

## 61 – The Haunted Armoury II

“This isn’t a tavern...” said the man by the courtyard entrance to the Bounty Hunter’s Guild.

Renji showed him the quest flier.

“Are all of you Exorcists?” the man asked, confused.

“They’re my party,” I told him.

“Well, it’s too many people.”

I was about to reply, when Rana stepped up, towering over the guard by at least a head and her face a dark cloud. She was good at mediating, though her intimidation factor played a big role...

“Your boss asked specifically for us. Do you think he’ll be pleased to hear that you delayed our job?”

The man looked away, scratching the back of his head awkwardly. “I suppose not,” he muttered.

We walked past him, with Elye and Lukas trailing in the back for once, and Renji in front, with Rana next to me. I felt a bit like I was some VIP being escorted by bodyguards.

Within the courtyard were hedgerows and colourful flowers, as well as people either seated on benches and chairs, or standing in small groups. It looked a lot more formal than I would’ve expected from the place.

Although we drew a lot of looks, no one stopped us from entering through the main door. We came into a sizeable room with wooden flooring and warm light from chandeliers on the walls and hanging down from the rafters. The atmosphere was quite serious inside, with groups of people seated by tables and talking business. I scanned the Bounty Hunters within, and, to my surprise, more than seventy percent were Natives. There were quite a lot of Witch Hunters though, despite the fact that they seemed to have their own Guild or something akin to it.

“This feels less like a Guild and more like a gentleman’s club,” Rana remarked. It seemed like she’d never been inside this establishment before.

Renji shrugged at her words, then led the way to a counter, behind which stood an eager young man dressed in a dark-blue vest over a crisp and white shirt, with dark-blue pants as well. His dark hair and pale complexion showed that he was a Lacksmey Native, or at the very least a descendant of people from there.

“We’re here about an Exorcism,” Renji told the man, handing him the flier.

The youth nodded, then led us to the second floor. He stood there in front of the chained-up and barred armoury door, looking at us expectantly. Renji turned to look at me in turn.

“What now,” he asked?

*I wonder if it's too late to tell him that I usually just wing these things.*

**“Prudence is a virtue.”**

*Maybe I will learn it one day.*

Although, to be fair, I had prepared ahead this time.

*Karasumany, reveal the Armoury to me.*

A loud **CAW!** reverberated through the walls, making the young Guild receptionist hop back a step. I saw how Renji stared at my right eye as it changed, becoming black as the vision of my familiar occupied it. I wondered briefly if my ear-canal changed as well, when the hearing in my right ear was overwritten by what the crow sensed.

To avoid a headache, I squinted my left eye slightly.

Revealed to me, from the entrance of a windowsill where the window had been left slightly ajar, was a room crowded with objects. The majority were weapons and armour, but there were also books and trinkets. Despite the Bounty Hunter Guild seeming more pretence than function, it was hard not to be impressed by their collection of equipment.

“No wonder they want this Haunting settled,” I mumbled to my companions. “Their Armoury is loaded with expensive stuff.”

“Are you seeing inside?” Renji asked, looking between me and the sealed armoury door.

Lukas, Elye, and Rana were all just waiting expectantly nearby, the two dexterity-fiends seeming quite bored. This was nothing new to them.

“There are no signs of invisible entities,” I continued.

Within, next to carefully lined shields and weapons, were statue-esque wooden stands with platemail, as well as hauberks and chain coifs, leather tunics, robes, and any other type of armour imaginable. Three in particular stood out, as they were not only of expert craftsmanship, but also had brutal-looking masks mounted to the front of their close-helmets. All three looked to be made of silver, and had glinting amethysts adorning them on the shoulder-plates, vambraces, and torso.

There were also some weapons of similar design, like swords that seemed more ceremonial than functional, due to their ostentation and abundance of embedded gems. I was personally most interested to know what sort of knowledge they might keep in such a place. Though unlikely, they might have books on summoning that could aid me.

I broke the connection with Karasu, then blinked a few times.

“So?” Renji asked expectantly.

“We’ll need the keys,” I told the youth that had been standing nearby for a few minutes now, seeming not to know whether to stay or go. Then I faced Renji and my Party, “I don’t know what sort of Haunter we’re dealing with, but let me go in first. I will try and see if there are any ethereal signs.”

“And if there isn’t?” Rana asked.

I shrugged. “Then maybe we can rely on Renji’s magic sense.”

It ended up taking twenty minutes before the young receptionist returned with a set of keys for the locks on the door and the chains barring entry.

“I think Lukas and Elye should stay out here,” I said. “There isn’t a lot of room inside.”

Elye thumped her fist into her chest, such that it made a sound, then she declared, “*We will guard the escape route!*”

I nodded. Then I saw Lukas’ confused look. “What did she say?” he asked.

Rana, Renji, and I shared a glance, then Rana immediately broke out laughing. “I completely forgot Lukas doesn’t have the Omniglot ability!”

“Oh, right...”

I looked between the Elfin and the Lundia Native, then said, with a teasing grin, “Lukas. Elye. Spend the time while you wait on learning a bit from each other’s languages.”

Lukas blushed, which was a reaction I hadn’t seen from him before, but then he quickly looked at the Elfin with an intense gaze, before pointing to himself and saying, “Lukas.”

Elye tilted her head, then pointed to herself and said, “Elfin.”

“I don’t think this will go well,” Rana remarked, unable to keep a chuckle from her voice.

“Is Lukas not an Otherworlder?” was all that Renji asked.

“We’ll tell you about it later,” I assured him. “Now, stay close, but let me enter first.”

Renji smiled his usual infuriating smile.

“What?” I asked.

“It’s just rare to see you taking the lead.”

“People change, didn’t you know?”

His grin just widened.

Although he seemed quite reluctant to, the Guild receptionist unlocked the chains and Armoury door for us, then quickly retreated to the relative safety of the stairwell, as though a monster might spring out from within.

“I think you can just return downstairs,” Renji told the youth. “We’ll call if we’re about to be slaughtered.”

The receptionist’s face paled, while Renji just laughed darkly.

“I don’t think sarcasm is that common here,” I told him.

“I’m just having a little fun,” he replied.

“Now’s not the time,” Rana said. Of course, she didn’t know Renji like I did. Even in this world, he seemingly the type that ran head-first into the most dangerous situation, grinning all the while.

I drew the Singing Branch from my back and tapped the bottom against the floor, as I settled my grip around its haft where soft moss provided a snug fit in my palm. Then I pushed my essence into it and my surroundings lit up with the auras of my companions.

With a nod to Rana, she opened the door and I immediately crossed the threshold, scanning the interior with my Spirit Sight, using the staff as the catalyst, instead of my real eyes.

Just like what I’d seen through Karasumany’s eyes, there were no overt signs of any entities. There were no ghostly footprints nor claw-marks, neither was there any miasma like what I’d seen in Skovslot nor any other signs of a Haunting.

I swept my gaze back and forth across the large room, but it was truly like nothing at all wrong.

With a sigh, I released the energy from my staff and my Spirit Sight waned and disappeared. Then I turned back to the Brawler and Vanguard in the doorway.

“It’s empty,” I told them.

They entered the room and looked around.

“You weren’t kidding,” Renji remarked. “They really do have quite a lot of things in here.”

“Is it possible that it’s not a Haunting?” Rana wondered.

“I’m not sure,” I told her. “A lot of the information in the Quest are close to what you might expect from a Poltergeist or shades. It has a preference for this particular room, as though bound to the place, and it is somehow moving things around.”

“Maybe rats are behind it?” she retorted.

“Two people are missing,” Renji reminded her.

“They could’ve run away?”

I scratched my cheek absentmindedly. There had to be something I was missing.

“Do you sense anything?” I asked Renji.

“I’ll walk around and check,” he said, then began slowly wandering down the length of the neatly-lined objects, while ogling all the items. Rana and I watched him both, but made no move to follow.

Eventually he stopped in front of one of the exquisite silver and amethyst-studded armour set that I’d seen, and for a brief moment I thought he’d sensed something, until I realised he was just using the mirror-polished surface to clean his teeth.

After a few more minutes, he returned to the entrance where we waited.

“Anything?” I asked.

“Nope.”

I frowned.

Rana chuckled next to me.

“What?” I asked.

“You always make that expression,” she said. “It’s quite adorable.”

“Isn’t it!?” Renji exclaimed, agreeing with her. “He always made that face when there was something he couldn’t solve. Like a cute little Sherlock.”

“Don’t patronise me,” I deadpanned. Renji ruffled my hair playfully, while Rana laughed.

Then suddenly I had an idea.

I reached into a belt pouch and withdrew something.

Renji immediately stopped messing with my hair to stare at the object I held. “Woah, that *feels* weird.”

“It is a whistle carved from bone, within which is the soul of a creature known as a Scenting Tongue.”

“Did you make it?” he asked.

“I did not make the whistle no, but I was forced by Leopold to contain the spirit that now resides within it.”

“Ryūta...” Rana started, sounding uncomfortable. The mirth had entirely left her. “What does it do?”

“Do you want to try it?” I asked, presenting it to her.

She looked sceptically at the object and then me.

“It allows you to see the world as a Scenting Tongue does,” I explained.

“And that accomplishes what exactly?”

“It turns you into a Tracker...” Renji realised out loud. “That’s amazing!”

I nodded. “Something like it at least.”

When Rana didn’t want to use it, I put it to my lips and blew.

A deep bassy sound blared from the whistle, and, for some reason, the Singing Branch in my left hand seemed to reverberate with its sound.

“**My soul is tingling,**” Armen commented. His word choice was very bizarre I thought.

“*What did you do, Exorcist!?*” growled Seramosa. She had been hanging around near the rafters of the room, as though hiding from me.

*Huh, apparently this is like a dog-whistle for spirits?*

“I feel weird,” Renji said.

Rana nodded, “Me too. What the hell was that.”

As they talked, I saw how the air was full of coloured tendrils that drifted in some unseen wind and connected to many of the objects in the room, as well as one connected to Renji that showed the path he had walked around the Armoury. The objects that hadn’t been touched or moved in a long time had a very faint trail, while anything that’d been moved recently had a more visible trail. Strangely, one of the statue-esque armour stands had such a trail. As did a bookcase in the back, as well as a chest-looking trunk. Those three scent-strands stood out, as their trails were black dotted with splotches of bright crimson.

Before I could contemplate the meaning of these unique trails, I saw Elye and Lukas poke their heads through the doorway.

“*Yuuta, what did you do? The whole room went bwaaaaah, and then my body was like squee!*”

“Don’t worry about it,” I told the Elfin.

As always, she seemed to take me for my word and so immediately disappeared from sight, while Lukas lingered a moment longer.

“You can come in, if you want,” I told him.

“That’s okay,” he said. “I’ll wait out here with Elye.”

“Renji, when you walked by the armour sets, did you feel nothing?”

“Not really. Why?”

I handed him the bone whistle. As soon as he took it from my hand, the magic imbued within it vanished from my body and the air returned to normal, with the scent-strands gone.

He looked at the whistle for a bit. “It’s just like *Meiabi*.”

“I don’t know what that is,” I replied.

“The anime? We watched it together.”

I shrugged.

“Anyway,” he said, lifting the whistle to his lips and grinning, “Indirect kiss.”

I shook my head, while Rana looked like she wanted to snatch the whistle from his hands.

As the bassy-deep sound flowed from the whistle, my Singing Branch did not reverberate with its strange tone.

“Woah,” Renji said.

“It’s quite odd, right? Look at the armour, and the bookcase, and that trunk over there.”

“I see it. They all have the same trail to them, and if I understand what I’m seeing correctly, they have moved around recently.”

“Now I need to see this as well,” Rana commented.

After a bit of looking around, Renji handed the whistle to Rana. She made a big show of wiping it off, before setting it to her lips.

Renji feigned a dejected look and said, “She’s treating me like I’m corrosive.”

“Probably a good precaution,” I replied.

He slapped me on the back playfully. I could tell he was holding back his strength. With his attributes, he could probably have knocked me to the floor if he wasn’t careful.

The bassy note came from the whistle again, and just like before, my staff didn’t react to it.

*I think the Singing Branch must be like some kind of amplifier for my magic,* I postulated.

**“I was about to make the same observation. Regardless, I would prefer if you were to use the whistle without wielding the staff. It is quite an uncomfortable feeling to be rattled in such a way.”**

*Peculiar that it affects spirits like you when amplified.*

**“Amplified, many spells may pierce the veil between life-and-death,”** Armen said ominously.

Rana grabbed her head and quickly handed me the whistle back.

“I think I know what we’re dealing with,” Renji told us.

“It’s not a Haunter, right?” Rana asked.

He shook his head. “We’re dealing with Mimics.”