

Hunter 237

Chapter 237: The Paragon Option

Jake guessed he had to go get the Golden Mushroom at some point, but quite frankly, it just made everything easier for him currently. Jake just had to shoot in the general direction of the mushroom, and he was sure to hit several targets at once when his arrow went boom.

He had also inadvertently made the troll mad now, properly drawing the lines between the three competing factions. Jake called it competing, but his contributions as a faction were just bombarding them from several kilometers away with arcane death.

Half of the warriors were dead by now, the troll seemed not to heal as fast as before, and the Warlord was still nowhere to be seen after it had been blasted away. So Jake switched his focus to the Fungalmancers to take those down.

One of them tried to avoid Jake by sinking into the ground, but that turned out to be a very bad idea. The troll stomped on the ground, and a block of earth emerged – the Fungalmancer within. With a mighty swing, the entire block was smashed apart, sending rock, soil, blood, guts, and body parts of the Fungalmancer flying.

Right after, another Fungalmancer fell to a barrage of exploding arrows. The third and final one tried to get away but was hit in the leg by an arrow and a club from a troll right after. With no more Fungalmancers, the regular Deepdwellers seemed almost lost. The warriors tried to rally them, but panic had truly taken hold by now.

It all looked to be well and truly over for the Deepdwellers – until their true leader reappeared.

The Warlord walked through the air, blood dripping from a nasty hole in its chest, and most of its bone armor was broken. It had let go of the Golden Mushroom to keep hold of its halberd, which was glowing as intently as before. It sniffed the air and seemed to get a good grasp of the entire battlefield. It even slightly turned towards Jake, once more making it clear it was aware of his exact position.

Jake expected the Warlord to attack either him or the troll, but instead, it headed into the midst of the surviving regular Deepdwellers. For a moment, it looked hesitant, and then it did something Jake hadn't seen coming at all.

It took the halberd, flipped it 180 degrees, and stabbed itself in the chest.

That was the moment Jake's brain made a connection. Crystalline halberd... consuming crystal to hulk out... if that halberd was like those crystals...

Jake felt like a gust of wind appeared behind him, blowing towards the Warlord. He knew it wasn't actual wind but the movement of the mana in the atmosphere. All of the life-affinity mana began being sucked towards the Warlord like it was it a black hole.

The body of the Warlord began glowing green, and the many Deepdwellers ran closer. The Cave Troll tried to make use of the opening to smash the Warlord, but all the remaining warriors got in the troll's way, risking their own lives.

As for Jake? Jake sat back to see what it was doing.

This was when he remembered the Golden Mushroom and saw that one of the Deepdwellers had it – one that was running straight towards the Warlord.

The Warlord began mutating at a rapid pace, but unlike the others that had done so, it didn't just affect itself. Instead, the green aura around it made all the other Deepdwellers also begin to mutate and glow green. Jake at first thought it was some kind of area of effect of the crystal to make them all stronger but was quickly proven wrong.

Once a Deepweller was sufficiently mutated, it ran towards the Warlord – ran straight into it. Literally. The growing Warlord absorbed the Deepweller entirely, only adding body mass to its grotesque form.

It was all an extremely bizarre and unsettling sight. The troll seemed to agree as it tried to get closer to smash the Warlord again, but a warrior chose to go on a full-on suicide attack to make the troll stop. It jumped straight into the troll to tackle it as its spear glowed a deep green color. It succeeded in stopping the troll, but in return, it got grabbed and had its entire head bitten off by the troll. It turns out trolls have quite the teeth too.

In the end, the Warlord absorbed over 30 Deepdwellers, and Jake thought it was done until one final Deepweller chose to join the flesh collective – the one carrying the Golden Mushroom.

The moment it got absorbed, it was as if a pulse went through the entire now nearly 10-meter tall Warlord. Golden veins spread through its body, pulsing with life energy. Jake was a bit shocked that it chose to absorb it, and he feared the mushroom was now gone for good... he could only hope it was still obtainable after the Warlord died.

Heck, maybe this was the key to getting it infused? Because he sure was doing this on hard-mode now.

"ROAR!" The troll smashed the final warrior to death with its club, leaving only three living beings in the battle - Cave Troll vs. Mega-Mutated Warlord vs. Jake.

Jake did feel a bit inferior in the size department – no, not there – as he was battling two hulking monsters, both several times larger than he was.

He also discovered that he was vastly different in another area. The two forgetful monsters charged into each other as if they had completely forgotten the very deadly hunter not far away. Thus, it appeared that while the mutation made the Warlord a lot stronger, it also wholly ruined its mind.

On the other hand, Jake was a smart boy as he decided to do the most brilliant thing – kill the weakest enemy first to fight the stronger one on one. As for which one of them was weaker?

The troll was lifted up and smashed into the ground by the large grotesque hands of the Warlord. It was smashed up and down as the earth quaked and split apart. The troll summoned a few pillars of stone that impaled the Warlord, but it barely made the massive monster flinch.

Earth spikes kept shooting up as the troll tried to strike back with its club but found itself restrained. It roared again in anger, sending out a shockwave that momentarily made the Warlord stumble. Just long enough for the troll to swing its club into the midsection of the Warlord.

Blood and flesh flew everywhere, as several tons of body mass was smashed off the Warlord, yet it seemed to barely mind as new tumors grew and replaced the now-missing flesh. The troll swung again, blasting off even more meat. It tried to go for a third swing but was punched in the head, making it fly back and impact the wall next to its cave.

The troll stood up, heaving for breath. If the fight had been equal from the start, the troll would have likely beaten the large flesh abomination Warlord – even after all the boosts from consuming its comrade and the Golden Mushroom. But as it was, the troll was spent.

It had taken so many wounds already. Poison from all the spears and all the magic from the Fungalmancers still slowly drained away at its life energy. Sickly green spots covered its body, and many of the wounds it had just received festered as they were infected with fungal spores.

The Warlord struck it again, making it tumble to the side. Jake saw it roar and reach out towards the chest of the Warlord but was just punched again. It tried to make another scream, but it couldn't release any more sonic blasts, so it tried crawling back into its cave. The Warlord smashed the upper parts of the cave, making it fall off and revealing what was within the cave.

Jake had been waiting for his opportunity to strike the troll and finish it off as he saw something he hadn't expected.

Two small figures lay within the cave, in an area where the mushroom looked to have been. Both were bloody and injured but not dead as far as Jake could tell. A sinking feeling appeared in his stomach as he used Identify on them.

[Juvenile Cave Troll – lvl 28]

[Juvenile Cave Troll – lvl 31]

They were injured and unmoving as the troll crawled up to them and tried to cover them with its body. The Warlord walked into the cave to finish the job as-

It froze. A gaze it had felt before penetrated into its soul as the entire monstrosity of flesh quivered. It couldn't move for over a second and couldn't do anything either as it was struck by an arrow from a fully charged Arcane Powershot – one that had been prepared for the troll originally.

The Warlord had a hole blown straight through it, arcane energy burning into its flesh, as well as plenty of necrotic energy devouring its vitality. Yet it was insistent on finishing off the troll, seemingly not caring about the damage it took.

This turned out to be an awful decision by it.

Another three arrows struck it from behind, all of them exploding and blasting off large parts, followed by another Powershot that tore an arm off. The Warlord was stupid now, but it had noticed... the source of the attacks was coming closer. And fast.

It still tried – and failed – to end the troll before what would be its doom arrived.

A new impact hit it from behind, but this time it was no arrow. Instead, it was a human with wings that stabbed two swords into its large back, followed by a web of arcane string that wrapped around it.

"Fuck off," Jake said as he pulled and threw the entire monstrosity of cancerous growths out of the cave. His entire body burned with energy as he really didn't feel like holding anything back – Limit Break active at 20%.

When Jake saw the two small trolls and the big troll move to defend them, something just flipped in his mind, and his body moved. He knew he was probably a fucking hypocrite and had flawed as hell logic, but when he saw what the troll did, he chose to help it.

For the Cave Troll, the mushroom had been a natural treasure to help what he assumed was its children. Jake couldn't fault it for that, as it just wanted to keep assisting them. It was defensive of the cave because the children were in there... he remembered how it hadn't moved from the cave when the Golden Mushroom was taken. Sure, it tried to get it back, but it never dared move away.

Shit, Jake even knew this was a dungeon. None of these creatures were ever going to leave the Dungeon, as far as he knew, but were stuck in this small pocket dimension forever. Even Villy had mentioned that taking a dungeon creature out of a dungeon under normal circumstances was a pipedream. Yet, he still came to its assistance.

Call it what you may, but Jake had chosen a side.

The Warlord got up from being tossed away, having taken little damage. From the throw, that is. Necrotic poison burned into it with more power than anything Jake had ever inflicted before, and the reason for that was simple – uncommon-rarity Potent Necrotic Poison. He had used one of the precious bottles because fuck the Warlord.

He saw it wobble a bit as it got up. Jake didn't bother giving it any time as he charged again, the rest of the Potent Necrotic Poison coating his blades.

With a single step, he appeared before it, both blades now also shimmering with arcane energy. Then, just as he attacked, dark mana joined the arcane, as he used two Descending Dark Arcane Fangs at once, cutting in a cross-shaped attack.

Both his arms shook from the sheer amount of energy he poured into the attack as veins popped on both of them, making blood spurt out. But it was more than successful. The entire abomination was split into four pieces as the cross-shaped dark arcane blades continued through the air before finally impacting the Dungeon wall and cutting a deep mark into the stone.

Instantly all four pieces sprouted out tendrils and tried to assemble themselves once more, even with the necrotic energy and mana burning into its flesh. However, Jake didn't let it as he swiftly summoned his bow and fired a Splitting Arrow that split into four – one for each body part.

Three pieces were blown entirely apart by the exploding arcane arrows, while the piece where the head was remained whole, albeit heavily damaged. It looked like it tried to regenerate itself still but fast gave up as it switched tactics.

It began emanating a powerful green glow that Jake instantly recognized – the fucker was going to blow itself up.

Fuck you, Jake thought as he stepped over and kicked the mass of flesh with all of his strength, sending it flying away from the cave and himself. After he kicked, he took one more step as he appeared before the broken entrance to the cave and held up both his hands.

An arcane barrier started forming in front of him as he covered his body in scales, and just in time.

The still mid-air lump of flesh exploded in a massive green explosion, not unlike the one he had experienced before. This one was far more powerful, though. Fortunately, it was also a lot further away, meaning that in the end, the explosion that hit him was far weaker.

His arcane barrier held up, and he managed to shield the cave entrance. If the explosion hadn't occurred a couple of kilometers away – Jake kicked hard – it wouldn't have ended as well as it did. Jake would still have been fine, but he couldn't say the same about the three trolls behind him.

The explosion continued to fire out energy for five or so seconds before it stopped. Jake didn't quite dare let the barrier down yet, but he did take the time to check his notifications, focusing on the latest one first.

You have slain [Deepdweller Warlord – lvl 146] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

'DING!' Class: [Avaricious Arcane Hunter] has reached level 116 - Stat points allocated, +10 free points

'DING!' Class: [Avaricious Arcane Hunter] has reached level 117 - Stat points allocated, +10 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (D)] has reached level 112 - Stat points allocated, +15 free points

While Jake didn't get any experience from foes lower than himself, he was pretty damn confident he got even more than usual from those above. Even then, it wasn't like just the Warlord had given him two class levels. One also had to remember the Fungalmancers he had slain since entering the Dungeon and a good bunch of the warriors too.

Well, he did likely get less experience from the kills this fight due to the troll, but what can you do.

Jake quickly flew over to where the Warlord had exploded, and in his sphere, he quickly spotted the Golden Mushroom. Or should he say Infused Golden Mushroom? Because yep, this one had also been upgraded. The key seemed to be to make Deepdwellers blow themselves up.

He turned around and walked back into the cave. The troll was no longer huddling over the wounded troll children but had managed to stand itself up as it tried to look threateningly at Jake. He knew it was all a façade as he could feel it struggling with poison inwardly still, and its legs were slightly shaking. The troll was in no condition to fight.

“I’m not here to fight you,” Jake said as he walked towards the troll. It made a weak roaring sound, but Jake looked at it and shook his head. “Relax.”

The troll didn’t look like it fully understood his words, but it seemed to get the gist. However, it was still wary as Jake took out a small bottle, tossed it to the troll, and made a drinking motion.

“Drink.”

It hesitated as Jake gave it a stern look.

“Drink.”

The troll didn't dare disobey as it threw the entire bottle into its mouth and chewed on it. Only a few moments later, its eyes lit up, and Jake could already see its legs stabilizing a bit, and the troll's natural regeneration kicked in along with the healing potion.

It has to have some skill to more effectively activate health points, Jake mused as he walked over the two small injured Cave trolls.

Once more, the big troll was hesitant, but it didn't stop Jake as he gave each of the two small ones a potion.

Half an hour later, Jake was sitting on the ground, enjoying two small cave trolls that were still the size of himself, poke him with their fingers as he meditated to refill his resources and to stave off the period of weakness from Limit Break.

As for the big troll? It was also just sitting there, relaxing.

Jake knew it wouldn't attack him. As to how he was so sure it wouldn't?

Call it intuition.