

## Hunter 157

### Chapter 157: Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter

Jake was excited as he stood up once more. Hawkie was confused about why he had asked to fly to the platform only to sit his ass down and make weird faces for half an hour. The hawk had already decided that the human was a bit loony. His sanity was nearly as questionable as his flying skills.

The bird couldn't give up on its free source of potions that easily, though, so it had to put up with the hassle that was the human mind.

To experiment with skills was one of Jake's favorite things in the post-system world. He still fondly looked back at smashing into trees while practicing Shadow Vault. Learning and improving a skill was a never-ending process, too, making it an endless entertainment source—the best part of skill practice, of course, being right at the beginning when it is all new.

His first task was to find a suitable target to test it out on. As it was conjuring an arrow, he planned on doing at minimum two tests, to begin with—one against a real foe like a bird and one against the intangible elementals.

As the arrow would be entirely summoned and magical, he hoped it would have the ability to damage the elementals. It wasn't a given, though. His regular arrows were technically summoned too, but they were made to be fully physical entities and didn't really hold any inherent mana.

Looking about, he quickly saw a lone vulture. It was around ten kilometers away on the cloud island, but he could see it clear as day. He had a feeling it had a level worth making it a test subject, and Identify confirmed it.

[Bubalinae Vulture – lvl 96]

The names of the things were still weird, and he didn't exactly know what it meant. Not that it matters. The bodybuilder-bird had a big chunky body that was just perfect for testing his new arrow.

Following the knowledge imparted to him on how to use the skill, he held out his hand. Palm facing upwards. Closing his eyes, he focused on the aura he had felt from the vulture. He furrowed his brows as he tried for a few minutes, getting no results.

He tried opening his eyes once more and staring at the vulture as he focused on it. Just as he was wondering what he was doing wrong, he had a breakthrough. Instead of focusing on the act of summoning the arrow itself, he focused on his desire to slay the beast.

The skill answered him as an arrow began being summoned in his palm. Growing upwards with the tip of the arrow coming out first. A barbed arrow-tip with several jagged etches and a slightly larger head than his regular arrows.

After that came the shaft. Its shape longer and thicker than the arrows from the magic quiver, with the material looking to be some kind of metal. Yet it had a brown wooden color, making the body look rather average.

The final part of the arrow was the fletching at its rear. These weren't made of feathers but instead looked to be made of cloth or even plastic. They were vanes. Bringing back memories from before the system and his compound bow. It was a type of fletching Jake hadn't seen after the system hit.

It made the arrow look almost modern. With a metal body that could even be aluminum for all he knew. But the moment the arrow was entirely out of his palm, it became clear it wasn't some modern arrow.

Runes lit up all over the shaft and arrowhead, and there were even small shining engravings visible on the fletching. They only lit up for a few seconds before the arrow returned to normal, but the markings left by the runes remained.

Jake stood there and stared at the arrow as it still floated over his palm. Its length nearly an entire meter. A bit more than twice the size of his usual arrows. It was honestly... monstrous. The aura it gave off as he stared at it, one of bloodlust and pure power.

He knew that he could only conjure one arrow at a time, the conjuration process of making this one arrow taking the better part of a minute. In other words, it wasn't a skill he could use during actual combat. It was one he had to prepare before the fight.

With the requirement of having a target already in mind also, it made the application of the skill relatively narrow. It was one that could only be used when hunting. When stalking prey and taking the initiative as the predator.

It had several limitations. Jake could only hope that the power would make up for it.

With a move of his hand, the arrow fell down as he caught it. In the other, he summoned his bow as he nocked the arrow - a bit awkward with its large size but more than manageable.

At the side, Hawkie had been observing everything attentively. At first, it had only scoffed at the stupid human standing there with his palm held out, but it quickly shut itself up internally as the skill began working.

The arrow that was summoned was scary. Hawkie didn't like it. It felt like it was made with the singular purpose of slaying prey. A prey not that much different from itself. Luckily Hawkie's instincts informed it that it wasn't the target.

Back with Jake, he drew the string as Infused Powershot began channeling. The vulture off in the distance was still relaxing, utterly oblivious to what was to come.

Jake hadn't coated the arrow in any poisons. It wasn't time to test that yet. This attack was purposefully made to test the power of the arrow itself. And as he would pretty much always use it with Infused Powershot, he saw no reason not to include that skill in the testing.

Seconds ticked by as the buildup of power increased. As Jake reached his limit, he activated Limit Break at 10% for just a bit more. A couple of seconds later and he couldn't keep the charging up. It was time to release the arrow.

Letting go of the string, the arrow was released. The explosion from Infused Powershot forcing Hawkie back a little as it was forced to keep itself still perched on its branch by opening its wings to buffer the impact. Parts of the cloud platform predictably dispersing from the energy released.

The arrow itself was flying through the air with unprecedented speed. The runes and engravings upon it lit up once more, the engravings on the fletching serving to speed up the arrow while the ones on the arrowhead subtly formed the image of a vulture.

On the cloud island, the vulture sat in relaxation as its instincts flared with warnings. It tried to react, but it already felt itself freeze up by the time it noticed anything was wrong, the subtle presence from the gaze of an Apex Hunter upon it.

Jake looked with great expectations from afar after having frozen the vulture with his gaze. He saw the arrow get closer and closer before finally hitting. And hit it sure did.

The arrowhead sunk into the flesh of the vulture unimpeded. The natural defense of the feathers offering no resistance at all. Of course, it didn't stop at the arrowhead as the rest of the arrow penetrated into the vulture, leaving an elegant, perfectly round hole.

It exited out the other side, its speed barely lower than when it first hit. But it didn't cause any impact then as it dispersed into nothing, only a moment after exiting. The only signs of it having ever existed were the damage done to the bird, and Jake's lost stamina and mana.

Jake, still observing, began feeling disappointment at the lackluster wound left behind. The attack had only carved out a fist-sized hole through its body and with the natural toughness and vitality of-

\*You have slain [Bubalinae Vulture – lvl 96] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level\*

-and then it died. From a wound that, in comparison, wasn't any more extensive than a 9mm bullet-hole on a human. Something Jake hadn't predicted was for it to die in one shot even if he had hit the brain. Which he hadn't. It was a gut-shot. Unless vultures had their brain and heart in a neat line in their stomach for the arrow to pierce through, he hadn't hit anything vital.

Yet... it died. The only feedback Jake had about how exactly it dealt enough damage to do that was the feeling he got from Mark of the Ambitious Hunter. It increased all damage done, and this damage was released as an invisible energy that directly damaged the vital energy of whatever he injured.

The wave that was released when the arrow hit was... massive. Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter had done far more damage than the arrow's physical impact should ever cause. It wasn't just a giant arrow that was ridiculously sharp.

Summoning the arrow had drained more than 2000 stamina and 1000 mana. Considering Jake only had a total of 8800 stamina, it was massive. Without all of his big stat bonuses from titles, it would have cost him half of his entire stamina pool, maybe even more.

The mana portion wasn't as bad as he had 13000 mana with the 25% bonus from the Mask of the Fallen King along with all the other bonuses. But the fact that it had drained mana was in itself significant. It meant that it was indeed far more complicated than many of his other skills. Splitting Arrow, as an example, only required stamina despite appearing magical.

At his side, Hawkie was staring wide-eyed at what had just happened. It had noticed that the arrow appeared powerful, but it had failed to recognize exactly how powerful it was. Jake turned to his feathered friend with a massive grin on his face.

"Ready for another?"

Jake wasn't even close to done testing his new skill. With the vulture dead, he moved on to a different kind of target. His gaze fell upon a giant cloud elemental that was just minding its own business.

[Cloud Elemental – lvl 93]

Once more, he focused on the skill as he held out his hand. This time, his target was naturally the Cloud Elemental, and the manifested arrow reflected that. It looked the same for the most part, but the arrowhead was now bullet-shaped and looked like a crystal.

It appeared somewhat fragile, but Jake could feel powerful echoes of mana from it. He also saw that the resources he had expended for the arrow were vastly different from before. This one had cost him 2500 mana and only 500 stamina.

Nocking the giant arrow, he took aim at the massive Cloud Elemental. With a deep breath, he began charging another Powershot.

Once more, an arrow of unparalleled might was loosed. Like a giant spear of destruction, it flew towards the giant elemental that was just doing elemental things.

It reacted less than a millisecond before the arrow struck. Unsurprisingly the arrow pierced into its incorporeal form, but what happened next did surprise Jake.

The arrow exploded with energy that seemed to somehow stay contained within the elemental's body. Pure destructive power reminding Jake of the energy his Mark of the Ambitious Hunter released, ravaging the elemental from within.

Without any grand explosion or mighty blast of force, the elemental's giant form simply turned to mist as it dispersed.

\*You have slain [Cloud Elemental – lvl 93] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level\*

I think I hit the jackpot, Jake smiled viciously. The arrow did indeed customize itself based on his visualized opponent. He wasn't sure if it would work on everything, but it sure as hell worked on these enemies.

"So, any comments, Hawkie?" he asked the hawk that was still perched on the tree.

The hawk looked at him as it clearly had a look of mixed emotions. Jake couldn't quite read its thoughts but saw a hint of fear and a bit of... expectation?

Jake did wonder why the hawk was still sticking around with him. While they certainly did make a strong hunting team, it was also risky for the hawk in many ways. Jake had proven several times that he was a credible threat to its life.

While it was far faster than him, he had ways to lock it down and possibly even kill it. Yet it chose to stick by him, something he found a bit questionable. Especially considering that it was a beast. A smart beast, but still a beast.



Jake was fully aware that he gave off a... presence of sorts. Even during the tutorial, the weaker beasts would flee when they saw or felt him, and even a mighty beast like the Horde Leader appeared to feel a hint of hesitation when he met its gaze.

Now that presence had only gotten amplified. Jake didn't know if it stemmed from his bloodline or just from being strong, but it was clearly a part of him. It even affected the Pylon of Civilization area, making beasts who entered it aware that they had intruded upon his territory.

Yet the hawk had approached him willingly and stuck by him after that. He wasn't stupid enough to believe that it was only due to his potions and help in combat. I wonder what you want from me, Hawkie...

He watched with bated breath as the fight played out before him. Bertram tried to block the giant beast's attack but ended up just being knocked back nearly a hundred meters before smashing into an old office building.

Maria, the archer who was second only to him in level, stood with a giant bow of flames as she bombarded the gigantic monster. She appeared more like a mage, but her swift movements as she dodged the beast's ranged attacks made it clear she wasn't.

Her attacks tore into the beast little by little as its hide became black and burnt. It did noticeable damage but far from enough to kill the powerful D-grade beast.

With the time she managed to buy, Bertram had gotten up, and the healers had managed to get him back in top condition. With a slew of buffs and shields placed on him, he charged the beast again.

The light around him was refracted as he received a powerful buff from the high-level priests and an invisibility spell from a light mage.

He got in close and unleashed everything with a cleave. His blade extended nearly a hundred meters as he cut down into the shoulder of the beast. His sword managed to penetrate deeply before it was stopped, and he was once more smashed away.

But he had managed to buy enough time. With a concert of chants, the ritual was complete.

More than five hundred followers had donated their energy to unleash a powerful joint attack. Jacob could not contribute directly to the fight due to his class, but that didn't mean he couldn't design the fight from the beginning – and so far, fate had been realized.

A giant beam of light descended from the sky that burned into the beast, weakening it significantly. Simultaneously, Maria released her strongest attack as she took out a special arrow she had crafted before. When it was fired, the cry of a phoenix was heard as the arrow itself turned into a flaming bird that smashed into the beast, resulting in a giant explosion.

The beast roared in pain as it unleashed an attack, but a second ritual activated at that very moment. There were more than a thousand people behind this spell, as a bubble of mana encapsulated the beast entirely, blocking out the destructive breath.

A third ritual came into effect as the ground below the beast erupted, and it fell into a kilometer-deep abyss.

A collection of explosives and countless magic circles were already present within the hole as they all exploded, blowing up the entire area as the earth shook.

Trapped, it could only struggle as thousands of attacks rained down upon it. Thousands of spells worked together to restrain and weaken it, as the few influential people in the group managed to damage and finally bring it down.

When the beast fell, they all cheered as Jacob went together with the other elites to claim their prize.

Laying his hand upon the Pylon, Jacob accepted the profession as he claimed it. The third person on Earth to do so.