

## Hunter 58

Chapter 58: Herrmann Schmidt

Jake moved on down the list of skills, and he had to say that the second skill was a bit more... traditional.

[Piercing Arrow (Common)] – The first strike is often the most important when hunting. Grants the hunter the ability to infuse an arrow with energy to increase its penetrative power. Increases power depending on stamina expended. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using Piercing Arrow.

This skill was also fascinating, and it would likely synergize incredibly well with Powershot too. But did he genuinely need a more powerful opening shot and more preparation for now? Would his arrows even be able to handle the skill, or just break apart?

If the skill said that it conjured an arrow, he would be far more excited about it. Many skills had to do that, but this one clearly didn't.

Assuming he did get the skill to work correctly, it would bring his opening attack to a ridiculous power-level. It was already quite silly with Powershot and his poison alone, but coupled with this... perhaps he could even have killed that giant buffalo.

Postponing the decision, he moved on to the next one. It was one of the skills that had gotten an upgraded version.

[Hunter's Tracking (Uncommon)] – The hunter does not sit silently in his lodge but actively hunts for his prey. Unlocks proficiency in tracking down prey based on limited clues left behind. Also allows the

hunter to more easily identify characteristics of the game, including mana signatures and aura. Adds a small bonus to the effect of perception while tracking.

This had been one of the skills he'd wanted back at level 5 in the early days of the tutorial. He had chosen Basic Stealth back then instead, a decision he hadn't felt any regret towards, but he did have moments where being able to track people would be useful. Such as when he was searching for his colleagues.

In hindsight, however, perhaps it was good he hadn't been able to track them down earlier. If he hadn't leveled up and acquired Shadow Vault, he would undoubtedly be a dead man by now.

If he thought about the current benefits the skill would provide... it was somewhat limited. It was the type of skill you hated not to have when you needed it, but rarely found yourself in a situation where it was actually necessary.

But even more importantly... Jake felt like he could learn a lot of what the skill did by himself. He was already starting to get a basic understanding of recognizing energy given off by others. He also had his Sphere of Perception, which allowed him to quickly search an area far more effectively than he ever could with his eyes.

Instead, he would try and get a skill that did something he was incapable of, something that did something impossible to learn for the current him.

Sure, the skill would still be beneficial even if he learned everything himself merely due to the stat effectiveness increasing effect, but he honestly felt it wasn't worth it. So he moved on.

[Hunter's Trapping Expertise (Uncommon)] – The Hunter has many tricks hidden up their sleeve and are not limited to merely facing their prey in direct combat. The Ambitious Hunter instead uses the materials found during his hunt to improvise and create traps to get an edge. Unlocks proficiency in creating traps and tools associated with traps, along with knowledge of how to use them. Adds a small bonus to the effectiveness of stats based on the nature of the used trap.

This skill was very much like the prior one, as in another upgraded skill that was more focused on granting knowledge and know-how than actual abilities. He wasn't a fan of it. He didn't exactly plan on going around placing traps anyway.

He preferred to take a more... active approach. He liked to be the hunter, not the hunted. Instead, he would rather strike with a fast and deadly blow rather than sit back and wait patiently for his enemy to slip up. For pretty much the same reasons as the prior skill, he skipped over this one too.

[Splitting Arrow (Uncommon)] – One arrow becomes many; one fallen prey becomes a field of death. Fire an arrow that splits into several copies while in flight. Each arrow strikes with the power of the original. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using Splitting Arrow.

This one was a bit like the first Piercing Arrow, aka a skill that had an active effect, but he instantly liked this one far more.

Perhaps he was still quite biased due to the previous fight, but having some area coverage would be very useful. Sure, the damn beasts could dodge one arrow, but could they escape five? Ten?

Just like with Twin Arrow, he still had the consideration if his poison would work with it. It said that it would make an arrow that splits and strikes with the arrow's original power. Did that include poison?

He couldn't precisely use logic to figure it out. This was quite literally the creation of matter itself. Making something from nothing. Sure, it did require energy from him, but it was still matter-creation.

Speaking of Twin Arrow, he was pretty sure this skill was an upgrade of that. They were incredibly similar, but this skill allowed him to make more than a single copy.

Overall, he had five skills that he considered. He did briefly look back at Active Camouflage but decided against it rather quickly. Much like the trapping skill, he preferred to move and chase down his enemies rather than sit in ambush.

The Piercing Arrow was also eventually ruled out. He didn't need anything more to prepare for his first strike. He already had Powershot and all his poisons. What he needed instead was something to help him during actual combat.

So, In the end, it came down to Splitting Arrow or Basic Nature Affinity. Both of those would help him a lot here and now. Nature Affinity would surely help him survive this mess and synergize well with his already high vitality and mana pool, as it would likely open up possibilities to use his mana more actively.

It naturally also reminded him of the warrior with the Aspiring Blade of Nature class. Thinking back, that man was still among the strongest survivors he had met during this tutorial. While he did seem weaker than both the spear-wielding fire-guy, Richard, and William, he was undoubtedly strong. His defensive powers at least were spectacular, easily blocking Jake's arrows with his energy alone.

He hadn't been using nature mana, however. It was instead stamina, or inner energy, infused with nature-affinity through some skill. Wait, he thought. Couldn't he use his stamina for something other than his active skills? If he could use it to enhance himself like the warrior...

Why couldn't he? It was clearly stamina the warrior had used. Sure it had a nature-affinity... but what stopped him from just doing the same thing with his unattuned energy? He could do so much with mana without any skill attached to it; why not stamina?

With the epiphany, Jake completely forgot the skill decision and even dropped the quiver he was still holding in his hand conjuring arrows.

Sitting down, he entered meditation as he allowed the inspiration to wash over him.

"William, can you promise to fulfill my wish? To avenge my family?" the Smith asked in a solemn tone.

"Of course, I already promised you..." William nodded. He owed him that for helping him, right? The Smith had done far more for him during this tutorial than Richard or anyone else. He had helped him learn to smith, patiently guided him, and now he was even making this armor for him. He felt like he owed it to him.

"Thank you," the Smith smiled as he went over to the armor and placed both hands on it as he turned to William with a sad smile. "My son was named Gunnar Schmidt, my daughter-in-law Karin. She was pregnant with my grandchild to be."

William suddenly got an awful feeling as he heard the man talk.

"-Please fulfill my final selfish request of keeping their memory alive."

A glow started to encompass the man as he kept eye contact with William. The young caster wanted to stop whatever he was doing but found himself unable to act.

“Farewell, my young friend. May you find happiness in this new world, and finally come to understand yourself.”

With those words, an explosion of mana came out of the man as it entered the armor. But soon, other energies began coming out too. First, his stamina started pouring out, followed by his vital energy. Every last ounce of energy flowed through his hands and into the now also glowing armor.

“Stop it!” William finally managed to yell as he stepped forward. He didn’t know why. He couldn’t understand it, but he didn’t want the man to die. What the fuck is wrong with me?

But it was too late as the final mana and stamina left the man. With only his health points being poured out. It was not just his health points disappearing, but his very life source itself. His already slightly graying hair turned completely white as his complexion withered.

The otherwise powerful muscles and healthy skin turned white, thin, and sickly. The Smith aged decades in seconds, leaving William completely unable to help or do anything.

As the final vestige of energy left, so did what life remained in the Smith... no Herrmann Schmidt.

He had told his name to William a long time ago... yet it was only at this final moment that he remembered.

At this point, William was dumbstruck. The seconds passed by as Herrmann's now withered corpse still stood with its hands on the armor. The armor itself had lost a lot of its shine, now no longer silvery but looking more like regular steel.

William, however, didn't care much for the armor currently. He just stood there frozen as the wheels in his head spun at high speed. He was confused, angry, shocked, but most of all, he felt a sense of... loss.

Snapping out of it, the young man walked towards the corpse. He was unsure what to do when he finally stood right before it. Was he supposed to move him? Would he have wanted William to do that? And when the hell did he start caring about what other people wanted?

Gathering his courage, he moved his hand towards the corpse, attempting to move it to the bed or something. But the second his hand touched him, the entire corpse turned to dust and fell to the ground.

Shocked once more, William stepped back in fright as he noticed something drop on the floor in front of him. Water.

Moving his hand to his face, he felt the liquid coming out of his eyes. He was crying. Why? These tears were real. They were real, and he didn't like it. Didn't like it one bit.

It hurt. Something in William's chest hurt a lot. It wasn't physical pain, but something else. He hadn't ever felt that before. When he remembered the old smith that would have admonished him for acting like a scared cat when he jumped back earlier, the pain only worsened.

William wasn't stupid. He knew what this was. Something he believed to be a defect, a disease he had never been afflicted with more. Grief. Something his parents and his psychologists had hoped for him to start somehow understanding for oh so long.

And now, when he finally understood that emotion, he so dearly wished he never had. It was a disease, a weakness. It made one do stupid things. According to William's grand philosophy of life, feelings were the key to all things stupid in this world.

Emotions were what made the entire faction-war go haywire. It had been the death of Hayden, an otherwise major powerhouse in this tutorial, as he had foolishly rushed to their camp with far too few men after Richard had sent an archer to fetch him after Jake had made contact.

It had been the death of Herrmann.

Trying to push the intrusive thoughts out of his head, William tried to focus on something else. The most apparent being the armor in front of him. When he looked at it, he got an oddly familiar feeling as he used Identify on it.

[Expanding Armor of Herrmann Schmidt (Epic)] – An armor made by the Prodigious Smith of Camicus, Herrmann Schmidt. All of his hopes, desires, and goals, even his very life, have been poured into this armor, giving it abilities far above what its materials or enchantments would indicate. Already powerful before the final sacrifice of the smith, the armor is now even more powerful. The armor's ability to absorb and store mana has been improved along with the materials' overall quality. Can only be worn by one chosen by the smith before his death. May his memory and Records live on through this artifact.



Enchantments: Expanding Armor. Kinetic Force Diffusion. Grants the ability: [Legacy of Herrmann Schmidt]: Summon the Armory of the fallen smith.

Requirements: Soulbound

The armor had... improved, but the description didn't make William happy at all. It only made the hurt worse. The smith had indeed poured all he had into it. This armor was his legacy, his final memory. All that remained of him now was this armor as even his corpse was only dust.

William knew that this armor belonged to him and him alone. It wasn't something that could be stolen or sold. It was his to keep until the day he died. It was the result of the man's desire for vengeance, along with his endless belief in William being able to carry out said revenge.

Emotions had killed Herrmann, but it had also allowed him to transcend his limits and create something he may never have been able to otherwise. He had managed to turn his emotions and obsessions into strength.

And William would carry those feelings. Those desires and goals. He had already decided to kill Richard before, but now... now he wanted to. Not because of experience points, tutorial points, or any other tangible benefits.

He wanted to do so because he had promised to. Because it was the final wish of his best... no, only, friend. He would remember his first real friend's son, Gunnar, and his daughter-in-law, Karin.

Placing his hand on the armor, he injected mana into it and found it flowed through the armor more easily than anything he had ever encountered. He instantly felt a connection with the armor along with the knowledge of how to use it.

Taking off the robe he still wore, he picked up the armor and put it over his head. It was light, far lighter than one would expect. Stats, of course, also helping. The metal felt warm, like the embrace of a caring father.

Nearly by instinct, he tried spreading out the armor as it slowly started sliding out to cover the rest of his body, almost as if it turned liquid. It first spread down his thighs and down his forearms, slowly taking form at William's own discretion. He felt that he could make it go far faster, but he enjoyed the feeling of the warm metal covering him.

Finally, the armor covered his hands and lifting his feet one by one; it protected them in boots. The final part was an open helmet that left his face still visible. Slowly he made the metal cover his face leaving only two small slits for his eyes.

But even those he ended up covering. If one looked at him now, it would look like a golem of steel. By design, William had made it entirely airtight. He could hold his breath for easily an hour with his improved stats, and even if he needed air, he could always open up small holes.

It had to be said that this wasn't all a function of the armor itself. Without Metal Manipulation, it wouldn't be feasible at all to alter the form of the armor. Yet it was so perfectly made for him that he could manipulate it oh-so easily.

With his skill to 'see' through metal, he didn't even need holes for his eyes. The only scary thing was the sound. The sound of his own heartbeat as he stood encapsulated by the warm glow of the metal.

For the first time since entering the tutorial, William truly felt safe. He felt like he could take on anyone and anything.

Slowly he retracted the armor to once again only cover his chest. Putting on his robe once more, he covered his chest, entirely concealing his new armor.

Turning back to the clothes on the floor that was all that remained of Herrmann, William made a sad smile as the tears welled up again. Shaking his head, he instead looked down at the now cloth-covered plate mail. If anything indeed remained of Herrmann in this world, it would be the very armor he was wearing.

“I promise you, old man. I shall show them what the two of us are truly capable of.”

The final thing he did before exiting the cabin was to unfold the sheet of metal Herrmann had told him to look at after everything was over.

Unfolding it, he saw that it carried a voice recording of some sort. As he listened to the old man’s voice, he felt sad, but the message within made him smile a little.

It was only fitting that his first friend was a sly one...