, echoed across the mountain flank, sending every creature that hadn't fled the vicinity yet scrambling in fear. Alice had shivers run down her spine, and Thani frowned; she understood completely what happened before: the Granite was enraged when she fought it, but it hadn't been serious either. The step back was taken as a sign of victory, and the beast was releasing all his pent-up frustration before going in for the finishing blow, eyes billowing magical radiance.

Left to itself for a second, the golem wasn't fast enough to parry the unstoppable blow; the core inside of it was rattled, and an arm began to melt. If Oakbud imitated the Granite perfectly and put the core in the head, it would have been destroyed right then. Luckily, it was only an imitation of lifegem at this place, and the true core was right in the centre of the trunk. The Granite prepared to smash open the golem's head for good, ready for the rush of plundering the lifegem of one of its brethren, only to be stopped by plants twining around its lifted arm.

Then, the Granite locked eyes with Oakbud on the fallen golem's shoulder and froze for a second. It was enough for the golem to stand back up and for more vines to bind its body. Now wasn't the time to think too much though, and now the golem was the one with an advantage over its slowed down foe.

It seemed like the creature had slowed, but not only because of the vines. It wasn't as aggressive either, even taking a step back sometimes. Disturbed by Oakbud's magic, the Granite's punches couldn't match the golem's anymore. However, it had started dodging and deviating some of the hits to compensate, buying more time. But in the end, this new fighting style wasn't enough to even the odds again, and the Granite ended up pinned down under the golem's equally massive body after another body

slam. When the golem smashed the Granite's head for the last time, Oakbud crossed its gaze again and felt its last emotions; pain, and sadness. It seemed that somewhere during the fight, it had attained a higher measure of consciousness.

The Granite had fallen apart, now only a pile of ordinary rocks dropped on the ground; lifegem was leaking between the ones that made up its head, losing its deep red lustre a bit more each second.

"That was incredible... I'm glad I didn't insist on fighting that monster. Armour or not, I'd have ended up as meat paste, and there's no way I can heal from that." Thani and Alice had come closer as the fight continued, because the beast's attention was fully riveted onto its rival. They managed to observe the majority of the fight, and the conclusion was not a happy one for Thani : being a God-candidate and possessing divinity was definitely not a free-pass in life, and countless beings were still stronger than that; some, just by virtue of their natural endowments. Alice was just watching with awe, perfectly aware that taking the fight as anything else but a show would result in her dying in one blow.

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There was a saying in Ocean's Guard, that was seemingly there from its inception. No one knew who brought it, no one knew who continued it; people simply used it to warn themselves and others of Granites. It was simple, barely a few words.

The mountain has eyes.

People who knew the habits of Granite would know what that meant, but those who tried to learn had all died the same death, crushed to paste. Sometimes, when wandering the mountains, you could meet plenty of little Granites, or some adolescent ones, and more sparsely adult ones. Elder Granites were excessively strong and not to be approached by humans. This territorial dynamic was what created "empty zones" on the peaks. But towards the middle of the mountain range, one of the peaks had his own special name: Peak of Repose.

A massive gust of wind came from the ocean and flayed the mountainous coast, infiltrating the land between the high peaks, before flowing back and dragging ice shards on the way. The tall cliff of Rest trembled, and ice and rock fell from it again. The previous avalanche had left no trace, the very same rocks having come back into place. The rocky wall, brownish and time-worn, receded up and into the higher wall of the mountain. This time however, the same happened roughly a kilometre on the side, exposing another surface, more polished and almost white. Underneath the layer of pale rock, if one looked closely, they could see thin red lines and rivulets of flowing magic.

The Eyes of the Mountain weren't only a saying. It was a Granite. That was the reason no other lived on or came close to the Peak of Repose. The very Granite who felt Jack's time stopping spell was able to recognise the three little troublemakers who killed one of his descendants this time. For anything else, he wouldn't have lifted a pebble, but those three were embroiled in divine affairs. Choosing to act or not could change the future. The mountain-sized Granite finally made up its mind: he had been silent for too long, and as the Ancestor of his race it was time to act. He would teach them a lesson; one they would have no choice but to accept.