

Air escaped the infected's chest as it gave a short groan, body staggering forward with arms outstretched to claw at Sin. Before its unkempt nails were close enough to make contact with the hunter Sin had struck the beast's wooden planks it had grasped to use as a shield, the flimsy thing knocked to the ground in an instant before he bore his saw cleaver into the flesh of the infected. Gripping onto Sin's forearm as it slowly fell to the ground the beast glanced up at Sin, eyes milky and distorted from the infection coursing through its body. "You.. are not wanted here.. you plague-ridden rat." This startled the cccat in disguise as he had never come across a beast that could speak fluently, his eye widening with surprise before the beast finally collapsed to the ground completely. Sin took a step back from the beast, eye darting across its deceased body in search of anything out of the ordinary only to find nothing of note, Monster approaching from behind.

"You alright?" He asked, using his free hand to wipe his black and green hair from the front of his face. "You hesitated a lot longer than you normally do when your blade made contact with it." Sin shook his head, attempting to clear the thoughts from his mind. "Yeah, I'm alright. We should keep moving though. Master Gherman tasked us with visiting lower Yharnam for clean up duty. Said it would be easier on my body since anything left over likely suffered pretty severe burn damage." Monster nodded in reply, taking the initiative to walk ahead of them down the remainder of the cobblestone bridge before them. Aside from the single beast Sin encountered at the edge of the bridge the rest of the way remained uneventful, the two eventually coming upon the Odeon chapel once more. The familiar red blob of a man remained in the same spot as they had left him in, his body twisting in the direction of the noise as the two approached. "Ah! Welcome back, good to see you alive and well. Say.. did you happen to find any sane survivors on your journey?" He asked, glancing up at the two as they approached. "Yes, actually. We have informed a young girl of this place, told her of this sanctuary and how she will be among kind folk here. I am surprised she has not already arrived." Monster replied, arms crossing over his chest in a self-soothing manner. "Ah.. I have not seen the likes of any young girl just yet but I shall keep my eyes open! Thank you for telling her of this place." The chapel dweller replied with a smile, body shifting back and forth slowly as the two continued on through the chapel. "If I may ask.. where are you two headed off today?" "Lower Yharnam, our master has sent us to complete a task there. We will return, don't you worry." Monster replied, trying to sound as carefree as possible considering all the beasts they'd encounter would be weak from the fires.

Passing through the archway on the left side of the chapel Sin felt the hairs on the back of his neck begin to stand on end, his gaze darting over to the far side of the large building. The cccat felt a sense of uneasiness as he peered across the decrepit remains of the garden, a single broken pillar stood on the center of the space with an old well towards the back. Despite his hair raising the space did not indicate any sort of danger as they were the only two current occupying the garden's remains. "You good?" Monster asked his fellow hunter, turning to face him as he noticed the space next to him had become empty. "Yeah, I'm.. I'm good. I just got this weird feeling when we passed through the archway is all." Sin replied, dragging a hand across

the back of his neck to smooth out his nerves, quickly catching up to his friend as they made their way around the corner.

They passed by a short wall lined with bars, the view overlooking a good portion of town below. Dark windows and a lack of smoke from any chimney silently told the hunters what they already knew to be true. Everyone below had either fled to safety or died trying.

Approaching a series of steps the boys glanced at each other before looking at the single doorway nestled between the two, thick ash clung to the sides of the walls signaling where they needed to go. The silently approached the doorway, stopping for a moment as an additional set of footsteps sounded from the steps above. A particularly lanky beast carrying a large sack atop his shoulder stared down at the hunters, silently approaching them as they readied their weapons. Its hands were monstrously out of proportion to the rest of his body, clad in dark tattered robes with a hood drawn up over his head. Broken and stained teeth poked out in all directions as the beast opened its mouth to let out a warning groan, its feet shuffling across the ground as it moved closer.

"I can get this one." Monster said as he unhooked his spear gun from its holster, already taking steps to close the gap between himself and the beast.

"Monster, wait!" Sin called out, attempting to grab at his fellow hunter's coat before he got too far out of reach, fingers curling around the fabric tightly. Sin tugged at Monster's coat hard enough to prevent him from moving forward any further, the green and black cccat glancing back at his partner in surprise.

"Dude, what's the big deal? I said I got this one."

"This isn't just any regular beast, Monster. That's a snatcher. You see that big sack it is carrying?" Sin replied, pointing a gloved finger at the beast. Monster glanced back at it, brow cocked in confusion. "If you paid attention during master Gherman's lessons you'd know that that thing isn't normal. If it gets the chance it will stuff you inside that bag and take you away. We've never managed to recover any hunter that has been snatched up before, even if we manage to defeat it. Once you're in that bag you're *gone*. Don't know how but you're just *gone*, dude."

"Shit.." Monster replied, fist tightening around the handle of his weapon. "Should we just leave it?"

"Probably safer that way.. it can't move too fast so we can just skirt around the side and make a break for the steps there." Sin replied, motioning to the stone steps leading down into a small structure, a series of steps leading upwards to a platform on either side.

They exchanged a nod before splitting up, forcing the snatcher to choose which one to go after. It gave a confused glance around itself before it began to shuffle slowly towards Sin, hand outstretched as if it was close enough to grasp the hunter. A flash of light followed by an intense wave of suction began to form from the beast's palm, Sin's eyes widening in shock before he leapt forward, body tucking to roll out of harm's way. He could feel the intensity of the suction as his clothes rolled through the faux wind, legs burning as he sprinted towards the steps. Monster stood below, watching as his fellow hunter came hurtling down the steps. His boots made a loud sound as they connected with the tiled flooring, the sound echoing off the tombs walls.

The two continued to descend into the tomb, Sun explaining to Monster why this was constructed in the first place. "That section we passed through used to be boarded off as a way to keep the citizens of the city from adventuring into the ruins below. One forgets what is not directly in front of their faces. Can't see the way in? Well.. what way into where? It was the church's idea to hide what they had done from those who knew of their crimes. Torching an entire city for nothing, it didn't save anyone, it didn't prevent the infection from spreading." "Suppose anyone traveling into the city above wouldn't be curious as to what happened if they couldn't find the access point." Monster agreed, following behind Sin as they descended several more flights of stairs before coming to a large open room with a massive wooden door to one side. Various vases littered the walls, large cobwebs strung from the ceilings down to the vases trailing to the floor were silent indicators that this place had not been visited for a long long time. Approaching the massive wooden door they noticed a sign nailed into one of the doors, the penmanship heavyweight and rushed.

*Turn back, for there are nothing but charred memories here.*

Pushing the door open with some effort, Monster and Sin began their descent into old Yharnam, eyes glancing around for any signs of danger. Upon their arrival the scent of smoke and ash quickly invaded their noses, eyes watering from the overwhelming aroma. Not a single beast could be seen at the time as they made their way across the footpath. Despite having been torched so long ago smoke still lingered from some of the buildings, embers threatening to spill over into pillars of flames at any moment.

"Wow.." Monster muttered out loud as he gazed upon the city's ruins, a sense of dread settling inside his chest. "They really just.. burnt down an entire portion of the city in hopes it would fix everything. And it didn't even fucking work." He spat, lips curling into a tight scowl of disgust. "Think of all the people they left behind to burn when they didn't even do anything."

Before Monster could utter his next thoughts a loud booming voice echoed across the lands, starting both unsuspecting hunters.

"You there, hunters. Didn't you read the sign? Turn back from whence you came. Old Yharnam, burned and abandoned by its former people, is home to only beasts. You will not hunt here." Glancing towards the direction of the voice they were able to make out a man sitting atop a tall clock tower, the machinery that kept the arms turning having failed long ago; likely during the first fires. Cupping his hands around his mouth Sin yelled back, hoping to be heard despite the distance. "We are here under master Gherman's orders. Who are you?"

"It is of no concern to you who I am, but the beasts here will not harm those above. Turn back or the hunter will face the hunt." The man replied again, his voice stern with warning.

"Why do you protect them?" Sin called back, genuinely curious for the man's answer.

"These beasts you hunt were once human, like you and I. Turned into something at no fault of their own now slain out of fear of spreading the infection. Do you truly know what started all of this? Do you truly think those above to be your ally?" The man replied, moving away from the large horn-like object for a moment.

"I am Djura, the last of the original powder keg hunters. I have long since abandoned my initial cause, to slay without question, without mercy as you hunters do. Now I remain here, protecting these creatures from further harm until the end of my days. One day you will see them for what they truly are.. It is time you got going." The man sounded almost sad in a way, his tone shifting as he spoke about the beasts and their lives before turning.

"What if we do not leave?" Sin asked, already knowing the answer before Djura could respond. "If you still insist on hunting them, I will hunt you. Do you understand me? Do not throw your lives away when you are given the chance to simply walk away. I won't enjoy laying you two to rest but I will if i absolutely have to."