

Hunter 248

Chapter 248: Minor Miscalculations

By now, he felt like he understood his foe well enough. He needed an arrow not to hit his foe hard but to do one thing only: disrupt the fuck out of it and drain a shitload of mana. This was his understanding, and the system seemed to recognize it as valid. The skill at least responded as an arrow began being summoned.

Out of everything Jake had ever summoned – besides maybe that soul-destroying arrow versus the Indigo Fungus – this arrow was the most unique. It was made of metal but had angular blue veins running along its body, making it look almost futuristic. The arrowhead was just a round crystalline orb of mana that Jake recognized – his own destructive arcane mana. Jake hadn't known the skill could integrate his affinity like that, but he wasn't complaining.

Jake looked down and saw that the golem was still falling. He had gotten faster at making the arrows, only taking half a minute this time. Jake had focused on doing it as fast as possible, and that seemed to have helped. It was almost too fast... but Jake could use that.

He didn't fire the Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter right away but aimed his bow upwards as he got a good idea. Jake couldn't help but hold back a smile as he joked with himself.

Deploying Time On Target stratagem.

Jake fired an exploding arcane arrow upwards with barely any force, turned around, and fired another barrage of arrows downwards. This resulted in ten exploding arrows flying down at the same time. He fired off a blast of mana after them, speeding them all up a bit more.

He repeated firing nine more arrows downwards, each of them with differing levels of strength. He had to do a bit of quick maths but mainly went by feel. Jake didn't need it to be perfect; it just needed to be good enough.

Finally, he drew the Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter and began charging his Arcane Powershot. Needless to say, Jake went for a full charge, which ended up being nearly 15 seconds. He was fine with taking a bit of damage as he hoped the blow would end up dealing far more damage to the golem than himself.

It was also because he needed to pack a lot more energy than usual into this arrow. He wanted to really make it bring with it a torrent of arcane energy on its way down – the reason for this would become clear shortly.

He released the string as a massive explosion of arcane energy came out. Jake went for full-on scale with the explosion to maximize the energy traveling down with the arrow. This meant the entire airspace in a radius around him became filled with wisps of arcane energy.

But it also meant that the Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter that flew downwards with monstrous momentum also carried an equally monstrous torrent of arcane energy with it.

Simultaneously, Jake began flying downwards, pushing his speed as much as he could. While flying, he kept firing arrows, one after another. It would be a while till he reached the ground, but he constantly accelerated on his way down.

After flying for a bit, he heard a huge explosion down below as the Pillar impacted the ground. For the first time, the black stone had been broken. The Pillar had implanted itself only ten or so centimeters into the stone.

While that didn't sound like a lot, it did mean that the golem was essentially tied to an immovable pole. He saw it below begin slowly getting itself free as it now had way more freedom of movement as it wasn't being constantly pulled downwards by an immense force.

Jake had counted on it not being able to free itself right away, and he was right. It would likely take the golem a few minutes to fully free itself. Maybe if it spammed that disruptive wave, it could free itself faster, but it clearly didn't want to waste mana.

Not that it would be a waste... for hell was raining down from above. It would soon arrive, and while the golem seemed aware of it, it hadn't bothered to react yet as it thought it had more time than it actually did. This turned out to be yet another major mistake made by the golem during their fight.

Above, a single arrow finally encountered more than fifty others that were already falling with incredible speed. As it passed, it was like a tsunami of arcane energy passed with it, giving all the other arrows a push, making them fly even faster.

The golem's ETA of the arrow bombardment had just been moved up by over a minute, something it clearly hadn't expected, as it now began trying more desperately to get free.

As for what Jake was doing at this moment? He was weaving.

He conjured a web of strings that he wound around each other, constantly spinning them as a form began taking shape. It looked like a long, thin drill as it spun around while he weaved it. The Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter would hopefully destroy the mana barrier. The other arrows would hopefully damage it and make it unable to reform the shield, while the weapon he was making right now was to serve as the finishing blow.

His two blades were still on the ground somewhere below, so he truly didn't have any other weapon, which is why he chose to construct one.

Below, the golem was just about to get free by repeatedly blasting out disruptive waves, but Jake used Gaze once more. His eyes hurt like hell, and he had a growing massive headache from overusing it, but now was not the time to complain about it. The freeze ended up just buying enough time as the not-quite-an-orbital-strike-but-close hit its target.

Jake saw it before he heard it. First a flash and then a large pink-purple explosion, followed by several dozens of smaller but similar explosions. It looked like someone had dropped a massive bomb, as the explosion had torn up the entire area, making him quite proud of how far he had come.

One could argue if one should be proud of making explosions that could level a smaller city, but he was nevertheless as he stared down at the widespread destruction he had caused. Throughout it all, he never stopped making his drill of strings bigger and bigger.

Jake flew faster than ever before, pushing mana into his wings to accelerate downwards. He had no idea how fast he was going, but it had to be nearing the double digits in kilometers per second. For reference... that was Mach 30. Faster than even the fastest unmanned rocket ever.

This entire box had some very peculiar properties. Mainly in that, it had none at all. All concepts and affinities were so openly deployed and easily detected. Perhaps it was to make whatever the "assessment" part of the test was easier, but it just made everything more... effective.

It was practically a vacuum of affinities in most ways. The concept of “heaviness,” if that was even a thing and not just some kind of gravity-affinity, made the Pillar fall faster as it got heavier. A part of that concept that the staff deployed appeared to be its desire to “fall”. It even made Jake’s poison not naturally disperse. All in all, it effectively made the natural suppression of the environment non-existent besides the bare minimum physical laws.

Ultimately, this didn’t favor either of them. At least it shouldn’t do so on paper. Yet Jake took advantage of this far more. The lack of wind-affinity made air resistance a non-concern, his entire trick with the Pillar, and even his application of arcane strings. None of it would be as effective in a more normal environment. Shit, with the passive, neutral mana all around, his strings weren’t naturally corroded by the environment, making them last far longer.

Long enough for the golem to have been hit by the entire bombardment by Jake.

Yet, he kept accelerating. Despite the explosion, he could clearly see the golem. Not visually, but through his Mark of the Avaricious Hunter. And through that Mark, he knew. The golem had been hit by more than just a few blasts of arcane mana, as it now was practically shining to him, and the arcane charge built up was quite substantial.

The golem appeared like it hadn’t managed to stabilize itself at all as the next attack arrived – a nearly two meters long drill of arcane mana coming straight for it with unstoppable momentum.

At the very last moment, as victory seemed assured, the golem’s left hand rose.

Jake didn’t know what he had expected. But what struck him wasn’t that.

The Pillar of Encumbrance was swung up by the golem and smashed into the side of the drill, and Jake only managed to move his right hand at the very last second. His left one wasn't as lucky.

In a single swipe, Jake's entire left arm from the elbow down was utterly obliterated by the Pillar, as well as the entire drill absolutely shattering as wisps of arcane energy filled the air. But it didn't end there... because Jake still had his own momentum to deal with.

He didn't deal with it well.

Jake had resigned himself to not come unscathed out of his descent, but he didn't expect it to end this badly. He smashed into the ground, with his left side first, smashing the rest of the arm and breaking his shoulder and a few left ribs at the least, and the wing was entirely crushed. He was happy that the D-grade evolution had gotten rid of a few pesky organs, as those surely would have been punctured or ruptured too. He only avoided getting his head bashed in by landing on his shoulder and his mask absorbing whatever impact he did receive.

Intense pain went through his entire body as the left side of his body took catastrophic damage, turning him into an even more bloody mess than before. His response to all this was the only natural one – he attacked.

Less than a quarter of a second after hitting the ground, while ignoring all the pain and damage he had taken, he lifted his one leg and sprung forward, reaching out with his right hand. He grabbed the leg of the golem and lifted it up, smashing it into the ground.

This made the golem let go of the Pillar, and Jake sent out a string of mana to grasp it as he swung it and smashed the golem away from him.

“Shit,” he muttered as he fell to his knee, breathing heavily. Moving his chest hurt, and everything was aching. He still had a bit to go till he could use another health potion too. In his arrogance or stupidity, he had forgotten one crucial thing... the Pillar was not recognized as a weapon. Which meant it wasn't bound by his mana. Which meant the golem could use it just as easily as Jake could. It still needed to purge his mana from it, but its constant disruptive waves seemed to have taken care of that. Coupled with him going way too fucking fast to dodge, he had royally fucked up.

Luckily... he wasn't the only one looking like shit.

The golem slowly got up, looking a bit wobbly. The entire right arm was broken from Jake pulling the axeblade off earlier, and its pristine metal body didn't look quite as pristine as before.

Veins of still-glowing pink-purple mana were pulsing on its exterior from the arcane explosions earlier, its right leg didn't look that good, and while its left hand and arm looked mostly fine, it still had taken a bit of damage.

But more importantly... the mana barrier was gone. The golem's eyes weren't glowing as brightly as before either but now emitted a far dimmer blue light.

They stood in front of each other, both heavily damaged and low on resources. Jake still had Limit Break at 20% running, and his stamina was beginning to get very low. It was good that he hadn't used that many skills besides Splitting Arrow, as he could see himself being out if he had. His mana pool was still okay, even if it was down to around a quarter. Without his mask, he could be out of mana.

Jake took a deep breath, and with pure willpower and by mobilizing his stamina to flow into his damaged limbs, he stood up. The Pillar was lying at his side, and he picked it up and saw that the lower portion of it had been slightly flattened.

It had likely happened when it smashed into the ground before. Jake could see where it had been embedded in his sphere and saw the ground all around that area actually quite damaged. It appeared like his bombardment had packed quite the power, enough to cause light damage to the stone at least.

“You’re tired too, huh?” Jake asked. He didn’t expect an answer and didn’t get one either. The golem was within his sphere, and he saw parts of its metal slowly begin to be purged of arcane energies that were still burning into it. He saw no reason to let it do this in peace.

He charged forward, biting through the pain as he swung the Pillar. The golem dodged it, far less willing to take hits now, and counterattacked by trying to kick him with its good leg. Jake didn’t let it but instead smashed the Pillar down into the raised leg. He saw the impact make a small crack in the metal and smiled internally.

Not as tough without the mana shield, eh?

A smile that quickly disappeared as a jet-blast of mana made its remaining hand fly up and grab the Pillar. Unfortunately, Jake couldn’t really maneuver the large staff with only one arm, making him unable to move it out the way.

They both held onto it for a while before the golem sent a charge of electricity through the Pillar, forcing Jake to let go.

He jumped back and retreated – back towards where he had dropped the Nanoblade and the scimitar.

Both were still bound to him so he could feel their general direction. They were nearly 20 kilometers away, and Jake had to dash like a madman while avoiding the swings of the chasing golem. It was faster than him by quite a margin, and Jake felt like he couldn't make it to his swords as it was... so he turned.

With an abrupt movement, Jake did a 180 and ran towards the golem. He summoned a handful of metal spheres – the ones made by Arnold – and with strings pulled out all the pins at once. Once that was done, he blasted them towards the golem as he took a step and teleported towards the swords with One Step Mile.

BOOM!

A large arcane explosion sounded out behind him as he kept running for the blades. He felt the golem had slowed down slightly, but not long after, he peeked back and saw it rush towards him. The arcane veins running on its body looked to have found renewed life as they pulsed even more than before.

His trick did buy him enough time to reach his weapons, and with two strings of mana, he pulled them both to him. He threw the Nanoblade in his inventory and stood ready for the charging golem with the scimitar in his one remaining hand.

Alright... round three.