

## Hunter 246

### Chapter 246: Census Taking (Hard Mode)

As Jake charged his Arcane Powershot, there was one aspect of his usual opening salvo he became a bit doubtful about. Some basic sense of danger seemed to be an inherent ability of most beings in the multiverse, which meant landing powerful opening shots could be problematic if the attacks weren't fast or powerful enough. Even then, some foes could still avoid it. Unless, of course, the attacker had some way to stop their target from evading – like Gaze of the Apex Hunter.

This is where Jake was doubtful... did a Golem have a soul as he understood it? Things like elementals did, but would it have a soul for him to gaze into if this thing was constructed? Only one way to find out.

Jake released the Arcane Powershot as it sent out an explosion of arcane mana around him. The stone beneath his feet still looked untouched besides a few remnants of arcane energy.

At the same time, he tried to activate Gaze of the Apex Hunter. He tried and felt like he couldn't get a proper look at his foe. Like it was hidden behind something. It was not unlike that time with Phillip and his skill that blocked Identify... meaning this enemy had some kind of soul-protecting skill.

Usually, there was no way a level 117 human could pierce this defense and still activate the skill. But Jake was no normal human. He was a human that had thrown the vast majority of his free points into perception, had a bloodline that made the perception stat even better, and was using a legendary skill.

Thus, his piercing gaze shattered the veil that sought to protect it, and just as the golem was about to dodge, it froze.

\*BOOM!\*

It was hit by a stable arcane arrow, yet an explosion of mana was sent out, not by the arrow, but by what it encountered. Jake saw a faint shimmering barrier running along the golem's exterior – a barrier that had completely blocked the arrow except for a nearly unnoticeable nick in the silver-like metal of the golem.

His opening attack that usually left his foe severely damaged if taken head-on had done barely any damage, but it had allowed him to see that it had a shield of sorts that defended it. Jake was not going to sit around and wait for it to counter-attack but took a step, making him teleport back over a hundred meters as he drew another arrow.

The golem several kilometers away turned his way, and Jake saw two blue mechanical eyes stare back at him. He saw them faintly light up, and his danger sense exploded.

Oh shit!

Jake took another step, making him appear not directly behind himself but to the side. This turned out to be a very good choice, as where he had stood just a millisecond earlier was now occupied by a blue laser beam of destruction.

It didn't cause any explosion, but Jake saw a small mark burned into the stone ground from the laser, which was more than he could leave with his own arrows. That eye-beam was packing some serious pow-

He had to dodge to the side again as another laser came his way, forcing him to abandon his strategy of rapidly attacking before the golem could make it to him. Once more, Jake was happy he had his practically precognitive danger sense. If not, he could have likely taken a severe wound from that first laser.

By the way, he called it a laser because it was. It wasn't just a beam of pure mana like the Indigo Mushroom had made, but a concentrated beam of light-affinity mana. The remnants of light mana left in its wake were apparent.

The golem fired off a few more lasers until it became clear it wasn't going to hit. Jake would have happily kept going to have the golem run itself out of mana, which was likely also the reason it stopped – Jake spent far less resources dodging than it spent attacking.

It charged towards him, taking quick steps, but it wasn't overly fast.

Jake finally took this chance to fire another arrow towards the golem. It split into five in mid-air – a new record – shortly before it reached the golem. His foe dodged in between them, but the moment they passed, all five exploded in a massive blast of arcane energy.

The golem came out of it, sizzling with energy but otherwise untouched. When it was around two kilometers away, Jake fired another arrow, and the golem also made a move.

Its foot landed on the ground, and just as it did so, a blast of mana came out of its sole, propelling it forward.

That's-

The golem arrived before him in less than a second, one of its arms transforming in mid-air. The metal seemed to fold and bend, forming a large crescent-shaped axeblade. An axeblade it swung with extreme momentum as a small hole opened up as the back of its arm sent out another blast of mana to speed up the swing.

-A fucking jet engine!?

Jake bent his back over 90 degrees to avoid the swing, but before he could even retaliate, the axeblade changed direction mid-swing as another jet appeared on the other side of the arm.

This fucking thing was damn fast and strong, but its unpredictable movements were equally as dangerous. Jake was forced to roll awkwardly to the side as the blade smashed down where he had just been. It managed to leave a small scratch on the floor below, sending cold sweat down Jake's back.

Now that the golem was within his sphere, he could inspect it far more closely. Its body was made of shiny silver-like metal as he had first seen, but he had been unable to see the smallest details on it before. Incredibly tiny openings were all over its exterior, with some larger openings placed around its limbs.

It was these small holes it fired blasts of mana out of. Much like how Jake had used mana blasts from his glove enchantment to propel himself and affect his airborne mobility, this golem used jet-like blasts to make incredibly fast and abrupt movements.

He also saw that its hands and feet were both modular of sorts. It wasn't like liquid metal, but clearly, its legs and arms could take many different forms – an axeblade clearly one of those available shapes.

Jake managed to equip his scimitar before the next attack came. He blocked the hit with the flat side of the blade, one hand on the handle and the other at the top of the flat body of the blade. A jet-like blast came out of its arm, making the attack even more potent. He was knocked back hundreds of meters before landing on his feet, only to block yet another attack.

This time he didn't land on the ground but made a small platform making him teleport towards the charging golem. It was taken by surprise, and Jake swung his scimitar with both hands like the weapon was a baseball bat, and the head of the golem was a ball.

It tried to dodge, but Jake froze it with his Gaze for a fraction of a second. A shimmer of arcane energy barely managed to form on the blade before he hit the golem, making it spin in the air from the impact.

Fuck that hurt, Jake thought, grinding his teeth from the reverberations going up his arms. It felt like that time he hit a streetlight with a metal pole, except far worse.

The golem flipped a dozen or so times in the air till two mana jets re-stabilized it, and the fucker attacked as if nothing had happened. Unfortunately, his attack hadn't even left a mark as it, too, had been blocked by the mana barrier.

I need distance.

Jake stepped forward but teleported back. He repeated this several more times, putting over a kilometer between him and the golem within a few seconds. He summoned his bow and wings both at once and fired an arrow after the golem.

It shot towards him with another jet burst. While it flew towards him, the other arm transformed into a claw-like shape. It reminded Jake of those things used to lift up and crush cars... except far smaller and with razor-sharp edges.

With a flap of his wings, Jake took to the air as he saw the golem dodge his arrow. At the same time, he pumped out poison mist and began summoning two arcane bolts, hoping to accomplish one of two things.

First of all, it was to do a bit of damage. Not to the golem itself, but its mana pool. No being had infinite energy, so Jake had already resigned himself to focusing on slowly depleting his foe's mana pool. He hoped the poison mist that attacked its entire surface would help do that.

Secondly, he wanted to find out more about how it perceived him. If it had some kind of pure mana-sensing skill, he had learned that his poison mist could help disturb that along with the arcane bolts. On the other hand, if it were sight-based, he would have other paths of exploitation.

Either way, the poison mist, and bolts shou-

A pulse passed through him, dispersing the cloud of poison, as well as destroying both arcane bolts mid-way through construction. Jake even felt a prickling pain in his summoned wings as it passed through, but it failed to do anything other than deal insignificant damage.

What it did do was ruin Jake's momentum as the grappling arm extended and shot up towards him. For a moment, Jake thought it was because the golem couldn't fly, but as it tried to grab him, the small jets on its legs activated and took it airborne.

Jake mirrored its trick as he dodged the grab by firing a blast of mana out of one of his gloves as he swung his blade with the other, sending out a prolonged arcane blade down towards the golem. It didn't even react as the stable arcane blade broke on its mana barrier but just continued its charge.

Well, it didn't just continue its charge but looked straight up at him as it did so – its eyes glowing blue.

He barely managed to condense solid mana below his feet to use One Step Mile before the laser came.

The beam of light continued all the way to the other side of the massive cube they were in, making Jake wonder if it even had a max range. He didn't have time to think much about it while dodging the constant attempts to grab him or cut him with the axeblade.

Jake had come to realize that trying to fight it at range wasn't possible right now, so he decided to engage it in melee. While difficult, it was still manageable. Unfortunately, this forced him to do something he had hoped to avoid.

Limit break activated at 10% as he also drew the Nanoblade. Using up his stamina more quickly was a big risk as he essentially aimed to outlast his opponent, but he really didn't feel like he had a choice. Being hit a single time from the axeblade would be a bad time, so he had to somehow keep up, after all.

He moved in, trying to stay rather close to avoid the extending grappling arm. On closer inspection, It reminded him of a certain doctor who used to fight a dude with spider powers in both form and function. The bladeaxe, on the other hand, was just a nightmare all by itself.

Jake couldn't really block it with either of his weapons as the impact was just too powerful, and it moved in absurd ways. Dodging a fast weapon was already hard, but dodging a fast weapon that can change direction mid-swing was just borderline impossible.

A few wounds here and there were unavoidable, but Jake tried to at least make his spilled blood useful – quite literally. All his wounds sent sizzling Blood of the Malefic Viper onto the mana shield of his foe, depleting its resources. It wasn't like he didn't return the favor for every hit either, as he managed to land many attacks too. The issue was that to Jake, it felt like he was hitting a... well, a metal golem.

He knew it wasn't sustainable, so Jake tried to switch up the situation again by also making use of magic. Sending out blasts of arcane mana here and there, as he found his destructive mana quite efficient against the mana shield.

Yet even with Jake's insane perception and bloodline, he could make mistakes.

Jake dodged a fraction of a second too late. One of the claws from the grappling arm managed to barely get around Jake's arm and clamped down with immense strength. It wasn't strong enough to do any damage by itself, but Jake had no way to get it off.

His danger sense screamed, but he could do nothing but see the blue crackle at the end of the golem's arm as the shock came. Blue lightning audibly crackled up the length of its entire arm as it sent a massive amount of energy into Jake's body.

Without even thinking, he managed to condense his scales, and luckily, they didn't give a shit about the claw but still transformed his skin. Jake hadn't used them earlier as they would only be a drain on resources while being highly ineffective against physical attacks.



Even with all that, it wasn't enough. Jake felt the electricity invade his body as he got electrocuted. But he knew he couldn't just do nothing, so he wrapped both hands around the golem's arm as his hands began glowing green. The lightning burned into his hands, and the barrier stopped him, but he kept pushing as another crackling sound came.

Jake clenched his jaw so hard several of his teeth broke, but the pain only made his senses sharpen as he mixed in more of his arcane-affinity into Touch of the Malefic Viper. So far, he only used the stable version with it to transmute items... but now he poured in the purely destructive aspect of his affinity.

The barrier was eroded through, and Jake's hands finally landed on the true body of the Altmar Census Golem. At the exact moment he touched it, the golem swung its arm, smashing him down into the hard stone below. With a whip-like motion, it swung him to the other side. It repeated this as it smashed him back and forth - the electrocution never stopping.

It only managed to swing five times before it froze mid-swing – this time far longer than other times it had been frozen. Two yellow eyes stared at it from a bloody face as another crack sounded out.

Jake stared at the golem as he poured all he could into Touch the Malefic Viper. Limit Break had also already been pushed up to 20% after the golem had gotten hold of him . The silver metal had become black and cracked, the corrosion now slowly spreading down the extended arm towards the main body of the golem.

The golem appeared to sense something was wrong, but for several seconds failed to move at all. Blood began dripping from Jake's eyes as he pushed Gaze of the Apex Hunter far more than ever before as his danger sense told him the moment he let up... things would end badly.

Two things then happened at once. With a twist, the extended arm was ripped in two, and the eyes of the golem turned towards Jake and fired a laser beam straight for his face – his eyes, more specifically, as it clearly had identified them as a primary threat.

Jake managed to barely roll to the side, dodging the laser. His entire body did small spasms from the electrocution, and he was smoking from his burnt armor and skin. He had marks all over his body from being swung into the unimaginably hard ground, and there were even two bloody imprints where he had been smashed down. In addition, both wings were broken as he had used them to absorb some of the impacts, forcing him to de-summon them.

Yet he stood up again and threw a potion into his mouth. He just ate the entire flask as the vital energy ran through him.

Luckily, the golem was distracted for a moment as it assessed the damage to its arm. It quickly concluded that it would be detrimental to keep the weapon as it detached parts of the arm and then retracted the rest back into itself. This turned out to be the right choice as the detached arm began corroding on the ground after losing access to the main body.

The reformed hand looked damaged with missing parts, and it didn't look like something it could heal quickly.

In the end, the damage it had taken was minimal, but at least it appeared that the hand wouldn't be able to form a new weapon right away. Not that the golem needed it as it charged towards Jake, who now stood tall again

He had lost both his swords throughout the scuffle as he couldn't deposit them in his storage while being electrocuted, so they now lay on the ground nearby. The golem charged the unarmed human that made a motion as something appeared in his hand, its axeblade ready to cleave him in ha-

\*DONG!\*

The golem had ignored the attack. It had believed the stick of metal to be no threat due to the lack of mana coming from it. This had turned out to be a mistake.

Jake had learned something back when he hit a streetlight with a metal pole – it hadn't only made his arm hurt but also left a good dent in the metal of the streetlight. Far more than some silly knife or sword could ever do.

So... if he was fighting a big metal golem... he should use a big metal pole.

[Pillar of Encumbrance (Rare)] – A metal rod made of a type of metal with the natural ability to change weight based on the intensity of the mana infused within. Incredibly durable.

Requirements: N/A

The golem was blasted nearly five kilometers away before it stabilized itself. No visible damage had been taken, but the barrier of mana flickered for a fraction of a second upon impact, signifying the drain of mana from that one strike.

Jake stood back with aching arms both from the sheer weight of the metal pole and the impact running up his arms. The golem seemed hesitant for a moment. Jake gave a toothy grin as he retracted his mana from the staff and let it go. It just stayed floating in mid-air as it now was lighter than the air itself.

He took out his bow and fired another Arcane Powershot at the golem, signifying the start of round two.