

64 – Compensation

The Priest shook her head. Merlisse suppressed a sob, but I could clearly see how her body was trembling with the effort of schooling her emotions into something neutral and cold-hearted.

The lady who had overseen Garven’s healing was a Seeker-ranked Adventurer, who had joined the crowd in the courtyard outside the Bounty Hunter Guild. She was the most powerful healer that Merlisse had been able to find in such short time. After all, the main Church lay at the far end of the city in Noble Quarter.

Why couldn’t the Priest save him? I asked, leaning against Rana and looking at the ruined body of Garven the Witch Hunter. *You’ve healed far more grievous injuries.*

“Her healing powers were not powerful enough. Before I died, I had evolved my Heal and similar abilities to their highest rank.”

Is that why I survived the fall from the tower in Skovslot?

“Indeed.”

Oliver Smile walked up to the Priest and handed her a gold crown, the lady frowned by palmed the large coin nonetheless.

“It was his own fault he died,” Oliver said, looking down at where Garven’s body lay across three chairs pushed together to form a flat bed of sorts.

Immediately Merlisse stormed from the building with thundering steps and fire in her angry glare.

“That was uncalled for,” Renji said. “It is unbecoming to speak ill of the dead.”

“He was my friend too,” Oliver replied, “But he was too strung up on Moth Wing and it made him sloppy.”

“It’s a drug, right?”

The Witch Hunter nodded. “Alchemists brew the stuff. It’s addictive like nothing else and dulls the senses during early stages of withdrawals. Garven is not the only of my Order hooked on the junk,” he explained.

“It’s not common for Witch Hunter teams to split up, right?” Rana asked, “But you had two other companions the first time we met. What happened to them?” The accusation in her words was clear.

Oliver adopted a tired grin as though seeing the humour in her words. “Our work is dangerous. Whether we hunt down heretic Summoners and Exorcists, or seek the extermination of Demons, we have the highest mortality rate of any Advanced Role in Arley and Lacksmey. Those who don’t die

often seek Euphorics or break under the strain. My former party members were weak, and their replacements were no different.”

Suddenly the doors to the hall burst open and an older man in a fancy suit with a well-kept grey goatee and side-swept hair entered, flanked by three Clerks and Secretaries of the Bounty Hunter Guild.

“Ser Smile!” he immediately started, as soon as he laid eyes on the Witch Hunter. “I do apologise for my tardiness, and for this whole... affair with the Exorcists I hired.” His eyes briefly swept across my Party and I.

“You’re late,” Oliver told the man bluntly. “I am no longer interested in seeking a potential cooperation between your Guild and my Order. It has been very clear from my brief stay that your Guild is woefully underprepared for emergencies. The simple fact that not a single of your members were interested in aiding these Adventurers with a Mimic infestation says everything I need to know.”

“Please reconsider!” the man said, and I got the sense that he was either the Master of the Guild or someone very close to that rank.

Oliver shook his head. “I will not change my mind on this. But you ought to compensate Exorcist Ryūta and his party for the danger you placed them in by filing an erroneous Quest, which your Guild frankly should have dealt with yourselves.”

The man looked annoyed, but then one of his Clerks whispered something into his ear and he nodded, then gestured towards Renji, Rana, and I. “You three may each pick something from the Armoury to keep,” he said.

“My Party has five members,” I replied.

“They may pick something as well then,” he added.

I glanced to Oliver who cast me a simple grin. I couldn’t tell what his angle was, but at least we’d get additional compensation for what had turned out to be a very dangerous quest. Renji left us and went out through the main doors, returning a minute later with Elye and Lukas behind him.

The Rogue immediately saw the dead man on the chairs, then cast a worried glance and us. “Are you okay?” he asked.

“*It was very loud,*” Elye remarked, then she saw the corpse of the Mimic Knight and immediately ran over to it, squatting down to get a better look. “*It is very goopy and gross!*”

Renji grinned despite it all. “Is she always like that?”

I sighed. “Yeah, but at least she seems to have fun.”

“Are these everyone in your Party?” asked the man with the suit and goatee.

“That’s right,” I answered.

“Then follow me to the Armoury.”

“It is in need of renovation,” Renji remarked, to which the Guild man and his entourage looked surprised. “You do understand that we fought three Mimics here, right?”

They shared glances. Apparently they hadn’t considered the ramifications, but I noticed that they were now looking around properly, seeing all the damage to the hall and stairwell, as well as the trails and splashes of purple blood.

The man with the goatee led the way up to the second floor with far more sobered steps and kept making sounds of apprehension whenever he spotted significant damage to floor, walls, and furniture. When we reached the doorway to the Armoury, I also let out a gasp of surprise. It looked as though someone had brought power tools and begun tearing up the floor and disassemble the many neat displays.

“The Mimic Knight was really dangerous, wasn’t it?” Lukas asked, looking at the damage and then at us.

Renji nodded. “They’re worse than a Hobgoblin Lord, mainly because Adventurers often underestimate them. If not for the poisonous weapon that the Witch Hunter possessed, I don’t know if I could’ve killed it as easily.”

I blinked. “*That* was what it looks like when it’s ‘easy’!?”

“Unfortunately,” he replied with a chuckle.

Oliver Smile had stayed behind in the hall, but I was sure that the Possessed Weapon I’d seen on his Guild Card was the one which Renji had referred to.

The Guild man was still gaping at the devastation as my Party and I ventured into the destroyed Armoury, looking about for something we’d want to keep as compensation for the screw-up with the quest.

A lot of the weapons and trinkets were scattered around on the floor, while the armour pieces that had been neatly arranged on the stands were now spread around everywhere, making it hard to assemble a full set without a lot of puzzling parts together.

While I looked around, trying to see if there was anything that caught my eye, I saw Elye immediately run to a hood travel cloak of some grey kind of matte silk. She held it up, running it across her cheek and then sniffing it repeatedly.

“*Look, Yuuta! Spidersilk!*”

I noticed how Lukas looked towards the Elfin with longing in his eyes, then he made his way over to where trinkets and jewellery had been kept, until eventually lifting a silver necklace with an amethyst stone up from the floor, wiping dust from it with the sleeve of his shirt. Before the Elfin could see what he had found, he hid it in a pocket, then walked over to her to try and strike up a conversation, using a few words in her language that he had already learnt.

“Pretty adorable,” Renji commented, seeing the same thing. He held a silver amethyst-studded sword in his hand. It was clearly a ceremonial piece, but easily worth a few gold crowns to the right buyer. “What are you picking?”

“I’m not sure yet,” I replied.

Rana was going through a pile of swords, lifting one, testing balance, swinging it back-and-forth, then dropping it to try another, over-and-over.

I continued scanning the room, my eyes briefly stopping on where Karasumany’s clone sat on the windowsill, even despite the fight that had taken place. When I looked out through the windows at the waning light, I saw that a flock of crows were circling the building, and many more perched on nearby rooftops and street lamps.

Karasumany, disperse yourself across the city. When your clones gather too closely, it brings attention to you. Attempt to be inconspicuous by blending in.

CAW! replied a thousand birds, before they all lifted from the buildings in unison and spread out across the sky, the swirling flock dispersing as well. The clone on the windowsill remained, staring right at me with its beady black eyes.

You too, I told it, and it cawed quietly, then hopped out through the window that’d been left ajar, before taking to the air.

“Quite a frightening display,” Renji joked.

I smiled slightly, then continued scanning the ruined Armoury, until eventually my eyes landed on a heavy-looking statue-esque stand of armour that had survived the battle with the Mimics without being knocked over and spread to every corner of the room.

Suddenly, an old idea I’d had returned to the front of my mind, then I pointed at the armour and told Renji, “I’ll take *that*.”

Rana came over a second after, along with Elye and Lukas. In her hands was a longsword with a twin-edged and somewhat-narrow blade and a T-shaped crossguard and hand-and-a-half hilt. “What did you pick?” she asked.

Renji showed her the sword, then said, “Ryūta wants *that* armour set.”

She looked at me in confusion, then asked, “Why?”

“You’ll see,” I replied.

“You’re really selling the ominous up-to-no-good Exorcist image well,” Renji joked.