

Hunter 235

Chapter 235: Golden Mushroom

One can have too much of a good thing. Something that would usually be highly beneficial could become unstable and even destructive in too large amounts or too high a concentration. Life energy was no exception.

The Deepdwellers were infused with so much life their entire bodies couldn't take it anymore, and all had to be released. This resulted in the explosion that infused everything caught in it with so much life it died – only to rise again.

The massive area infected by the explosion suddenly sprung to life once more, with massive plants and mushrooms growing rapidly. The only ones that didn't rise were the Deepdwellers, who had been the cause of the explosion. Their lives had been fuel for growth, as the life energy had to come from somewhere."

Yet this growth would only be temporary. A single cycle before the innate life energy in the entire area was used up, and it would take years for it to return to a stable state once more. It was a sacrifice the Fungalmancers had been willing to make to strike down the invader.

But... once more, they had been under a severe misunderstanding.

The suicide attack was undoubtedly powerful and could kill most early D-grades without any issues. At a minimum, it would leave them crippled from the overflow of life energy and make their own bodies turn against them. An influx of too much vital energy was incredibly dangerous, as Jake had already experienced before during the Challenge Dungeon when he consumed his amalgamation. The energy back then had even been neutral and not actively seeking to harm with. This time he was struck with life mana actively seeking to end him, but such a thing was easier said than done.

In the middle of the huge area that was currently experiencing explosive growth, a single area stood unaffected.

A single figure was kneeling on the ground, covered in dark green scales. Blood flowed from the tiny gaps between the scales as Jake gritted his teeth and stood up. A pink-purple current ran across his body as any small annoying growths were instantly eliminated.

More noteworthy was the blade sticking out of his chest. The scimitar glowed in an almost cheerful red light as it drank the foreign life energy from its owner. Standing up, Jake observed the area in his sphere as he noted the peculiar effects of the explosion.

“Should have learned to focus the effect a bit more,” he chuckled, shaking his head. See, this was why big fancy explosions weren’t always the best way to go. So much life energy is wasted by simply soaking into the ground and leading to growth instead of harming Jake.

Now, if one really wanted the best effect of big explosions, the best way would be to make stuff explode from within the target. Jake was certain the King would agree. This entire ordeal was actually a bit reminiscent of back then. It even included the entire contaminated area and stuff like that, except for one big difference – the explosion back then had been even more powerful. How the fuck the King had survived it to keep fighting was a testament to his durability.

Jake had only survived back then because his energy was the source of the explosion, and all he was hit by was the impact and nothing more. That was also after the vast majority had been focused within the King, and the energy back then was also far more focused in the immediate area around the King. He survived the explosion this time because he was simply too durable for such a thing to take him down.

Between his arcane barrier, Scales of the Malefic Viper, and his subsequent application of arcane mana to destroy any mana getting too close, he eliminated the vast majority of energy. What he failed to stop, he had the Scimitar of Cursed Hunger absorb. Granted, stabbing yourself in the gut to absorb overflowing life energy wasn't the optimal choice, but it was better than dealing with tumors.

Jake hadn't handled the fight as well as he could, but he believed it was still a valuable experience in the long run. He had just started the dungeon, so learning what enemies he would meet were capable of was beneficial. Also, it was a new experience for sure. While Jake had tried to be supercharged with life energy before, it had never been by a foreign antagonistic type that held clear intent to kill him.

Now, Jake only had one issue remaining... those fungal-loving fuckers hiding below.

"Either you come up... or I make you come up," Jake said.

Could he ignore them and lose nearly nothing? Sure, he could. But he wouldn't. Justice had to be carried out, after all.

Jake re-summoned his wings – they had been destroyed in the explosion earlier, as he couldn't adequately protect them – and took to the air. On his way up, he summoned his bow. He didn't fly up very high to keep both Fungalmancers within his sphere.

They were just sitting down there, 100 meters below the ground. Neither of them had even tried to attack, making Jake wonder if they were even able to. Maybe they could no longer see him? Well, they could never see him, but they could still detect him somehow.

Jake summoned an explosive arcane arrow and nocked it. He didn't bother using Powershot but just shot it down and watched it explode. It made a big hole, and a moment later, another arrow fell, followed by another, and this continued as Jake rapid-fired arrows of pure destruction.

Like a jackhammer - or Jakehammer if you will - of arcane destruction, he dug. The two Fungalmancers were still unmoving below. The ground was hard due to mana and the earth-affinity mana within, making it even more dense and solid, but he would be able to dig all the way down with enough time.

When he was 70 meters down, one of them finally reacted, but not as Jake expected. The one who had entered the ground first began coming up towards the surface in a very unexpected and 100% moronic move. Unless it was forced to come up for some reason?

Either way... it was in for a bad time. Jake aimed his bow, and before the head even had a chance to pop up, it was hit by an explosion of arcane mana. He heard it scream and struggle. It tried to summon vines, but it failed as the ground it was on was no longer under its control.

It turns out that when you use half your mana pool to explode an area with arcane mana, it left a lasting effect. Who would have known? The Fungalmancer sure knew now as it failed to properly do anything before its life was ended.

You have slain [Deepdweller Fungalmancer – lvl 125] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

Jake didn't do much after that but just waited patiently. After a bit, the last Fungalmancer also began coming up, making him now confident that the hiding skill had a duration of sorts. Maybe it was even dungeon-imposed not to have enemies just hide below ground forever. Either way, the Fungalmancer got absolutely slaughtered once it showed its ugly mushroom-filled head above ground

You have slain [Deepdweller Fungalmancer – lvl 134] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

With both dead, Jake went to the one place still standing after the green explosion – the large tent the Fungalmancers had come from. Well, the tent wasn't really there anymore, but a smashed-together bubble of rubble remained, making it obvious some kind of barrier existed. The mushroom he had seen them sit and meditate around was still in there.

Jake flew down and landed in front of it. With a wave of his hand, he blew away all the debris and saw a green barrier surround the mushroom. As he didn't feel any sense of danger, he walked closer and found that he could walk through it with no problems.

The barrier was only just a few meters in diameter and was created to protect the mushroom - without a doubt created by the Fungalmancers. Jake used Identify on the mushroom to see what all the fuss was about.

[Infused Golden Mushroom (Unique)] – A golden mushroom grown in the unique environment of the Undergrowth. This mushroom contains energies cultivated over a long period by Fungalmancers of the Undergrowth with the hope of gaining access to the Heart of the Undergrowth. Has been further infused with the life energy released from the Deepdwellers that inhabited the village build to guard it. Collect Golden Mushrooms to open up the Heart of the Undergrowth. WARNING: Golden Mushrooms cannot leave the dungeon. If the dungeon is left with any mushrooms, they will appear at the entrance upon re-entry.

Definitely a quest item, Jake thought as he promptly picked it up and threw it in his spatial storage. It was only the size of his palm, which meant it had only looked all the more ridiculous that the Fungalmancers sat meditating around it.

The item instantly gave him a lot of context to the Undergrowth. First of all, the Heart of the Undergrowth could be opened, yet Jake needed only to touch it to complete the dungeon. What did this mean? That's right, bonus objective for better rewards.

Collecting mushrooms was clearly an important aspect of the dungeon. It even included the fact that one couldn't take the mushrooms out of the dungeon. The fact that you wouldn't lose them permanently meant that one required a specific amount. Jake also assumed there was a limited amount and that you needed as many as possible to open the Heart.

That his first mushroom was Infused wasn't something expected, but he hoped it was a good thing. It had to be. Jake loved when his own stupid recklessness was rewarded - that damn system and its repeated enabling of unhealthy behavior. Sometimes curiosity truly didn't kill the cat but gave it a pleasant surprise instead.

With one mushroom in the bag, Jake began to look for his next target. He hadn't even gained a level yet, but then again, he'd only been in the dungeon for less than an hour. Only the four Fungalmancers and three Deepdwellers had given any experience due to the "downside" of his class.

Jake traveled further into the dungeon, running in a zig-zag pattern to not miss anything. Luckily the dungeon was relatively narrow, but he did notice it opening up more and more. In the beginning, it only had a width of 10 kilometers, but after approximately 30 kilometers it now had a width of around 12. It was a small expansion, but it was there.

Through his exploration, he gathered a bunch of herbs, primarily mushrooms. While he did save some of them, he chose to eat the majority due to something the Golden Mushroom had said – unique environment. Maybe it was just flavor text, but Jake wanted to see if he could somehow glance at what this uniqueness was about by learning from the herbs that inhabited it.

After half an hour and around 50 kilometers total into the Undergrowth, he discovered the next point of interest. This time it wasn't a village but instead, what Jake could only describe as a hunting party... as for what they were hunting? The first instance of Jake seeing any creature that wasn't some variant of Deepdweller.

It was an around 7 meters tall hulking monster with slightly humanoid features. It had massive muscles and long hairs covering parts of its body, with a disproportionally large head with an even larger nose. It carried a massive club that looked to be made of wood and walked on two legs. Jake didn't even really need Identify to know what it was.

That's a troll.

[Undergrowth Cave Troll – lvl 149]

It was a troll.

The Cave Troll – true to its namesake – stood in front of a cave, roaring at a party of around fifty Deepdwellers and two Fungalmancers. The Fungalmancers were level 131 and 135, respectively, and the Deepdwellers were around the same levels as those in the village. Only a handful were above 115, the highest one at 119.

Jake decided to just keep his distance, for now, making use of Expert Stealth to stay hidden. He noticed that the Cave Troll didn't want to leave its cave, while the Deepdwellers stayed back and made noises back in response. Neither party looked like they wanted to attack, and Jake could easily guess why.

He could feel that the troll was far stronger than the Deepdwellers. In a fight, it would no doubt be able to crush the other side effortlessly, but it would have to leave the entrance to its cave. Jake assumed that the troll was guarding the cave because something valuable was in there it didn't want to be stolen – like a Golden Mushroom.

Meanwhile, the Deepdwellers wanted to wait for assistance. Jake guessed the villages only got larger and stronger further into the dungeon, so these Deepdwellers had to have more powerful fighters in their midst.

Jake considered if he should just get the party started but decided to wait...

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It took nearly half an hour before anything happened. How the hell they could just stand there screaming at each other for half an hour straight was insane, and Jake was this close to just blowing up a Fungalmancer more than once.

Anyway, a small group of Deepdwellers came, and Jake saw something surprising.

One Deepdweller walked ahead of the rest, and the two Fungalmancers bowed in respect when it showed up. Why they did so was obvious based on the aura it gave off, and Identify confirmed this was no normal Deepdweller.

[Deepdweller Warlord – lvl 146]

The Warlord was wearing some kind of armor that looked to be made of bones. It carried a weapon that looked like a halberd, with a wooden handle and body with a crystalline edge. It looked almost to be made of diamond. Size-wise it looked just like all the other Deepdwellers.

It had arrived with a small entourage of five other Deepdwellers. They also all wore bone armor and carried more ornate-looking wooden spears compared to those the normal Deepdwellers used. Their levels were also a good deal above anything that wasn't a Fungalmancer.

[Deepdweller Warrior – lvl 137]

[Deepdweller Warrior – lvl 134]

[Deepdweller Warrior – lvl 136]

[Deepdweller Warrior – lvl 133]

[Deepdweller Warrior – lvl 136]

Jake still sat in hiding as he saw the Warlord make some loud noises to its brethren, and the troll responded by screaming back at them. The battle was about to begin, and Jake just couldn't wait to butt in and fuck shit up for all parties involved. Would it be a bit dickish? Oh, for sure, but none of these opponents deserved mercy, and he was morally in the right.

The troll defended a mushroom: Bad guy.

The Deepdwellers practically worshipped mushrooms: Even badder guys.

Jake hated mushrooms: Good guy.

It was just math.