

## Hunter 240

Chapter 240: To Upgrade Or Not To Upgrade, That Is The Question.

\*Avaricious Arcane Hunter class skills available\*

Jake always liked getting new skills. Not just because he got something new and shiny to add to his repertoire, but because the list he got was a testament to his progress. Every single offering was proof of his achievements and a small insight into what kinds of improvements he had made. It felt like a good pat on the back and a high-five for how great he had been. The skills also often gave him good ideas for what he could do himself in the future.

As with every other time, he went in with great vigor. He opened up the list of new skills offered, and as always, was incredibly disappointed with the first skill available. Well, at least it was an expected disappointment.

[Arcane Bolt (Rare)] – Inspired by the simple Mana Bolt, you have taken it to the next level and created the Arcane Bolt. Allows the hunter to summon bolts of arcane mana to defeat your foes. You can summon two kinds of bolts, a stable and a destructive version. The destructive bolts will explode upon impact, and the stable version will be tough and piercing. Adds a small bonus to the effect of Intelligence when using Arcane Bolt.

This was far from the first time he had been offered some kind of “Mana Bolt” variant, and it was a bit funny to have seen it progress from common-rarity with the Dark Bolt back in the day to the rare-rarity Arcane Bolt he was offered now. He was even pretty damn sure he could get offered an epic-rarity version if he kept working on it. Jake liked making Arcane Bolts and firing them, but he didn’t feel like he needed a skill to do so at all. Would it make them stronger? Sure, but he seriously doubted they could ever get as good as his arrows.

Hence he moved to the second option – which was another damn repeat. At least it appeared to be so at first glance.

[Disruptive Arcane Wave (Rare)] – Mobilize the arcane and dispel that which impedes you. Erupt in a torrent of destructive arcane energy, dispelling any spell constructs in your immediate vicinity by overloading them with mana and pushing away anything else in your immediate surroundings. Higher consumption of mana and stamina is required based on the power and stability of the spell constructs or physical impediments. Adds a small bonus to the effect of Wisdom, Intelligence, and Endurance when using Disruptive Arcane Wave.

Not much had changed from that Disruptive Arcane Eruption he was offered at level 90, but upon closer reading, there was a difference; it wasn't a mana eruption at all but an energy eruption. It also used stamina and even now benefitted from endurance. It was now more just a small localized explosion of arcane energy around himself. A simple and probably effective skill that Jake didn't need a skill for at all.

It did give some more inspiration, though. Jake should really work on not just using his arcane-affinity with mana but also with his stamina. This Wave clearly used both mana and stamina, making it even more effective on physical impediments as well as magical ones. Having had something like this skill during his second fight with the Indigo Fungus would have saved him from getting half his body sheared off.

But in the end, Jake had no interest in getting the skill itself. He would rather just work on mimicking the effects with free-range magic. Moving on.

[Barrier of the Avaricious Arcane Hunter (Epic)] – Stability is a cornerstone of your arcane-affinity, making barriers an obvious application of your arcane. Allows the Avaricious Arcane Hunter to summon a barrier of pure, stable arcane energy in a bubble around you, blocking out any kinds of direct attacks that attempt to pass through – both physical and magical attacks alike. Mana or stamina will be consumed depending on the nature of the blocked attacks. All concepts not deployed by you will be weakened within your barrier. Adds a small bonus to the effects of Wisdom and Endurance when using Arcane Barrier.

Now we're getting somewhere,

Jake thought. It was the first skill with "Avaricious Arcane Hunter" in the name and was epic-rarity right away. As for the skill itself? It felt a bit like something he had done many times before, but also had some new stuff.

First of all, it was a bubble around him and not a wall as he usually made. This one was also once more arcane energy and not only mana, likely making it a lot better against physical attacks. Right now, the arcane barrier he summoned was best against magical attacks, though that hadn't been much of an issue as most ranged attacks he faced were magical.

This was another case of him needing to get off his ass and use stamina as well as mana with his arcane-affinity. He had originally formed the affinity primarily using mana, but he knew affinities didn't just affect mana. He still remembered the Aspiring Blade of Nature back in the tutorial who used a powerful aura of sorts with a nature-affinity.

More food for thought that he would have to sit down and seriously go over, hopefully before the Treasure Hunt.

The second very interesting thing about the skill was that entire thing about concepts. How would that work? It said it would weaken any concepts not deployed by him, which he had no idea what meant. Would that mean things like gravity, space, and time itself would be weakened within his barrier? That sounded ridiculous and not at all how things would work. Jake assumed it was great, though, and likely the reason behind the epic-rarity tag. If not, it was just a robust defensive barrier and nothing else.

If he had to make a slightly educated guess, he would assume the barrier could weaken enemy spells already within the barrier that affected him. For example, if he were poisoned, cursed, or on fire, it would weaken those effects. This was ultimately only a guess, but it made sense. It could also just mean

that the barrier couldn't fully block concepts but only weaken them slightly, so if he was hit with some weird spell akin to his own Gaze of the Apex Hunter or some mental skill, it was only a partial defense. Once more, he was just guessing, but it did have some interesting implications – if he isolated himself with arcane energy, he could at least partly suppress outside concepts.

To be fair, Jake would be perfectly fine with selecting this skill but naturally still moved on as he had two more to go. The next one was a lot more interesting than anything prior, as it was truly something new.

[Mark of the Avaricious Arcane Hunter (Ancient)] – Your prey is chosen; the hunt is on. Covertly mark targets, making you aware of their positions at all times until the marks expire or are dispelled. All damage done to marked targets is increased. Arcane damage has its damage amplified further. The extra arcane damage inflicted while the marks are active will be built up in the form of an arcane charge that you can detonate to release all the stored up energy. Additional bonus experience earned for slaying a marked target above your level (this effect remains even if your target dies to the mark detonating or within a short duration of the detonation). Adds a bonus to the damage inflicted, the duration of the marks, the subtlety, and the number of marks available based on Perception.

WARNING: This skill is unlocked by, and will serve as an upgrade to, your existing Mark of the Ambitious Hunter

Jake had never tried to encounter a skill selection that offered to upgrade a skill and not just an entirely new one. Was this something new to D-grade? Did it only include class-specific skills? Did this mean he would get a better version of his Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter, too, at some point? That would be rad.

The skill itself was honestly just awesome. Jake really loved Mark of the Ambitious Hunter as it was one of those hidden heroes that just helped him immensely. At this point, he didn't even think about applying it to targets before he killed them for the experience, but this did mean that he hadn't really made much use of the extra damage part outside of against singular, powerful enemies. He couldn't help but pull up the old Mark and compare them directly.

[Mark of the Ambitious Hunter (Rare)] – The prey is chosen, the hunt begins. Covertly mark a target, making you aware of their position at all times until the mark expires or is dispelled. All damage done to the marked target is increased. Additional bonus experience earned for slaying a marked target above your level. Adds a small bonus to the damage inflicted, the mark's duration, and the mark's subtlety based on Perception.

The old description was sure a lot shorter, and it also made the differences obvious. The new one would add the arcane charge mechanic, likely more extra damage than the old mark even without arcane damage; it would allow more than one mark active at a time, and it was likely just better in every single way. Shit, it somehow had even kept the aspect of only benefitting from perception, his highest stat by far.

There was also the entire extra experience part that maybe got improved further. Jake still had no idea how much extra experience he got from his old mark, but he used it on every single kill on enemies above his level anyway. Everything counts, after all. He already had a strong suspicion that his class leveled faster than usual against higher-leveled foes by default, and the mark only improved that aspect.

Jake wanted it a lot, but he was still unsure of a lot of things, primarily how it would affect him in the future. Skills were a limited commodity which is why getting some from the Tutorial Store was so valuable. New skills usually only came from titles and level-ups, and he couldn't just expect them to grow on trees. Choosing to upgrade a skill would mean not getting a new one, which was quite the cost.

On the other hand, was it really that bad? He already had skills he barely used now, so wouldn't it be better to make those he actually does use better? Sure, he could upgrade the old ones, but he hadn't had time to do anything like that yet. Skills could also fuse, like how his Hunter's Sight had merged with Gaze of the Apex Predator to make Gaze of the Apex Hunter, or how Sense Herb and Sense Toxin had formed Sense of the Malefic Viper. Those instances had just been improvements and in no way losses, in his opinion, even if he had lost a skill due to the merging.

There was also the fact that he theorized all of the “of the Malefic Viper” skills being part of a whole and eventually merging into one singular incredibly powerful skill. Sure, he had been offered the Malefic Dragonkin race change, likely as a result of having all the skills at ancient-rarity, but he still believed they could be merged somehow. Would he be angry if two or three of his ancient-rarity skills merged and made a legendary one that retained all effects but stronger? No, of course not. At least not in the short run.

In the end, Jake needed a second opinion, so he asked:

“So, Villy hasn’t been that long, but I called anyway to ask you since I am unable to make decisions myself: is upgrading a skill or picking a new skill best? I know you told me about skills being valuable as you can only get a limited amount, so would upgrading an existing one not just mean that I am “losing” a skill? I could potentially just upgrade it myself at some point, right?” Jake asked out loud into the empty chamber where the mushroom had been.

Within a second, Jake felt the attention of the Malefic Viper upon him and the connection strengthening as he answered, his tone the same as usual. It made Jake happy that his pal hadn’t gone back to moping, and the reason why he asked honestly had as much with having an excuse to hear how Villy was doing as it was to get advice.

“That one came out of the blue... you got a potential skill upgrade for one of your skill options while leveling up, I reckon? Tends to begin happening around D-grade, but most often only if you pick a class or profession closely associated with the one you had before. Also, for once, don’t be ashamed at not knowing this – not that I think you know shame about such things – as this really isn’t common knowledge for most. People tend to hate sharing this kind of information outside of their organizations, and the system hasn’t been giving out much info related to D-grades to your universe yet, as far as I know. Most importantly... you would have had to actually talk to other people to learn about it, something we both know has a very low chance of happening,” Villy answered quite rudely.

“Wow, that’s just mean. Am I not talking to someone else right now who is telling me? Also, I am pretty sure you didn’t actually address any of my questions,” Jake answered back with faux offense.

“You answered most of your questions yourself. Any skill you upgrade is the opportunity of getting a new skill lost. It’s pretty simple. Ultimately, it comes down to how much you value the upgraded skill and the nature of the skill. No two skills are created equal, and some skills can do things that cannot be done with freeform magic. Well, theoretically, everything can be done, but some things are just unrealistic. Also, it isn’t like having fewer skills is always bad. Many skills end up unused or forgotten or perhaps end up having overlap with other better skills. Often there is value in focusing on your most important core skills. Focus on your primary fighting method and improve on that while shoring up weaknesses. You don’t need a skill to do everything, but having skills related to what you do most is highly preferred. The rest can be fixed without the use of skills. All in all, having 100 diverse and mediocre skills is worse than having 10 you all use and synergize with each other. Quality over quantity and all that.”

Jake nodded along as the Viper spoke. It was pretty much as he had thought, and the thing about skills too hard to recreate also struck true. If he wanted to somehow create a skill like Big Game Arcane Hunter, he had no idea where even to start or if it was even possible. Villy said it would be possible to do all that skill did somehow... but Jake just didn’t see how at all. It was a skill that made him stronger against higher leveled foes. Maybe some serious soul magic? He wasn’t sure.

Either way, Jake didn’t feel a need to hold back, so he shared the skill’s details.

“Well, the skill marks targets and increases my damage done and making me aware of their positions at all times. It uses my arcane-affinity too and can build up a charge of arcane energy that I can explode. It didn’t have all the arcane stuff before the upgrade, and it could only be placed on one target at a time. It goes up two rarities, by the way. I do reckon both the damage done and the additional experience will also in-“

“Additional experience?” Villy cut him off.

“Yeah?” Jake answered. “Only against higher-leveled enemies, though.”

“Well, that puts the skill firmly in borderline-impossible-to-recreate-territory. If you want to upgrade one, a skill like this would be optimal. These kinds of signature skills can sometimes do otherwise impossible things. Seriously, creating things like that is hard. I didn’t make a poison that increased experience gain before a long-ass time with research. Though to be fair, increased experience gain isn’t actually that valuable and will, for many, just mean hitting a wall at a faster pace. I reckon this won’t be an issue for you, and that it only works on targets with higher levels is good. Remember, the path to power is not a sprint but a marathon. Skills that increase experience gained honestly aren’t that rare either, and most professions or monsters focused on leadership will have skills to increase the experience gain of those under them. It’s often one of the advantages of living under a powerful noble or Alpha,” Villy explained.

That actually wasn’t that surprising to Jake. The Pylon already increased non-combat experience gained, and that leaders had such skills was to be expected. Jake was sure Jacob had some like that too, and maybe Miranda did too? Phillip maybe? He should probably ask them.

“So, do you think it would be good to upgrade if the experience part isn’t even that valuable? That was in my mind one of the big draws,” Jake asked.

“For borderline everyone else, I would say that the increased experience isn’t worth much if it doesn’t also come with an increased chance of enlightenment or something like that, but for you in particular, it’s great. As a new initiate in a new universe, there are many advantages associated with having a fast leveling speed, and I also don’t think you have to worry about hitting any walls anytime soon... if ever.”

“I see... well, I do like the skill quite a bit, even before the upgrade, so making it better would be great...”



Jake would have to decide, but before that, he moved on to the last skill, and just by skimming it, he already knew... he would have even more questions for the Viper.