

## Hunter 241

### Chapter 241: The Morality of Domination

Jake knew his class was considered good just based on the stats it gave and the – in his opinion – not very restrictive downsides it had. Yet he hadn't expected it to grant him a legendary-rarity skill right at level 120, much less one that would give him such mixed feelings.

[Domination of the Avaricious Arcane Hunter (Legendary)] – Your avarice knows no bounds, and you claim whatever you decide belongs to you. Allows the Avaricious Arcane Hunter to initiate a Soulbinding Contract with other living beings, forcing them to serve him if they surrender to your desires while making them more inclined to work towards realizing your avaricious goals. Any bound being will serve you for life, and your demise will mean their deaths, while your advancement will give them opportunities to continue serving you. In your arrogance and avarice, you have even become able to force those above your level to serve you. Your ability to dominate a target or not is determined on an individual basis. The number of maximum dominated entities is determined by Willpower and how powerful those dominated are. If those you have dominated are foolish enough to attempt to break free, crush their souls to dust. Naturally, your avarice does not allow any possession of yours to escape your will once bound, and only death shall be their release. Dominating a living being will count as slaying it, rewarding extra experience.

The description was incredibly long... and hot damn. There was a lot packed in there. This skill appeared to have little to no relation to his arcane-affinity as far as he could tell but was clearly entirely related to the "Avaricious" part of his class.

He had to read it a few times to get it... and he really hoped he misunderstood something. Jake had seen many skills – especially those related to Villy – with some weird-ass descriptions, many of them obviously yelling "I am evil!" but this one took the cake.

Jake barely knew where to start... so he decided just to share the entire damn description with Villy to get a reaction.

"A domination skill? Good time to get one. Soulbinding a dungeon creature will effectively turn them into your possession and allow you to bring them out. Yours even sounds like a rather powerful version, definitely not an easy one to break out of. It even sounds like it includes a Record and experience-boosting part to make those dominated be useful to you for a longer time. Good skill all around," Villy answered, far more casually than Jake expected.

"I guess... but... it's kind of fucked up, isn't it?" Jake asked. The entire skill just rubbed him the wrong way from here to the moon. It was fucked up, right? Or did he have some skewed perception of things? He didn't... did he?

"Well, these kinds of skills do have some drawbacks. For the dominated target to progress much further after being bound is rare. I can't say if it's due to the targets having low levels of innate ambition that limit them or if it's just inherent in these kinds of skills. Having a few Soulbinds can be very beneficial, as they do things you don't have the time or desire to do yourself while being 100% loyal. They can function as meat shields too.."

"You know what I mean. Isn't this essentially just forcing someone into slavery?" Jake asked.

"So that's what you're worried about? What a weird mentality. You are killing so many already, so what's the difference? Soulbinds are essentially just pieces of equipment that can serve certain functions for you. They may be living entities, but viewing them as anything more than tools is meaningless. Those with such weak mentalities to agree to a Soulbound Contract aren't worth anything to begin with. And have no doubt, they do need to agree to it. The system has some hard rules related to things like these contracts, and signing one cannot be fully forced. Coerced? Sure, but not forced," Villy said, his tone still far too casual for Jake to feel comfortable.

"I think there is quite a big difference between killing someone and forcing them into servitude and manipulating their minds to serve you till the day they die."

"I already told you, you cannot force anyone or anything to accept it. They will always have a choice – even if the choice will be between becoming Soulbound or death. It often doesn't even come to that. Many pathetic individuals choose to become Soulbound by those more powerful or influential than themselves, hoping to improve their own fates that way. Sure, it works for some, but advancing a single more rank or living a more luxurious life than before by giving up control of your own life does not make you any less pathetic," Villy said, and Jake could practically hear his voice dripping with venom before he continued.

"Look beyond your own culture for once. You grew up on a planet with a history where forced servitude has quite the bad connotations – ones I agree with – but for the wrong reasons. Slaves are not to be pitied or seen as victims. They are weak and pathetic individuals who surrendered themselves to fates worse than death. The humans who rose up and died to fight for their own freedom are to be admired, but those who chose to wallow in their own misery deserve no pity or mercy. Tell me, if I came to you here and now and told you to become a slave or die, what would you do?"

Jake frowned as he listened to the Viper speak. He knew he and Villy had different views on many things, and this was clearly one of them. Perhaps it was because the Malefic Viper was exactly that: a viper, but Jake believed things were a bit more nuanced.

"For me personally, I would tell anyone who came to me and told me to become a slave to fuck off and gladly fight them to the death and die rather than agree. But that is me and the current me at that. It is inherent to human nature to try and stay alive no matter the circumstances, even if it means becoming a slave. The sheer desire to stay alive and the hope of one day escaping a bad situation is incredibly human. Sometimes all people have is hope, so they choose to hold onto that – because once you're dead, all hope dies with you. There is also the whole family aspect to it and how some chose to become slaves to protect those they love. Oh, and finally, let's not ignore that for some, slavery is all they know. It is their norm. They cannot even imagine the concept of freedom, so to expect them to desire the unknown is unrealistic," Jake answered.

"You humans always had weird views on slavery, Hypocritical even. Your race – on your planet too – always had a tendency to enslave anything they deem lesser than themselves, yet admonish others for enslaving - a tendency that continued after the system. Before, you could at least excuse your

enslavement of other races and calling them pets or whatever with the limited intelligence and lack of sapience for those enslaved, but what now? Fuck, it isn't even a problem with humanity but all enlightened races. You talked about how they knew nothing else... that is how every damn beast feels when they grow up slaves and gain sapience while already forced into it. They never even got the choice as they decided before their level of intelligence was high enough to," Villy said, and Jake had already predicted the rant coming.

"Do you have any idea how many of your race have professions or classes related to "taming," as they call it? Someone who forces beasts or other monsters to serve as slaves are called tamers, while those who force other enlightened races are called slavers. The same human can advocate for making a beast into their "pet" and at the same time admonishing the evilness of a slaver. There is no fucking difference between the two, but the perceived value of the lives of two different sapient beings and the fact that the enlightened one is often in a better position to decide. Fuck, if one had to compare, taming a beast is far worse. It is deciding that the beast will one day evolve into realizing it is a fucking slave or condemning them into never evolving into sapience at all. Either way, it is a fate far worse than death – a fate the beast will never have had the option of making. It would be like holding a toddler to its words for life, not even considering the child could grow up and change their mind.

"I have heard all the excuses. "Oh, but I am good to my pets!" "I love my pet like family!". Well, guess the fuck what? It doesn't change shit. You're still a slaver, and you should own up to it and stop making bullshit excuses to make yourself feel better. Ah, but don't get me wrong, I am not saying it is wrong... it is just the pathetic double standard I hate. In fact, I would advise you to pick up the Domination skill. Get a few good slaves or beasts and have them serve as defenders of your city, or maybe just as temporary fighting power. Just don't enslave anything you actually value – that would just be ruining them and nothing else. You can even bring that troll out with you. Slaves are tools, nothing more. Treat them as such, and never become some hypocritical asshole who talks about how you actually value them. If you did, they wouldn't be slaves."

The Malefic Viper stopped his rant, and Jake heard the undertone of anger in disgust, especially in the middle parts. Throughout it all, Jake frowned as he had to consider many things he had never even thought of before. Was having pets in the old world kind of fucked up? Jake would say no... but having them now would be if they were sapient.

He was damn sure that Villy had a history with slavery. As a beast, the double standard of viewing tamers and slavers as different clearly irked him, and Jake could see growing up in that kind of environment had affected him.

Jake had already come to terms with that he was technically a mass-murdering machine. He knew that many of those he killed were intelligent beings with sapient thought, but he had killed them anyway, only for his own selfish goal of getting stronger. He didn't delude himself into thinking what he was doing was somehow moral; it just is what it is. The way the world functioned like that. Jake was a hunter, so he would hunt.

A part of him hated the thought of ever enslaving anything or anyone or forcing them to do his will. Jake was a firm believer in not doing unto others what he didn't want them to do to him... which was why he was fine fighting and killing. He would be totally fine with a strong foe fighting and killing him in a fight, as that was just how things worked.... but he didn't see any reason for needless cruelty.

Fighting foes far weaker than yourself was just pointless. Likewise, torture was a waste of time that leads to nothing good happening. It was why Jake had hated the Minotaur Mindchief so much. If the Minotaur had had just decided that it would kill all humans and went on some righteous crusade, Jake would call it a moron, but he would at least understand it partially. But torturing people? Fuck that noise.

And what was worse torture than turning someone into a slave? To Jake, it would be the worst kind of existence he could imagine, which was why the concept was so abhorrent in his mind. Jake truly would rather die than be a slave and would rather kill than enslave others. Temporary prisoner? Maybe, if the situation called for it, but the Domination skill was permanent. It was a one-way ticket to – as the Viper said – turn another living being into a possession.

"Yeah, I am not a fan of slavery," Jake answered incredibly bravely. "I guess you dabbled?" he followed up, already knowing the answer.

“Once upon a time, yes, but not since I became a god. There simply has been no reason for me to do so. People came to serve me willingly, so why would I force others to? Enslaving someone is also a great way to ruin any future they may have, which is why it’s pretty much never done with anyone of value. Also, you won’t have to fear ever being Soulbound,” the Malefic Viper said.

“Why not?” Jake asked. Well, Villy likely wouldn’t have it, and the blessing likel-

“You got a bloodline. Anyone with a bloodline cannot be Soulbound. You can still sign Soul Contracts, but not a full-on Soulbinding. The reason for this is simple... Soulbinding someone is to bind them like an item to your soul, and as you know, you need to meet the requirement to bind an item before you can do so. Due to the nature of bloodlines, this means that no one can ever meet the requirements to bind your soul,” the Viper explained.

“That’s good to know, I guess,” Jake answered. “Does all this mean there is no way to properly have animal companions or something like that? You know, without making them slaves or forcing them to serve you, but still helping them progress with you?”

“Your humanoid bias is showing again. That is literally what a party is, Jake. Leader-type professions help you progress with your companions and your level and work together as you progress. There are plenty of such professions or even classes focusing on fighting with companions of other races, not just other humanoids. Alphas, nobles, leaders, or other kinds of leadership-focused paths function to amplify the progress of other enlightened or monsters around them and are found everywhere. You don’t need a contract or some kind of magical connection to be companions. There will never truly be a soul-bond of equals unless you fully bind your soul to another. These kinds of bonds do exist, but they will never be available to you either due to your bloodline. All your Soulbinds will automatically become those of domination.”

“Not sure if that sucks or not, but I guess it doesn’t truly matter,” Jake finally said. “I don’t like this whole domination business. If I could release people again and just use the skill to bring the trolls out of the dungeon, that would be one thing, but this is just too fucked up. So fuck that.”

“Up to you. The skill is great, and I would personally have gone for it primarily for the bonus experience and gateway into practicing soul magic it would provide, but don’t do it if you don’t feel like it’s your path. Taking a skill like this will greatly impact your future and your progress from here on out. Picking what is compatible with you in the long run is far more important than just going for some short-term benefits. You don’t need a bond to be companions or friends. It is only for those insecure if the other will betray them or those lacking the confidence to have others serve them willingly. Or the worst part, those too cowardly to battle themselves. Slaves have uses, but any task that a slave can accomplish, a willing servant or companion can do better. All who now serve me don’t do so because I make them, but because they want to. Probably for selfish reasons, the lot of them, but that’s still better than some forced bullshit contract as at least they do it willingly – and reaffirm that they continue to do it willingly every single day by not leaving,” Villy finished off with saying.

“Yeah, I also prefer the non-slavery form of employment myself. Thanks for the talk, as always, Villy. I have a feeling this topic will come up again. I guess slavery just isn’t my thing, and honestly a bit of a dickish thing to do. Glad you grew out of that behavior,” Jake said snarkily, bidding his goodbyes.

“Heh, talk to you later. Open to discussions on heavy topics at any time, and I always find them enlightening. Mainly because everyone else I talk to just agrees or refuses to even engage. Good luck and have fun. Oh, by the way, don’t be mad when you come to the Order in the future. Slavery abounds here!”

The presence of the Viper faded, and while Jake felt like while he could still send a message, there was no need to force it. One didn’t always need to have the last word. Also, he seriously hoped that the last part was a joke... but he feared it wasn’t. He would cross that bridge when the time came.

Jake shook his head, as many thoughts still tumbled around. It had been quite the conversation. Jake had heard another quite foreign perspective to his own, but it hadn’t really changed his mind, just

expanded his thoughts a bit. Maybe it was just him being stubborn and had the culture of Earth too deeply ingrained in his personality, but he didn't like slavery as a concept, and he was too damn stubborn to ever do so. He could see that to others; it maybe wasn't that big a deal. The multiverse was big, and many different people existed. He was sure that he could find plenty of humans on Earth who thought it would be perfectly normal and moral to bind a beast to themselves with what was essentially a slave contract. Jake just wasn't one of those people.

It did suck a bit that the first legendary skill he had been offered by either his class or profession was a dud, but he didn't regret skipping it. It wasn't him. Instead, he picked the Mark of the Avaricious Hunter as that one was far more aligned with who he was.

You have chosen to evolve Mark of the Ambitious Hunter to Mark of the Avaricious Arcane Hunter.

Accept?

Y/N

Jake naturally picked yes and felt the knowledge flood into his head for a few moments.

[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.

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[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.

It honestly didn't come with that much new know-how, just the basics of how to use it. It was a simple skill, just the way Jake used it. No long moral discussions about how fucked it was to mark things or not. It was a skill made for hunting down targets and killing them, just the way he liked it.

Though he had some doubts that the dungeon's resident Deepdwellers would agree.