

Hunter 236

Chapter 236: Deepdwellers vs Cave Troll (feat. Jake)

Jake came to a realization as he stood hidden far up in the air on solidified mana within the Undergrowth and observed the posturing of the Deepdwellers before the troll. As he prepared to watch the show, something was missing, and it took him a few moments to realize what it was...

I miss popcorn.

It felt like an eternity since the last time he had popcorn, and the battle about to unfold before him made him truly understand how much he missed those small poppy corns. He would have to ask Miranda about it when he got back because some chef somewhere must have made it. But, wait, they had unlocked Foodstuff with the system store... yeah, he could just get at least the base ingredients through that.

Actually... this made Jake realize that he wasn't even entirely sure how popcorn was produced. He only ever really had them at the movies or when he made them in the microwave. Were those small kernels actually made of regular corn? They were hard and dry... maybe dried corn?

These were all critical questions that occupied his mind as the impatience he felt from the cowardice of the Deepdwellers only increased with every passing second.

Seriously, Jake had assumed things to get started when the Warlord showed up, but instead, it had just joined in with the yelling. He got that it was lower level than the troll, but they outnumbered it heavily. So even if the weaker Deepdwellers couldn't do much damage, they could still do a bit, right?

The five warriors, the Warlord, and the two Fungamancers should be able to put up a good fight, shouldn't they? So what the hell were they waiting for?

Well, Jake learned that only ten minutes later. More reinforcements.

Three more Fungalmancers and six more Warriors came, all with a level between 128-137, along with nearly forty more of the regular Deepdwellers, most of those below level 110. Jake assumed they could only serve as distractions or perhaps living bombs.

Finally, when the Deepdweller side outnumbered the troll with over a hundred to one, they made their move.

The Warlord took the front as the Fungalmancers channeled magic into empowering both it and the many warriors around it. Eleven warriors and the Warlord charged, Fungalmancers right behind as support, and nearly a hundred regular Deepdwellers were surrounding the troll.

As for the Cave Troll, it backed away towards its own cave, roaring higher than ever before. It smashed its club into the ground to intimidate its attackers, but the Deepdwellers were determined. Fungalmancers then waved their hands, and Jake saw the spears of the many Deepdwellers begin to light up with an ominous green color.

Jake sensed the poison and knew the Fungalmancers had done something to amplify it. The same green glow also appeared on the stones of the Deepdwellers with slings and the claws of the big and bulky Deepdwellers – Jake actually felt a bit for that last group because they were sure as fuck not gonna survive melee combat with the troll.

The first strike came from over fifty spears and about a dozen thrown stones headed straight for the troll, timed with a charge from the Warlord and its comrades. Jake heard the Warlord make a weird noise as a green aura washed out of it and into the warriors around it.

They all began glowing green like their leader and engaged the troll.

The Cave Troll raised its arm and had the many spears and stones hit it like a rain of pebbles and toothpicks. Many of the spears were now sticking out of its arm and stomach, but honestly, this only seemed to make the troll angrier. It roared in anger and swung its club, sending out a massive wave of force that blasted back the three closest warriors and continued into the mass of Deepdwellers.

Jake whistled silently at the power of the troll. That was some strength it had there, and Jake sure as hell had no plans of taking a direct hit from that club. The warriors who had been blasted back looked slightly hurt, but the green aura bathing them seemed to focus on areas with wounds, making them heal rapidly.

A few of the Deepdwellers impacted weren't as lucky as they were blown off more than a kilometer into the distance. Likely still alive, but for sure hurting a lot.

In response, the Warlord closed in and attacked with its halberd. A blue glow emanated from the crystalline edge as it swung, sending a wave of energy towards the troll. Simultaneously, four warriors also moved in close to stab one of the troll's legs.

The wave of energy cut deep into the troll's chest, and the spears penetrated even deeper, making the Cave Troll stumble and scream out in pain. It kicked with the leg that had been stabbed and blasted away one of the warriors, while it once more made a mighty swing with its club, this time trying to smash the Warlord.

With extreme grace that Jake hadn't seen coming, the Deepdweller managed to block the club with the edge of its halberd. The body of the halberd bent, and the Warlord used that momentum to spring over the club and cut into the face of the troll in a quite frankly badass athletic move.

The attack cut off the long nose of the troll, sending green blood splashing everywhere as it made an almost supersonic roar louder than anything ever before, sending out a shockwave blasting the airborne Warlord back to its brethren.

Throughout it all, the troll had been pelted with smaller attacks. Vines grew on its lower body, and mold grew all over its thick hair, and it had dozens of spears sticking out of it. Blood was pooling beneath it. The warriors had also managed to land many deep stabs on one of its legs, and from the looks of it, the troll had trouble standing on it.

Jake didn't feel any need to butt in yet, though. Even with the troll down on one knee and bleeding from its entire body... it by far gave off the most dangerous aura of anything present – besides himself, of course.

He was proven correct not long after. The Deepdweller looked to be in high spirits as they kept up the aggression until finally, the troll looked to have had enough.

Jake felt it before he saw it. From the looks of it, the Fungalmancers felt it too as they made some screaming noises, all but a moment too late.

BOOM!

Giant spikes of rock shot up in a giant area around the Cave Troll, impaling more than a dozen Deepdwellers, killing at least a few. The warriors weren't unscathed either but had to retreat while waiting for their wounds to slowly heal. Jake even saw the Fungalmancers cast some kind of healing magic, blanketing the Deepdwellers in a shower of healing spores.

On the other side, the Cave Troll wasn't idle either. Jake saw all of its wounds quickly began closing up, and even the cut-off nose began growing back. All of it had happened incredibly quickly, and Jake was amazed by its healing powers. Then again... trolls having high regeneration was a bit of a trope, so it shouldn't really surprise anyone.

The explosion of earth spikes by the troll had created a momentary stalemate as both sides healed up. However, this stalemate was broken by the third-strongest creature present as the Warlord cut through a spike of earth and flew forward, once more cleaving into the troll that was in the middle of regenerating itself.

This marked the resumption of the battle as the troll counterattacked with its big-ass club, but this time it was all slightly different. Earth moved, and the soil beneath them seemed almost liquid as if the entire area several kilometers around the troll had been turned into a swamp.

Jake was far enough away to be unaffected, but only barely. He was also happy he was currently standing on solidified mana and not on the ground as he got flashbacks to the Horde Leader and the Steeltusk Boars. He was sure that the Cave Troll would have felt him if he moved on the ground.

He looked on as the tide slowly began to turn. The troll manipulated the earth and pushed back the Deepdwellers. All the regular ones were utterly useless as they were forced to all retreat, which meant it was just the warriors and Fungalmancers as well as the Warlord against the raging troll.

This was when Jake noticed the Fungalmancers do as Fungalmancers do: underhanded tactics.

Jake saw crystals looking just like he had seen one of them consume to hulk out. Then, five of the warriors retreated back and were handed a crystal each to eat by a Fungalmancer. He saw them hesitate for a moment, but some stern noises from the Fungalmancers made them relent as they consumed them.

All five began transforming only a moment later as they bulked up, and massive cancerous growths appeared all over their bodies. With the hesitation of the warriors and the effect the crystals had, Jake was sure that shit wasn't healthy in the long run. He wouldn't be surprised if consuming a crystal was a one-time thing - pretty much a suicide pill for temporary power.

The five warriors charged the troll, and once more, the tide began turning. Unlike Jake, who could dodge the hulking versions of the Deepdwellers, the troll was too large and slow not to be hit. To then make things even worse for the troll, the Fungalmancers began channeling the same damn ritual they had used to try and kill Jake.

That was where Jake drew the line. It had nothing to do with him just getting too trigger-happy to stay put. While it would be a bit fun to see what else the Fungalmancers, Cave Troll, and Warlord could pull out between them, he would rather be the one on the receiving end than sit back and wait any longer.

Holding out his hand, he began summoning his one-shot arrow, also more popularly known as Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter. The arrow that appeared looked pretty regular but was just bigger than usual. Jake felt powerful energy from it, reminding him of necrotic energy, likely to counter the life energy.

Jake decided to double up and coat it in some extra common-rarity poison, and he also prepared a good stock of stable arcane arrows soaked in poison, all while observing the battle in the distance.

The mutated warriors were near-unkillable and healed from any wound near-instantly, but the troll did the same. Its skin also looked to be made of stone now, and he saw the warriors hit it fruitlessly the majority of the time.

A halberd occasionally struck the troll, easily penetrating the stonewall and cutting off large chunks of flesh. The Warlord did most of the damage, with the warriors creating openings and keeping the Cave Troll distracted.

Everything was looking up for the Deepdwellers. The Warlord was the third strongest creature present, with the troll in second place. As for the strongest? Well, he was just about to enter the scene.

An arrow came out of nowhere, taking a Fungalmancer entirely by surprise. It didn't even have time to turn around as it froze up just as it was hit in the back. A meager scream escaped its mouth as it collapsed to the ground, dead a few moments later.

Another arrow arrived less than a second later and split apart mid-air into three. They landed amid Deepdwellers and caused a massive explosion of arcane mana, completely ruining the ritual being performed by the Fungalmancers.

By now, both the Cave Troll and the Deepdwellers noticed that something was going very wrong on the backline. Well, wrong for the Deepdwellers. One of the non-mutated warriors was distracted and didn't react fast enough as the club descended and smashed it into a pulp.

The troll seemed perfectly content using the momentary confusion of the Deepdwellers to strike back and reclaim the advantage. For a moment, the Warlord appeared confused as its nostrils moved rapidly, and it looked unsure what to do. Finally, it made a screeching sound and got an answer from a Fungalmancer just before said Fungalmancer got hit by an arcane arrow in the back of the head.

Jake happily stood back and bombarded the shit out of them with a mix between Splitting Arrow and Arcane Powershots. Due to the distance, he even got some mileage out of the perception amplifier on his stable arrows and, of course, his Archery of Vast Horizons.

Pinned by the troll ahead and an unknown new threat from behind, the Warlord made a swift decision. It ran past the Cave Troll and straight into the cave it was guarding, much to the dismay of the troll that roared angrily and smashed the ground as a wall of earth shot up.

The Warlord swung its halberd and cut through the wall and entered the cave, the troll running after it, not caring about all the attacks it received from behind. Jake thought it was a bit of a dick move to go claim the treasure before the fight was over, but perhaps he shouldn't be the one judging.

Jake began charging up an Arcane Powershot as he waited. He saw the Warlord exit the tunnel a few seconds later with a Golden Mushroom cradled between its arms. The troll had a chance to attack but hesitated to smash down its club, likely because it feared hitting the mushroom. Instead, it tried to slow down the Warlord with walls of earth and tried to grab it.

All of this gave a certain someone a great opportunity to release a fully charged Arcane Powershot just as the Warlord jumped over a wall of earth.

An explosion in the distance of pure energy that all the blind Deepdwellers felt sent a single arrow piercing through the air straight towards the Warlord as the entire area of the Undergrowth was momentarily bathed in purple light. The powerful Deepdweller actually stepped on the air, preparing to dodge, but Jake was way ahead of it as Gaze of the Apex Hunter activated.

The Warlord got hit right in its chest, sending it flying back hundreds of meters – but more importantly for the troll – it dropped the Golden Mushroom due to the impact. The mushroom was blasted off too,

but Jake spotted that he indeed had been right in his assessment that those little golden fuckers weren't that easily destroyed. Not that he had tried on his own as they were important quest items... definitely not.

Everyone scrambled for the Golden Mushroom, with especially the Fungalmancers going crazy for it. Jake didn't much care himself but took the chance to launch even more arrows to kill as many warriors as possible, including the mutated ones. The troll also took the chance to begin slaughtering the many regular Deepdwellers.

While those hulking monsters easily handled regular wounds, they sure hated Necrotic Poison. He also found that the occasional exploding arrow did wonders to blow off large parts of their bodies while they had difficulty healing due to the necrotic energies.

Jake had only been interfering with the battle for less than a minute, and it had already turned to shit with the entire Deepdweller side scrambling. The Warlord was who-knows-where and likely heavily injured, two of the Fungalmancers were dead, several warriors dead or too injured to fight, and a troll was rampaging in their midst.

So yeah, all in all, things were going great.