Walking the Planes

by ThatOnePsycho

Summary

In which the Gatewatch gets a couple extra founding members, Ruby becomes a discount Magical Girl, Sun learns that nothing can't be killed if you can throw enough mana at it, and Blake wonders how she got such weird friends.
Chapter 1

“Ruby?”

Sun looked down the alley of the smog choked city. He was in the remains of the city’s industrial district, looking for his new friend.

His grandfather said that when he was a kid Sun’s age, the city had been renowned for its metallurgy. Sun wasn't sure what that was, but he could tell that it wasn't happening now. The few jobs left in the city were tied to the CCT and Shade. Fresh water had to be flown in, and vegetables were grown in greenhouses, hiking up the price.

Which is why his mom would kill him if she found out he was doing this.

Sun walked further down the alley, looking at one of the doors. Drawn on it was a twelve pointed star, created from a red diamond and a pair of blue and white triangles.

Sun pressed his hand against it, and the star flared to life, before the door swung open.

Ruby’s ‘home’ was a repurposed warehouse, the bedroll they had pinched a month back was rolled up in one corner, several coils of chain were on one of the tables around the place, with two sitting below it, and Ruby’s ‘inventions’ dominated the rest.

“Ruby~! Ya here?”

He wouldn't be surprised if she wasn't, the younger girl tended to wander off at the drop of a hat, normally to ransack one of the other buildings for some part or another.

Dropping the water bottle and bag onto one of the tables (he still wasn't sure how Ruby had moved them) Sun walked over to another.

On it was Ruby’s newest creation. Sun reached down, picking up the nunchaku.
Like everything else Sun had seen Ruby make, they were roughly made, with a chain clearly taken from some forgotten project. Unlike most things Ruby made, however, the symbols on it were a uniform red.

Huh.

Sun examined the weapon, passing it from hand to hand. It was… interesting, for lack of a better word.

"-Can't believe we’re doing this."

"Do you have a better idea?"

"Leave her alone? She’s a little girl."

"We need an Artificer. If I knew where Dack was, I’d ask him. But I don’t, so we have no choice. Plus, we’ll also have a Warder on our side."

"She’s a little girl who *still* hasn't gotten home after flaring."

"She’s also primarily Red and Blue. If anything, we’re doing the right thing by picking her up. Once we're done with this, we can bring her home, she would never get there otherwise."

Sun took a step back as the two came closer to the bay door.

*Clang*

*Clang*

“Ruby! It’s Gideon, are you there?”
Sun backed up, climbing up onto the second floor and hiding behind one of the empty crates.

“We’re going to come in!”

The door was pushed up, allowing the weak sunlight in. Sun watched as the three people walked in.

One was a man with light brown skin and sideburns; the other two were women, one with bright red hair and eyes, the other with pointed ears.

Three.

Two.

One…

The coils of chain glowed with white and blue symbols, before firing across the room, the ones on the ground reaching them first.

All three cried out in shock as their legs were suddenly bound together, followed swiftly by their hands. The red haired woman started to say something before a blue chain impacted into her mouth, wrapping around her head and silencing her. Another preemptively did the same to the man and long eared woman.

Sun tried to keep from laughing as they fell over, the red haired woman glaring at the chain around her hands. He remembered when he had triggered Ruby’s defences.

The door swung open, Ruby walked in, fidgeting with a set of scrap. Behind her floated a staff made from a rod of metal, three sets of sigils glowing on it.

“Maybe if I-? No, that would blow up.”

Ruby walked towards the back of the warehouse, where the manager's office sat normally. The red
haired woman jangled her chains, only for the ten year old to ignore her.

Or, more likely, fail to notice her in the first place.

Sun snickered for a moment, stopping as a wave of heat rolled over him.

There seemed to be a shimmer of heat around the woman, the chains glowing brighter, before her hair lit on fire.

Sun kept from yelping, barely.

Gouts of fire burst from her hands and mouth, causing the symbols on the chains to blaze for a moment before winking out. She forced her arms apart, tearing out her gag and directing her hands at her legs.

She quickly untied her friend, at the same time Ruby walked out, no doubt drawn by the blistering wave of heat.

Her eyes briefly flickered to the bag and water, then up to where he was, before locking onto the trio. The minute she did, a large smile grew on her face as she broke into a jog, weaving in between the tables to launch herself at the man.

“Gideon! Nissa!” the second name was punctuated by Ruby launching herself from her spot around Gideon’s neck and at the long eared woman, who looked uncomfortable, “What are you two doing here?!”

“We need you to make something for us.”

“Ohhhh. What?”

“We’ll explain in a few, were you about to eat?”

Ruby looked back at the food, “I guess? My friend brought it over, Sun?”
Sun peered over the edge, cover blown, “Yeah?”

“We’re going to eat?”

“Yeah?”

Was it just him, or was Gideon doing his best to burn a hole through his head?

---X Line Break X---

Kytheon Iora, or Gideon Jura, continued to watch the monkey-boy who had been hiding on the second floor. To his credit, Sun didn't flinch.

The Hieromancer looked over as Chandra nudged him.

“What?”

“Stop looking like you’re going to kill the kid,” Chandra said out of the corner of her mouth, “What’s wrong?”

“Just… who is he? Look at them,” Gideon pointed at the two kids. Sun was balancing a small red fruit(?) from the meal on his nose, causing Ruby to giggle around the sandwich in her mouth.

“What? they're kids playing.”

“It’s just… messy. All of it.”

Gideon didn't just mean the pair playing with their food. The entire building was messy.
He was sure that to Ruby the mess had some sort of order, but for the life of him, he couldn't see it.

There were tables all over, some pushed against the wall and some sitting in middle of the room, with Artifacts on them. Clubs, shields, staves, gauntlets and orbs. The air was thick with mana, and Gideon could see Dominarian numbers and letters placed in strategic places around the warehouse, the only order in the chaos.

“Giddy?”

Gideon looked back at Ruby, who had finished eating.

“Yes?”

“What was it you needed?”

“We need you to create something that could keep someone alive when tapping into a massive mana supply.”

“Huh?” Sun looked between the two of them, “Mana?”

“I’ll explain later, Sun. How much?”

And here's where it became a shot in the dark.

“Ley Lines.”

“A Ley Line? I might be able to-”

“No. Ley Lines,” Gideon stressed, “as in all the ones on a plane at once.”

Ruby’s eyes bugged out.
Gideon didn't blame her. Something like this hadn’t been done for decades. Since the disappearance of most of the Old Planeswalkers, and weakening of those who remained.

“What are you doing-”

“Things have gotten worse on Zendikar. This is our only plan.”

They could do it without one, but it ran the risk of killing both Chandra and Nissa.

“Can you do it?”

“I… I can try,” Ruby pushed herself up, pacing, “Something like that... maybe by dispensing the mana into the atmosphere and manipulating it there? No. Too uncontrollable,” Ruby picked up an orb on one of the desks, rotating it in her hands as she looked into the water.

Chandra jumped down from the desk, reaching out for Ruby, “If you can't-”

“I can try,” Ruby repeated, ducked under Chandra’s arm and ran into the back room.

Gideon caught the orb, catching a flash of yellow before the water settled.

---X Line Break X---

Nissa walked back into the cramped space, ducking under the half open bay door.

Sun was on the second floor, throwing a ball into the air and catching it. Chandra was playing with one of the orbs, shifting panels and chuckling as gouts of fire burst from it.

“Where’s Gideon?”
“Went outside,” Sun said, continuing to throw the ball.

Nissa sighed, before turning around and heading back into the hot sun. The Animist looked around, before heading back towards the populated part of the city.

Following the beacon of White mana that was Gideon’s spark, Nissa slipped through a curtain of plastic strips… and was promptly hit with a wall of cool air.

Nissa’s breath hitched, before she let slip an involuntary sigh of relief. After spending hours in the heat, the artificially cooled air was exquisite.

As little as two years ago, every instinct in Nissa’s body would have rebelled from the technology. She was a Joraga elf, they knew better than to destroy the world through uncontrolled technology!

Or they had, before her bias had gotten them wiped out and caused more damage to Zendikar in two years than the other races had in millenia. Combined.

“How’d you find out about this place?”

“I asked where they grew these,” Gideon held up the bag, “apparently they grow most of the food here.”
The Planeswalkers sat on a bench. Gideon placed the bag on the floor, taking one of the fruits from the bag.

“What is that?”

“A pomegranate. We had them on Theros,” Gideon explained, driving his thumb through the rhine, “I haven't had one in a long time.”

Gideon pulled the pomegranate in two, ignoring the juice leaking onto his hands. He handed one half to her, before picking out one of the seeds and eating it; Nissa did the same, wrinkling her nose as the tart juice spilled out.

“Are you alright?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve seemed a bit agitated since we got here; you didn't wait for Ruby to be done eating before you left.”

Nissa looked around, checking to see if anyone else was there. She didn't see anyone, but lowered her voice just in case.

“There’s almost no mana here.”

Gideon frowned, closing his eyes. Nissa could feel him reach out, grasping for the mana lines that should have attached to a city like this. There were a few, but they were sluggish and weak. Not nearly as many as there should be. The few that were strong were clearly from Ruby drawing mana from another plane. Zendikar, in all likelihood.

Gideon’s eyebrows scrunched together and he snapped open his eyes; looking to Nissa he murmured a question.

“Is the whole plane like that?”
Nissa shook her head. She could feel the lifeblood of the plane far away, ready to be tapped at a moment's notice.

“I wonder why-”

“Yo!” Both Planeswalkers stopped their conversation as Sun walked towards them, “I told Ruby I could find you,” that comment seemed to be aimed less at them and more to himself, “Listen, Ruby was asking for you, said something about Black and Green.”

Nissa and Gideon shared a look; rising to follow, they trailed behind the boy with a monkey tail. Halfway to the place Ruby was hiding out, Sun’s eyes widened and he ducked into an alley. Nissa followed, looking behind her in time to see a long haired woman with a tail walk by.

“You know her?”

“Mom,” Sun said, looking like he had swallowed a lemon, “come on. Let’s get back to Ruby.”

Nissa and Gideon bowed their heads; Nissa hadn’t been on speaking terms with her mother before her death, and Gideon’s father had died before he was born.

Once they entered the building, Ruby looked up from where she was working with one of the rods; this one was shorter than the others and ended in a sharp tip, blue and red runes sat on it.

“You’re here!” Ruby cheered, walking towards the back room, “Nissa, I need your help.”

Nissa followed the young girl, glancing around the smaller room. The most obvious thing was the map on one wall, an X sitting over a spot near the middle and an O around a spot in the desert.

Ruby picked up the clip off a desk, holding it up, “This is what I’m using. I’m planning to ward it against all types of mana. Hopefully that will keep you alive.”

It was better than nothing. As Nissa started to reach for it, however, Ruby pulled back, a serious
look on her face.

“I want something in return.”

“What?” Nissa asked as her stomach plummeted.

Deals between Planeswalkers rarely ended well. Even if they no longer were nigh-omnipotent, capable of tearing planes apart, most Planeswalkers could bring enough mana to bear to level a city.

“I want help getting home,” Ruby looked tired as she said that, looking longingly at the map, “It’s my birthday in a couple weeks. I want to be home for it.”

“...Ok?” That was all? They had planned to do that anyways.

Ruby smiled, handing the pin over, “I need you to channel Black and Green mana into that. Then it will be done.”

Nissa reached out, feeling four sparks nudging at the corner of her senses, she ignored them as she grabbed tightly onto mana lines from Zendikar and forging a bond.

After a moment, five sigils lit up, one for each mana type. Red, green, blue, white, and what could only be described as light that wasn't for Black.

Clipping the ward to her collar, she walked out, looking at Gideon and Chandra.

“We good?”

“Yes.”

The three Planeswalkers stepped out of the building, into the alley, and into the Blind Eternities.
Sun watched as the adults left. Turning towards Ruby, he followed her as she ran into the back room, grabbing the rucksack he had bought with money he had pinched from his mom, and thrown it on the table.

Ruby weaved through the tables, picking up some of the items seemingly at random, and threw them next to the rucksack.

“What are you doing?”

“Packing,” Ruby said, weighing two orbs in her hands, before throwing one back and dropping the other on the table.

“Why?”

“I want to make sure they keep their promise to bring me home,” Ruby explained, now examining a rail spike, before turning around and haphazardly throwing it over her shoulder.

Sun froze, “You’re leaving?”

“Yeah,” This time Ruby picked up the pointed rod, throwing it next to the rucksack without stopping to examine it.

Sun had known Ruby was looking for a way home, he’d watched her make plans and throw them out, but he hadn't expected it to be so sudden.

He didn't want to be stuck alone with his mom, even if he was supposed to pick a Huntsmen academy at the end of the year.

Ruby stopped from where she was picking up a pair of small steel rods, “What's wrong?”

He didn't want to lose his only friend, to be stuck in a dying city in the middle of a desert, with no-
one but his mom.

“I’m just going to miss you,” Sun muttered, watching as Ruby cast aside the rods for another pair, adding them to the rucksack.

Sun focused on the same spot, even as Ruby walked behind him.

A hand planted on his shoulder, and Ruby turned him around and placed something into his hand. Looking down at it, Sun realized it was a washer with Ruby’s twelve point star.

“What’s this?”

“It’s like a beacon. So long as you hold onto this, I’ll be able to find you and visit,” Ruby smiled, grabbing a pair of gauntlets and adding them to the growing pile.

Finally, Ruby stopped by the shields, picking up one and studying it, before nodding and carrying it over, grabbing the bedroll as she went.

Sun watched Ruby start to pack, the shield going in first, followed by the rod and gauntlets, the pointer rod was relegated to a side pouch, with the orb in the other. Finally, the bedroll was clipped to the front.

Ruby put the rucksack on her back, grabbing her floating staff, and started to walk to the door. Halfway there, she turned around, and walked into the back room. When she emerged, she had her map shoved next to the rod. She grabbed the nunchaku as she passed and walked over.

“I made these for you,” Ruby lifted them up, “you had said you wanted to learn how to use them.”

Sun took them, “Thanks.”

“Come on,” Ruby said, “We need to get out of here.”

Sun followed, “Why?”
“I can't take everything, but I can't leave it.”

“Then what are you doing?”

“I’m going to demolish it.”

…

“What!?"

Ruby snapped her fingers, and Sun whipped around as the sigils on the building flared and it crumbled in on itself.

“What was that about!?”

“I’ll be able to make better stuff when I get home,” Ruby turned, petals flaking off her body, “I’ll see you later, Sun.”

“Wait!” Sun lurched forward, grabbing Ruby’s wrist.

He had just enough time to hear Ruby start to say his name, before it was drowned out by a rush of color and a roar of energy. Sun felt something tear away at him, only for something to burn to life in some deep part of him.

When Sun came to, the first thing he noticed was that his whole body ached. The second thing he noticed was the weight on his chest and the wetness that accompanied it; the third was muffled sobs.

Sun looked down, squinting through the pain; Ruby’s head was buried there, her long hair covering his vision.
“Ruby? Can you get off? You’re kind of hurting me.”

Ruby’s head sprang up, staring at him through her unkempt hair, her eyes puffy and red, with snot trickling down her face. The tear tracks were the only part of her face that wasn’t dirty. Sun could see that one of the whites of her eyes wasn’t, instead red mixed with it, slowly spreading.

“What happened to your ey-”

Sun never got to finish that question, groaning in protest as Ruby launched herself across the gap and threw her arms around his neck, her sobs renewed.

“H-hey! What’s wrong!?”

“You could of died! Normal people aren't supposed to survive going through the Blind Eternities!”

What the heck was a “Blind Eternity”? That was what Sun wanted to ask, but he currently had a hysterical friend holding him in a death grip, “I guess I’m not normal then?”

Ruby gave a wet laugh, pushing herself off him and trying to stand. Instead, she gave a yelp of pain and grabbed at her leg. Sun looked down at it, wincing.

Legs weren’t supposed to turn that way. Ruby’s rail thin body made it abundantly clear that it was broken.

Ruby grabbed her staff, pushing herself up and leaning on it. Sun stood, groaning as his body sent another wave of agony. As he looked around, though, it quickly left his mind.

They were on a cliff, a grassy field stretching out in front of them, with a forest at their back. Giant diamond shaped stones hovered in defiance of gravity. Further away, Sun could see the grass turn to sand, and them give way to an ocean.
“Where are we?” Sun breathed staring out over the expanse.

“Zendikar,” Ruby said, limping over to him, “Help me walk, we need to find Gideon and Nissa before the Eldrazi find us.”

“Eldrazi?”

“I’ll explain everything on the way, now, *come on*, leaving the Blind Eternities will have drawn their attention and we’ve been here too long.”

---X Line Break X---

Sun grunted as he helped Ruby along, following her instructions. He wasn’t sure how she knew where to go, but she apparently did.

“You said you would explain this?”

Ruby nodded, limping along, “Where do you want me to start?”

“How about where we are?”

“We’re on Zendikar.”

Sun rolled his eyes, “Yeah, but where *is* Zendikar? We can’t be close to Vacuo, there’s nothing like this for miles.”

It was awesome.

Ruby giggled, but winced as her lame foot caught on a root.

“You could say that. We’re on a different Plane,” Sun could practically hear the capital P.
“What’s that mean?”

Ruby stopped, looking behind them with faintly glowing eyes.

“We need to hurry up, they're still on our trail.”

Sun looked behind them, trying to figure out what was giving that away.

“Come on, Sun,” Ruby pushed on him slightly, “Me explaining all this will be pointless if we’re dead.”

“That's cheery,” Sun grunted, helping Ruby along.

“So. Planes. Imagine a bubble encasing the entirety of Remnant. Can you do that?”

“Yeah?”

“Right, now imagine an infinite number of those bubbles, all containing their own world. All these bubbles float in the Blind Eternities. We, you, me, Gideon, Chandra, and Nissa, are Planeswalkers. We can survive the pure energy of the Blind Eternities and travel through it between Planes.”

Sun stopped. Looking at Ruby in shock, “We’re on a different world?”

“Yeah,” Ruby said, “And we need to keep-”

A chittering noise from above cut Ruby off, causing both kids to look up.

“Oh boy,” Ruby muttered, grabbing the rod on her back.
Clinging to the trees were four legged creatures. Each one had a bony plate covering their midsection, with tentacles coming from one end and a thick blue tail on the other. The trees were turning ash white, parts crumbling off.

“What are those things?”

“Eldrazi,” Ruby said, turning on her good foot so she was back to back with Sun, “I need you to grab the shield and gauntlets from my backpack.”

“Really?” Sun asked trying to keep the Eldrazi in his sights, “is this the time?”

“Yes.”

“Ok,” Sun reached behind him, opening the bag and groping blindly. First he handed the gauntlets to Ruby, and he heard him struggle to get them on without letting go of the rod or her staff. By the time she had, Sun had long found the shield, and Ruby snagged the buckler.

“Why haven't they moved?”

“They haven't noticed us yet,” Ruby said, looping her arm around her staff so she could keep both hands free.

“Then why don't we leave?”

“They’ll notice us,” Ruby said, “We can't go out the way we came in, we’re still being chased. But if we get too close? They won't ignore a couple of Planeswalkers that just traveled through the Blind Eternities.”

“Then what do we do?” Sun asked, pulling the nunchaku out of his pocket.

“Cover your ears.”

“Huh?” Sun felt Ruby shift, her arm coming up to hold the rod next to his head. The sigils started
to glow, and oddly enough, spin around the rod.

“Cover your ears, now.”

Sun did so, and Ruby threw the rod, switching the staff to her newly emptied had and throwing the shield into the air. A golden barrier came down around them, projecting from the shield.

Sun had just enough time to see the Eldrazi start to move, before a second sun burst into existence behind him.

The hexagonal bubble shook as the wave of force washed over it, followed by a wave of heat, and Sun barely caught the flash of light jumping from Eldrazi to Eldrazi before the rumble of thunder came.

Half of the thirty Eldrazi fell dead, smouldering holes having appeared through them. Sun stared as the rod sat in one of the trees.

Ruby clicked her tongue, “I’ll need more mana next time.”

Next time?

“You think there will be a next time?”

“Maybe not here,” Ruby said, and Sun heard her shift, “But if we make it out of this, it will be good to know when we're Huntsmen, eh?”

Sun laughed, moving with Ruby so they could keep the remaining Eldrazi in their sights. They had definitely noticed the pair now, and were skittering around the bubble. One lunged at it, the tentacles laying across and revealing a proboscis that dug into the barrier. That caused Sun to stop laughing, watching as the small hole grew in size.

“Ruby?”
“Yeah?”

“It’s breaking through.”

Ruby didn’t verbally respond, grabbing him by the shoulder and using it to keep herself standing as she pushed the staff up and knocked the shield out of place.

As it fell the hexagons flashed, before exploding out and sending the Eldrazi flipping onto its back.

Sun swung down, crashing the nunchaku onto the chink in the Eldrazi’s armor. It shrieked, kicking its legs wildly as Sun brought it down again and again.

“Sun!”

Sun looked up as another Eldrazi lunged at him, only for it to be blasted back when a bolt of yellow light that tore through it.

Spinning, Sun stared.

Ruby was pointing one of her hands in his direction, smoke rising from red circle on the palm of her. Two other Eldrazi lay dead next to her.

“Don’t stop fighting! I’m tapped!”

“What’s that mean?”

“It means I can't use anything for a minute! Keep them off me.”

Sun stepped between the Eldrazi and Ruby, putting away the nunchaku and taking a basic boxing stance.
Sun dodged to the side, kicking the Eldrazi onto it’s back and stomping on it. The carapace crumbled almost confusingly easily.

Sun caught one as it lunged at him, flinching back as the Eldrazi’s tentacles tried to grab him, and threw it at the others.

“Ruby?”

“I just need to- got it!”

A twisting cloud of energy appeared and shifted, after a moment, it turned into a man with black hair, red eyes, a torn red cape, and a huge sword.

Sun stopped, staring as the man went to town in the Eldrazi.

“What the-?”

“Aether construct,” Ruby said, pointing her hand at one of the other Eldrazi, and blasting it, “I’ll teach you how to do it at some point. I’ve got a lot to teach you now.”

Between the three of them, the rest of the Eldrazi were dealt with quickly, before the ‘Aether construct’ ran off the way they had come.

“It will distract the horde, come on, we need to go.”

Sun continued to help Ruby along, pausing to grab the sharp rod and the shield, “How long have you been a Planeswalker?”

“I flared six months ago,” Ruby said, “spent a couple of months trying to find my way back to Remnant, met a few Planeswalkers.”

“It took you a couple of months to get back to Remnant?”
“I got lucky. It can take much longer. Planeswalking has never been an exact science.”

“So I’m stuck here?”

“Nah. You can follow me. We’ll have to teach you to follow lines and look for Sparks.”

“Spark?”

Ruby nodded, screwing up her face in determination as they started to climb higher. Sun could catch people talking in the distance. Something about “never again”? Ruby’s face grew even more serious, pushing Sun onwards, one ear cocked towards the group.

“Every Planeswalker has a Spark, it’s what lets us travel.

“-I’ll keep watch. With you.”

Ruby pushed off, limping forward.

“I’ll meet you up ahead.”

“What-?”

Ruby forced herself forward, raising a hand as she reached the group of four and adding it to the circle. White lightning sparked around it.

“Who’s-” The brown haired man with blue clothes was cut off by Gideon.

“Ruby! What are you doing-”
“I ran away last time I was here,” Ruby said, sounding much older than she was, “But other people couldn’t. If we don’t stop the Eldrazi here, Dust knows how many Planes they’ll destroy before they stop. Never again. For everyone who can’t run away, I’ll keep watch.”

“Rub-”

“You’re not convincing me not to,” Ruby snapped uncharacteristically, “I was born with this Spark, this power, for some reason. Even if all I do is make Artifacts for you, I’m going to help.”

The four shared a look, before nodding in acceptance.

“I’ll keep watch too,” Sun said, finally joining the five, “I don’t know much about all this, but I’ll try.”

Sun looked out, stopping as he saw something moving in the distance.

Two towering creatures were moving closer. Their legs were replaced with writhing masses of tentacles. Both were vaguely humanoid in shape, but were otherwise completely different.

Most of the smaller one’s body was the color of flayed flesh, with a white head with no features, and a purple arms that split in two at the elbow. The larger was covered in what looked like armor and missing a head, with large void tipped plates hovering above its shoulders and off its elbows. At the base of the colossi writhed an army of Eldrazi, slowly making their way into the valley.

“What are those?”

“The Eldrazi titans,” Ruby turned him away, “They’re like super Eldrazi.”

“They’re the only Eldrazi,” the blue robed man said, “the rest are just part of them. And we’re going to kill them.”

---X Line Break X---
Ruby looked out over the sea, raising her staff up, and valiantly ignoring the bones of her broken leg grinding against each other, Ruby pointed her staff at Ulamog’s head, launching a golden spike of energy at the Eldrazi.

It stuck dead on, but Ulamog showed no sign that it had felt it beyond turning in their direction.

Which is what they wanted. The armies of Zendikar, amassed in the valley below, started to move, swords clanging against shields, Gideon’s sural flashed with white mana, and Chandra exploded into a rolling pillar of fire. The defenders of Zendikar were making themselves tantalizingly alive.

Slowly, Kozilek turned alongside his brother, and an army of Eldrazi appeared, moving towards the defenders.

Before they got too far, the sea rose up, forming into a structure that looked vaguely like a hand. The wave smashed down, dragging the Eldrazi into the sea. Finally, Ulamog and Kozilek reached the point where land and sea met, and the trap was sprung.

Across from them stood Noyan Dar, the merfolk reached out, coaxing Zendikar into action. Ruby could see the mana slowly trickling into the world, memorizing the feeling. For a long moment nothing happened and Ruby held her breath. If it didn't work, they had sent everyone to their dea-

She never finished that thought as Zendikar was roused from its sleep.

The ground and air warped, crashing into Ulamog and Kozilek and sending their brood flying into the air. The smaller Eldrazi were dashed against the rocks as Zendikar brought its rage against the intruders. The sea smashed into them from behind, trying to drag the titans back out to sea. In the distance, near where Ruby and Sun had arrived, the trees shook and the ground heaved as a giant Elemental rose. It leapt over the defenders heads, crashing down and stomping on the Eldrazi that had made it to the army as it moved to meet Ulamog and Kozilek.

The giant fist crashed into Ulamog’s blank face. Once, twice, thrice. Ulamog grabbed its hands and-

*Nissa*! The Blue mage’s, Jace’s, voice reverberated through Ruby's mind as he telepathically connected the entire group, *now*!
Zendikar allowed itself to be shifted, the water receding miles in seconds, the newly revealed ground rising to create a giant circle with Ulamog and Kozilek to the side. Green vines of energy appeared, following the design Jace and Ruby had made.

The Titans realized what was happening seconds too late, rising to their full height as Ulamog let go of the hands of the Elemental. The Ley Lines finished the glyph and exploded into action, creating a lattice work cage above them. Ruby sucked in a breath as the Eldrazi pressed against the barrier, the slack quickly disappeared. The lines snapped taut, and forced the Eldrazi back down.

There was a long moment of silence, the Eldrazi hordes had stopped moving, and all eyes locked onto the two descending titans.

Then one of them shrieked.

Ruby threw up a hand to keep the shards of rocks from striking her eyes, hearing them ping off her gauntlet. The ground shook and shattered under the force of the inhuman shriek, and Ruby gritted her teeth as her leg shifted again.

Pull them! They need to be on the center of the glyph! Jace’s voice echoed.

Sweat matted Nissa’s hair as more vines came up and wrapped around the Eldrazi, now in both black and green. The clip Ruby had made was venting mana and shuddering.

I'm trying!

Every second, more Eldrazi were appearing the the valley below, attacking the army or tearing at the ground to get at what little remained of Zendikar’s mana.

Slowly, achingly, Ulamog and Kozilek started to be dragged towards the center. But even as it happened, the world seemed to shift, Ulamog and Kozilek were growing until they consumed the sky and millions of smaller Eldrazi appeared from nowhere, all attached to the two Titans.

Ruby’s ward gave out with a sputter and Nissa cried out, her eyes turned into green suns and green mana spiraled out from her.
And all through it the Titans continued to grow. Kozilek’s crown blotted out the sun and Ulamog’s hand reached for them, the other coming down and effortlessly destroying the Elemental.

Ruby lunged across the space between her and Nissa, siphoning off the extra mana and adding it to the spell.

White, red, and blue chains grabbed onto Ulamog’s arm and looped around the still growing titans. Ruby felt her eyes burn as Zendikar started to come apart at the seams.

Ruby was aware of people landing around her, of a wall of blue and green mana rising up and being sent at her and the beacon of green mana, only to be cut in two by a thin line of pure blue, then a torrent of red mana was launched at the titans.

Ruby felt Nissa guide her hand to the Red mana well in front of her, allowing it to pour its fire through them and into the ley lines. The titans unleashed another world splitting shriek as the fire burned away their body and left nothing but a core of mana. The ley lines swallowed the mana, and everything was silent.

They had won.

“Holy crap!” Sun laughed, “You did it!”

The White mana walked over, breathing heavily.

“What do we do now?” asked Gideon.

“Let’s head to Ravnica,” Jace said, “We can use that as a base of operations.”

Ruby looked in the direction of Remnant, weighing her thoughts.

“I’ll meet you there. I want to go back to Remnant for a couple. Clear my head.”

Gideon reached over, patting her on the shoulder, “You earned it.”
One by one, the other Planeswalkers left, Gideon taking Sun with him.

Why was it so dark?

Ruby focused on the blue strand from Remnant, praying it lead to Patch, she went through the Blind Eternities.

As she landed, her leg shifted again and Ruby cried out in pain. Just before she passed out, she heard someone running towards her.

---X Line Break X---

Ghira stopped as he heard the shout of pain, looking behind him at the alley he had just passed. He hasn't seen anyone there.

Walking back, Ghira picked up into a brisk jog as he saw the little girl slid against the wall, her right leg clearly broken.

“Are you alright?”

What was he saying? Of course she wasn't; She had a broken leg and looked like she hadn't eaten in awhile. The girl gave an inarticulate moan, as if in agreement that it was a dumb question.

Ghira scowled, trying to think what to do. Moving her could just make her injuries worse, but he couldn't just leave her here, even if it was just long enough to get home.

Uttering a hurried apology under his breath, Ghira moved the girl, grabbing the backpack from her back, adding the groceries he had been sent out for to it, throwing it on his own back, and picked her up, briefly considering trying to break her death grip on the rod of metal in her left hand.

Trying to keep her from getting jostled around too much, and aware that Kali and Sienna were going to yell at him for this, Ghira returned to his home as quickly as possible.
Pushing open the door with his foot, Ghira laid her on the kitchen table.

“Sienna! Kali!”

After a moment the tiger Faunus walked in, hands shoved in her pockets.

“What’s wro- ah crap,” It was testament to how many people ended up injured on Menagerie that Sienna’s voice was slightly resigned.

Ghira allowed himself to be pushed aside as the medical student pulled a pen light out of her pocket.

Flipping one eyelid open, Sienna clicked the light on, shining it into the eye, before moving to the other.

“Pupils constrict like a human’s,” Sienna muttered to herself, running her hands through the girl’s hair, “no ears,” down the girl's face and neck, “no scales or gills,” Sienna grabbed the girl’s right hand and pressed down on two spots of each digit.

Kali walked in, before rushing to join Sienna.

“What have you-”

“No ears, scales, gills, or claws. Eyes are human.”

Kali rolled back the girl's lips, “These are too.”

Sinna reached down, grabbing the zipper on the girl’s hoodie before pausing and looking back at Ghira, gesturing with her chin.

Ghira took the hint, walking into the living room where Blake was reading a book. Ghira slipped
the backpack off his back as his daughter looked up.

“What’s that?”

“I found a hurt girl on my way home; she was carrying this.”

Blake's nose twitched as she walked over, flipping open the top.

“She was carrying food?” Blake asked dryly.

Ghira took the bags out, sighing. Why did Blake have to inherit her mother's sense of humor?

Blake reached into one of the side pouches, picking up a ball of metal. Hundreds of white and red symbols were scrawled across it.

Ghira looked into the bag.

There were several other pieces of what was seemingly junk. Looking up, Ghira started to say something, stopping as Blake turned to orb around with a fascinated look on her face.

“Blake! Ghira!”

Both of them snapped their head towards the kitchen where Kali had called from.

“Yes?”

“Go get the guest room ready. She’ll be staying with us for a couple of weeks.”

The two shared a look of confusion.
“Why?”

“Her leg is broken and she’s malnourished. I’m not letting her out on the streets like this.”

---X Line Break X---

Qrow sat in the back of the Bullhead, watching the water pass by them. A long black shape sat just beneath the surface of the ocean.

“You sure it’s her, Oz?”

The headmaster of Beacon nodded, examining his scroll, where his itinerary was pulled up.

“She was asking for you and Tai-Yang. I’m surprised he isn’t here.”

“I didn't tell him.”

Ozpin looked up, one eyebrow raised in a silent question. Glynda looked even more taken aback.

“I didn't want to get his hopes up,” Qrow muttered defensively, “He was just starting to accept she was gone, I couldn't tell him and risk it not being her. It’d destroy him.”

The last anyone had seen Ruby, she’d been running away from her class with a Beowolf on her tail. When they had gotten there, they had found the Beowolf fading away with a massive hole through its skull, but nothing of Ruby. Qrow really wanted to know what had happened in between then and now that ended with her on Menagerie.

“I think it’s her, she looked exactly like you described her. Skinnier than you would probably like, but alive.”

Qrow looked back out the window. He could see the Menagerie in the distance and feel the Bullhead slowing down.
“You said she was blind?”

“Was being the key word. She’s been slowly regaining her vision over the last week. If it keeps up, she should regain complete use of her sight within two months.”

“Do you think there’s any chance of a relapse?”

“I don’t think so, but it would be best to schedule an appointment with an optometrist to be safe.”

Qrow nodded, discreetly pulling out his scroll and checking what that was. Even after twenty years of living in the Kingdoms, there were still large gaps in his knowledge.

Once the Bullhead landed, Qrow jumped out, looking for the person who was supposed to be meeting them. As he did, he tried to resist sucking his teeth.

He hated this place, hated what it represented. Hated that there was so much hatred between Humans and Faunus that many felt it was safer to live in one of the most dangerous places on Remnant than to try living together.

Finally a woman who looked like she was in her mid twenties pushed through the gathering crowd and gestured for them to follow. The three Huntsmen did so, rushing to keep her in sight.

Wasn't she cheerful?

Eventually the woman threw open a door, walking in without bothering to check if they had followed.

Sitting at the table was a bear of a man with black hair and yellow eyes, a smile grew on his face as they walked in.

“Oz,” He pushed himself out of his chair and made his way around the table, “How long has it been?”
“Years,” Ozpin took the man’s hand, “have you met Glynda and Qrow before?”

The man shook his head, turning to the pair. He grabbed Glynda’s hand, shaking it firmly.

“Ghira,” He introduced himself.

“A pleasure.”

He turned to Qrow, shaking his hand.

“Ruby’s uncle?”

“Yeah,” Qrow looked around, “Is she…?”

“Out,” Ghira answered, “She was going with Kali and Blake to pick up some food.”

“Will they be back soon?”

“Any minute now. You can wait outside for them if you want?”

“Yeah. I’ll do that.”

Qrow ended up hearing Ruby before he saw her, her voice carrying down the street.

“And then I said ‘maybe another time Mr. Bolas, I’m trying to get home’.”

Qrow leapt up, looking down the street.
Ruby was using a metal rod to keep herself up as she hobbled along. Her leg was wrapped in a cast and her eyes were unfocused.

“Ruby!”

Ruby stopped talking, a large smile splitting across her face.

“Uncle Qrow!”

Qrow ran over, bundling her into a hug, he pressed a kiss against her hair.

“Do you know how scared we were?”

Ruby wrapped her arms around his waist and squeezed tight.

“I was scared too,” Ruby’s voice wavered, and Qrow felt something wet leak onto his waist, “can we go home soon? I want to see Dad and Yang again.”

“How did you even get here?”

“It’s, it’s a really long story. Can it wait till we get home?”

Qrow sighed, picking Ruby up. She was distressingly light.

“Yeah. It will take a couple of days for us to get home.”
Sun knocked on the door, looking back at Gideon. The Faunus Planeswalker was attempting to ignore the buzzing at the base of his skull that had become synonymous with the presence of Mana.

“You’re sure this is where she is?”

Gideon nodded, “I can feel her spar-”

Both Planeswalkers looked over as a rasping hiss came from the road leading to the house.

“Well,” Sun grabbed the bo-staff he had been practicing with, “I think we're in the right place.”

The little drake hissed at them, the spines on its back standing straight as it stood on all fours, a thin illusion hiding it from most of the world. Had they always existed, and Sun just hadn't been able to see them before now?

Sun shuffled through the spells he had learned so far. There weren't many, and he didn't think any of the Aether constructs he had would win a fight with it.

“Gid-”

“Drache! Slow down, I’m not that quick.”

Ruby rounded the corner on a pair of crutches, her staff missing for the first time Sun could remember. Next to her was a blond-haired girl carrying a pair of backpacks and a mousy girl.

Ruby’s face lit up as she looked over to them, though Sun couldn't help but notice that her eyes were fogged over and glowing slightly.

“Sun! Giddy!”
Sun grinned as Gideon flinched at the nickname.

The drake moved onto two legs, walking up to Ruby and rubbing against her. Seconds later a small corgi came around the corner of the house, panting up at her.

“Hey! You’re looking better.”

She did. The dirt that had constantly covered her face had been washed off and her clothes had been replaced.

"Who are they?" The blond girl asked, watching them carefully.

“Gideon and Sun. They're like me.”

“Huh? Oh,” she looked like she had swallowed a lemon, pushing passed the two of them and unlocking the door.

Ruby turned to the last girl, “Coming, Leenie?”

“I… Uh…,” her eyes flickered to Sun, then to Gideon, then to the ground as a blush ignited across her face, “I have to go home.”

Then she turned tail and ran.

“Leenie!” Ruby raised a hand in a vain attempt to stop her, before letting it drop and hang on the crutch, “Your home is the other way…”

Sun shared a look with Gideon. The older Planeswalker shrugged, obviously just as baffled by the events as Sun.

Ruby turned, still looking confused, and moved over to them. Gideon stepped aside, allowing
Ruby into her house. As she passed, the Hieromancer nodded down at the drake.

“Why’s that spewing mana?”

“I’m using him to saturate the area with mana. I lost my vision after Zendikar, and everything is still a big blur, so I’m making do with a combination of mana sight and familiar sight until I can see clearly again.”

Sun would have been more shocked, but Nissa had also lost her vision after channeling all that mana. Chandra was the odd one out of the female Gatewatchers, having lost use of her legs after incinerating Ulamog and Kozilek.

Ruby continued into the house, the two men following, “Do you two want anything to drink?”

---

Tai looked down at his Scroll from where he stood in front of the register at the store, picking up food for Ruby’s birthday party the next day. It was a text from Yang.

*two guys were waiting at the house. ruby knows them. plainswalkers*. The grammatically incorrect text read.

“-for Ruby’s birthday?”

Tai looked up, trying to keep the dread he was feeling off his face, “Sorry?”

“I said, is this for Ruby's birthday?” Ciara Delaney asked, “Aileen said that Qrow had found her?”

“Yeah,” Tai nodded, checking his phone again, “he went on a job, apparently she had been near the town for a week.”

Technically true, but vague enough that Tai didn't need to come up with a fake explanation on why his youngest had reappeared several thousand miles away from the last place anyone had seen her.
Nobody would have believed him if he told the truth. Hell, _he_ hadn’t believed Ruby before she cast a couple spells and made several Aether constructs, including her ‘seeing eye drake’.

“I’m glad. I’ll see you tomorrow?” Ciara asked, ringing up Tai’s purchases.

“Yeah,” Tai took the bags, trying to keep from breaking into a dead run to his truck.

Throwing the bags into the back seat, Tai started the truck and pulled out of the parking spot. With his other hand, he scrolled through his contacts and found Qrow’s number. They had agreed it would be better for Tai to take time off from work, if only to make sure Ruby stuck to the diet that had been prescribed to combat the effects of six months of malnutrition.

After three calls went through to voicemail, Qrow finally answered.

“What is it, Tai? I’m in the middle of a class.”

“I’m coming to pick you up.”

“Classes don’t get out for another hour, you know that.”

“I’m coming to pick you up early.”

Tai could hear the eye roll in Qrow’s voice. “I’m not a student, Tai. You can’t just ‘pick me up early’.”

“I got a text from Yang. A couple of Planeswalkers showed up at the house.”

The line went dead for so long that Tai had started to reach for his Scroll to check if Qrow had been disconnected.

“I’ll be waiting,” Qrow all but growled out just before he hung up.
Sure enough, Qrow was waiting for him, dropping into the passenger seat and throwing Hewer into the back.

They were halfway down the winding road that separated Signal from the rest of Patch before either of them spoke.

“What do the want?”

“Don’t know,” Tai said, gripping the steering wheel so tight his knuckles were white, “I just want them gone. Load Howl and Roar for me? They're in the glovebox.”

Tai knew, on some level, that they were both overreacting. Even if they did run off the Planeswalkers, Ruby would never go back to not being one.

After the year their family had, Tai thought that he was allowed at least one moment of irrationality.

He had already lost Raven and Summer. Tai had thought that he would be desensitized to losing loved ones by now, but losing one of his daughters had been worse than losing either of his wives.

He just wanted them to be safe, and Ruby had come out of this malnourished, blind, and with a broken leg. He might not be able to protect her forever, but he could for now.

Tai took his knives from Qrow as they pulled into the driveway, slipping his hands into the knuckle duster handles as Qrow reached back and grabbed Hewer.

The front door swung open, Yang gesturing for them to hurry up. As Tai walked in, he looked around the living room.

“Where are they?”

“The kitchen.”
Tai started to head in that direction, wondering why they were there of all places. Pushing open the door, Tai walked in.

“What's going o-”

Tai stopped.

He wasn't sure which was more confusing, the boy around Yang's age hanging from his tail on the light fixture, Ruby cheerfully eating one of the meals he had prepared in containers, or the grown man sipping coffee(?) from one the god-awful china cups Tai’s aunt had bequeathed to him.

“What’s up, Tai?” Qrow pushed passed him, took in the sight before him, and shared a look with Tai.

“Dad!” Ruby swiveled in her seat until she was facing their general direction, smacking into the table with her cast as she went, “these are Sun and Gideon. They're my friends!”

---

Gideon sipped from the cup of coffee, trying to ignore the tense air. In all honesty, he should have expected this. He could have brought Ruby home much sooner, and had wanted to, but between helping the Boros Legion on Ravnica and fighting a losing battle against the Eldrazi, he just hadn't had the time.

Still, he wasn't exactly comfortable sitting across from two men who looked like they would very much like him dead, especially because the Gatewatch had agreed that it was probably for the best if he didn’t bring his sural so they weren't intimidated.

“So,” the one with slicked back black hair, Qrow, leaned forward, “why are you here?”

“We were checking on Ruby,” Gideon looked out the window where Ruby was showing Sun a shed in the back. The blond girl was leaning against the side of the house, watching them, “She had said she would meet us in Ravnica. After two weeks, well, we got worried and decided to check.”
Even as he finished saying it, Gideon knew it wasn't the right thing to say, wincing as a stormy look came across the two men across from him.

“You waited two weeks to look for her? What if she had been in trouble?”

“She could have Planeswalked out,” Gideon defended himself, “we could sense her spark, so we knew she was alive, but we were working on other things.”

Juggling teaching Sun about ‘their world’, coming up with fake identification for Chandra, Ruby, Sun, and Nissa, two fifth of the Gatewatch being restricted in what they could do, and registering the Gatewatch as one of the many smaller guilds that had formed falling the breaking of the old Guildpact and subsequent war had left Gideon with little time until now.

Even if Jace was technically Ravnica’s leader as the Living Guildpact, he was bound by the myriad laws created to keep the guilds in check, the Guilds did their own thing unless they needed Jace to act as an arbiter (which was surprisingly often, considering that the Guilds had existed for ten-thousand years), and he had been looking for a way to stop being such. Partially because it left him with very little time to do anything, and partially because nobody wanted to think about what would happen to the new Guildpact when Jace died.

“Ruby told us about the Gatewatch.”

Gideon sighed, “I don't like it either.”

“Then why let her?”

“Because this way, we can atleast keep an eye on her,” Gideon explained, “if we had refused, her and Sun would have probably run off and done it on their own. Better to have four Planeswalkers to chaperone her.”

“She’s still in danger.”

“She would be in more if we aren't there. At least this way we can minimize the amount of time she’s doing so,” Gideon put down the cup, leaning forward, “I understand your worries, but if
Ruby wants to get involved she will get involved, and there is no real way for us to stop her.”

Tai and Qrow seemed to share a look, before turning towards Gideon as one.

“O-”

All three men jumped as a hurried knock came from the front of the house.

“Gideon!” the voice of Ral Zarek came through, “Gideon! We need Sun or Ruby at Ravnica, now! There’s, there’s another Planeswalker from Remnant.”

---

Blake stood next to her mom, standing on her toes to see better. At the same time, she pulled the wool coat her dad had bought her tight.

They were in Atlas, part of a massive crowd gathered at the foot of the SDC refinery. It had been built on the back of Faunus labor, and now those same workers were gathered in protest. As the head of the White Fang, her dad had been asked to make an appearance during his yearly circuit through the Kingdoms.

Which is why they were in Atlas in the middle of winter, much to Blake’s consternation.

It wasn’t that she didn’t want to be there, in fact, she was incredibly proud that her dad had decided she was old enough to come with him to something this big, but Blake had spent most of her life in northern Menagerie and Mistral. She was used to the weather being blistering hot in summer and comfortably warm in winter.

All in all, she was woefully unprepared for the below freezing climate of Atlas.

She should have gone with Ruby and waited for her dad there, at least Vale was warm.

Reaching into her coat pocket, Blake wrapped her hand around the steel ball hidden inside. Blake
had planned to return it to Ruby, but when she had gone to, the younger girl had just smiled and waved it off. Despite the freezing air surrounding Blake, the orb was giving off an aura of warmth, especially compared to the pocket knife Ilia and Adam had given her.

“...they continue to ignore the Menagerie agreement! Faunus are forced to do dangerous work at minimum wage. Why, exactly, Mr. Hale, do you continue to support the SDC if you are so outspoken for Faunus Rights?”

The portly man standing across from her father on the steps of the building ran a handkerchief over his balding head, sweat dripping down his face.

“I have to follow the orders from above me Mr. Belladonna, if I quit someone much worse will take my place. I do sympathize with the Faunus—”

Blake found herself swept up in the heat of the moment, joining in the jeers that rose from the crowd.

“Liar!”

“Thief!”

“Slaver!”

The last one was punctuated by a rock striking Hale in the chest, which started a wave of several more. The Faunus crowd pushed at the metal barricade separating them from Atlasian police and the SDC guards.

Her father span, gesturing with his hands as he attempted to stop the unrest.

“This isn't-”

Several rocks struck him, his Aura soaking up the force. Wasn't this going a bit too far?
Then one Faunus leapt the barricade, charging at the steps. The din of the riot quieted in Blake's ears as she pushed through the crowd, eyes trained on the knife sliding into his hand in slow motion.

One of the guards, a young man who had a pistol, stepped forward. Three inches of steel entering his body right below the ribs.

*BANG*

No matter how many times Blake replayed the memory in her head over the next week, she couldn't recall who had fired the shot. Whether it had been one of the other guards in retaliation, or if the guard had pulled the trigger on instinct, or maybe he had just flinched and the gun had gone off.

It didn't matter, in the end, it got the same result. The Faunus crumpled, his hand letting go of the knife as the guard stared down at him in horror. The front of the crowd grew silent as they stared at the dead Faunus.

Then years of tension exploded in the worst way possible.

“Murderers!”

“Killers!”

Blake was forced forward with the crowd as they moved forward, knocking over the metal barricades and charging the guards. Blake saw a grey haired guard pull out a second pistol, shooting any Faunus that got close to him. Another was firing his rifle at the feet of the advancing wave, trying to scare them into stopping. The guard with the knife in him dropped his gun, backing up towards steps as the riot grew worse.

One of the Faunus broke free from the crowd, grabbing the knife and tearing it from the boy’s flesh. She tackled him to the ground, stabbing down, once, twice, thrice, four-

Blake watched as her father grabbed the woman’s arm, an unusually stormy expression on his face as he hoisted her off the man. Ghira wrenched the knife from her hand, throwing her aside as one of the younger guards rushed over and tried to drag the guard into the building.
“I got you Row, just hold on!”

Blake wasn’t sure ‘Row’ could hold on, four stab wounds were dangerous even if you got medical attention almost immediately, and the riot didn’t look like it cared enough to stop and let him get the attention he needed.

Someone crashed into Blake from behind, sending her to the ground. Blake saw him scramble to his feet, swinging for her dad, before collapsing like a puppet as a bullet struck him. Sienna stomped down the stairs, grabbing Ghira and dragging him towards the building while firing above the crowds head. Ghira was shouting, but couldn't be heard over the roar of the crowd and the howl of guns.

This, this was Hell.

Blake gasped as another woman kicked her in the ribs, not even stopping to comprehend that she had. Again and again, people charged over her without a care, and she could feel bruises starting to form even as she struggled to stand.

Another blow sent her rolling towards the fight, where she could barely see what was happening through the forest of legs. Looking over, she grabbed Row’s gun, trying to push herself up as another foot came down at her head.

Blake closed her eyes, and everything died in a rush of sound.

“Hey,” Blake squinted as someone spoke down at her, “are you alright? Here,” he held out his hand and helped her stand, “you alright? That looked like it was a nasty fall.”

Blake looked around, staring in equal parts awe and confusion.

They were standing on a bridge, above them stretched so many it blotted out the sun.

Looking down, Blake saw so many more that she lost sight of them before they ended.
“You alright?” he asked for the third time.

Blake turned around, opening her mouth and stopping. The young man across from her had several canker sores and was gaunt.

“Are you alright?”

He raised an eyebrow, “‘course I am. Why wouldn't I be? If you are, I’ll be going.”

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

Blake watched him go, before looking up and heading to find a way up there, trying to keep the worry from mounting. He had said she had fallen, that meant she couldn't be too far right?

Wrong. Blake had lost track of how many stories she had gone up and how long she had been climbing when she came across the arch. Above it was a blue and red glass emblem of some sort of winged creature.

Seeing as it was the closest thing to a building Blake had seen, she entered it. Unfortunately, it turned out to be another endless maze of halls.

It took a while longer for her to find anyone, and just her luck, it happened to be guards.

“Halt! This is a restricted area!”

Blake stopped for half a second as they walked towards her, then she turned tail and ran.

Eventually she ran into a dead end, in the form of a huge drop. Blake looked down, trying to figure out how high she was.

Turning, Blake grabbed the gun and knife from her pockets, pointing them both at the guards shakily. They stopped warily, and Blake tried to keep an eye on them both.
“Hey,” a man with black hair and red and blue clothes pushed passed them, clapping them both on the shoulders, he seem… more than the guards in the some way, “good job, you two! Now, why don't you leave the rest to me, the Living Guildpact wants to talk to her.”

The two shared a confused look, before nodding and leaving.

The man held up his hands, keeping a jovial smile on his face, “What's your name?”

Blake looked around, pointing the gun at him.

“I'm Ral Zarek,” he continued, “what’s your name?”

“Blake Belladonna.”

“Ok,” Ral nodded, “I'm going to take a step forward, ok, Blake?”

She nodded, and he did so.

“Where did you come from, if you don't mind me asking?”

“Menagerie.”

“I don't know there, Blake. I'm going to take another step forward.”

He did.

“You're in Ravnica, have you ever heard of it?”

Blake shook her head.
“Then we can explain that to you when you meet the rest. I’m-”

“-Going to take another step.”

Ral nodded, stepping forward.

“You said the rest, what do you mean?”

“I wasn't joking, Jace does want to talk to you,” he didn't ask to take a step forward this time, and he was so close to Blake that she could see the lines on the tubing that went into a gauntlet.

“What’s that me-”

Ral lifted a hand and something sprayed into her face. The world span for a second, and then Blake was opening her eyes in a bed, someone holding her hand. Turning, Blake raised an eyebrow.

“Ruby?”

---

The hardest part of being blind (or close enough she might as well be) at the moment, in Ruby’s honest opinion, was the fact that she couldn't do anything related to Artificing... Well, anything that wasn't sketching designs.

Which sucked, because she finally had resources beyond scrap.

Ruby held the new one in front of Drache, using the drake’s eyes to examine the design. Grunting in dissatisfaction, Ruby tore it out of the journal her dad had bought her when she got back and ignited it, throwing the burning ball of paper out the window.

Her dad had finally agreed to let her help the Gatewatch, but she needed to start training with Uncle
Which meant picking out a weapon.

Swords, spears, knives, axes, bows, none of them seemed right. Even her staff didn’t feel comfortable as an actual melee weapon.

Ruby put down the journal and pencil, grabbing Drache from her lap and turning him to face her.

“What do you think?”

The little drake cocked his head, causing Ruby's sight of herself to do the same. He let out confused croon.

“Yeah,” Ruby sighed, putting the drake down and running a hand along his spine. He melted into a puddle in her lap, eyes drifting shut and leaving Ruby staring at a huge blur, “thanks anyway, buddy.”

Ruby hearing the door of the apartment creak open, pressed her hand against Drache, and absorbed him into her body, feeling the drake ‘tattoo’ appear on the back of her hand. Planeswalkers had devised many ways to carry preferred Familiars, or in extreme cases, entire living beings on their person to get them through the Blind Eternities and places where they would get strange looks.

Ruby sat by as Lavinia guided the Simic healers in, who walked over, examining Blake's eyes. Ruby heard the elves walk around the bed. Blake’s bed, if she joined the Gatewatch.

“Izzet?” One of the tutted.

“Ral,” Lavinia answered tersely.

“Of course,” she sighed, “I take it the ears are some sort of experiment?”

“Or they found her in one of the old Simic bases,” the man said, “It looks like something Momir
would have done, and I’ve never seen an Izzet get involved in biological experimentation.”

The was a brief moment of silence as that sunk in, then the female elf spoke.

“Please tell me they found her in a Simac base,” she practically pled, “If the Firemind has started biological engineering, the world is doomed.”

“She is,” Ruby said quickly. It was a good excuse, since Faunus didn’t exist on Ravnica… or Zendikar, Dominaria, or any other plane she had visited.

Huh, she wondered what that was about?

"Who are you?"

“Ruby. Blake’s my friend.”

“And why are you here?”

“It’s her apartment.”

Say what now?

Apparently one of the elves agreed with her, if the noise of confusion was any indication.

“The Living Guildpact has allowed her to use this apartment since her parents can not be with her.”

“That got anything to do with that?”

Ruby sat still, waiting.
“Well? OW! What the hell was that for, Aysi!?”

“Look at her eyes, you insensitive asshat.”

“Wha- oh,” the man suddenly sounded apologetic, “Sorry. I didn't notice. You’re leg, what’s wrong with it?”

“Broken,” Ruby said, pawing around and finding her journal and pencil and starting a new design. Maybe a scythe like Uncle Qrow’s?

Ruby started with a rough outline of a crescent, or, at least, she hoped it was a crescent. She would need to bring Drache back out once they left.

Foot fall came from the group, and something dug into her cast, breaking it open. A pair of hands cupped her half healed leg, and something that felt like cool water covered her leg. Looking up, Ruby activated her mana sight and saw the green mana shimmer along her leg. After a minute, the person stood up and helped Ruby to her feet. Ruby tested the foot gingerly. No pain.

“There,” the man said, “that should fix that at least. I can't do anything about your eyes unfortunately.”

“They’re getting better.”

“That's good. Aysi, how’s that going?”

“Done, she should be waking up soon.”

“Thank you two kindly,” Lavinia said, the three adults moving towards the door, “Ruby, remember that Gideon wants to see you both when she’s awake.”

Ruby nodded absentmindedly, allowing Drache out and back on her lap as she worked on the design. After fifteen minutes, according to the loudly ticking clock, Ruby lifted up the design with a smile. A sniper-scythe, she would be able to fight, and shoot spells and bullets. Perfect.
Ruby grabbed Drache, dancing with the little drake and enjoying the return to a full range of movement as she did so.

“What do you think we should call her, buddy? I’m thinking Crescent Rose.”

Ruby nearly dropped Drache when Blake groaned.

Ok, honestly, she had dropped him. He started beating his wings vigorously in an attempt to stay aloft.

Ruby migrated to the wooden chair at Blake’s bedside, taking the Faunus’s hand and waiting for her to wake up. Drache flew right behind her, allowing Ruby a once in the lifetime view of the back of her head in real time.

Blake’s eyes flickered open, and she turned her head towards Ruby.

“Ruby?”

“Hey.”

“I had a really weird dream.”

“What about?”

“There was a riot in Atlas, and I got caught up in it, then I was in a huge city.”

A… riot?

Oh.
Oh no.

Ruby jumped from her seat, practically dragging Blake behind her as she ran for the older Planeswalkers.

Hopefully they would know a way to get Blake back to her family before they freaked out too much. Giddy and Nissa hadn’t, but that had been six month ago and there were two new ones.

If not, they would have to have Blake call her parents from Patch.

Either way, this wasn't a conversation she was looking forward to.

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“So, you can go from one world from another.”

“Yep.”

“And my daughter is like you.”

“Yep.”

“And you want her to go to Signal so she can stay close to two others like her and help if anything goes wrong in the multiverse.”

“Yep. This food is delicious, Mr. Rose!”

“Xiao-Long,” the other man at the table said, watching the kids playing, including Ghira’s daughter.

“Huh?”
“My last name is Xiao-Long. Rose was my wife's last name… Ruby's mother’s,” it sounded like he was tearing the words out from somewhere deep inside.

For what it was worth, the redhead caught the unspoken message, redirecting her attention to the burger in front of her for a moment.

“Can I just call you Tai? I’m not big on formalities.”

“Yeah. Can I call you Chandra?”

“Of cou-”

“Sun!”

Ruby was running around, trying to bat the Faunus boy with her staff and yelling at him to give the golden rod he had grabbed from the shed in the back. The effect was ruined by her giggles as he took off up a tree.

“Blake! Blaaaake! Help me, I can't climb up there and get it!”

“What makes you think I know how to climb a tree?”

Ruby stopped at that, looking like the idea of a kid not knowing how to climb a tree was an insult to the world, before running over to the grill, where the green clad woman and a white clad man were sitting at the table and talking to Qrow.

“Nissa! Sun stole my repository and Blake can't climb trees!”

“I can't climb it either, remember?” Nissa moved her hand in front of her eyes.

“Oh,” Ruby looked lost for a second, before plopping down and glaring in the general direction of
How had she been chasing Sun?

“Planeswalkers are massive beacons of mana, since we’re drawing it from multiple planes,” Chandra explained in a stage whisper, “she was following that. She knows where he is, but can't climb up on her own because she can't see the branches.”

Ah. Right.

“Can you show me any actual evidence of all this? I mean, Blake showing up on Patch is pretty convincing, but anything else?

“Yeah,” Chandra wheeled herself out from the table, moving towards the yard, “Hey, kiddos! Want to see a party trick?”

Ghira watched as they crowded around the wheelchair bound woman, only for her to gesture for them to back up, pulling her goggles over her eyes. Looking over, he leaned towards Kali.

“What do you think? About Blake going here?”

“I,” Kali sighed, “I don't know. I don't like the idea of her being so far from home, especially if she is going to be in danger, but I’m worried she might run off and join the Fang if she stays.”

Ghira nodded, diverting his eyes away from Kali so he could watch Chandra.

As of yesterday, Sienna had officially taken his place as leader of the White Fang, after the riot, he just couldn't do it anymore. Forty Faunus dead, ten dead guards, another crippled, Hale had been lynched, and there had been more arrests than he wanted to think about.

What did it achieve? All they did was validate everyone who said Faunus couldn't be trusted. Hurting people wasn't going to get Faunus anything other than people fearing them.
Ghira’s eyes shot up as Chandra’s hair ignited, her hands moving in circles as she formed a ball of fire.

“They weren’t joking.”

“It’s hard to believe,” Tai said, “I’ve known for a week, and the idea that magic could exist still blows my mind.”

Ghira looked over at the other man. There were light bags under his eyes, and he was watching the pyrotechnics with a sharp eye.

“How do you feel about this?”

“I don’t know,” Tai sighed, “I’m not any happier about the idea of Ruby being in danger, but Gideon,” he jerked his chin towards the man sitting next to Nissa, “pointed out that if they want to, there’s nothing we can really do to stop Ruby and Blake from running off and doing it on their own.”

“Anything else?”

“I’m proud of her,” Tai admitted, “how many parents can say their kid has helped save an entire world?”

Ghira chuckled slightly, watching as Chandra leaned back the best she could.

“Every parent tells their kid that they’re one of a kind, but I guess we can say that truthfully. ‘One in a million have a spark, and only a few of those will actually become a Planeswalker’, That’s a bit more than we expec- Whoa!”

Ghira stood up as Chandra threw the ball at one of the trees, skimming above Sun’s head. The boy fell back, plummeting towards the ground.

There was a flash of red light and the next thing Ghira knew, Sun was landing on his feet, arms spread wide. Ruby’s repository glistening in the sun.
“And he sticks the landi- HEY!”

Sun fell over laughing as Ruby tackled him to the ground, grabbing the rod and running behind Blake as Sun flipped back up and went to chase after her.

“Blake, protect me from the evil man!”

“Oh, I’m evil now!?"

“Leave me out of th-” Blake was cut off as Sun barreled into her, sending all three Planeswalkers tumbling to the ground.

“Quick! Drache! Bring that back to my shed!”

Who was she talking to? Wait, where did the rod go?
Chapter 3

Ruby looked up as Blake walked into the room of their apartment, dragging her katana behind her.

“Rough day?”

Blake didn’t answer, collapsing onto the couch with a groan. As the blade fell, Ruby caught it, raising a brow as she drew it from the sheath.

“Soooooo… I tell you I’m almost done with the enchantments on that weapon you made, so you wrecked the old one?”

The nameless blade was indeed wrecked, and would be considered such at any reasonable place in the multiverse and probably even Tarkir.

Parts of the blade were warped to the point that Ruby wasn’t sure how Blake had managed to sheath it in the first place. Ruby ran her thumb along the length of the blade, confirming it was just as blunt as it looked. The red, white, and black runes were barely holding on, flickering on and off weakly.

“What did you do?”

“Blame your sister,” Blake groaned out, “we were paired up today.”

Ruby reached over, rolling up part of Blake's shirt and flinching. Purple bruising was appearing along Blake's stomach.

“I thought there was a rule about fighting without Aura?”

“Normally there is,” Blake spoke through gritted teeth as Ruby poked at one of the bruises, “but your dad wanted us to get used to fighting stronger enemies without our Aura.”

“Gee,” Ruby couldn't keep the sarcasm out of her voice as she lay her hand on the bruise, “I
Blake laughed, before wincing, “Oh, don't make me laugh,” she pled.

Ruby drew the White from the atmosphere, using it to power the basic healing spell. Blake gave a wane smile as the bruising slowly faded.

Ruby jumped as the door slammed open, the excited voice of their third friend entering the apartment.

“Innistrad, here we come~! You guys looking forward to- you two need a minute alone?”

Ruby looked over at Sun in confusion, continuing to heal Blake as she did so.

Sun’s open button-down had been replaced with a closed long-sleeved equivalent.

“Ruby,” she looked over at the hissed words, “can you move your hand?”

“I’m not done healing you yet,” Ruby said, continuing to channel the White mana.

“Ruby,” Blake's face started to turn red, eyes flickering towards Sun, “move your hand down like an inch.”

Ruby’s eyebrows met as she did as Blake asked, moving her hand from its spot just below Blake’s sternum.

“So,” Sun coughed awkwardly, “you two ready?”

Why were they both acting so awkward suddenly?

“Yeah, I have to wrap this up, then we can head over to Jace’s.”
“What about Gambol Shroud?”

“I finished the enchantments before you finished school, so we're good to go,” Ruby said, finally raising her hands from Blake's stomach and helping her to stand, “You should go change, Jace said Innistrad is pretty cold.”

Blake slid into her room as Ruby went and grabbed the katana in her workshop. At the same time, she grabbed a whetstone and added it to the bag she had been preparing for the trip. Various Artifacts, a set of tools in case something broke, and a pistol in case they ran into a situation she couldn't deploy Crescent Rose in, hardcover journal her dad had got her, and the repository that held the two leather journals that were among her greatest possessions.

“So, you haven't been to Innistrad?” Sun called.

“Nope,” Ruby grabbed a pair of vambrace from the table, sliding the leather armor on and tightening them, before making sure that the enchantments were working. Finally, she planted a hand on Drache, causing the small drake to wake up, “time to head out.”

Drache yawned sleepily, before returning to his portable form. As she walked out, Blake grabbed Gambol Shroud, and the Gatewatchers stepped out of the apartment and into the Blind Eternities, aiming for Jace’s spark.

---X Line Break X---

As the group of horses trotted down the path, Blake tried to keep from grumbling and pulling the soaked wool coat tight around her again.

Stupid cold weather, stupid Innistrad.

When she had been told to expect cold weather, she hadn't expected it to be cold and rainy, otherwise she wouldn't have brought this coat with her.

Ruby, Sun, and Jace were all wearing leather coats that had been ‘appropriated’ through Jace’s mind magic in the town they had Planeswalked into two days before.
Jace was in the lead, rambling on to their guide about the contact they were going to meet. Apparently Jace and ‘Liliana’ had some history. The guide made an inarticulate groan as the silver moon rolled into view.

“I shouldn't be burdening you with my problems,” Jace apologized.

The man gave another noise, more of a snarl this time, as he hunched over. What was-

The guide’s head lolled to the side, revealing a bulging yellow eye and his lips pulled back into a snarl, allowing sharp teeth to poke through.

“Uhhh…”

With the ear splitting noise of cracking bones and tearing fabric, the man's body rearranged. His lower mouth pulled forward into a snout, claws burst from hands that were rapidly growing hair, his wiry frame was bulking up, causing his barrel like chest to tear his shirt to shreds, and his shoes broke to make room for digitigrade feet.

Blake’s first thought was something along the lines ‘What just happened!?’ followed quickly by ‘Did he just turn into a Beowolf?’ and ‘I thought Ruby said Grimm were only on Remnant?’

Blake followed Jace’s lead in urging her horse to speed up, going passed the lupine creature as he dug his teeth into his horse's throat.

Behind them, the horse's struggles for survival were cut off by the wet snapping of bone and the wolf baying at the moon. Several other howls joined in, and Blake managed to count six before she lost count.

The horses jerked left, dodging the ravine sitting between them and the manor in the distance.

“What are these things!?”
“Werewolves,” Ruby looked back, drawing Crescent Rose and unfurling it. The runes on the scythe blade lighting the horse's side, “They're people cursed to transform under the light of the full moon.”

Blake stopped from where she was halfway through drawing Gambol Shroud, looking back at the pack of man-wolves. They were catching up to them even as the horses ran at full tilt, bounding across the ground on all fours.

“Should we be fighting them? They’re not in their-”

Blake was cut off as another werewolf leapt from the treeline at Sun. He reached beneath his new coat, one of his shotguns coming up, a glowing half rune burning on the last broken chain.

The werewolf was sent flying back as the pellets hit him, leaving him twitching and whimpering on the side of the road. Sun worked the lever, allowing a spent casing to drop onto the ground.

“I don't think they care, Blake!”

They hit a long set of switchbacks, forcing their horses to slow down. Blake drew Gambol Shroud as several of their pursuers went down the hill, waiting in front of them. Shadows wrapped around her blade, dropping the already chilly air to below freezing. Screwing up her eyes, Blake attempted to ignore the rising guilt about what she was going to do, and swung.

Each of the two werewolves she hit managed to give a pitiful half whimper, before the shadows silenced them forever.

Blake wasn't sure why she had any sort of alignment with Black, even a minor one, but she hated it. Nissa had spent days explaining to Blake that Black didn’t mean evil, that it could represent pragmatism, or natural death, and that one didn't need to take on every part of a color they were aligned with’s philosophy. That Blake could have gone her entire life without casting a Black spell. Blake wasn't sure if she believed the elvish woman, and even if she was right, Blake couldn't pass up an advantage like this.

Ruby’s horse slowed down, carrying both Ruby and the extra weight of Crescent Rose exhausting it quickly. The wolf gouged into its flank, sending Ruby to the ground.
Blake grabbed the reins of her horse, trying to make it stop. As its head reared back, Blake saw the blue glow in its eyes.

“Jace!”

“If we stop we’re all dead,” Jace yelled over the hooves, “I’m sorry, Blake, we can't-”

Blake turned around, shifting Gambol Shroud and aiming for the wolves through the pouring rain. Was that Drache on Ruby’s shoulder?

As one of the wolves lunged at Ruby, Drache launched from his perch, growing.

Drache body-checked the werewolf, sending it rolling down the switchbacks as he roared, spewing a wave of fire from his mouth to scare off the others wolves. As they scampered away, Ruby climbed onto his back and they took off towards the manor.

Blake snapped her mouth shut, focusing ahead.

As they arrived, they found Ruby and Drache staring down an army of slightly rotting men and woman.

Blake jumped off her horse, joining Ruby. A couple of moments later, Sun and Jace joined them.

The tense standoff lasted for a second longer, before the army shuffled into two rows, creating a long alley to the entrance of the house.

“What's going on?”

“That,” Jace sighed in resignation, “is an invitation.”

---X Line Break X---
Liliana watched as the four walked into her manor, water dripping from their frames.

“Hello, Jace,” Liliana took in the other Planeswalker, “Nice coat. And who are these? I didn't know you were forming a posse!”

Liliana smirked as the black haired girl glared at her balefully from the back. Rising, Liliana prowled down, watching each of them.

Reaching Jace, Liliana flicked his nose. He jumped, yelping in pain.

“What was that-”

“I wanted to make sure you came in person,” Liliana responded coolly, walking over to the next.

She was clearly the youngest of the group, but as Liliana looked into her silver eyes, she didn't flinch.

“And what’s your name?” Liliana asked lightly, moving one wet clump of hair behind her ear.

“Ruby Rose.”

“Really,” Liliana let one eyebrow raise as she examined Ruby, gesturing for one of her zombies to step up and take her jacket and cloak.

Ruby let the jacket be removed, but stopped on her cloak, gripping it tightly. It looked like she was tempted to argue against giving it up, before she met Liliana’s eyes and lowered her gaze, undoing the cross shaped fasteners and letting it be taken from her.

Next, Liliana walked to the boy, who seemed slightly uncomfortable, bowing his head. The necromancer grabbed his chin, forcing him to meet her eyes with slightly more force than was necessary.

“You're...?”
“Sun Wukong.”

Liliana had his jacket taken too, raising an eyebrow at the tail that was exposed. She looked back at Jace.

“You meet the most interesting people, Jace.”

Finally, Liliana met the last girl’s yellow eyes, “And you?”

“Blake Belladonna. What's your name?”

The zombie stepped forward, only for Blake to hardly spare it a glance, “I’ll keep mine, thanks. Your name?”

Liliana started to walk back towards her chair, “Can I offer any of you something to drink?”

One of her zombies stepped forward, offering a bottle and several glasses.

“I’ll pass, and they’re too young,” Jace said.

Liliana scoffed, grabbing the bottle and pouring a generous amount into the glass, “It’s nonalcoholic, dear.”

Not that Liliana would have been opposed to offering it to the trio if it had been, she just didn't drink. When you made as many enemies as she had, taking anything that could weaken your ability to think was asking for someone to take advantage of the fact.

Several zombies walked in, carrying chairs from around the house for them.

“I was hoping for a warmer welcome,” Jace said, “You have some… disagreeable neighbors.”
“I do,” Liliana agreed, “but they had their uses, keeping people I don't want to see from going places I don't want them, for example, and there are much worse things out there at the moment.”

“Vampires,” Jace supplied, waving off the zombie carrying the drink.

“Angels,” Liliana sneered.

“Your feelings on the matter are documented,” Jace said dryly, “but I would have been thankful for some angelic intervention out there.”

“That's not-” Liliana snarled, before taking a moment to collect herself, “Who you trust is up to you, Jace, but I wouldn't trust an angel here if I were you,” she said with a veneer of calm.

Under the surface, however, she was quietly seething in rage. He wanted an angel to show up? Hadn’t he done any research into Innistrad before coming? Avacyn and her flocks were going around butchering every human unfortunate enough to cross their path.

“My default state is to trust no one. I’ve yet to find something to change my mind.”

“Clever boy,” Liliana snagged the bottle as the undead finished its rounds, “are you sure you don't want anything to drink Jace?”

“I’m sure.”

“So,” Liliana sipped from her glass, “This is a first. Why are you here?”

“I…” Jace seemed to weigh something, “I came to apologize for leaving Ravnica with unfinished business between us.”

“For abandoning me, you mean,” Liliana let the predatory grin spread, “and running off to some backwater plane with a walking anatomical diagram.”
Ruby started to giggle as Jace and Blake stifled a laugh.

“I doubt he'd take that as a compliment,” Jace said.

“It is,” she insisted, “He'll make a perfect corpse, if he gets around to dying before it all goes soft.”

Ruby stopped giggling, looking at her in shock. Liliana noticed Blake shift slightly in her chair.

Jace, meanwhile, rolled his eyes, “and I’m certain he wouldn't take that as a compliment.”

“So, you regret going with him?”

“I didn't say that. We managed to save the whole plane with Ruby, Sun, and two other Planeswalkers’ help,” Jace’s eyes flickered to Ruby, who was searching for something in the bag she had been wearing, “We made an oath, to keep doing it, going after interplanar threats.”

“Lovely,” Liliana let the sarcasm drip forth, ,“Very noble. Is that why you’re here, to ask me to join your little heroes club?”

“No. I thought about it, you could use some friends to watch your ba-”

“Jace. Cut the bullshit.”

Before Jace could respond, Liliana continued.

“I’m not interested in your oaths.”

“I never said-”

“You aren't here to recruit me, you aren't here to help me, and you aren't here to apologize.”
“I did apologi-”

“You said it yourself last time, I betrayed you, I cursed Garruk, and I still have the Chain Veil,” Liliana lifted up the Artifact, watching as Ruby, who had been sketching something, went wide eyed, “I never asked for your help. Has any of that changed?

“No.”

“Which means you are here because you need something. You know I have troubles, and you want to make a deal.”

“I-”

“We do,” Ruby spoke up, “We need to find Sorin Markov.”

Liliana paused, letting slip a small amount of surprise. The idea of anyone willingly looking for the Lord of Innistrad was baffling, “Do you know who he is? What he is?”

“He’s a vampire Planeswalker, the ‘Lord of Innistrad’. We know he’s either in trouble, or causing it. We need to find him.”

“Why?”

“He helped seal away the Eldrazi, the plane devouring creatures we stopped on Zendikar. He was supposed to come help deal with them again, but didn't.”

“Sounds like him.”

“We’re worried a certain Draconic Planeswalker might be looking for him,” Jace cut back in, “He fought our contact, who isn't talking to us anymore, he was one of the other Planeswalkers who worked with Sorin. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?”
Liliana felt a brief surge of annoyance at Jace bringing up her service to Nicol Bolas, “I told you, I don't work for him anymore.”

“Liliana, you aren't known for your hones-”

“I don't work for him anymore,” she repeated, “Listen, Jace, drop this. Whether Sorin had anything to do with these ‘Eldrazi’ or not doesn't matter. You think I’m cruel? You think I'm selfish? Sorin makes me look like a charity worker. He’s had thousands of years to get used to idea that human are cattle.”

“You know him?”

“I met him, once. Shortly after I arrived in Innistrad, he tracked me down, thrashed me around in battle, and I’m using the loosest definition of the word possible, and pronounced me too weak to be a threat,” Liliana felt no shame in admitting to a lost that had happened several centuries ago, right after her flaring, “Then he told me that Innistrad was his, and that I'd best be a civil guest… or he'd find me and kill me. Turn around and leave, Jace, Sorin isn't going to be any more open to talking than this contact of yours.”

“Fine,” Jace pushed himself up, “I was hoping you could help us, but I guess we’ll have to follow our only other lead. Can you at least point us towards Markov Manor?”

By Urza’s disembodied head, he hadn't done any research, had he?

“That's even worse!”

“It’s his ancestral home, isn't it? Wouldn't his family know?”

“Sorin is a pariah among vampires, he hasn't been allowed among his family in centuries, maybe longer.”

“Even so,” said Jace, “if you won't help us, we don't have much choice. Markov Manor is the best lead we have.”
Liliana tightened her grip on her throne, before sending her zombies forward.

Jace looked around, horror dawning on his face.

“Lili, what are you doing?”

“Making a point.”

Jace flickered out of view, but the other three took much more physical approaches.

Blake threw off her coat, grabbed a cleaver like blade from her back as she turned and kicked her chair into the approaching undead.

Sun grabbed his chair, throwing it at them and grabbed the set of four oddly shaped pipes and snapping them together into a staff.

Ruby pulled out a small, rectangular box with a handle, pointing it at one and pulling the trigger at the bottom.

One zombie’s head jerked back, then another, and another. Ten in total stopped for a moment, before continuing forward. In that time Ruby grabbed the red rectangle next to her chair, which unfolded into a scythe. At the same time, a drake appeared, landing beside her and growing until it was bigger than the tallest zombies.

Liliana glared at them. It wasn't much of a point being made if they were capable of fighting and weren’t afraid, was it?

Jace reappeared in the center of the trio, slowly backing up.

“Sorry for bothering you,” he croaked. "We’ll head to Markov Manor on our own, then."

“Nine hells, you reckless fool,” she snarled.
“Goodbye Lili-”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she snapped her fingers, causing the zombies to back off, “you can stay until morning, otherwise you’ll get yourselves eaten.”

---X Line Break X---

Sun stared at Markov Manor.

“Something tells me,” Blake said dryly, “Sorin isn't here.”

Sun snorted in laughter.

The manor was floating in the air in complete defiance of gravity, the entire mountain beneath it having been shattered. The manor house itself wasn't much better, towers laid at various angles, torn from the house in a massive show of force.

But for who? Had this Bolas person that had Jace worried done it as a message to Sorin, or had Sorin done it as a message to them, or was it someone else entirely?

Sun wasn’t sure which option was worse, because while the first two meant there was a good chance they would have to fight a very old, very strong Planeswalker, the idea of there being someone else on Innistrad who could do this raised his hackles.

It had only been three days, but Sun could already tell that he was never going to come back to Innistrad after they left. Everything about the plane sent warning bells off, leaving him paranoid.

Ghosts, people who turned into animals, bodies standing back up and trying to kill them, it was like someone had made all his nightmares real.

Liliana had become a lot less hot after she tried to make them part of her corpse collection.

Sun followed the other three across the broken bridge, ignoring the plummeting feeling as he
stepped from one floating rock to another. As they approached the door, Sub cracked his knuckles, cycling mana through his body as he looked to the sky.

The hardest parts of learning magic, especially for Sun, was that there was so many styles, and most of those required study. Sun wasn't like Ruby, Chandra, or Nissa. He didn't have some special gift that made a style of magic a cakewalk. He couldn't instantly attune to a plane, or throw around enough fire to burn through the walls of the Gatewatch training room, or throw up a ten layer ward with five minutes of warning.

While Ruby was already adept with enchantments and runes and was still progressing in leaps and bounds, and Blake was completely willing to sit down and read through countless books on schools of magic, Sun had felt like he was being left behind.

Ultimately, however, he had found a way.

In the first two months of his new life, Sun had taken great pleasure in his newfound freedom. Wandering through the multiverse never really got old, every plane was so different.

On one he came across a festival going on, centered around a tournament. There he watched mages throw around spells that had made him green with envy. As the spells thundered across the arena, it hit him… literally.

The bolt of lightning that had been launched from a staff had slammed Sun back into his seat, his Aura dampening the blow. And as he stood up, he had realized what to do.

Sun had started looking into two fields of magic when he arrived back in Ravnica that day.

Soul and lightning.

With Ral as the unofficial ninth member of the Gatewatch, the latter had been really easy to look into. Sun wasn't sure why he hadn't tried it before, maybe because he didn't think that it would be as easy as ‘be the storm, be uncontrollable’.

Sun looked around the entrance hall, taking in the high ceiling room, looking around for the vampires that were supposed to be here.
Sun hated vampires.

Yeah, he knew it was slightly hypocritical to hate another race when he was from a race that was regularly looked down upon, but Faunus that tried to drain you of your blood were the exception to the rule, instead of the norm. Maybe he was just jaded from his last run in with one.

“I don’t see any- guys?”

Sun watched as the other three froze in place, before walking further into the manor, their eyes glassy.

Oh boy.

Sun closed his eyes, allowing three clones to appear and trying to stop them. Nope, they continued to push.

Letting the clones fade, Sun focused on gathering a storm overhead as he followed the three.

Eventually they came to a door, and the three snapped out of it, looking around in confusion.

“What-?”

“You were possessed, but all you did was walk here.”

The door was splintered forward, and looked like someone had jammed it back in place after blasting it off the hinges.

Jace reached out, and the heavy set double doors fell forward at the lightest touch.

“What happened here?” Blake asked in horror.
It was a good question.

The entire throne room was canted slightly to the side. Rotting, bloody meat from somewhere Sun didn’t want to think about lay about, like the Markov’s had been in the middle of dinner when everything went down. And went down it had, huge pillars of stone reached the roof, hundreds of stone white men and woman hanging from them in dinner clothes.

As they walked in, Sun took a moment to study the closest ones, feeling his mouth go dry as he noticed one common feature.

“Nine hells…” Sun breathed the Dominarian oath.

“They're the Markov’s,” Ruby was at the pillar opposite Sun, running a finger along the one of the fangs all the statues have, “Someone turned the Markov's to stone.”

Sun didn’t like vampires, but as he looked at the hundreds of them frozen into the pillars, he wondered who hated them so much that they would wipe a family this big out.

Sun looked back at Ruby, who had gone glassy eyed again, walking towards another door where Blake and Jace stood waiting, a journal under the Living Guildpact’s arm.

Damnit.

Sun followed them around various rooms of the house, watching as the cycle continued, a cathedral where Ruby and Blake snapped out of it looking horrified and Jace in grim resignation, several other halls with more pillars, at one point Sun thought he had caught sight of another person, before they finally broke out long enough to beat a hasty retreat from the manor. He couldn't help but notice the caged look in the other three’s eyes.

---X Line Break X---

“They're Artifacts,” Ruby said, examining the ‘cryptolith’, as the journal had dubbed them, in the forest.
“What do they do?” Blake yawned out. By this point they had been up for almost twenty-four hours, and it was starting to wear at them.

“I don't know.”

“What?” Blake gaped at that, “How don’t you know? I thought you could know what Artifacts did by looking at them?”

Ruby felt a stab of annoyance at Blake. Was she implying Ruby was lying? Ruby could comprehend artifact’s purpose at a glance, and recreate them in the privacy of her workshop. Ruby breathed in, trying to calm down.

“It’s… I don't know, it’s like they're a fragment of something bigger. Maybe she knows,” Ruby pointed at the copy of the journal Jace had made before they had split into two teams.

Blake picked it up, mumbling questions at the book as she leafed through the pages. Finally, Blake stopped on a page, reading from it.

“Entry 643, Hunter's Moon:

Alchemical analysis on the moorlands’ cryptolith formations was completed today. It indicates a number of exceptional features of the samples received, including a high surface hardness, and a directional energy field along a twisting axis. Curiously, inspection of the striations suggests a material only recently emerged from the earth. In contrast, crystalline analysis seems to indicate the samples are far older than all other geological formations found within the area.”

“So, they’re pushing energy somewhere… but where, and why?” Ruby asked the book.

“The strength of the internal lodestone field in each monolith is able to distort local field lines and poles. Over time, we have received more reports of these formations, causing a net migration of our poles to a location just offshore. The disruptive properties of the stones appear to also extend to an ability to warp the flow of mana through the region, with potentially severe effects for beings composed of raw mana-particularly the angels of the plane. Perhaps there's more to Avacyn's madness…” She responded.

Somewhere off the coast. But how could they find wher- wait.
Ruby activated her mana sight, watching the stream of mana flow from the cryptolith to another in the distance, and then from there out of sight.

“...despite experiments performed in triplicate, far exceeding tolerances for measurement error. The gravitational force governing the movement of the tides appears to have shifted from the moon itself to a location very close to the sea—” Blake trailed off into non-committal sounds, “Nephalia. A reef near Nephalia.”

Ruby nodded, letting Drache out and allowing him to grow into his larger form as she climbing on his back with Blake. At least, she thought it was Drache, he was different than she remembered, “Where's Nephalia? Near here?”

“I think so?”

“We’ll follow the mana.”

Ruby did just that, eventually landing on the shore near a ring of cryptoliths.

“That’s it?” Ruby felt her anger break its bonds, spinning on Blake, “You said there was something here!”

“I just read the book!” Blake held the offending item up, only for Ruby to bat it aside, grabbing Blake's coat.

“I guess you read it wrong,” Ruby snarled, “There's nothing but-”

Ruby stopped, noticing something out to sea.

Zombies made from waterlogged corpses were building an Object. Ruby let go of Blake, turning towards them. She was aware of Blake coming next to her, and Sun and Jace joining them.

“That's it?” Jace pulled out his copy of the journal, “This is what you were leading me towards?
There's nothing here but a bunch of zombies and angels—"

Ruby locked eyes with Jace and Blake, all three of them coming to the same realization.

‘Turn around and leave.’

‘Angels.’

‘places I don't want them.’

“Liliana,” Jace snarled madly.

“I’m going to kill her,” Blake ran a hand down Gambol Shroud.

The picture of a veil made of chain links flashed in Ruby’s mind, it had taken the death of an entire race to enchant it, and she wanted to use the death of an entire plane to undo it, “Let's g-”

Ruby flew forward as a shock wave crashed into the three.

Where was Sun?

---X Line Break X---

Liliana looked up in irritation as several of her zombies suddenly exploded into several pieces as something rammed into them.

Standing, she started to draw mana from the air, necromantic energy crackling along her fingers as she waited for her uninvited guest, following their path through her home by the trail of re-dead zombies.

Finally, the door slammed open, and Liliana threw her hand forward, watching as the purple spell
passed over the ground, bugs shriveling and dying.

The actual target, however, launched themselves over the spell, dodging and weaving around the two that followed.

“Wait!” Sun stopped, hands held out in a placating gesture, gasping for breath, “I came to warn you.”

“Of what?”

“Something went wrong at Markov Manor,” He said, “The others started acting weird. They think you're behind everything going on in Innistrad, they're coming now. I don't know how long until they get here.”

Liliana stretched out her senses, using her zombies to scan for them. Their sparks were still in the distance, but rapidly moving closer.

“Tell me what happened,” she hissed, “quickly, boy.”

“Markov Manor was torn to pieces when we got there,” Sun continued panting, grabbing the glass from a zombie and downing the contents in one, “the mountain was gone, parts were torn off and floating in the air, the bridge was shattered. When we got there, they blanked out until we got to the main hall. There were giant pillars with the vampires turned to stone and fused to them.”

“What?”

“Yeah,” Sun had finally caught his breath, “Jace found a book, and then they blanked out again. That happened a few times before we managed to get the hell out of there. Once we did, we decided to split up, cover more ground, you know?”

“Yes,” normally Liliana wouldn't answer a rhetorical question, but she needed to hurry him up.

They were almost here.
“Anyway,” Sun hurried, probably feeling their presence, “Jace started talking to the book and then
to the air, and when we got to the places all the pillars led, Ruby and Blake were fighting-”

They landed, Jace immediately vanished, down to his Spark, as the other two drew their weapons,
mad looks in their eyes.

“-and then they started talking about killing you.”

Ruby was making giant sweeps with her scythe, cutting Liliana’s zombies in two. Blake, by
comparison, was eliminating them one at a time, falling on them and ramming the actual sword
hidden inside the cleaver into their skin until they stopped moving.

Liliana pursed her lips, trying to think of some way to break them out of whatever madness was
consuming them.

“What makes you think there is, child?”

Liliana froze, looking at the man standing next to her chair.

“What’s the rush?” Sun cried, “When did he-”

A raven sat on the chair next to him, and he didn't look like he had aged a day since she had met him on Dominaria. Short grey hair, a pointed beard, glowing gold eyes, and blue and gold robes.
Sun could see him? Liliana wasn't sure if that was a good thing, on one hand, that meant he wasn't a figment of her imagination, on the other, that meant he was a Planeswalker.

“And even if you can save them, why should you? Don't tell me you love the bo-”

“Of course not,” Liliana cut him off, wondering if it was worth risking having less mana when they made it here to throw a spell at the Raven Man.

“Then why save them?”
“I happen to enjoy Innistrad,” she informed him curtly, wondering why she was bothering, “and they know more about what’s going on.”

The door creaked open and Liliana threw another storm of necromantic energy at the two girls who walked in. As it washed over them, something red and purple flashed across Ruby and Blake, respectively.

“So, here's where you went,” Ruby muttered, her disheveled clothes and hair making her look even madder than she probably was, eyes trained on Sun, “We made an oath to protect the multiverse, and you throw it away at the first chance?”

“Ruby, Liliana didn't have anything to do with this-”

“Liar!” Jace’s voice echoed from every corner of the room at once as illustrations of him prowled in and out of existence at random, “She does these things, Sun! Whatever she told you, don't believe it for a second!”

“She has an Artifact called the Chain Veil, it was created using the death of all the ogres on the Plane it was created, if she wants to get rid of its curse, she needs to sacrifice an entire plane’s worth of mana!”

Liliana felt her mouth go slightly dry at that. An entire Plane? There weren't many limits she hadn't crossed, she had sold her soul four times over, killed half the demons she had made the deals with, started to feed an army to her zombies to force that girl to shatter the helvault last year, unleashing all the demons that had been sealed there by Avacyn, manipulated Jace on several occasions, had plotted to do so on at least one more, and would probably still so if they got out of this alive. But destroying an entire plane might be where she drew the line, or, at least, the line that gave her the most amount of pause before crossing it.

No, Liliana shook her head, Ruby was just a mad little kid, she didn't know what she was talking about.

“What was it we saw at the drownyard, Liliana? What does manipulating the ocean have to do with your plan?” One of the Jaces asked the first question, then disappeared and been replaced with another one who had finished the question before doing the same.
“He’s asking leading questions, trying to get your mind where he wants it to go,” the bastard had moved to Liliana’s chair, sitting in it with one leg crossed and his head resting on three fingers, looking all the world like he was watching a mildly amusing play. A pair of ravens had joined the first, all with their heads cocked at the exact same angle, “An extremely basic trick.”

While he was right, and Liliana could feel the spike of Jace attempting to drill into her mind, she would never admit it aloud. Especially because that chair was tainted now, and would have to be burned… she had liked that chair too.

“Shut up,” another Jace snarled, rapidly flickering through a multitude of different forms in a vain attempt to scare the Raven Man into silence. Dragon, manticore, wurm, hydra, kraken. Jace was so focused on that, in fact, that he forgot to focus on something else.

Liliana pulled her punch, throwing Jace against the wall and holding him there with a blast of telekinetic force. Rising to her full height, Liliana stared down Blake and Ruby, who had shifted their weapons.

“I don't want to hurt you Jace, but if you three don’t stop, I will!”

Liliana felt the Chain Veil pluck strands of mana, giving them back ten-fold, the Onakke shades whispering in her ears. Once, she had been a goddess, immortal and mind bendingly powerful, before all the Planeswalkers were weakened. At the moment, she felt like she could be again. All she had to do was kill these four and destroy this plane like Ruby had sai-

No, Liliana smashed that thought down, realizing it was the Veil warping her thoughts, instead, Liliana did something she would normally never do. She reached out, worming her way into Jace, Ruby and Blake’s minds, and soothed them. Liliana felt the demonic scars reopen as she fought off the Veil’s influence.

It was pragmatism, at its core, Beefcake and the other two would come looking if they all died, and if she destroyed the plane, she would be on the run from them and Sorin until the day she died. The fact that it clearly riled the Raven Man, if his noise of disgust was any indication, was an added benefit, as was that she could call in this favor in the future. It wasn't like she cared about Jace.

That, at least, was what she told herself as the looks of madness faded from their eyes.

“What,” Jace wheezed, looking at her, “Lili, you're bleeding!”
Genuine concern, after he had just attempted to break her mind open.

Liliana leaned down, moving Jace’s head to her lap as Blake stepped out, wheezing, and Ruby grabbed a leather bound journal from her bag and skimming through it. Considering it looked older than Liliana, she doubted it was the one Sun mentioned.

“What’s going on, Jace? Sun filled me in on some, but seeing as he didn't attack my house with the intent to kill me, I think there’s something else going on.”

“There was a-”

“Liliana, do you have any spare metal?”

“Third room on the left on the second floor, I’d send a zombie to bring you, but you were pretty through.”

Ruby left, her nose burrowed in the pages, Sun following her.

“There’s something warping the plane, and Avacyn,” Jace’s eyes started to fog over, “at the drownyard, there were spirits like were attac- fine Geists!” Jace snapped at the air, “She knows what I mean-” Jace winced as Liliana lightly slapped his cheek.

“Focus.”

“There were so many, like the Veil, and- and-” Jace looked up at her bleary eyed, “You really don’t have anything to do with this?”

“No.”

“Thank the gods,” Jace sighed, before trying to stand suddenly, “I need to go to Thraben.”
“You should stay here-”

“I need to go to Thraben,” Jace repeated, forcing himself to his feet, “If you don't know, I need to ask Avacyn. Make sure the kids are ok, please? I've put them in enough danger.”

“Jace-”

Before Liliana even finished his name, Jace had vanished from sight

---X Line Break X---

Tamiyo pushed open the library door, stopping to watch the young man standing over the elderly librarian. Mana wisps trailed off his form, and as Tamiyo focused on them, she couldn't stop her mouth pulling into a thin line. A Planeswalker.

In Tamiyo’s line of work, her kin were to be avoided at all costs. They were often brash, biased, and would meddle in the events of the Plane.

This one was a young human, wearing Innistrad clothing inscribed with unfamiliar symbols as a poor disguise. Clutched to his chest was a journal, her journal. His eyes were clouded with madness, which gave Tamiyo pause. If the madness could infect a Planeswalker, could they carry it to other planes?

His face cycled from confusion, to anger, back to confusion, before stopping on joy.

“You,” he staggered over the librarian, reaching for the Soratami, “It’s you! You brought me here! No, not you, this journal, your journal. You brought me here? No, how could you?” His eyes drifted down, before snapping up, anger in them, “You were watching me, weren’t you! You knew!” He shook his head, “Help me. Can you? I think… can you help me? Help me!”

The last words weren't a request, carrying with them a storm of mana that buffered Tamiyo’s mind. Tamiyo shrugged it off easily, but smiled in an attempt to calm him, before wrapping him in her veiling spell and grabbing a scroll. On it was the Myr’s creation myth, and it allowed her to free him from his madness.
He sighed as he rubbed his head, “Oh, wow. Thank you!” He bent down to grab her notes, “I’m Jace. And you’re Tamiyo, right? Your journal…” He held it out, but Tamiyo lifted one moon white hand in refusal, “It led me here. Your calculations, your studies, the moon, it all made sense… or at least it felt like it did. I was affected and you… you fixed it. Somehow. I’m rambling. Probably sound almost as mad as I did before, I just… thank you.”

“I gave those notes to someone I trusted, Jace, and now you have them. Did you hurt Jenrik?”

“No, but… whatever happened at Markov Manor, I don’t think he survived it.”

Tamiyo closed her eyes in quiet mourning for a moment, before continuing.

“You must leave this plane, Jace. Your brand of magic makes it particularly dangerous if you fall to the madness. You could rampage across the multiverse, driving people insane.”

“I understand, but… I can’t leave, me and my friends, we can save Innistrad. We’ve saved another plane before. We both know Avacyn is at the center of this, I can look into her mind, find out what’s causing her madness… and stop her if that’s what it takes. Then we can move on to fixing it.”

Tamiyo kept the anger off her face, “You don’t know anything, Jace. You suspect. I’ve studied Innistrad for years. What do you know of Avacyn? She wards the entire Plane, protecting it from threats. Have you ever heard of such a thing? I’m not here to stop Innistrad’s problems, I am here to understand it. To chronicle it. To know the truth of it, and record that truth for all time. Innistrad is most likely doomed, and I have no intention to stop it. It is sad to see it go, perhaps, but all things wither eventually. Planes die all the time, Jace.”

Jace’s response had slightly more bite in it, “I’m sure that’s a relief to the millions of people you’re willing to damn to madness and death. We have the power, here, to make a difference. You have that power. Will you help me?”

“I have helped you, Jace. I will offer a compromise. I will share my research with you, and you and your friends can use that information to help avert similar disasters on other planes, if it suits you. But I have recorded ten thousand stories about heroes, and a hero is merely a disaster with a point of view.”

“You said you wanted to understand, to write down the truth of what happened here, you can’t do
that without know why Avacyn went insane. Give me one chance with Avacyn, if it works, we’ll have saved everyone. If it doesn't, you’ll at least be able to take it down.”

“If you try, her madness will consume you, as it did before. But… in theory, I could anchor you. Tether you to your sanity. But if I decide that we are in too much danger, you will break off the connection immediately, and we will retreat. It will also require that we connect minds on a very fundamental level. I will understand you, and you will understand me. And if I do not like what I come to understand, I will alter the terms of this arrangement again. You, for your part, will come to know precisely what I am capable of. Is this acceptable to you?”

“Yes.”

Tamiyo cast the spell, and understood Jace.

Unfortunately, Jace Beleren wasn’t the easiest to know on the best of days. He had destroyed his mind when he had flared, losing almost all his memories from before then. He had ended up on Ravnica, where he used his mind magic to blackmail the rich for money. He had worked for the Ravnica branch of the Infinite Consortium, the same organization that had killed Nashi’s, her adopted son, birth parents. He may have very well watched it happen. For a moment, Tamiyo was tempted to break the link, before he learned of the four ironbound scrolls that carried stories she could never use. But then she saw what he had done after that.

He had returned to Ravnica, run the Implicit Maze and stop the war brewing between the guilds, had torn his mind apart again to stop the ten maze runners from using the Supreme Verdict. He had returned to Zendikar to stop the Eldrazi, had sworn an oath to protect the multiverse. His desire to save Innistrad was true, and he had left his companions behind, knowing he would likely die in Thraben.

Tamiyo felt her veil be pierced, a great source of White mana coming their way.

“She’s found us,” Tamiyo warned Jace, “I’ll try to communicate with her, to distract her. You won't have long.”

Jace nodded as the stained glass window showing a relief of Avacyn shattered to allow the real one to enter.

White wings were dripping with fresh blood and her spear burned with fire. Tamiyo floated until
she was level with the angel.

“Avacyn. I am a visitor to your world, and I have been as respectful a guest as I have been able. I want nothing but peace and wellness for those you protect. As an angel, you can hear the truth of my words. How do you respond?”

A mockery of a smile appeared on Avacyn’s lips, a clicking laughter rising from her mouth.


“I see,” Tamiyo let a scroll fall from her sleeve into her waiting hand, unfurling it with a simple gesture, “That is… unfortunate…”

Tamiyo did little more than glance down at the scroll. On it was one of the first stories she had collected, on Dominaria. It was a lament made four thousand years before, during the ice age that had started after the Brother’s War.

Winter's Howl

A young man took a step through mountain door,
A short trip to tend to his fence and farm,
The winter's chill and ice beneath the snow,
Did bring him to both swift and final harm.

His wife, a beauty who loved him so dear,
Went through her day not knowing awful truth,
That just a hundred yards from mountain door,
Her love's own blood did freeze despite his youth.
When widow did suspect that she might be,
She called with terror's breath from mountain door,
The truest cold had risen from the sea.
Only his howl of anguish echoed more.

Frozen wind buffered the angel, weakening the flames. Hoarfrost formed on Avacyn’s feathers, but all it took was a simple beat of her wings to send herself flying at Tamiyo. As Tamiyo dodged, she caught sight of something in the window. A flight of angels coming to join Avacyn.

*Hurry, we don't have long.*

Tamiyo dodged several strikes, lashing out with the icy winds when possible. Avacyn snarled, drawing her spear back and for one moment, Tamiyo saw the protector that monsters feared as light shined from Avacyn’s chest.

Then Avacyn dropped like a rock, Jace’s magic finally taking hold.

“She’s asleep. Or, as close as I could make her. Listen, she’s the source of the madness among the angels, but it’s coming from somewhere else, infecting her too-”

Jace cut off as the light from Avacyn changed, the sense of glory being replaced with sickening anger as she rose.

“Defiler” Avacyn walked towards Jace, she wrapped a hand around his neck hoisting him into the air and pulling back her spear, “Thief. Pustule of corruption.”

Tamiyo formed a spear of ice, charging at Avacyn in an attempt to stop her. The minute she got too close the flames melted the spear, and Avacyn threw Jace into her, before stalking over and grabbing them both.

*Tamiyo. The scroll. The iron scroll. You showed it to me. An old story. A powerful story. The survivors of a place that was lost... Serra's realm. That cataclysm, that power... the story fits. You know it does. You can stop this.*

It could, Serra’s realm had been home to angels like Avacyn, but Tamiyo had sworn an oath.
I’m sorry, Jace. I promised to never use that story. We make promises for times like this, when we desperately want to break them. No, Jace. The scroll stays closed.

Disbelief. Anger.

I'm sorry, Jace. Sometimes, our stories have to end.

As Avacyn drew back her spear, a hole appeared in the arm holding them, followed by a roar of thunder.

Ten golden shields enclosed Jace and Tamiyo, taking Avacyn’s arm off at the forearm. A small slug of metal hung in the center, Dominarian symbols carved into it. Tamiyo looked at the open door, where three children stood.

One was a black haired girl with a sword on her back, and a copy of Tamiyo’s journal. The second a blond haired boy with a staff. Both of them had their fingers in their ears and all three had metal clips with Dominarian runes.

The one in the lead was holding a scythe, a smoking hole at the top. She let go of the scythe, reaching into the pocket of the leather jacket she had on and taking out a black glove with more Dominarian runes on it.

Pulling it on, she slid off the coat and grabbed a white rod from it as she threw it aside and grabbed her scythe, walking forward.

At no point did she break from the look of hatred she was casting at Avacyn. One the Archangel was returning.

---X Line Beak X---

She was Avacyn. She was to protect.

From the moment she had come into existence, she had known why she existed. To protect Innistrad.

At first, she had thought that meant the humans of Innistrad, but now she could see them for what
they really were. Corrupt filth.

And more from beyond Innistrad had appeared before her.

The girl who had taken Avacyn’s arm walked further into the room, before throwing the rod in between the two of them. Avacyn could see the corruption writhe beneath her flesh.

The minute it struck the ground, hundreds of white symbols appeared around the two of them. The other two defilers cried out, pounding on the air.

“Ruby!”

‘Ruby’ didn’t respond, merely snapping her gloved fingers.

Avacyn picked up the scent of ozone, dodging to the side as a bolt of lightning roared past where she had been. Avacyn continued to dodge the blasts of lightning, watching the girl.

She was Avacyn. She was to protect.

Avacyn launched a spear of fire at the girl, who disappeared in a storm of rotting rose petals. Another bang came from behind her, and Avacyn hissed as a hot shard of metal gouged a hole in her side.

Turning, Avacyn dodged another blast of lightning, hearing it crash into the barrier behind her.

Avacyn launched several lances of fire at the girl, who once again fled in an explosion of rotting petals.

A storm of clicks followed, and Avacyn couldn’t dodge them all. One lanced through her wing, the plasma burning away the feathers there.

Avacyn followed suit, throwing twenty spears at the girl. The fire would burn away this corruption.
Another bang, and the spears were encased in a bubble of white magic. They swirled in it, raging against it. The first layer shattered, then the second. Foolish girl, Avacyn had been at this for thousands of years. Even with one arm, she could defeat the girl.

She was Avacyn. She was to protect.

As the orb drew closer, however, Avacyn realized that she had been tricked. Folding her wings, she plummeted to the ground, dodging the firestorm that had broken free where she had been.

“I read that journal,” Ruby spoke for the first time, black maggots falling from her mouth with each word. Behind her, Avacyn could hear something breaking.

Avacyn threw another lance of fire at her, only for a single layer barrier to jump out and redirect it to the ground.

Avacyn tightened her grip on her spear, before throwing it at Ruby. The silver spear flew at the girl whose eyes were glowing the same color. She could throw up a thousand barriers and it wouldn't make a difference, the lance was the manifestation of Avacyn’s promise. So long as she was protecting Innistrad, it was unstoppable.

Which was why it caused Avacyn to pause as the lance stopped without piercing even one layer.

How? She was Avacyn. She was to protect.

Avacyn summoned the spear back to her hand, rocketing across the space between the two of them. Ruby raised her scythe, catching the spear in between the prongs.

To Avacyn’s surprise, she struggled to move the spear even an inch further. She was fighting to protect Innistrad from these sacks of corruption. How was she struggling to kill one girl?

“You were these people’s savior, their hero, their protector! They marched in your name!” Ruby said, her eyes glowing as silver as the moon.
She was Avacyn. She was to protect.

Ruby made a move with her scythe, sending both polearms clattering to the ground.

Avacyn reached for Ruby’s neck, only for Ruby to tackle her midriff, sending them both to the floor next to their weapons.

Ruby climbed onto Avacyn, eyes blazing brighter as Avacyn struggled to push her off. She had fought giants ten times larger than this girl and moved them, so why was she incapable of doing it now!?

Ruby wound her gloved hand around Avacyn’s white hair, pulling her head up, before sending crashing it back into the ground with the other fist.

“You were these people’s savior!” Another blow, “Their hero!” Another, “Their protector!” Another, “They marched in your name!”

She was Avacyn. She was to protect.

But

“A savior doesn't murder children!”

she

“A hero doesn't kill innocents!”

had

“A protector doesn't burn down villages!”
“They're following your example! Killing innocents!”

protected.

That one thought shook Avacyn to the core, and she stopped trying to force Ruby off her. The girl continued to pound on Avacyn.

She had set those fires, she had killed those innocents. She had been created to protect the innocent, to defend them. Instead, she had sown the seeds of destruction. She had forced the Wolvir back into their cursed existence, she could hear people screaming as her church and angels followed her example.

Ruby’s fist, knuckles bloody, crashed into her head again, and Avacyn felt her eyeball rupture.


Ruby grabbed Avacyn's spear, and the bloody, twisted form it had become disappeared. Black fled the weapon from the point of contact, chased by silver, and the smaller prong grew until it was equal to the larger.

As Ruby thrust it down, however, something wrapped around her arms and hoisted her off Avacyn.

“Put me down! I’m going to- going to- oh Dust,” the last words were choked out.

Avacyn heard the other dif- no, people join them as she rose to her knees, watching them with her one eye.

Ruby was surrounded by the two who had come with her, her shoulders shaking with muffled sobs. The woman joined in after a moment, muttering words of a story in an attempt to calm her. After a moment, and with an uncomfortable expression on his face, the one with the blue hood joined in.
Which left the one who had actually done the lifting. A vampire.

“Avacyn,” he said, looking like he was actually worried for her, “We need to go into the cellar of this place.”

This, at least, she could deal with.

“Be silent, vampire,” Avacyn weakly threw another spear of light at him, and it washed over him, but didn't harm him.

“Ava-” He was cut off by another spear. By the time she reached four, he only looked irritated.

“Avacyn, you cannot harm me.” He reached out to her, “And there is a reason.”

His next words caused her bones to chill, but the minute she heard them, she knew they were true.

“I am your creator.”

She could see it, his eyes were like hers, as were his high cheekbones. He was Sorin Markov, and he was her creator.

Avacyn hated him.

“You- You have allowed this to happen.”

“You should be careful what you say to me, child.”

Avacyn struggled to stand, glaring at Markov with one eye.
“I am not your child. I am your creation. You are responsible for everything I am capable of. I was made for a purpose, and your purpose was impure. Sorin Markov, I condemn you as the greatest evil of this world.”

“Avacyn. Don’t force my hand.”

Avacyn summoned her spear, forcing all the power she could, and launched herself at Markov.

He put her through the floor.

Avacyn gasped as she crashed into the stone, struggling to rise.

Her eye locked onto a black impression of an angel on the floor, like it had been scorched into it.

“You should know this place,” Sorin jumped down, sword drawn, “It’s where you were made.”

“Where you made me what I am.”

“Let me help you, my child,” Sorin held out a hand, and Avacyn saw the leeches writhe beneath the skin, “I could cleanse your mind, make you anew.”

“If I’m not the daughter you want, then we shall fight forever. I will not be a monster’s instrument.”

“Then I will end this now,” he said quietly, pointing his sword at her.

You will create another vault to seal me away, because that is the only way you can stop me.”

“I can’t make another helvault, just as I can’t make another you.”

“Then what can you do? You can’t destroy me-”
“But I can.”

Sorin didn’t look at her as he cast the spell, an ancient rite in reverse. Avacyn sank back to her knees and touched the spot that marked the place of her birth, and of her death.

She was Avacyn. She was to-

---X Line Break X---

Sun looked down the hole, watching as Sorin sheathed his sword and walked away.

“It’s done,” he mumbled to Ruby, “she’s gone.”

“The people of this plane lost a protector,” Jace said.

“The Plane lost a protector,” said the woman seriously.

As if saying that triggered some sort of magical ritual, the world shook. Breathing in, Sun broke free from the hug and walked to the window. As he looked out, he felt his face.

“Guys, we need the others.”

“Why?” Blake awkwardly shimmied over, Ruby still locked in a death grip. As they did, Blake’s jaw dropped, “What is that?”

Sun had never seen it before, but he instantly knew what it was.

It looked like a giant mushroom, with a single purple eye on the cap, and its stalk replaced with tentacles that scoured the area around it, consuming all the mana.
Emrakul, the last Eldrazi Titan, had arrived on Innistrad.
Ruby sighed as Sun held her hand, using his aura to kickstart her regeneration.

“I don’t get how it went down,” Sun mumbled, watching Ruby’s bloodied knuckles start to stitch back together.

“Liliana’s attack took a lot out of me,” Ruby lied, eyes focused on the Eldrazi sitting in the horizon.

The collection of Planeswalkers were sitting outside of the cathedral, trying to figure out what to do.

Ruby wasn’t sure why, but all the noise had died in the wake of Emrakul’s arrival. A calm before the storm.

It didn’t feel right, there should have been screams, people raging. Silence wasn’t right.

Ruby tightened her hold on Avacyn’s spear, wondering if there could have been anyway to stop this.

Emrakul was larger than either Ulamog or Kozilek, even from this distance that was clear. It made Ruby wonder if She could be beaten.

How had She even gotten here? It wasn’t like She was a aether construct, it would take a ton of mana in one location to get Emrakul’s attention.

Wait…

Ruby closed her eyes, mentally pulling up the design of the cryptolith. It was directing mana towards the drownyard, where the was… was…

“Hey,” Ruby looked up, meeting Blake’s eyes, “Is everything alright?”
“I’m just trying to think. Do you remember what we saw at the drownyard?”

“I… kinda? There were undead there, and they were building… what were they building?”

Ruby’s heart was hammering in her throat as she forced herself to call out to their other companions.

“Jace, Sun… Do either of you remember what was being built in the drownyard?”

“They… no?” Jace sounded worried.

Ruby nodded, “I need you to go into my head, see if there's some sort of mental block around the drownyard, and maybe the cryptoliths.”

“Are you-”

“Yes.”

There had to be something going on, she had understood things much more powerful and terrifying than the cryptoliths.

Jace’s eyes glowed blue, and Ruby could feel the cool watery feeling that accompanied it. After a moment Jace answered the question, “There is.”

“Break it.”

“But it could-”

“We need to know what's going on, Jace. Break it.”
Ruby felt a wave of vertigo wash over her as the memories came rushing back.

“Oh… oh!”

The cryptoliths were like hedrons on Zendikar, a plane wide amplifier meant to force the mana into one place and attract Emrakul. For the spell to work, however, Avacyn needed to be dead.

Ruby relayed the information, causing the rest to stop. It was Sun who voiced the question on Ruby’s mind.

“Why would someone want to bring Her here?”

“Girl,” Ruby looked up at Sorin, “Walk with me, would you?”

“Ok,” Ruby said softly, standing with Avacyn’s spear.

Ruby followed the vampiric Planeswalker away from the group.

As they walked down the streets of Thraben, Ruby saw people in the windows, pointing at her and whispering.

“Your hand. Does it need healing?”

Ruby looked down at her left hand, watching the brown flakes of drying blood.

“It’s fin-”

“Your other hand.”

“It’s uh-” Ruby briefly considered lying about it, before deciding that since he knew despite the fact that she hadn’t made the slightest fuss about it, it was pointless to try to deny it, “It’s not
good.”

Ruby struggled to remove the silk glove, biting her tongue to hide her pain as the air hit the burns.

“I think I’ll use leather next time. You know, the big ones they use on some planes to avoid burns?”

Sorin didn't answer, waving a hand over the second degree burns. White mana swept over them, and they faded.

“You know how to heal?”

“When you’re alive as long as I have, you pick up any trick that can be useful.”

And he had created an angel, one of the two races that were the embodiment of White mana.

Ruby breathed in, before holding out Avacyn's spear to Sorin. The vampire’s face betrayed a look of shock.

“You...” Ruby ducked her head, “You said you were her creator, er… father… so shouldn't this be yours? I... I mean, that's how things normally work on Remnant, my plane-” Ruby stopped as the weight of the spear was lifted from her hands.

Ruby lifted her head, watching Sorin. He looked like he wanted to cry, but couldn't remember how.

“Do, uh... do you mind me asking how that happened?”

Ruby closed her eyes, waiting for the explosion.

“There was another archangel on Innistrad once,” Sorin said quietly, “then there was a year with a terrible famine. My grandfather made a deal with a demon, Shilgengar, he would kill the archangel, Marcyz, and in return Shilgengar would teach him a way to survive the famine.”
So that's what she had seen in the chapel of Markov Manor. An angel bound and ritually sacrificed to create a new race.

“My grandfather did so, becoming the first vampire on Innistrad, and then made me the second. It caused me to flare.”

Ruby waited for Sorin to continue, not willing to risk angering him again.

“Eventually, so many vampires were made that they were going to eat through all the humans. So, I made Avacyn to act as a deterrent.”

Sorin’s grip on the spear tightened until it groaned.

“Then Nahiri ruined everything,” Sorin snarled, eyes gravitating towards Stensia, “She called Emrakul here… Girl, I need your assistance.”

“How?”

“There’s no way to save my plane, but if Nahiri thinks she can get away with damning everyone here because of what happened to Zendikar, she is-”

“What happened to Zendikar?” Ruby felt a stab of worry. Had something happened while they weren't looking?

“That Thing,” Sorin spat the word as the used the spear to point at Emrakul, “is called an Eldrazi. It's two siblings destroyed Zendikar. I don't know where they are now, but-”

“They're dead,” Ruby supplied, “We dragged enough of their body into Zendikar to kill them.”

“That ridiculu-” Sorin paused, “You’re serious.”
“Yes.”

“You, you killed them?” It could probably be counted as an achievement to cause Sorin Markov to be shocked twice.

“I work with a group of other Planeswalkers, kind of like you and Ugin and… whoever the third was. We managed to kill them. Ugin said you would be angry about that.”

“Nahiri,” Sorin breathed again, watching as Emrakul moved forward at a glacial pace, “Then there's still hope for Innistrad.”

“Maybe? It took manipulating the Ley lines.”

“But there's hope, at the very least… We could use that,” Sorin pointed at the moon, “It has sealing properties. You specialize in wards, correct?”

“Artifacts in general. Why?”

“We will need to find a way stop Her,” Sorin looked back to Ruby, “but in the meantime, I need your assistance. We’re going to stop Nahiri, then we shall gather every Planeswalker we can.”

Sorin effortlessly span the spear around, ramming the tips into the ground.

“Emrakul will be here in four days. She’ll not go farther than Thraben.”

---X Line Break X---

Liliana glared at the Chain Veil from where it had fallen from her face, ignoring the residual wisps from the tempest of energy that had torn the room she was in apart.

“I warned you of the risks, Madame,” the geistmage, Dierk, said as he handed her a handkerchief to dab at the demonic etchings.
The necromancer briefly entertained the notion of killing him. All it would take would be a wave of her hand, and he would collapse into a pile of rotting flesh and bone.

“See yourself out,” She said, “and make sure Olivia gets that orb.”

Even if Olivia Voldaren, Dierk’s patron, wasn't as dangerous as Sorin, she was still one of the oldest vampires of Innistrad. It wasn't worth Liliana making such an enemy to release some of her pent up frustrations.

He gave a swooping bow, leaving Liliana with her new hunchback manservant, Gared. Liliana looked out the tower window. In the distance, Thraben glowed like a dim candle on its mesa in the center of the Lake of Herons.

The brats had left to meet with Jace.

Liliana considered going after them.

She didn't need them, but she needed someone to need her, if only to have a couple of bodies in between her and the demons.

Suddenly, the mana in the air pulsed and wavered, like it was being yanked towards something in the distance.

There was the sound of broken glass below her, followed by a man’s scream. Dierk’s scream.

Gared drew a knife as he swung the door open for her. Liliana grabbed the Chain Veil, striding down to see what had happened.

Liliana wrinkled her nose at the smell of wet fur and blood. Werewolves. Liliana's throne room was overrun with werewolves.

Dierk lay in a pool of blood, chest torn open as they sat around him. They were… warped in various ways. One opened its mouth to bare its teeth, and it reached the back of its throat. Another opened its mouth, and it had three tongues lined with eyes. A third’s arm was held on by little more
than a lattice of flesh.

That was strange.

Liliana threw a wave of energy at them, watching as the ones in between her and the door dropped dead. Another spell caused Dierk's corpse to rise.

“Gared, get your coat! We need to return something to Olivia!”

It took several hours for them to get to Lurenbraum Fortress, and thing had become even more warped. Vampires, werewolves, angels, demons, all heading towards the coast and all becoming more and more warped. As they arrived, Liliana briefly noticed two other sparks there.

Gared stepped forward to knock for her, gaping at the massive door, “You know the lady of this house?”

“It’s in my interest to know people of power, which she is.”

The door swung open before Gared got to knock, an imposing woman in an ornate dress swung the door open. She held a priest’s staff in hand, and Liliana could see her veins against her snow white skin. On many other planes, vampires would be preparing for sleep, but the vampires of Innistrad were not undead, nor were they harmed by what little sunlight there was on the plane.

“I’m here to speak to Olivia.”

“She's not seeing human guests tonight, or, well,” she casted a disdain filled glare further in, “Most humans.”

Liliana rolled her eyes, “I’m returning something of hers.”

“Then leave it here and begone.”

“I’ll talk to Olivia personally, thank you. Tell her Liliana Vess is here to see her.”
“I said,” the vampire bared her teeth in an attempt to scare Liliana, lifting her staff, “She isn’t seeing-”

“Who is it, Astrid? Liliana,” Olivia appeared over Astrid’s shoulder, pushing her aside and dragging Liliana out of the gathering storm, “you heard the good news and came to join the celebration? Astrid, be a dear and fetch a cup of wine, would you?”

“I don’t drin-”

“Oh, I know dear, but you should have at least one. Today is a momentous day!” Olivia took the drink from Astrid, pushing it into Liliana's hand and moving further into the hall. Liliana handed it off the glass to Gared, following behind the hovering matriarch and leaving Dierk’s body behind.

“What's happened?”

It looked as if every vampire under the name Voldaren was gathered as one, many wearing armor.

“You haven't heard? That archangel is gone! Poof!” Olivia mimed something exploding with a cackle, “turned to dust on the floor of Thraben’s cathedral! Dead in the very place she was most powerful, it must have been poetry in motion!”

“Avacyn is dead?”

“Yes! Now that Sorin got rid of that disgusting creation of his, we,” Olivia waved a hand over the hall, where everyone was focused on them, “are finally free to rule again! I was quite disappointed when she was freed from her trap, you know.”

“Is that why it looks like you are preparing for war?”

“Not quite,” Olivia gestured for her to follow into a room. There was someone seated in front of the window. There was also somebody behind a screen, clothing folded up on the hassock. They looked familiar.
“You see, dear,” Olivia continued the conversation, “When you had that cather break the Helvault, you didn't just release Avacyn and those demons you are so fond of consorting with.”

“I didn't-”

“Don't lie,” the man at the chair stood, revealing himself to be Sorin Markov, “You released Nahiri, you brought that upon us.”

Sorin punctuated that by pointing out the window, where a giant shape was just visible through the howling tempest.

“I had business to attend to,” she said. “It’s not my fault if your closet was full of skeletons.”

It was the wrong thing to say. Next thing Liliana knew, Sorin had slammed her against a wall, teeth bared against her throat.

“You didn't have the right,” he spat, “I told you when you arrived here, Innistrad is mine.”

“Lady Voldaren?” Liliana stopped to look at where Ruby was standing, the young Planeswalker was shifting uncomfortably, “Is this right?”

Ruby was wearing an elaborate ball gown-cum-armor. Olivia gave a gasp of joy, floating over to adjust it.

“You look wonderful, darling. And please, call me Olivia.”

“That isn't practical. Lose the gown,” Sorin said.

“Hush,” Olivia said, “you don't understand. A woman must look her best in battle.”
Ruby looked like she would *gladly* lose the gown, but also like she had learned how pointless it was to argue with Olivia.

Sorin, hadn't apparently, grabbing Ruby's clothes and throwing them at the girl.

“Switch back into those.”

Liliana took Olivia bristling with outrage as the sign to get out of there as.

As Gared and her walked out, Liliana watched the giant shape in the distance. She could get out of there easily. She didn't need to stay.

It wasn't like she needed Jace. But she did need someone to need her.

Liliana started to walk towards Thraben, raising every corpse in every graveyard she passed.

---X Line Break X---

A reckoning is not to be postponed indefinitely, and this one was over a thousand years overdue.

The chittering army of cultists below called her Harbinger, Earth-Forger, Tide-Binder. All of them were, in some way, true.

Nahiri had spent a thousand years in the black solitude of the helvault, plotting her vengeance against Sorin. Now, however she was fighting for more than just herself.

She had knelt in the dust of Bala Ged, watched as the sea washed away the dead continent. She had wept as the last Surrakar had died. Sorin had betrayed her, and Zendikar had died because of it.

She would avenge her home now, everyone on Innistrad would suffer for his betrayal. She was going to make Sorin watch as his beloved home was destroyed.
The first vampires arrived then, riding undead horses while wearing armor and holding banners.

Slowly, hundreds of vampires walked into the sight of Markov Manor. One cultist charged forward, his third arm scouring the ground. The front vampire swung his sword, leaving the cultist to bleed out. Nahiri waited for Sorin to step forward, and when he did, swung an arm down.

One of the towers hovering in the air followed her hand, launching towards the army like the fist of an angry god.

Nahiri watched as the other Planeswalker, a little girl, reached for something on her arm. Sparks came from it, and she pulled out a staff.

That tricky little bit-

The staff’s head flared, and a giant beam of energy consumed Nahiri’s attack.

Well then.

“Nahiri!” Sorin’s voice echoed across the space, “I will give you one chance! Come down here and help us fix this, or I will kill you!”

“You brought so many friends, Sorin. It’s such a shame that someone else couldn't be here.

Nahiri smirked as Sorin’s face settled into a mask of icy rage at the reference to Avacyn, and lifted her hand.

One of the other towers warped, shifting into a hovering twister of blades. Another gesture sent them flying at the army.

Sorin threw a hand forward, an orb of black mana crashing into the swords and rapidly turned them into a dust cloud of rust.

Another move saw the front row of cultists disappear in an explosion of blood.
Nahiri growled, jumping down with a pair of swords. As she landed the earth rippled.

“You destroyed Zendikar, Sorin! You promised to come back and help, and you didn-”

“I DID!”

“He did!”

Nahiri stopped.

“What?”

“I did go to Zendikar! The girl I recruited to help me sabotaged it! I asked Ugin for help, but he was injured!”

No. That wasn't possible. It couldn't be.

“That doesn't matter! Zendikar is gone!”

“It isn't!” The girl stepped forward, “Zendikar’s safe! The Gatewatch killed Ulamog and Kozilek! We can go and see. Me and Sorin need to go other planes anyways. Please, we can stop this together!”

Nahiri throat a sword at her, the blade sinking next to her throat.

“Please. We’re going to need every Planeswalker possible if we’re going to stop Emrakul! If I’m lying, you can kill me. Please!”

Nahiri lowered her hand, taking the girl’s.
The familiar explosion of energy took them away from Innistrad, before they landed on a floating outcrop.

Nahiri sank to her knees as she stared out at the recovering land. No. No.

Nahiri covered her mouth to hide the building scream. What had she done?

“Nahiri,” Sorin’s voice came from behind her, picking her up and pulling her into a hug.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“We can still save Innistrad. Girl,” Sorin snapped at the girl behind them, “Go. Gather what allies you can. Now. We only have three days left.”

The girl turned, planeswalking away and leaving Nahiri to look out over her slowly recovering home.

---X Line Break X---

Ruby stepped onto the plane, only to stop as she did so. Reaching down, the young Planeswalker ran her hand upon the ground.

Below the surface of the earth was living metal. Ruby sent a spike of magic down, knowing it would draw the attention of the creature and the Planeswalker she was looking for.

The earth cracked and heaved as giant clawed hands broke free, hoisting the body attached to them free.

The creature's eyeless head was covered in a carapace of metal. Hooked tassels stretched from its back, and its chest looked like it had been torn open. The creatures barbed tail swung back and forth as his mouth split open, unveiling hundreds of needle-like teeth.
Ruby activated her Semblance and surged backwards as the creature smashed down. A pair of Dust bullets slammed into the body, before falling down. There were two indents where they had hit.

Ruby gathered mana into her index finger, drawing a new symbol onto Crescent Rose. It was the symbol of a group, an ideal, that was against the concept Phyrexia as a whole. A circle with a dot in the center, a cluster of five lines radiating from the dot to the top of the circle.

The plane where Ruby had learned this symbol was one of the most dangerous she had traveled to in her attempts to arrive home, and yet, was the first time she hadn't immediately fled. It’s where she had been brave, and rewarded for it.

Ruby grabbed the bolt on Crescent Rose, leaning low and preparing. As the Phyrexian swung down again, Ruby activated her Semblance and pulled the trigger.

The blade cut through the Phyrexian’s arm easily, the glistening oil within was obliterated as it struck the blade that was temporarily enchanted with the concept of a multiverse without Phyrexia. For Koth of the Hammer, Elspeth Tirel, and all others who had seen their planes corrupted by the creatures.

Ruby created a barrier in the air, landing on it and firing off. Crescent Rose hooked around the Phyrexian’s neck and ended its life.

Landing, Ruby struck a pose for a moment, Crescent Rose behind her, her cloak floating in the breeze.

What? She was still a kid!

Ruby looked behind her at the sound of heavy footfall. Just the person she was looking for.

Crafted by Urza Planeswalker for use in time travel and combat against Phyrexia. Made from silver, which is the element most resistant to the timestream. Embodiment of ‘The Legacy’, Urza’s final plan to stop Yawgmoth.

“Karn!”
The silver golem walked towards her, golden eyes on the Phyrexian. A wave of his hand, and the body disappeared. It was yet another reminder of the fact that Planeswalkers were only really weak when compared to how strong they had been in the past.

Silver eyes met gold. Ruby breathed in, preparing to attempt to convince Karn to take a break from his one man, er, golem crusade against Phyrexia.

---X Line Break X---

Tibalt danced around the dark warehouse, picking up a dull knife and chuckling.

How would the girl react when he set in on her? Would she beg for mercy, or be defiant even as the blade started to peel off her skin? Maybe she would ignite?

Tibalt had never seen someone ignite because of his work, it would be interesting to watch.

Pulling the gag from the girl, Tibalt grinned.

“So, what's your name?” the Planeswalker devil asked, like he hadn't captured the girl and was about to torture her to death.

To her credit, she hadn't gone down without a fight.

The girl with mottled skin glared at him from the rack he was holding her on. Her whip lay on the ground, and Tibalt’s arm was hanging loosely to his side. It was going to be a bitch to reduce that dislocation later.

“Come on, you should tell me. You’re going to die here and-”

The girl jerked forward, her forehead striking Tibalt’s nose full on. The ex-skaberen staggered back, laughing as he clutched his broken nose.

“I like you,” Tibalt spat around the pouring blood, “The defiant ones are always the best, watching
it break. In fact,” Tibalt activated a spell, letting her drop, “come on, girl, another round. I have
time to kill.”

Tibalt lifted the knife, years of brawling in the streets of Nephalia left ready for the fight to come.
The girl pushed herself up, grabbing her whip.

“Come on, girly! You're fighting for your life, you have everything to lose! If you lose, you’re sure as
hell in for a slow death, so come at me! Give this everything you’ve got!”

Tibalt dodged her strike, grin spreading wider as his heart started to hammer.

“Is that the best ya got!? My grandmother is more dangerous than yo-”

Tibalt stopped as his tailcoat suddenly gained a hole as the girl's whip gouged a hole in his side.
His sudden stop allowed her to land a blow clean across this chest, the whip tearing open his flesh.

Tibalt’s grin shrunk slightly, before returning full force as he attacked. The dagger missed each
time. Must have been because he was using his left hand.

“Come on, girly, what's your name!?”

“...Illa.”

“I’m Tibalt! Whoever walks away from this battle is gonna have to-woah!”

Tibalt dodged to the side again, laughing.

“Good one, catchin’ me while I’m talking! That will be something that keeps you alive… assumin’
you survive this, course.”

Tibalt dodged again, trying to ignore the feeling of energy to his left.
“Unfortunately for you, Illa! I think it’s about time we wrap this up,” Tibalt sheathed his knife for his new toy, let the black smoke of his magic gather, “I’m getting bored, and would like to move o-”

Tibalt’s eyes widened as an ash white hand smashed through the wall, latching onto the front of his shirt and dragging him through the wall after it.

Tibalt found himself staring at the familiar marble features of the so called ‘Lord of Innistrad’.

“It wasn't enough for ya to ruin my art back home was i-”

Tibalt was cut off as Sorin adjusted his grip so that the vampire had his neck in a vice grip.

“Innistrad is in danger. Assist me in saving it, and maybe, I’ll consider not ending your pitiful existence, devil. Am. I. Clear?” each word was punctuated by Sorin tightening his already impressive grip.

Tibalt nodded pitifully.

“Good,” Sorin tightened his grip further, before dragging Tibalt into the Blind Eternities.

---X Line Break X---

Thalia rode upon her gryff, eyes locked on Thraben in the distance. The banner of Saint Traft fluttered above the small war party of fifty people. She wished they had more time, enough to build up an army, but the Storm that was sweeping through the countryside would hit Thraben within a couple of days.

“Ma’am! Scout ahead! It’s Halmig!”

Thalia rode behind to meet with the group of ten men she had sent out on horses to gather support from Hanweir. Another, smaller, group had been sent to find the Bower Passage through Ulvenwald to reach Kessig to recruit the Spearsages, the archmages tied there.
There was only one. Halmig looked like he was barely staying on his gryff, his right side splattered with blood from the hole where his arm had once been.

“Halmig,” the cathar called to him, “What happened?”

“They… they were Emrakul. Avacyn save me, they were Emrakul,” Halmig coughed.

“Focus, Halmig, what's Emrakul, who were Emrakul? And where are the others?”

“They- they became Emrakul too,” another cough, “She passed over the town just before we arrived, and they all became Her. Man, woman, child, horses, gryffs…” Halmig’s coughing fit got worse, and the gryff writhed under him. Wait… Thalia had sent him out with a horse, “Me,” Halmig barely managed to wheeze out before the change started.

The gryph rapidly molted, feathers dropping off as one as its heron head split into four to make room for the mockery of a maw, its wings grew, the sinew tearing at points. Four extra legs stretched down from its torso.

A writhing mass of flesh exploded from Halmig’s arm socket, rapidly weaving itself into a latticework arm. Halmig’s body jerked another limb burst from his chest.

Thalia closed her eyes for a moment, then drew her saber with blinding speed.

The moon-blessed silver easily cleaved through the new limbs, but another pair sprouted in their place.

Sliding off her gryff, Thalia struck forth with her saber.

The twisted form of the gryff collapsed into several pieces, giving the cathar access to Halmig’s head, which she took off in one swoop.

It reattached before Thalia finished sheathing her sword.
The legs and one remaining arm of the creature that had once been Halmig turned to face her with the sickening crack of bone. Another set of lattice arms burst out, and the more burst from the neck to reattach the head. After a moment, the front of the leather armor it was wearing exploded as even more tendrils exploded forth to grab the fallen gryff’s wings and fuse them to the monstrosity.

“Stay back!” Thalia snapped at her men. She had an advantage they didn’t, one that kept her safe from the insanity tearing Innistrad apart.

Are you prepared?

The voice came like a breath on the wind. The geist of the Saint that shared her body roused from his sleep.

“I am,” she murmured, the grip on her saber tightening.

Sometimes, it was Thalia in control, others it was Traft. Here, it was both.

The ghostly flames of Traft started to emanate from Thalia, running down her arm and along the edge of the saber.

Thalia swung, tearing through the creature again and again. Each time the limbs regrew, they were thinner.

Finally, the body collapsed and didn’t stand back up, leaving Thalia gasping for breath as she stared at the body of her companion. Pointing the blade down, she allowed the flames to burn away what little remained off Halmig’s body.

“Ma’am, another creature! It’s- Traft protect us… it’s a town!”

Turning, Thalia grit her teeth.

It was, indeed, a town writhing towards them. Buildings and animals and people, all connected by
the lattice-like substance that followed in the Storm’s wake.

“Men! To arms!”

Thalia didn’t really believe that they could stop such a creature, but she would be damned if she went down without a fight. The flames of Traft burned bright, and Thalia lined up her blow. She would only get one.

Then the werewolf pack came.

It was the biggest Thalia had ever seen, led by a shewolf larger than most alphas. The living town lashed around, trying to break from their hold.

The shewolf shifted, turning into a naked middle aged women who threw her arms up, causing spikes of wood to grow from the ground and impale the town. Glancing over, the woman smirked at Thalia.

“Who are you?”

“Arlinn Kord,” the werewolf said, “we’re here to help.”

“I didn't think werewolves would care.”

“It’s my plane too, I don't want to have to find another unless I have no choice.”

Arlinn made another sharp movement with her hands, and even more wooden stakes impaled the town.

Another group of cather, wearing the symbol of Kessig, rode up. At their head was a pair of archmages, who thrust the staves they carried forward. Beams of sunlight destroyed the town in one move.

“Lady Thalia!” One cather, who was wearing the symbol of Thraft, rode up in salute, “I have
managed to gain reinforcements from Kessig!"

Truly, he was the wisest among them.

Looking at the pack, the ten archmages, and the army of four hundred cathers, Thalia had to resist from sighing.

Beggars couldn't be choosers, she guessed.

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A dragon flew over the skies of Tarkir, in the distance was a raging storm, with more dragons flying from it.

To the average denizen of this plane, this was far from an interesting sight. Dragons had ruled Tarkir for hundreds of years, since the Khans’ Fall.

For the man flying alongside it, it was a dream come true. It was proof that all the suffering he had gone through was worth something.

Sarkhan Vol was an orphan twice over. His parents had died during a failed assault on the capital of the Abzan Houses, Arashin. But he was also an orphan of time.

On the Tarkir he had been born, the Dragon Tempest had died, leaving the dragons incapable of reproducing. By the time Sarkhan had been born, there was little more than remnants, scraps fought over by the five clans.

When Sarkhan flared, he had searched for a dragon worthy of being served.

On Jund, one of the five broken shards of Alara, he had watched the hellkites that ruled there and found them unworthy. He had also met his greatest mistake. He had sworn himself to the dragon Planeswalker Nicol Bolas.
The monster hardly deserved such a distinction. The years under his thumb had nearly broken Sarkhan’s mind.

Eventually, Sarkhan returned to Tarkir, using an artifact hidden by the creator of the Dragon Tempest, and changed the course of history.

In the original timeline, the spirit dragon Ugin had died to Bolas. Thanks to Sarkhan’s intervention, Ugin survived. The tempest never ended, and the dragons and the clans became one.

Sarkhan had cast aside the armor of Mardu Horde, the last remnant of a present that never happened. Now he flew with dragons!

Sarkhan folded his wings, dropping on a direct course for the canyon that held Ugin’s cave.

At the last second, he flared out his wings, landing in front of Narset. The former student of Ojutai looked up from the book she had collected from another plane.

Sarkhan transformed, grabbing his pants from the place they sat next to Narset and shoving one leg in. He stopped as the yells hit his ears.

“They're still at it?”

The Kor had appeared outside a couple days ago, walking right past the two of them into the cave Ugin was in. About half an hour later, the shouting match had started.

How she had managed to keep up a shouting match for two days without a break to eat or sleep, Sarkhan wasn't sure.

The woman’s voice, which had the same consistency as gravel, finally started to approach them.

“-this isn't over, Ugin. I’m gonna forge set of chain, then I am dragging you to Innis- Hello!”

Sarkhan’s dragon eyes flickered down, and he quickly rushed to finish pulling on his pants.
“You are?”

“You are?” The Kor said, walking over to a bolder and planting her hands on either side of it, “you mind helping me with something once Ugin’s involved?”

“What?”

“I. I made a mistake, and I’m trying to fix it. We’re gonna need every Planeswalker we can get.”

“To do what?” Sarkhan asked impatiently.

“There are these things called the Eldrazi-”

“I’m familiar with them,” Sarkhan cut her off hurriedly.

He had been involved in their release, to some extent, and Ugin had flown into a rage (or what counted as one for him) when two of them had been killed.

“Yeah, well, we’re killing one. Here we go!” Nahiri was holding a large set of chains she had apparently created from the boulder during the conversation, “Alright, Ugin, we’re going to Innistrad!”

---

Ral sat on the couch across from the kids, tinkering with some spare parts as a mindless show played on the ‘scroll’.

Assuming the Gatewatch survived their fight, he was using his ‘unofficial member’ status to jockey for moving the main base to Remnant. It would be much easier to cover up Chandra’s fire here than in the constant cityscape of Ravnica.
If they didn't... well, Ral would still probably build a summer home here. He couldn't wait to pick apart the artifacts here.

Looking at the two kids he had been roped into babysitting, Ral placed the half-finished artifact on the table.

“Alright, what's wrong?”

“Huh?”

“You two have been watching me for the since you were drop off. What’s wrong?”

You didn't get as high into the Izzet League as he did without great peripheral vision.

Blake and Sun looked at each other, before turning back to Ral.

“We’re going back.”

Ral leaned forward, “Really?”

“Yeah,” Sun nodded, “We didn't sign up for the Gatewatch just to be sidelined at the first big fight.”

“Besides,” Blake cut in, “Ruby’s still there. We aren't going to leave her.”

“Ok,” Ral stood, “come on.”

“Wait, seriously? Just like that?”

“I need to make sure Jace doesn't die anyway, and you two are more competent fighters than him. Let’s go.”
A quick (as much as that could be applied to the Blind Eternities) Planeswalk saw the three of them on Innistrad.

They were outside an impromptu military camp that had been made from abandoned houses to house the combined forces.

Vampires spoke with cathars, werewolves ready to transform with farmers. Skabs toiled away at grind stones, sharpening silver and farm tools, and Planeswalkers were preparing their strongest spells. Kor and Devil, Golem and Dragon. Braziers lay unlit around the camp, and the cobblestone street was flooded to Ral’s ankle.

Across the Lake of Herons was Emrakul. The Eldrazi titan was rapidly approaching the town they were in, the land it had passed over a twisted, manaless mess. Below the lashing tentacles were warped creatures.

Ral’s lips tightened as he did the math in his head. Minutes, they had minutes before Emrakul struck.

A young woman with platinum blond hair stood, turning away from a silver spear to look at the cathars. Her voice could barely be heard over the wind.

“Cathars of Saint Traft!” she shouted. “The madness that has seized our world is pressing in around us. You feel it, I know. You’re questioning your thoughts, doubting your eyes and ears. Listen to me!”

Ghostly blue flames rose in defiance of the rain, covering her body.

“Saint Traft lives within me,” the flames briefly covered her completely, and the young woman was replaced with a man, “Once, he was beloved by angels, and he was protected by them as we of the Church protected the faithful! Avacyn is gone, her angels consumed by madness! But there remains one group who can assist us today!”

As if by some hidden incantation, golden spirits appeared, from the ground, from the sky, and from the distance. Men and women on spectral horses, ghostly weapons in hand.
“Behold the spirits of the faithful dead,” her voice echoing now, raised to a pitch that couldn’t be natural as it drowned out the wind, “In the past they shielded us, they sacrificed so that we could stand here today! However, they still have more to give! Take them in, let the living and dead stand as one against this threat! Let them be your shield, and you their sword!”

Many of the cathar raised their arms, greeting the geists head on as golden flames danced along their body. One spirit carefully nudged Ral’s hand, a little girl holding a knife. She held out her hand.

Ral shook his head. He could take her in, use her to power his spells, but he wouldn't. There was a point where he would draw the line.

“Ruby!”

Ral turned to see the girl walking towards them, exhaustion visible in her frame. Next to her stood another Planeswalker.

He was a tall man with dreadlocks, a beard, and a metal arm. In his arms was a large crate.

“Guys,” Ruby said, bleary eyed, “Good, you’re here. This is Tezzeret, I don't like him, he doesn't like me, but he’s going to help. He has to.”

“Perimeter breach!”

The creature that had broken through was horrific. It looked, superficially, like a horse and rider. But the horse's body was coming apart, held together by a few strands of skin, and one leg had two smaller legs growing from it. The rider was fused to his horse, barely recognizable with his head replaced with a lantern and his halberd and arm fused at the elbow.

Ral looked to the sky, then back to the creature. A moment later, a lightning bolt dropped from the sky, slamming into the creature in a flash of heat and noise. It was blasted off its feet, skidding to a stop in front of Gideon. His sural flashed with mana, taking the head off in one move.

Gideon met his eyes, walking towards them.
“They’re not supposed to be here.”

“We know it’s dangerous,” Sun said, “but I was right next to you when we played bait for the other two, so why shouldn’t we be here?”

“You could di-”

“Gideon, we’re training for a job with a high mortality rate, we know we could die.”

“It doesn’t matter anyway,” Ruby said.

“Why?”

“She’s here.”

Emrakul had indeed finished her travel across the lake.

“Alright,” Gideon raised his voice, “Pack up! Archers, set up choke points! Everyone else, to the square!”
Sun ducked under yet another lashing tentacle, throwing Ryu Jingu Bang at one of the Eldrazi that had made it into the center of Thraben.

The shotgun at the end went off, cracking the shell of a crab so huge that it had just walked over the choke points. As the staff returned to Sun’s hand, he closed his eyes. When he opened them, there was a golden clone beside him.

The auric copy reached out, melding with Ryu Jingu Bang. Sun threw the staff again, feeling sweat form even in the downpour centered around Emrakul. It took a fair bit of Sun’s mana to move while one of his clones was out.

The clone exploded on impact, shattering the crab’s shell and letting the collection of pellets at the insides.

Sun caught his staff again with a laugh, only for it to stop as yet another set of tentacles lashed from the sky and dragged him up.

Looking up, he groaned as he caught sight of what had grabbed him through the storm.

Vampires. Why did it have to be Vampires!?

The creature had a pair of bat wings sprouting from the furred body of a werewolf, and the head of both creatures side by side. One arm ended in the tendrils dragging Sun and the other in a giant claw.

Halfway up, a pitchfork embedded itself into the wolf head, sending the creature, and Sun, smashing into the ground.

As Sun stood, grabbing his staff and shaking his head, a woman in a torn ball gown and veiled tiara smashed the vampire head to bits with a shovel.

“These fiends are slightly less tolerable than you, Geralf!”
Geralf, who was a man wearing a heavy brown apron and a magnifying glass over his left eye, tore his pitchfork from the wolf head. Looking past the woman, he threw it at another Eldrazi. This one was one of the more common… mutations, the head had been replaced with a writhing mass of tentacles.

“A sentiment that warms my heart, dear sister.”

Sun disconnected one of his shotguns, firing at several more Eldrazi.

*Jace! I think this chokepoint is down!*

*Sending help now!*

*How lon-*

The question was answered as a green dragon flew over his head, landed in front of the approaching Eldrazi, and breathed flames down the path. After a moment, it took off, flying back the way they had came.

“Way to make me feel inadequate guys. ‘Oh, Sun you can make clones of yourself and cause lightning strikes? This guy can turn into a dragon and *breath freaking fire!*’”

Geralf patted Sun on the back, before stepping forward and using his pitchfork to jab at an octopus with too many limbs and a sideways mouth.

There was a crack of wood, and Geralf was left holding the broken shaft of his pitchfork. He threw it at the octopus, before grabbing a spear from a passing cathe, ramming it into the octopus’s head, and drew a sword from his side.

Sun fired a couple more rounds down the street, before connecting the shotgun to the whole and using it hold off another werewolf Eldrazi.
While neither Thalia nor Traft were overly prideful, both were comfortable in being able to normally say that if they were probably the best swords(wo)man in the room.

Which is why the woman making them look like a novice was so surprising.

The pale woman, Nahiri, was a storm of blades. Every vampire, every werewolf, every warped cultist that got within her range was quickly cut down by one of her two blades.

A dragon passed overhead, and Nahiri reached out, allowing herself to be plucked from the ground and thrown through the air towards another area. Thalia saw spikes explode from the point of impact, impaling the corrupted near it, before returning to the earth as if they had never been there.

A cultist burst from the crowd, her chest completely replaced with latticework. Thalia put her sword through it, impaling her heart and sending fire through her veins.

Thalia slammed her sheath into another cultist, tearing the sword from the first and slitting their throat. A spray of blood struck her briefly, the blood running down her hair.

“Thalia,” Grete called, “Angels!”

Looking skyward, Thalia tightened her grip as she took in the flight of once holy creatures.

Most of them had replaced their feathered wings for those of twisted flesh, and several had extra wings.

Thalia saw several cathers fall to their knees in horror at the creatures. Breathing in, Thalia swung her sword. One angel fell as ethereal flames ripped through its right wing.

As it fell, one of the kids that had shown up just before the battle, the black haired one, impaled it with a sword coated in black magic.
The angel dissolved, the flesh rapidly turning black, then disappearing. The girl span, releasing a black crescent that dissolved another angel.

A third angel crashed down in front of the girl. This one was so warped that, if not for the once holy blade fused to its arm and the head staring with blank eyes at a sickening angle, Thalia wouldn’t have been able to tell what it had once been.

“Watch-”

Before Thalia could finish her warning, the angel’s blade smashed into the girl’s midriff, cleaving her in two.

Thalia stopped for a moment, letting Traft take control as she silently said a prayer for the girl to find peace in the Blessed Sleep.

As her body dodged around the strike, Thalia stopped her prayer, and if she had been in control, would have let her jaw drop. Thraft, while still focused on killing the angel, nevertheless took a moment to send a brief spike of surprise.

The girl was standing to the side, her sword in one hand, a sharpened piece of metal that looked vaguely like a butcher knife in the other.

The girl swung at the angel’s back, distracting it and allowing Traft to run it through and put fire through it.

“Thanks,” Thalia said with a nod, retaking control of her body, “Thalia, by the way.”

“Blake.”

Is this really the time for this?

“Thalia, more angels!”
Thalia sighed, looking up.

These angels were more conventional, white feathered wings and holy weapons in hand.

*We should join them.*

The flames of Traft formed into wings, launching Thalia skyward.

---X Line Break X---

*Gisela was the leader of the Flight of Goldnight, the angels tied to the sun. She had been Avacyn's loyal confident, and had marched against the forces of darkness with her.*

*Bruna was the leader of the Flight of Alabaster, the angels that guarded the Blessed Sleep. When Avacyn had disappeared, she had continued to ward the people of Innistrad.*

The two of them hung over the battlefield, watching the warped creatures below fight their flights.

Turning, they dodged aside as a heron headed scythe moved to across their chest.

“Hello, my sister.” They greeted as one.

Hovering across from them was Sigarda, her face locked into a mask of calm.

“You are no longer my sisters,” Sigarda said in a clear voice.

*Gisela growled. Sigarda had stood aside as they purged the corrupt humans. She had become like HER.*

They could see it now, the taint swirling below Sigarda’s skin.
“You should have joined us when we called.”

“Why? So I could be part of this ‘great work’?”

They looked down, watching the twisted, corrupted form of the humans and Sigarda’s angels fight their warriors.

One human was rising towards them on wings of oily black flames. In her hand was a sword coated in the same.

The flames ate at Bruna’s leg, and they lashed out with their left arm. The human dodged back, a set of scratches appearing on her leather. They reached out with their right arm, only for the arm to be cut off in a tide of the oily fire.

Gisela howled in pain as Bruna’s arm fell to the ground below, and turned themselves towards Sigarda.

“You still side with the-”

Gisela’s question was cut off as the sword was impaled in them. Spinning, she batted the creature down to earth, watching it crash into the ground away from the fight.

Turning back towards Sigarda, Gisela and Bruna reached out with their many arms.

“We will be together again.”

Bruna watched as Sigarda struggled against the cocoon of light they were weaving around her, the oily non-light fighting to be seen through their radiance. Reaching out they wrapped more around her, bringing Sigarda to their bosom.

They felt several burning hot things strike their back, but ignored it for their current course of action. A second before the light fully covered Sigarda another trail of black fire cut through,
drawing their attention downward.

*A wail of grief rose from Gisela’s throat as she saw the creature from before holding Avacyn’s spear. Her eyes were pitch black and drinking in the light from around them. They raised Gisela’s hand as the girl launched the oil flame covered spear at them.*

The spear destroyed their other arm, before reappearing in the creature’s hand. At the same time, Sigarda burst free, her scythe returning to her side and unleashing two more tides of oily fire.

They plummeted together, kicking out with their feat as the sword shattered within them. This wasn't end, it couldn't be! *They were Gisela! They were Bruna! They were Emrakul!*  

The creature landed in front of them, the twisted fire spinning around her. *Bruna saw a devil stop, lowering his twisted weapon as he looked at her. Gisela saw a pair of female creatures, one made of fire, the other of plants, stop and watch her.*

The oil covered spear stabbed down, rupturing several of their organs. Then it, and the creature, disappeared.

Sigarda descended from above them, oil tears dripping from her face, and swung her corrupted scythe once.

--- X Line Break X---

Gideon stopped from where he was watching the fight near the top of the cathedral. A brief, familiar implosion of mana had appeared on one side of the battlefield.

Igniting, flaring, triggering, ascending. What had just happened had a million different names, all meaning the same thing.

Someone on the battlefield below had become a Planeswalker.

Gideon could feel the white mana being drained from the cathedral around him and the ley lines below him. His sural fell limp as the white mana was torn from it, leaving Gideon to use his shield
to cave in the head of a cultist.

Several strands of red mixed into the white, before disappearing into the nexus. The manastorm suddenly ended as quickly as it appeared.

Gideon slashed out with his empowered sural, the mana allowing it to cut two more cultists and an angel to bits before he threw up a barrier to block the flames from a werewolf.

The creature was as twisted as any of the others, multiple heads opened in a roar to allow the flames nestled in their chest out.

The flames stopped, rolling back into its mouths and holding there as the werewolf tried to breathe more.

The creature thrashed about, attempting to roar through the storm of fire building.

Chandra’s voice echoed through Gideon's head, a single order ringing out. That the pyromancer was willing to give an outright order was much telling of what was to happen.

Ruby!

A white-gold barrier appeared around the werewolf, one of Ruby’s bullets hanging in the center.

The werewolf exploded, the buildup of fire tearing it apart at the seams and bouncing off the barrier until there wasn't enough air within to sustain them.

Nice job!

Thanks! We’re almo- Whoa!

Gideon span on his heel, looking up to the tower the Artificers were situated on. Nothing.
Ruby?

After a moment, Ruby’s voice reentered the mental link Jace was running all the Gatewatch through.

Sorry about that, Tezzeret nearly added too much wind Dust to the compound. It’s tricky stuff, strengthening this to the point we need.

Why didn’t you just buy some from a store? It has to have been cheaper than getting the ingredients to make your own, Blake’s voice piped up.

Not strong enough. We’re creating a set of bombs that would give Dust specialists nightmares. Heck, I’m pretty sure making a Dust compound this powerful is banned by the Treaty of Vytal on Remnant.

Think it will work?

If by ‘work’ you mean ‘kill Her’, probably not. If you mean ‘slow Her down long enough for us to come up with something more permanent’ hopefully!

Gideon batted away two more Eldrazi, looking to the sky.

Emrakul hadn’t moved much since hitting Thraben, its eye roaming rapidly.

Was She watching them?

That thought sent a shiver up Gideon’s spine. He had never thought of the Eldrazi as intelligent enough to do something like that. They had always been closer to a natural disaster than a thinking being in his mind.

Gideon, can you go get that new ’Walker? We’re gonna need everyone.

You sure, Jace?
Gideon closed his eyes, imagining a path through the Blind Eternities and walked through it.

Opening his eyes on the other side, Gideon stopped. He was on a hill overlooking another battlefield. Hundreds of knights were fighting a legion of undead, demons standing in the back and roaring orders.

Gideon started towards the hill next to his, where the new Planeswalker was. As he did, something brushed against his foot.

Reaching down, Gideon examined the metal for a moment before closing his eyes again as he recognized the symbol.

Bant.

This was Bant. This was the Plane Gideon had been thrown to after his ignition.

What had happened to it while he was gone? The Bant he knew, the one where he learned the Code of Chivalry, had been perfect. Beautiful, orderly. All disputes were settled by a trial of champions.

Now? Now the knights were waging a war. A War. There wasn't a type of combat more disorderly.

No. Not now. They would save Innistrad, then Gideon would find out what had happened to Bant.

Gideon stood up, pushing the sigil into a pocket, and rushed up the hill to find the Planeswalker.

She was watching the battle, a silver bident clutched in hand, and golden wings on her back. As Gideon approached, she turned, glowing golden eyes watching him.
“Hello,” he said with a shaky smile. Ignition was a big event that typically followed a near death experience, or other traumas. There was always the risk of a new Planeswalker defaulting to violence, “I’m Gideon. I don't know if you met me at Innis-”

“I did,” She turned away from him, looking at the sky, “What is this place? I’ve never seen the sun so high and bright before.”

Gideon nodded, Innistrad’s sun hadn’t shown itself during his time on the Plane.

“We’re on Bant, another Plane. I can explain better later, but right now, we need to return to Innistrad.”

“We can do that?”

“Yes,” Gideon raised a hand, “Coming…?”

“Thalia,” she turned and took it.

Gideon closed his eyes, focusing on where his friends’ Sparks were blazing, and stepped into the Blind Eternities.

---

Chandra stood outside the house, wisps of fire rising from her hands as a slightly manic grin spread across her face.

After a moment, Nissa weaved around her, barked, barbed vines catching the vampire Eldrazi that had been chasing her. Nissa’s eyes changed from green to black, and the leaves dropped from the vines.

Perfect.

Chandra snapped her fingers, a stream of fire striking the vines and turning the house to flames.
Swinging her arm, she directed the conflagration into several streams, incinerating several of Eldrazified birds.

*Test firing first canister now!*

At Ruby’s mental declaration, a spiraling purple trail flew from the tower. One of the few remaining Eldrazi angels flew in front of it, but it tore right through her dragging her along.

The projectile impacted Emrakul…

*Here we go, guys.*

...and suddenly, part of the Eldrazi titan was consumed by an explosion of black and purple energy. The flesh around the explosion was being dragged towards it.

Chandra laughed as the creature squirmed. The Dust being used to power the bomb ran out of power and left a hole in the side of Emrakul, down which a multicolored ichor was running.

*Nice!*

*Thanks! Loadi-*

Before Ruby could finish that thought, the wound rapidly closed, one of Emrakul's tentacles came around to smash into the bell tower, sending it, and the people inside, tumbling down.

Oh Shit.

Chandra shared a look with Nissa, before both Planeswalkers tore through the battlefield to the rubble.

“Ruby! Ruby, are you alright!?”
Yeah.

Chandra stopped, sharing another look with Nissa.

Ohhhhh right. Telepathic link.

Where are you?

Under some rubble. Drache’s got me. Look for Ral.

Chandra did, searching through the rubble until she came across the Izzet inventor.

“Nissa! We’re going to need some heavy lifting.

Ral was pinned by his right arm, groaning in pain as the shard of metal dug in.

“Ral! We got you. Nissa, hurry up!”

“Left pocket,” Ral groaned out.

“What?”

“Keep a Weird in my left pocket. Never know when you’re gonna need some heavy lifting.”

Chandra searched the pocket, finding a small vial. This was for heavy lifting?

“Pour it out.”

Chandra did so, watching the quicksilver substance spill down. There seemed to be a lot more than
should have fit in the vial.

The puddle grew up and formed into a elemental, which calmly grabbed the shard of metal and tore it out.

Ral winced as he pushed himself up, blood splattering from his arm. Chandra tore a large piece off from the cloth around her waist, using it to stem the bleeding.

“Nissa!”

The elvish woman finally came over the edge, rushing over and pressing her hand against it. The flow of blood slowly staunched itself, leaving Ral’s arm ending in a rough stump.

“Thanks,” He winced, “I’m gonna kill Tezzeret.”

“Why?”

“The son of a bitch was trying to screw us. Kept making ‘mistakes’. I guess I got lucky that he made the mistake of not making sure I died.”

“Do you need help getting somewhere safe?”

“Nah. Find the kid. My Weird will get me there fine,” the creature picked up Ral walking away. As they did, Chandra heard Ral mutter about finding a forge.

Ruby?

I’m free. Things… they aren't good.

Chandra turned, climbing through the rubble with Nissa, only to stop as she found what Ruby had meant. The brunette was beside them, a cut above one eye, and clutching Drache’s ridges with one hand as she swayed.
The vampires and cathers were fighting as hard as they could, but still being crushed against the wall. The Planeswalker werewolf was thrashing about, trying to throw several Eldrazi off her. Nahiri, Sorin, and another vampire were performing a dance of death, white and black swords moving in a beautiful display of coordination. Sarkhan’s hands had turned to dragon heads, breathing out gouts of fire while Ugin flew above, ghost flames spilling from his throat. Sun was standing with a man and woman, battling back the Eldrazi. Blake was on top of another pile of rubble, lashing out with arcs of black mana as the devil Planeswalker reloaded a gun. Another Planeswalker was standing in the center of a twister of water, knocking back the Eldrazi that came too close. The golem was picking up Eldrazi and tearing them in two. Gideon and the new girl were guarding Jace. And something was coming towards them from the alleys.

Like they needed more Eldrazi.

Chandra unleashed another storm of fire, incinerating as many Eldrazi as she could. She felt her flames flicker as she started to run out of mana, her hair returning to normal even as the creatures finally arrived.

They weren't, as Chandra had thought, Eldrazi. Hundreds of zombies crashed into the Eldrazi from behind.

Slowly, the defenders were able to make their retreat back to the front of the cathedral. The undead made a defensive line, and out walked a raven haired woman with an uncomfortable looking purple dress.

Her hand rose from next to a veil made from chain, and a single move sent a wave of purple energy behind her. The twisted dead were vaporized as it ran over them.

“Well,” Liliana Vess smiled, “I suppose being late to the party is better than never arriving at all?”

---X Line Break X---

Liliana looked around as Jace and his friends argued on what to do.

Many of the cathar were watching her, whispering almost mutinously as they did so, no doubt angry about her raising so many people. Fools.
Most of the other Planeswalkers were watching her with slight wariness. Or, more particularly, the
Chain Veil at her hip.

“Jace!”

The mind mage looked over from where he was standing with his friends, Sorin, and two other
Planeswalkers.

“We’re leaving. Come on.”

Jace’s forehead crumpling in confusion, “Leaving? What do you mean?”

Liliana rolled her eyes, “I saved you, you're in my debt. Now we’re getting out of here. Come on!”

Liliana turned, only to stop as Sorin stood in front of her. Liliana looked back in shock, sure
enough, Sorin was no longer standing next to Beefslab.

“You're not leaving. We need everyo-”

“Let her,” the elf cut in, “I refuse to fight alongside that cursed thing,” she was pointing at the
Chain Veil.

The spirits were whispering to Liliana, words that caused her to pause, *Vessel of destruction. Root
of evil. Flee.*

“Nissa,” Beefslab placed a hand on her shoulder, “you fought alongside Vampires, pirates, and
worse at Seagate. You’re fighting alongside something worse today,” the look was directed at the
devil, “we take what help we can, if they can be trusted.”

“So the meat can see reason!”
“But I don’t know if you can be trusted. Nissa’s instincts are rarely wrong—”

Sorin muttered something unflattering about that.

“-and I agree with her. I can see that object is… a problem. Jace, can she be trusted?”

_Vessel of destruction. Root of evil. Flee._

Liliana laughed at him, “Trust me? Look around, I snap my fingers and you’re overrun. You’re already trusting me! Fine if you won’t listen to me, then I guess I’ll have to help. What’s the plan?”

Nobody answered. Well, except the spirits. _Vessel of destruction. Root of evil. Flee._

“Oh, wonderful. You don’t even have a plan?”

Before anyone could speak, the door slammed open, allowing a moonfolk to run into the cathedral. Her eyes were locked onto Jace, and they seemed to be sharing a silent conversation.

Wonderful, another _useless_ mind mage.

_Vessel of destruction. Root-_

_Shut up._

Liliana wanted to have a few minutes alone with Jace, to convince him they needed to go. Away from Thraben, away from Innistrad, away from Emrakul.

As she thought that, Liliana’s eyes drifted up to the giant creature almost over them. Why wasn’t it moving? The air felt tense, like a storm about to break. As Liliana breathed in through her nose, she tried to place the smell.
Not rot. At least, not as Liliana knew it, the rot of tombs and graves. Liliana had become so accustomed to that rot that it had become comforting. This rot… it put her on edge.

Then Emrakul unfolded. Her head ballooned out as more tentacles appeared beneath her. From hundreds to thousands, to tens of thousands in seconds. A wave of invisible force ripped through the air, shattering the windows and washing over every Planeswalker in the room.

Three moments came to Liliana’s mind then. When the elixir that the Raven Man had given her had killed Josu, her brother, and brought him back as an undead zombie; when she had first met Bolas’s gaze, his spiteful laugh as he had sent her to the demons that had given her a poisonous redemption; the third was on Shandalar, when she had first tapped into the power of the Chain Veil to force back Garruk Wildcaller.

None of them even began to compare to the nauseating despair that this sent through her. Liliana had spent the last half a century running from her death, but now, she couldn't help wonder if death was life’s way of hiding from something like this.

We must flee this plane. This...it is insanity to stay, the Raven Man’s voice filled her head, something like terror eating at his voice.


All around her, the wave was wreaking havoc on the other people. Beefslab, and the redhead collapsed like stringless marionettes, as did Thalia, her cathar, Olivia, her vampires, the werewolves, the angels, Geralf and Gisa, and the devil.

Jace and Ruby's eyes lit up their respective colors, while Sun and Blake were coated in sheets of gold and purple for a moment before Nissa and them started to jibber.

Sorin’s teeth ground together next to Liliana's ear, but he didn't show any other sign it affected him. Bolas’s old pet, the moonfolk, and the black haired woman groaned in pain, while the Kor, golem and dragon didn’t show much more.

Behind them, Liliana heard her zombies groan out a word, throats ravaged by years of disuse barely getting it out.
“Emr- Emrakul…”

---X Line Break X---

Ruby looked around, taking in the place she had just appeared. It looked like the entrance to her Remnant workshop, the shed where her dad parked his truck.

Ruby slid off the back of the truck. It was the shed where her dad parked his truck, right down to the broken lamp from when Yang had tried out Ember Celica after Ruby finished enchanting them. The only difference was the huge staircase where there should have been a ladder.

Well, that and the storm slowly consuming the roof.

Ruby could see purple clouds through the chunks breaking off and disintegrating. Then a tentacle passed over one of the holes and Ruby realized she was looking at a creature, not a storm.

Emrakul, the name sprang into Ruby's mind, this was Emrakul. It sounded weird, like it wasn't right in some way. Or maybe it was right and not at the same time?

Focus. Emrakul. It was… what was it? An Eldrazi Tit- no, just an Eldrazi. Something about it was distressing, like when Blake started to talk about Faunus Rights and kept talking about certain days like Ruby should know them all by heart.

A deep roar of thunder shook the room, sending several large chunks of roof floating away. How had she gotten here? They had been on- on-

Innistrad! They had been on Innistrad and fighting Emrakul, then Tezzeret had stabbed them in the back and Liliana had shown up.

So how had she gotten here?

The circular thinking was cut off as a light from the stairs drew her attention.
Ruby flinched as another explosion of thunder came from above, causing the rest of the roof to break up. Ruby beat a hasty retreat down the stairs, deciding the voice, her voice, was probably right.

As Ruby descended, she passed by several scenes of her friends. Gideon talking heatedly to a giant man with a whip, a young Chandra standing across from a blue skinned man, Nissa with twenty five fingers on one hand and speaking in tongues.

Sun was hiding in a corner as his mother approached, before an elderly man stepped in front of him, warding her off.

Blake was standing in a crowd, which rapidly exploded into a riot as she attempted to stay with her mother.

Finally, Ruby came to a heavy door, pushing it open.

It was a one-to-one recreation of her workshop, down to Urza’s and Venser's journals sitting on their stands, and some half forgotten blueprint for Uncle Qrow to have something made on the center table.

As Ruby stepped further in, she heard someone shut the door behind her. Turning, Ruby stared at the woman.

She had soft angelic features, with huge wings behind her. A pair of swords sat in her hands and her eyes were shrouded by wings. Finally, her robes were frayed at the end, into hundreds, no thousands, no tens of thousands of strands that seemed to probe the air.

After a moment, the angel spoke.

“May I sit down?”
“Huh?”

“This is your sanctum, Ruby Rose,” the sentence came out syllable by syllable, like the angel was testing it, “I am only a guest here. May I sit?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you,” the angel sheathed her swords and fell into a deep chair on one side of the table. One Ruby was sure hadn’t been there a second before.

The angel pulled out a scroll with metal bands around it, “You do not mind if I work while we talk, do you?”

“No?”

“Thank you,” a pen appeared in her hands and she started to write, replacing words already there, blotting out whole sections.

“Who are you?

“I am known by many names. Jace says the merfolk of Zendikar called me Emeria, his mind says the Kor called me Kamsa. Who do you think I am?”

Ruby stared at Her, thinking. Before she could catch it, the name slipped out.

“Emrakul?”

The angel paused in Her writing, a pained look on Her face.

“This is wrong. I should have been met with blossoms, not with barren resentment. The soil should have embraced me, but they were not ready. Not yet.”
What was that supposed to mean?

“Would you like to play a game?” Emrakul asked suddenly, throwing the pen behind her and rolling up the scroll, fitting the iron bands around it and storing it away, “You are still a child, children enjoy games, do they not?”

“Uh… sure?” Ruby said taken aback by the sudden question, “but do I have time?”

“If you win, you will have all the time in the world.”

“And if you do?”

“I am already winning, Ruby. Let us play a game.”

“Ok… What game?”

Emrakul waved a hand, and figurines appeared between the two of them, alongside dice.

The Wild's Reliquary.

“First to wipe out the other’s army wins.”

Ruby went first, moving her minis with surgical precision. Emrakul, meanwhile moved slower, like She didn't know how to use Her army. Ruby was playing Vale, and Emrakul Grimm. There weren't as many pieces on Emrakul's side as there should have been, and they were all weak.

“Are you really Emrakul?”

“I am as close as you can understand. I must admit, that attack you did was quite impressive. You actually managed to get my attention. Like she is now.”
“Who?”

“I… I do not know. You must understand, I am hardly more aware of you all than you are of a gnat crawling near your mouth. I may be your mind’s attempt to comprehend part of myself to speak, but you might be my attempt to conceptualize what you are like.”

Ruby rolled to hit, taking out several of Emrakul's few minis.

“You should hurry up, Ruby, you do not have long.”

Emrakul moved Her pieces, attacking several of Ruby’s troops head on. The Vale King took a single wound, her Huntsmen two, nothing against her Bullhead.

Ruby rolled even more dice, pausing as they all came up perfectly, wiping Emrakul's army. That wasn't right.

“I win.”

“You would think so,” Emrakul waved a hand again.

Ruby’s minis came to life as another Grimm appeared, butchering themselves.

“You can't do that! Those are mine!”

“As I just said to Jace, they are all my pieces, they always were. I just do not want to play anymore. Go, it is coming. I am coming.

A new door appeared behind Ruby as the ceiling was torn off, making way for Emrakul's maw, and Ruby fled through it and down the stairs.
Liliana forced herself up, rage coursing through her veins and turning her blood to fire as one thought let her fight through the pain.

Those were her zombies. *Those were her zombies!*

Liliana grabbed the power of the Chain Veil as Emrakul released another wave of force.

The fire in her veins was different now. Every time she had tapped into the Chain Veil it had come with agonizing pain, but now, standing in the heart of a gathering storm, it was exhilarating. Was this the secret? She just needed to *want* it this much?

*Fool girl*! the Raven Man’s voice was hard to hear over the rush of blood, *I thought you wanted to conquer death? This creature is older than your mind could comprehend, and a hundred times more powerful then anyone here was, even before the Fall!*

Liliana pushed passed Sorin, stepping outside and reasserting her control of the zombies.

Another wave of psychic force launched out, the assault attempting to batter her mind. It would have ripped it apart, if not for the Chain Veil.

Liliana countered with a wave of her own, watching the tendrils wither as it passed over them. A laugh rose from Liliana's throat. This was the closest she had come to the nigh-omnipotence she had once held. She could do anything!

Still, the spirits of the Veil prodded at her mind, *Vessel of Destruction, we must flee the World-Eater, we must flee. Vessel!*

*Listen to them you fool!*

Her zombies started to moan, “Vessel! We must flee! Ves-”

“*I! AM NOT! A VESSEL!*”
Liliana's roar silenced them, and while she could feel their fury, it was nothing. They belonged to her!

Emrakul started to drift towards her as Liliana fell into her rhythm. Blast, breath, blast, breath, blast... Trenches of dead flesh were ground into Emrakul's body, and for the first time since Her blossoming, Emrakul was shrinking.

She wished Jace and his group were awake, so they could see what a true Planeswalker could do.

*You don't know what you do, girl. You can't hold this power much longer.*


*You are mortal, it is not. You have limits, it does not. You have made your grave here.*

Blast, breath, blast, breath, blast, breath, breath-

Liliana’s tempo was broken. In the second she should have blasted, Emrakul's scared body reformed, hundreds of tendrils reappearing and slamming into the shield of energy around Liliana.

She wasn't going to die here!

*If you are lucky, Liliana, your death will be all that happens. You’ve doomed us both.*

The shield gave out with a flicker, and Liliana closed her eyes, preparing for the feeling of the tendrils crashing into her body.

Instead, there was the sound of cracking stone.

Opening her eyes, Liliana watched the Kor standing in front of her, the tendrils turning to stone.
Ruby looked around the room, trying to figure out where everyone was.

She was in the library of Thraben’s cathedral, but as she looked around, she paused.

The stained glass was different, the images of Avacyn replaced completely, with the one in the back shattered.

The first was of a little girl pulling a wagon. In the back was a bundle of blankets. After a moment examining it, Ruby moved on to the next one.

A Beowolf was backing up from a young girl. She was flinching back, her hands held out in a warding gesture as her head was faced away from the Grimm. After a moment, the stained glass seemed to ripple and warp, streams of red, white, and blue creating a cocoon around the girl. A beam of golden light burst from the cocoon, drilling into the Beowolf’s skull. Finally, the cocoon faded, and the girl was gone.

Then the glass reset.

Ok… this wasn't Thraben.

Ruby stepped to the next one, watching it.

On it was the girl, who Ruby noticed was herself, running from something in a forest. After a moment, the picture started to move, and Eldrazi bursting from the forest only for a barrier to appear in front of Ruby, Gideon standing between her and the Eldrazi.

Ruby moved to the next one, entranced by the glass retelling of her life.

On this one, Ruby was walking through a plagued land, hands thrown up to cover her face from the poisonous clouds, an indistinct shape in the background. The glass Ruby started to walk...
forward, dodging puffs of smog as the shape slowly crystallized into a broken ship.

The next saw Ruby climbing aboard the ship. On the main deck was a skeleton, another skull lying next to it. She walked over, picking up the skull and watching it crumble, before turning and waking below deck.

The glass Ruby was pouring over a book, eyes drinking in designs the real Ruby now knew by heart. A rod of metal sat next to her, and her hand grabbed it, etching in runes.

Ruby was standing on another plane, a group of three Planeswalkers next to her. Across from them was a metal golem fused to a chair, a woman resting her hands on him. She shook her head, mouthing words. One of the Planeswalkers stepped forward, casting a spell and then dropping like a stone. The golem rose, breaking from his shackles.

Ruby was on the streets of Vacuo, watching as people bought food from a market. Sun walked by, before stopping and doubling back, pulling an apple from the bag he was holding.

“As much as I’d love to let you continue, we don’t have much longer.”

Ruby span, staring at the girl seated at the table.

It was a blue version of her. Blue cloak, hair fading into blue.

“Right, don’t have long so let’s go over this quickly. Yes, I’m you, Jace seal off everyone who could use it from most blue mana, which is why you and him stopped acting remotely rational after Markov Manor. Not sure about Blake, maybe she has some sort of alignment with it she doesn't use. Emrakul's tearing our mind apart, Nahiri is about to die, and Innistrad’s mana probably isn't potent enough to pull off the trick Nissa, Chandra and we did on Zendikar.”

“So… what? We should just abandon Innistrad?”

“I never said that. Though it would be the rational thing to do, you are far from being tied down to rationality at the moment.”
“Oh, thanks.”


“We could use that,” Sorin’s voice came from the book, “It has sealing properties.”

“There, we have seventeen Planeswalkers, between all of us we have to be able seal away one oversized mushroom.”

The blue Ruby clapped her hand on Ruby’s arm, dissolving back into the whole.

Ruby woke up.

---X Line Break X---

Nahiri breathed in, reaching out for the ley stones she had spent months creating as she heard the Planeswalkers awaken. They had already been pointed at Thraben, now all that was left was to shift them to one point.

Emrakul stopped her attempts to attack on the woman behind Nahiri, and the Kor knew that She was focused on the ley lines converging in front of Her.

Right where Nahiri was standing.

Nahiri tapped into the collection of Ley Lines, turning the ground behind her into a set of spikes and launching them at Emrakul.

*Come on. I’m right here! I dragged you into the Plane and I’m going to fix that mistake, even if it kills me!*

Emrakul attacked, hundreds of tendrils launching out at lightning speeds.
As they approached, Nahiri raised a single hand. The tendrils slowed, finally stopping just before her as the petrification took hold.

Nahiri slashed out with one arm, causing the petrified tendrils to break apart, floating away as more took their place.

“Nahiri!” Sorin barked, “We have a plan, just keep Her distracted!”

Nahiri didn't respond, merely yanked more energy from the well below her.

The broken rubble of the bell tower turned molten, and Nahiri forced it into the shape of a sword, cooling it rapidly.

The blade smashed into Emrakul, tearing through boneless flesh. As it came out the other side in a shower of multicolored blood, more tendrils sprouted, lashing out at it.

*Perfect.*

Nahiri dissolved the blade back into the magma, incinerating the tendrils.

The waterfall of blood had reached Nahiri, and she reached out, letting the pure mana join her reserves.

The magma formed into a storm of blades as Nahiri closed her eyes to bask in the power.

That was a mistake.

Nahiri barely threw up a barrier in time, the white and red mana turning anything close to it into stone.

Damn.
“Sorin! How much longer!?”

“Minutes!”

Minutes. She could do that.

The Lithomancer reached deep, grabbing all the mana she could from the ley lines below.

Emrakul’s tendrils reached out, trying to grab the storm of mana below Her.

Nahiri yanked her arms back, and the hurricane of blades tore open Emrakul’s flesh, letting more of the mana that She had been consuming rain down on Thraben’s square.

That’s all this was, in the end, a mouth trying to feed the rest of the body.

At that moment, vines descended from the sky, looping around Emrakul and snapping taut. Shortly after, blue and white chains joined, then a black and white set that were forged differently, then golden ropes, colorless chains covered in equally colorless fire. Nahiri added herself to the spell, pouring all the mana she could into a set of chains.

It wouldn't be enough. Maybe on Zendikar, which had been chosen as the Eldrazi’s prison because of its potent mana, or before the Fall, when everyone here would be able to summon enough mana to create a new plane. They were going to lose the spell.

“NO!”

“I have another spell I can use.”

Ghostly fire ate at Emrakul as Ugin took to the skies, distracting it from Nahiri.

“Nahiri,” Sorin grabbed her, hauling her away from the ley lines. At the same time, the woman
who was paler than even Nahiri stepped onto it, pulling out a scroll with iron bands, “your leg… your arm…”

“ Caught that did you?”

Nahiri’s left arm and leg had been turned to stone when she had thrown up the spell to stop Emrakul’s attack.

Then there was a roaring storm of mana behind them, one that couldn't be from Innistrad.

“Beleren!” Ugin roared, “Now!”

The storm that had been growing in intensity as the battle against Emrakul raged on finally paused, the clouds above were obliterated by a beam of silver moonlight as the mind mage and spirit dragon cast the spell.

Emrakul was yanked upwards, more and more of Her body being dragged into Innistrad as a glyph burned on the moon.

Finally, the entire body was dragged in and up, folding into an impossibly small shape and disappearing into the full moon, the glyph carved into it overlapping the heron on it. The woman who had cast the spell fell to her knees, a mixture of sobs and vomit spilling forth.

It was over. They had done it. They had won.

---X Line Break X---

The after battle celebration really wasn’t. It was more a “lick your wounds” party.

Ruby sat on the roof away from Thraben’s square, running a hand down Drache’s spine. If anyone really needed to find her, they would.

She had passed Gideon talking with the new Planeswalker, Jace and Liliana had left to talk, and she
knew Chandra was helping burn the bodies of the corrupted dead.

There was a brief, frustrated flurry of grunts, then Blake climbed up onto the roof, falling onto her butt next to Ruby.

The cat faunus pulled her bow off, wringing the liquid out of it and throwing it over Drache’s snout. The drake looked up, blinking sleepily, before lowering his head again and dozing off.

Blake kneaded her eyes, releasing an explosive sigh. After a moment, Blake asked a question that was ridiculous- and yet, also grounding.

“Was it really a week ago that I was running around trying to finish that project for Qrow’s class before break?”

Ruby blinked owlishly, thinking of everything that had happened since they had gotten to Innistrad in reverse order.

Fought Emrakul, bought a bunch of Dust, got Tezzeret to help, stopped by Mirrodin (Koth was busy coordinating the resistance, Elspeth had left shortly after Ruby herself had, and Ruby didn’t have time to deviate to track her down) recruited Karn, talked with Sorin, fought Avacyn…

Yep, it had only been a week.

Wow.

“I… yeah, I guess it was.”

Ruby looked out over the rooftops, watching the glow of fire in the distance, Ruby spoke up.

“How are you holding up?”

“What do you mean?”
“A lot of people died today, Blake, how are you holding up?”

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that? You’re the younger one.”

The wan smile slid off Ruby’s face, memories rising up unbidden.

“The multiverse isn’t a nice place…”

The Eldrazi were terrible, but somehow, the Progress Engine and Seven Steel Thanes were still a bigger nightmare in her mind. Maybe because until today, until her talk with Emrakul, the Eldrazi had been little more than a living disaster.

“Hey…” Blake reached over wrapping one arm around Ruby in a hug, “I’m fine. Do you want to talk about… whatever?”

“No,” Ruby said softly.

“Ok. If you decide you want to, I’m willing to listen, and I’m sure Sun is too.”

“Maybe instead of being a Huntress, I should become the only Planeswalker psychologist,” Ruby started to giggle, perhaps a little madly, “Now, show me on the doll where the bad Multiverse touched you.”

Maybe it was because they were both running on fumes, or that after the completely traumatizing week they had both gone through, they were desperate for something to laugh at, but both girls broke into peals of laughter. Drache’s head rose, and he gave them a look that Ruby read as Hey, I kept that rubble from crushing you during the fight AND dug you out after, can’t I at least get some sleep?

“Sorry, buddy,” Ruby reached out and rubbed his head, “We’ll head home soon.”

“Ruby,” said girl looked down at where Jace was standing, “Tamiyo wants to talk with us.”
Ruby hopped down, following Jace outside the city.

Tamiyo was leaning against Thraben’s wall, arms above her head as it was pressed against the stone. Held in her hand was a scroll held shut by three iron bands.

Where had Ruby seen that before?

“Tamiyo,” Jace started, “before we begin, can I ask… what happened out there?

Tamiyo’s shoulders started to shake, and Ruby heard the soft dripping of tears.

“Nissa had fallen, and the spell was going to break. I didn't know what to do.”

“So Nissa generated all that power by herself? I thought you had done something with that second scroll. You had said-

“It was the second scroll.”

“Then- why are you crying? You saved the da-”

Ruby not-so-stealthily kicked Jace in the shin to get him to stop talking before he shoved his foot farther into his mouth.

It was too late, Tamiyo whipped around tear tracks glistening in the moonlight.

“It wasn't me! It… She… She took me over! I was trapped in my own body as She… She…”

Tamiyo broke down there, descending into full sobs then.

As I just said to Jace, they are all my pieces, they always were. I just do not want to play anymore.
“She wanted me to tell you two ‘you win’. Then… then She opened this,” Tamiyo waved the scroll through the air.

_Emrakul slipped the scroll into iron bands._

“I know the stories in these scrolls by heart. The story on this one should have destroyed the whole Plane. Instead,” Tamiyo’s voice hiked up, hysteria entering it, “there was a completely different story! How did She do that? Why did She help fuel the spell that sealed Her? What _happened out there!?_

_they were not ready. Not yet._

Silence reigned for a moment.

“Did we really win?” Tamiyo asked, “Or did She just decide that waiting in the moon was a better course of action?”

Ruby didn’t answer. Didn't have an answer to give as the moonfolk flew away.

“Come on,” Jace said, “we should get back to the others. Liliana was swearing an oath when I left.”

--- X Line Break X---

Tai sat up in bed as the door slammed shut, grabbing Howl and Roar.

_Thieves weren't common on Patch, being so close to a Huntsmen Academy was good at warding off all but the most foolhardy, but it didn't hurt to check._

_Walking into the main hall, Tai followed the trail left by whoever had entered the house._

_Boots, cloak, Crescent Rose._
Stepping into the living room, Tai looked down at Ruby collapsed face first into the couch, snoring softly, with Drache laying on her head.

Tai picked up the drake, putting him on the table and picked up Ruby.

Tai jumped slightly as he turned, Qrow standing in the doorway.

“She just got home?”

“Yeah.”

Qrow walked over, running a hand through Ruby’s hair, exposing a scabbed over cut. The girl’s face twitched, and she struggled to turn away from it in Tai’s arms.

“She must be exhausted.”

“School’s gonna be hell in the morning.”

“I’ll call her out sick,” Tai said, starting to climb the stairs, before pausing, “I bet you neither Sun or Blake show up tomorrow.”

“I don’t take sucker bets anymore.”
“This seems like it’s a bit much,” Blake said dryly.

“Nonsense,” Liliana scoffed, pushing open the doorway and walking in, “I refuse to live in one of those run down apartments-”

“Hey!” Jace, the owner of said apartments cried in indignation.

“-and with how cheap the land was? How could I not? Now, I need to unpetrify Gared.”

Either Blake had really low standards at what constituted a run down apartment, or Liliana had unrealistically high ones.

Probably the later. It also gave Liliana the advantage of being able to say everyone owed her for her letting them stay in her new manor.

And the worst part was, on a pragmatic level, Blake was seriously considering taking her up on the offer.

Planeswalking was, quite frankly, exhausting. The Blind Eternities didn't like being parted, didn't like the aberrations that were Planeswalkers crossing through it. The average Planeswalker could gather enough energy to make three journeys in a day, four, if they were willing to push it and risk coming out the other side with a few sections of flayed skin.

That had been an interesting day.

The problem was that the Gatewatch wasn't truly centralized. While Ravnica had served as the unofficial base of operations, it ran into the problem that Blake, Sun, and (to a lesser extent) Ruby all had to make a near daily commute between Remnant and Ravnica.
It also ran into such problems as Gideon's seeming inability to keep a shirt on, Sun rapidly taking after Gideon in that regard, Nissa being uncomfortable in the enclosed space of the city-plane, Chandra’s tendency to start to heat up any time she… well, any time she got heated, and that every Planeswalker that showed up in Ravnica increased the chance that Niz-Mizzet would find out about the existence of Planeswalkers and attempt to capture them.

As such, Ral (a man who spent most of his post-flaring life on Ravnica) had suggested that moving the main base to Remnant would eliminate most of the problems. Jace would need to spend most of his time in Ravnica, but he was supposed to be doing that anyways. Even a month later, he was still running around trying to catch up with the work he had missed while they were on Innistrad. The same was true for Ral, but him officially joining the Gatewatch meant that Lavinia was more willing to let Jace leave, since there was someone who could drag him back to Ravnica if he stayed away for too long.

The rest of the Gatewatch had taken to the idea with various levels of agreement. But the most obvious had been Liliana.

Before the idea had time to be really discussed, the necromancer had somehow (Blake was willing to bet it was either illegal, or would be if knowledge of magic was widespread) acquired a large plot of land on the island of Patch. Far enough away that the average person wouldn't come across it and be traumatized by the undead that Liliana had acquired through equally vague-but-sketchy means to build her built-way-too-quickly manor, but close enough that Liliana could get a road built for the car she had bought with her totally-not-blood-money.

Really, the only ones who weren't at least considering it were the aforementioned Living Guildpact and Izzet Leaguer, Ruby and- well-

Blake looked at the cathar who was lurking in the back, so far away from the house that she was almost covered by the trees. One undead moved too close to her as he went about digging up the roots of trees, and suddenly there was a silver sword in her hand. Something skimmed behind her.

Apparently Thalia and Liliana had a history, and not a particularly good one either. Blake had gotten the feeling that the only reason Thalia hadn’t broken off from the Gatewatch the minute Liliana had joined was because she didn't trust Liliana to be remotely altruistic, and was waiting for the day when Liliana tried to stab them in the back.

It was a sentiment Blake shared. Liliana wasn't someone to be trusted, someone that steeped in Black magic wasn't likely to suddenly decide to work with a group like the Gatewatch, especially when they didn't have something to balance them out, like Blake's White and Red alignment, Nissa’s Green and Blue, Sorin’s white, or-
Blake jumped slightly as the girl next to her pinched her arm.

“What was that for?” Blake hissed, rubbing her arm.

“You shouldn't think like that,” Ruby chided, “none of the colors are any more or less good than another.”

“How did you even-?”

“You were talking under your breath,” Ruby supplied.

“When was the last time you saw a completely evil White though?”

Ruby’s face suddenly gained the same stormy expression that had appeared on Innistrad, her arms crossing in front of her chest and latching onto each other with a vice grip.

“I have,” Ruby said darkly, but didn't elaborate, eyes locked into the distance. Drache was on her shoulder, rubbing his head against her cheek.

Blake had tried to slowly coax Ruby into telling her what it was that always soured the younger girl’s mood, but had yet to make any real progress.

“Sorry,” Blake apologized as they started to walk into the manor. “Do you want to check out the kit- what was that?”

Gambol Shroud was in Blake's hands in a second, eyes scanning the forest for another sign of movement—there!

The Variant Ballistic Chain Scythe lashed out, wrapping around the girl as Blake dragged her into the sun.
“Ilia?”

It was indeed Blake's friend. Blake immediately took in the bags under her eyes as she loosened the hold.

“Hi,” Ilia said, looking up at Blake with doe eyes, “can, uh, can we talk?”

---X Line Break X---

Ilia took the mug from the younger girl, watching as she left, before directing her eyes to the brown substance in the ceramic container.

“I don't like coffee,” she said weakly, trying to grasp onto something normal in this situation.

“If that's coffee,” Blake said dryly, “I’m going to have to step out of the room to check if Ruby’s sick.”

Ilia sipped from the cup, eyes locking onto the crackling fire. Hot chocolate.

“Ilia,” Blake placed her mug down, “what are you even doing on Patch? Last time I called, you were at ho-”

“That was over a month and a half ago,” Ilia interrupted, “Last time I saw you, you had run off to suddenly go to Signal, last time I heard about you, your mom was vetoing Adam finding you when we got to Vale.”

Blake’s eyebrows jumped up at that.

“You and Adam are in Vale? Why?”

“White Fang stuff,” Ilia tried to dodge the question.
“And what sort of White Fang stuff a seventeen year old and and fifteen year old doing?”

“What do you care?” Ilia bit out, “You're living here, dressed up like a human, aren't you?”

Ilia felt a brief stab of vindictive joy as Blake flinched back slightly, it wasn't why Ilia had come looking for Blake, but now that she was here, it felt good.

*Blake* was allowed to go to Signal, *Blake* could just slip on a bow and be treated normal, *Blake* got to stay in a mansion with friends.

*Ilia* was only allowed to leave Menagerie because many of the old guard were leaving the White Fang, unhappy with the way Sienna was taking them. Ilia got constant looks because of her scales. *Ilia* was stuck squatting in abandoned houses because Adam hadn't the financial skills to make the money Sienna had given them last three months and wouldn't swallow his damn pride and call her, and *Ilia* got kidnapped by some insane psychopath and nearly tortured to dea-

Ilia’s face crumbled as she remembered what had caused her to look for Blake in the first place.

Tibalt had haunted her dreams nearly every night since her encounter with him, made all the worse by the fact that she didn't know where he was and what he was doing.

“He- hey,” Blake’s stricken look faded away, replaced with worry, “I'm sorry-”

“No,” Ilia shook her head, “It’s- this- this isn't your fault.”

Ilia couldn't talk to Adam about this. He hadn't been good with these sorts of things before, and now he had trying to navigate leading the VWF around.

“It’s- it’s- there was this guy-”

“Ilia, if you tracked me down for girl talk, I swear-”

“No! Not like that. Dust, no!”
“Then what?”

“He, he kidnapped me, was planning to torture me. He called himself Tibalt-”

“Red skin, horns… archaic clothing?”

“You know him?” Ilia asked worriedly.

“Give me a minute,” Blake pushed herself from her seat, “I need to get the others.”

---X Line Break X---

Thalia was leaning against a tree, enjoying the feeling of sunlight on her face.

It was something she hadn't ever noticed, hasn't had anything to compare it to, but Innistrad was dark. Even on the Feast of Goldnight, when the sun didn't set for two days, it didn't rise as high as the suns of Ravnica and Remnant did at noon, and wasn't as bright.

Thalia opened her eyes as an undead opened the door, letting Blake out of the manor.

The younger girl walked down the steps and towards Thalia, dodging around the undead still uprooting the stumps.

As Blake approached, she slowed and stopped, mouth sliding open.

“What?” Thalia asked, sheathing her sword.

“Did- did you do that?” Blake was pointing to the werewolves that Thalia had finished killing a couple minutes before.
She would admit, she hadn't thought werewolves existed on Remnant. These were particularly tricky, they had bony armor and were capable of transforming when the sun was high in the sky.

“They weren't that ha-” Thalia stopped as she turned towards them.

The werewolves were decaying at incredible speeds. Much of their bodies had already disappeared, and the white bones had become dull and cracked, especially the one that still had Avac- Thalia’s spear impaled into it.

“What happened to them?”

“Grimm always fade when they die.”

“Grimm?”

“Yeah,” Blake suddenly sounded worried, “Did we forget to tell you about Grimm?”

Thalia tried to remember if that term had come up before now, “I think you did? What are they?”

“They’re soulless monsters are have overrun most of Remnant, they’re also attracted to negative emotions.”

“Like devils?”

A world full of monsters, that was something Thalia was familiar with, something she could deal with. Ravnica was too safe, there wasn't any danger in the day to day life.

“Yea-” Blake stopped, “Devils are attracted to negative emotions?”

“Yes,” Thalia nodded, “cults of hatred, graveyards, places where tragedies occurred. There’s some sort of organization to fight the Grimm, I take it?”
“The Huntsmen, yes. About the devils, that- that actually answers what I came out here to ask.”

“You came here to ask about devils?”

“Yes. One of the Planeswalkers at Innistrad, from Innistrad, Tibalt-”

“Oh,” Thalia’s face settled into a scowl, one gloved hand coming down to grip her saber’s hilt, “I know about Tibalt.”

Tibalt had been one of those stories used as a precautionary tale, of why the cathars and inquisitors needed to act swiftly and decisively when rooting out corruption.

He had been born in Nephalia, and trained to become one of the providence’s many Skaberen, a corpse stitcher, while masquerading as a surgeon by day. However, at some point Tibalt had realized that he didn't have the skill for necromantic arts, instead venting his anger through torture.

His rage, and the agony of his victims, had attracted devils to gather around his house each night. Their chittering tongue had echoed around the village, causing for one of the elders to send for an inquisitor.

At the time, Tibalt hadn't moved onto humans, and Inquisitor Caine had been content with killing the devils and going on his way.

Six months later, he was called back. Not only had the devils returned, but several of the village’s inhabitants had gone missing, starting with the elder who had called him last time.

After staking out the house, Caine had left to get several cathar, returned the next night, and broken the door down.

Tibalt had been in the middle of cutting up his newest kill, a vagrant, with devils all around the room. Guilty by any metric.

As the cathar stepped forward to take him in, Tibalt had cast a spell.
Tibalt had howled in agony as the devils were dragged towards him on strings of mana, before he had vanished suddenly.

That, everyone had assumed at the time, had been the end to that sorry tale. Tibalt had been dragged off to whatever hell awaited those who consort with demons and devils and the families of his victims had some measure of closure.

Until, that is, when Avacyn was trapped in the Helvault. Tibalt had reappeared, skin the blood red of a devil, and resumed his grisly work.

Tibalt had disappeared again shortly before Avacyn had been freed, last seen fleeing from Sorin Markov.

Thalia relayed this information to Blake, who looked horrified.

“If he’s on Remnant…”

“We’ll find him. Where's the place with the most amount of suffering near here?”

“I don't know. Ruby migh-”

“Mountain Glenn.”

Thalia jumped as Ruby spoke up, staring at the girl.

She hadn't been there a moment before. Thalia would have seen her if she had.

“Then that's where we start. He’ll have to have left a magical trail if he was there, something we can follow.”

“Ok,” Ruby nodded, “Blake, can you get Yang, Nissa and Chandra? I need to go down to the
kitchen to let them know I won't be able to make it today. I’ll meet you in Vale.”

Then Ruby disappeared in a storm of petals.

---X Line Break X---

Yang crashed into Gideon's gut, driving Ember Celica into his side. The pellets halted as they struck his faintly glowing skin, before falling to the ground, smoke rising as the Fire Dust burned away.

Oh, that son of a-

Yang felt her skin heat up, pulling back and lowering her center of gravity, and started to bob in the shape of an eight, striking Gideon repeatedly.

Left, right, left, right, left, righ-

Gideon dodged suddenly, sending Yang staggering forward as she put her weight into hitting something that wasn't there.

Yang span, throwing another punch at Gideon.

Halfway through, Gideon’s arm snapped up, knocking Yang's arm off course.

The gun let loose a bang, the shot causing the ground to shatter. The whip blades of Gideon's sural locked together, stopping an inch in front of Yang’s neck.

After a moment, the serious look on Gideon's face broke, and he clapped a hand on Yang’s shoulder. A clear sign that the fight was done.

The barrier dropped, and Yang saw some of her classmates leaning over the edge to watch.
Perk of having your dad as Combat Instructor? Almost free reign to use the arena after school. Con of the same?

“And what did Yang do wrong?”

...he turned it into a lesson for the tournament club.

“Well?” Tai looked across the assorted students, “Anyone?”

A Senior raised his hand.

“Yes?”

“She was relying on a technique that relied on unpredictable attacks to overwhelm her opponent, however, Mr… Jura, was it?” Gideon nodded, “Mr. Jura’s Semblance made him capable of completely ignoring her blows, meaning she was just tiring herself out. It reminds me of last year’s Vacuo Cup semi-finals, when Tanner Colby lost to Sorrel the Unbreakable—”

Yang tuned him out, stepping around Gideon and into the girl’s locker room. Turning on the shower, Yang leaned forward, closing her eyes as the cold water steamed on contact with her hair and head.

“Hey.”

Yang span around, inadvertently splattering the back of her jacket.

Chandra was standing in the doorway that divided the showers from the actual lockers, messaging someone on her Scroll before snapping it shut and storing it in a pouch.

They needed to get her some actual clothes next time they made a trip into Vale. It couldn't be comfortable wearing chainmail all the time.

“What’s up?” Yang asked grabbing a towel and throwing it around her shoulders, hoping to soak up
some of the water.

“I wanted to make sure you weren't beating yourself up about what happened out there,” Chandra gestured with her head, “There was no way you would have won that fight.”

“Oh,” Yang said, “Thanks.”

“Ok,” Chandra winced, “not the best way I could have said that. It's not that you're a bad fighter, if it had been Jace out there, or Ral, or Sun, you would have whooped their ass. Gids is just a nightmare to fight, that glowy skin thingy is impossible to break.”

Which means Yang had exhausted herself for nothing.

“What's wrong?”

“What do you mean?”

“You don't seem the type to let a loss get you down, so what's wrong?”

“I never said I’m beating myself up over a loss.”

“Ok,” Chandra shrugged, “want to go for a walk? I need to go find Nissa.”

“Sure?”

Yang followed Chandra out of the school and into the forest. Occasionally the Pyromancer would lean down and pick up a broken branch, weighing it as if judging something, and more often than not throwing them aside.

At several points, they came across a Grimm or two, which Chandra easily dispatched with a careless swing of her arm and a bolt of fire.
Eventually they got the point where the noise of the after school clubs had completely faded and Chandra had found two thick branches.

Chandra looked up a tree, span and fell down on her butt and patting the spot across from her.

Yang looked around, before sitting more gently. Chandra handed her one of the branches, making sure she was holding it with both hands, and placed a finger on the center. When she removed it, there was a smouldering indent where she had touched it.

“Huh?”

“It’s a old meditation thing we did at Keral Keep, the ember reacts to your emotions, get too angry and it will eat the branch. It never helped me much, but maybe you will like it better.”

“I’m not ang-”

“Then why’s it already so burnt?”

Yang looked down, staring at the already half burned branch.

“What's wrong?”

“...I’m worried about Ruby.”

“Why?”

“I… what if she decided to not come back?” Yang was surprised by how quiet her voice came out. How weak it sounded.

“What do you mean?”
Yang jumped slightly at the voice from the tree, where Nissa was nestled between two branches.

“I mean- do either of you visit your home planes anymore?”

“Of course,” Nissa answered.

“No,” Chandra said at the same time.

“You don't?” Nissa asked, pencil thin eyebrows crinkling, “Why not?”

“Nothing left there for me,” Chandra said a bit too quickly.

Ok…

“You said you were looking for Nissa.”

“Yeah, Blake was looking for- oh, crap, that's right!” Chandra threw her branch aside, “We were supposed to meet Blake and Thalia at the ferry to Vale!”

---X Line Break X---

Nissa walked through the streets, following Yang, Blake, and the other girl through the city.

While not as big as Ravnica, Vale was definitely bigger than any city in Zendikar.

“Listen- sis, listen!” Yang was using her Scroll to talk to Ruby, “We can deal with it tomorrow. You stay there, I'll send Blake over, and we'll meet up at that hotel I mentioned when we're done, ok? ... It's the weekend, dad can call us if he’s looking for us.”

Nissa heard Ruby grumble before Yang hung up, turning to Blake.
“She’s at the food kitchen near the refugee camp.”

A refugee camp? Was there a war they hadn’t mentioned?

Blake nodded her head, pulling out her Scroll and disappearing down the street with her friend.

“Why are there refugees?” Nissa asked, remembering Seagate.

Men and women begging for scraps of food that wasn't there, enshrouded children being taken to be cremated to save space.

“Grimm and bandits,” Yang said, “Villages get sacked, and the survivors go to one of the Kingdoms until they can find somewhere else to live. That’s why we're training, Sun, Blake, Ruby and me, to fight Grimm. Come on, the bus stop is this way.”

They arrived at the “bus stop” just as a large rectangular vehicle pulled up, allowing several people off and Nissa, Chandra, Thalia and Yang to get on.

The man seated behind a wheel held up a hand, pointing meaningfully at a container next to the glass between them.

“We need to take off any weapons,” Yang explained, rolling her eyes as she took off the bangles on her arms and dropped them into the container.

Nissa considered turning around right then, before placing her staff in the container alongside Thalia’s sword and spear.

Nissa squirmed slightly as she saw how packed the bus was, before sitting in a chair next to Chandra.

Once everyone was seated, the vehicle shuddered into motion, picking up speed rapidly.
The bus made several more stops before finally getting onto the massive road as the sun began to dip below the horizon.

Nissa jumped slightly as Chandra’s head landed on her shoulder, the Pyromancer yawning and blinking rapidly in a vain attempt at staying awake.

Before Nissa could ask her to move, Chandra's eyes drifted shut and she began to snore softly.

Eventually the bus pulled to a stop, letting the door open and everyone to get out. Nissa jostled Chandra slightly, who snapped up, drool flicking out and onto Nissa's face as the Pyromancer looked around sleepily, “Whuzgoinon?”

“We’re here, I think.”

“Oh,” Chandra yawned, stretching and rubbing sleepily at her eyes. As they got out, Nissa stopped at the container grabbing her staff.

They found Yang standing next to the door, foot tapping impatiently as she waited for them.

“Come on! Ruby’s already at the hotel, so let’s hurry up!”

“What are we even doing?” Chandra yawned.

“We’re going clothes shopping!”

Say what now?

Before Nissa could protest, Yang had turned walking through the door with Chandra. Nissa and Thalia shared a look before following them in.

As Nissa saw all the people she couldn't help but swallow.
This wasn't going to be fun.

---X Line Break X---

“Ruby!”

Ruby was curled around the spear she had been giving, eyes locked onto the creatures in front of her.

She had to hurry, the poison would finish cycling soon. First she would lose her ability to cast magic until it was flushed, then she would die.

She couldn't die here, people were relying on her, and she had promised to make it home.

Looking down at the woman who had beaten her here, Ruby leaned down, grabbing the dead woman's spear and breaking it.

A hundred sigils burned through Ruby’s mind. She need something to make her strong. Like- like- Perfect!

Ruby gouged a flaming heart into her arm, dragging up everything its owner was synonymous with in Ruby’s mind. Protection, love, strength.

The symbol ignited in White and Red, and Ruby felt a rush of energy, as if the poison in her veins had been purged.

Ruby dropped the broken spearhead, grabbing her spear with both hand and-

“Ruby!”

Snapped her head up, looking around sleepily.
“Aqua,” Ruby chided lightly, “What did we say about sucking your thumb?”

“Noht ta,” the little girl said around the appendage before popping it out, “Were you napping?”

“I just dozed off,” Ruby said, rubbing the scar on her arm, “What’s wrong?”

“Your Scroll was going off.”

Ruby pulled the Scroll Tai had gotten her when she had finally made it home out of her bag, examining it. She had missed a call from Yang, alongside a text with… an address?

“Can you go find your brother, Aqua? I need to call back, and then bring you two back.”

“Ok!”

Ruby hit the button to call Yang back.

The Scroll hadn't finished the first set of rings when Yang’s voice came through the other side.

“Ruby!

“Hey, Yang,” Ruby said tiredly, “What’s taking you so long? I asked Blake to get you guys hours ago. I was able to watch Aqua and Ash.”

“About that,” Yang laughed sheepishly, “I’m bringing Chandra, Thalia and Nissa to the mall to pick out some clothes.”

“What?”

“I said I’m going-
“I heard what you said,” Ruby groused, “There’s a psycho Planeswalker running around Vale and you want to go *shopping*?”

“Listen—”

“He’s probably planning to release the Grimm into the city—

“Sis, listen! We can deal with it tomorrow. You stay there, I’ll send Blake over, and we’ll meet up at that hotel I texted you the address of when we’re done, ok?”

“And what about us going home? Uncle Bai is supposed to be coming over.”

“It’s the weekend, dad can call us if he’s looking for us.”

That didn't answer any of her questions.

“Ok,” Ruby grumbled, “I need to drop Ash and Aqua off, I’ll be at the kitchen.”

Hanging up, Ruby found the kids, bringing them towards the soup kitchen.

“Ruby?” Ash asked

“Mh?”

“Why do you come here?”

“Where?”

“To the camp.”
The Furnace roared as Ruby sat next to Koth and Elspeth, disillusioned faces all around.

“I stayed in a camp like it once,” Ruby answered, “I want to help people like you.”

“Where?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Ruby said, “Let’s get you home.”

Best leave New Phyrexia buried.

So why did that thought send her stomach rolling?

---X Line Break X---

“Let me off here.”

“Sir?” the word was growled out through gritted teeth.

That wouldn't do.

“Let me off here. Oh, and…”

*BANG*

The first mate of the ship went for his weapon as the captain dropped, only for one of Tibalt’s devils to bite his hand before throwing the revolver and its ammo to the Planeswalker.

Tibalt caught it, aiming down and pulling the trigger. Something flared around the point of impact before the man dropped.
As Tibalt walked over to a lifeboat he looked to the side. One of his devils’ hands were sticking out, giving a thumbs up.

“Well then,” Tibalt stepped onto the boat, allowing two devils to start to lower it, “It was fun meating you all,” Tibalt chuckled at the pun, “I hoped I didn't burn up too much of your time.”

Tibalt grabbed the rudder, starting the engine and forcing his hostage to stand.

“Been a great time, Chum,” Tibalt chuckled again, “but I have other arrangements soo…”

*Bang*

“Now you're really chum, Love,” Tibalt laughed out as he sailed away from the ship and the dying body.

Halfway towards the island Tibalt pulled out a Scroll, dialing the number.

Three.

Two.

One.

The fire Dust exploded, tearing through the ship behind him. Tibalt laughed as he heard screams of pain and one person, the captain, fall over the edge, flames eating at his Aura.

Tibalt loved this plane, so many ways to cause pain, to cause death.

Tibalt landed on the shore, climbing out of the boat and pulling out the map he had copied.
Let’s see… that way!

Tibalt started to head towards the heart of the island, loading his sawed off shotgun and the revolver as he went.

The half-devil whistled a jaunty tune as he entered to forest, showing away the shotgun and pulling out his knife, throwing the blade into the air as he continued on.

It took half an hour for him to come across the first sign he was in the right place.

The two legged Grimm waddled near him, the spines on its back glowing a sickly green. It waddled over to Tibalt, looking up at him with equally green eyes, but not attacking.

Tibalt put away his dagger, forming a ball of Black and Red mana in his hand and crouching down next to the mutated Grimm.

“Ya want this, buddie? Do ya?”

The Grimm blinked, before opening its mouth.

“Here you go,” Tibalt threw the ball into the Grimm’s mouth and reaching out to rub it, “You’re not as bad as they act like you are, are ya?”

The Grimm didn't respond, focused on the ball of mana it was consuming.

“Well,” Tibalt stood up, pointing the revolver down, “bye.”

As the Dust round lodged into the Grimm’s skull Tibalt turned away continuing his whis-

Suddenly Tibalt was thrown forward, crashing into the ground as the Grimm suddenly exploded.
Oww...

Tibalt stood, throwing off his coat and beating it against a tree to stop the smoldering embers.

“Well, that's an interesting modification you made, Doctor Merlot,” Tibalt muttered, before raising his voice, “I bet you're watching me, aren't ya? Listen, you got two options, meet me now, or meet me when I find the place myself, and I’m gonna be really ang-”

Tibalt stopped as the ground rumbled, making way for a staircase.

He loved this plane, and there wasn't even anyone like Sorin to stop him, those ‘Huntsmen’ weren't any closer to finding him today than they were a month ago!

A shiver crawled up the half devil's spine. Why did he feel like he had just jinxed himself?

---X Line Break X---

“So, what's this all about, Oz?” Qrow asked from his spot across one of the chairs around the room.

Nothing.

“Oz?”

When the headmaster didn’t respond again, Qrow sat up, looking over at Ozpin.

He was seated at his desk, fingers laced as four different screens played security footage, while a Scroll lay forgotten on the desk in front of him, cycling through a slideshow of pictures.

“What's that?” Qrow snagged it, flipping it around.

Oh, Dust.
“What is this?” Qrow asked as watched the pictures go by.

It was in a pattern, a healthy person, followed by that same person in a morgue, missing body parts and stretches of skin.

Qrow’s stomach rolled. Some of them, they didn't look that much older that Yang.

“You’ve heard of the rash of disappearances?”

“Course I have, wh- are these them?”

“They are.”

“I don't remember any news of them being found?” Ozpin didn't answer, eyes locked to the screen before him, “Oz? Oz!”

“I heard you the first time,” Ozpin said softly.

“What’s going on? There wa-”

“I’m keeping it under wraps,” Ozpin explained, “I plan to announce that we found them once we’ve located and eliminated the one behind this.”

“And what about their families?”

“I already told you.”

“They-”
“Aren’t important right now,” Ozpin cut Qrow off, “If it got out that there was a serial killer running around Vale, torturing people at random, not only would it weaken the people's trust in both the police and the Huntsmen, it would cause fear to run rampant through the city. We cannot allow that to happen Qrow. I’m using every resource at my disposal to locate them as quickly as possible.”

“And do you have anything so far?”

“Yes. These,” Ozpin swung an arm at the screens, “are the street cameras from the last known location of four of the victims, around the last time they were seen. Do you see anything?”

Qrow leaned in, eyes skimming across each. What did Ozpin mean-? There!

“Him,” Qrow jabbed his finger at one of the screens, where a horned, red skinned man wearing a tailcoat was in them all, “He’s in them all.”

“Precisely,” Ozpin nodded “I be-”

“Professor Ozpin,” the intercom crackled to life as the secretary call up, “Professor Goodwitch is here along along with Misters Arc and Jura? And a call is coming in from General Ironwood and Professors Lionheart an-”

“Send the calls to my terminal, now!”

“Y-yes sir,” the man stammered out, and a moment later they popped up.

“Ozpin,” Sauda gave a tired smile, the headmistress of Shade was playing with the grey hair in her braid, “It’s been too long. And it that little Qrow I see back there?”

“Uh... Yes,” Qrow coughed lightly, “hello Ma’am.”

The Iron Queen of Shade was one of the few people Qrow would unashamedly admit to being terrified of.
“It’s good to see you agai-”

“Can we skip the pleasantries? I have work to do,” Lionheart cut in.

“Yes,” Ozpin sighed, “Sauda, do you have anything?”

“On those fingerprints? Nope, not from Vacuo, or at least, he didn't have a criminal record when he left. You’d think a serial killer would be more careful about where he leaves a knife coated with his finger prints.”

“You would, wouldn't you?” Ozpin muttered, eyes suddenly on the video still playing out the security footage.

“He’s not from Mistral either,” Lionheart interjected, “are you sure he’s not just from Vale?”

“He could be, but I didn't want to leave any avenue closed,” Ozpin was leaning forward, eyes drilling into the video.

What was going through his head?

“Nothing from Atlas either, Oz. There’s not even a trace of Aura on the knife, so I’m gonna bet it’s a civilian.”

“Or… yes, that would make sense. Tanner! Send up Albian and Gideon!”


“I’m sending you three a video, there’s a man with red skin in it, I think he’s our man. Watch him carefully.”

A sweeping gesture made the calls move to the side to make room for their copy of the video.
Qrow watched the sped up video as man strolled along, leaning against a wall and watching people pass, drumming his fingers on the wall.

About fifteen minutes in, he reached out, a small red creature appeared on his arm and jumped down. Then he resumed his drumming.

“What was that thing?” Ironwood asked, “and where did it go?”

“I don't know what it is, but…” Ozpin trailed off as the video continued.

People started to crowded around one of the stores, where one of the windows exploded outwards.

“...I think you can infer where it went.”

“Oz, wha-”

“Give me a moment, Albian, I’ll be right with you.”

Qrow watched as the man pushed off the wall, pointing an arm at one of the gathered people, a middle aged man. Smoke started to flow from the hand, wrapping around them both. The victim stopped moving for a moment, before turning around and following the other man down the alleyway.

“Did he just-? I thought you said he didn't have his Aura unlocked, Jimmy?”

Ironwood opened his mouth as if to protest the nickname from Sauda, before apparently thinking better of it.

“I don't know, we ran every test we could, I even made sure it was only handled by civilians so it wouldn't trigger a false positive, there was nothing.”
“Mr. Jura,” Ozpin sudden spoke up, looking over at the Planeswalker, “Does this man look familiar to you?”

Gideon took the offered Scroll, examining it.

“Yes.”

“I take it he is like you?”

Gideon didn’t say anything for a long moment, only the grinding of gears breaking the silence.

“...Yes.”

“I see,” Ozpin closed his eyes, resting his forehead on his laced fingers.

“Wait, what are you two talking about? Who is this man, Oz?”

“I am about to tell you all something that will sound insane,” Ozpin hadn’t raised his head, “This man is what is known as a Planeswalker, beings that can travel from one world to another.”

An awkward silence stretched through the room, and Qrow saw Glynda and Albian share a confused look behind Gideon’s back.

In the end, it was Sauda who broke the silence with a shrug and almost flippant, “Ok.”

That, if anything, caused the silence to get worse.

“What?” Sauda said, “It’s not the first time I’ve seen something ‘impossible’ and unless I drop dead tomorrow it won’t be the last! Have you seen the advances we’ve made in technology since I was a kid? If he’s from a different world, they must be much more advanced than we ar-”
Qrow saw Albian give a half nod. It kind of surprised Qrow to see him here, last time Qrow had heard anything about him he had bought a farm close to his son’s home so he could spend more time with his grandkids.

“Actually,” Gideon interrupted politely, “My home wasn't more advanced than Remnant, far from it actually. It’s magic.”

Qrow was almost certain the silence couldn’t get any more oppressive. However, he could see the look in the headmasters’ eyes as they all realized came to a similar conclusion.

“And this… man, he is also a Planeswalker?”

“You can seriously thi-”

“Albian, please wait,” Ozpin raised a hand the silence the White Bloodhound’s protest, “Mister Jura, I understand you are the leader of a group of Planeswalkers?”

“I am. We’ll begin searching for hi-”

“Please,” Ozpin cut Gideon off, “wait until I am finished talking. I would like to request that you not look for him immediately.”

“What? Oz, if we can-”

“Mr. Jura,” Ozpin continued, talking over Qrow, “I am going to ask you some questions, if at any point I make a leap of logic you find unreasonable, feel free to stop me. From what Qrow has told me, your group, the… Gatewatch, was it?” at Gideon's nod, Ozpin continued, “The Gatewatch is dedicated to combating creatures and Planeswalkers who are a danger to multiple planes?”

“Yes, such as h-”

“Therefore, while you are on Remnant for the moment, there will come a time where you will have to leave to deal with another threat, correct?”
“Yes.”

“Which of course means, if another Planeswalker comes to Remnant while you are gone, we would have no way to contact you?”

“...Yes.”

“And finally, I take it that these Planeswalkers can be incredibly dangerous?”

“Yes.”

“Then, Mr. Jura, the only option I view as reasonable is that if Remnant itself is prepared for when the inevitable comes. That's why I called you here, Qrow, Albain. I intend to start a task force to hunt down and eliminate Planeswalkers who prove to be a danger.”

“I’m retired,” Albian protested halfheartedly, but Qrow could already see some light returning to his eyes, “This,” he struck his bulkier right leg with his cane, causing a loud clang, “isn't going to disappear just because magic might be real.”

“Wait,” Ironwood interjected, “Is that one of those old fullmetal models? We started phasing those out over fifteen years ago! How’s it even still working?”

“I’ve had a lot of time on my hands, figured learning how to keep this old thing working was better than picking up some inane hobby like whittling.”

“But they don't even have a full range of movement! We’re going to have to fix that if this team is created.”

“ We ?” Ozpin asked.

“Don't play dumb, Oz. You were planning to bring this up at some point. Probably not today, but at some point.”
Ozpin didn't argue the point, “So you’ll be sending some people over?

“Yeah. I have a couple of promising recruits from the Specialist Initiative I can get them there by the morning with a temporary replacement.”

“I’ll send over a couple too, Oz, but it will take longer,” Sauda pitched in, “what about you, Duncan?”

Lionheart didn't look enthused by the idea, before sighing, “Fine, I’ll pick out a couple over the next month, ok?”

“Shouldn't we be allowed to help, “ Gideon protested, “More of our members call Remnant home than any other Plane-”

Ozpin had raised his hand again.

“’I’m not opposed to your assistance, I simply worry of what will happen if we become reliant on you.”

Chapter End Notes

Meet Albian Arc. Jaune's grandfather and all around dick. I hate him, and you're free to hate him too.
“What was that?”

Qrow opened his Scroll, reading the message from Gideon, “he says that one of the other Gatewatch members says to look for ‘places of great suffering’.”

Albian gave a noncommittal grunt, limping towards the medical bay.

“Tell me, Qrow, what do you think of all this ‘magic’ nonsense?”

“What do you mean?”

“It can’t be real can it? It’s just some clever manipulation of Aura, right?”

“Maybe,” Qrow said, “my niece and a couple of her friends are Planeswalkers, and they’ve got pretty strong Aura for their ages. Even if it is, from what I’ve heard, most planes use magic, so maybe we’re the odd ones out.”

“Your niece is one? How’d that happen?”

“Best answer I’ve gotten is that it’s random. Some people are just born with the potential, and some of those become Planeswalkers when something happens.”

“Something?”

“It changes,” Qrow shrugged, “Ruby, my niece lured a Grimm away from her class. One of her friends, Sun, got dragged along when Ruby was Planeswalking, the other got caught up in that riot at the Dust refinery in Atlas a while back.”
Albian grunted, a scowl spreading across his face.

“Idiots, the lot of them.”

“The Faunus?”

“And the Schnee’s. Acting like fuckin’ animals isn’t gonna get them what they want, but treating them like they are is just asking for another war.”

“You don’t really think they’ll ever get along do you?”

That seemed far too idealistic for the White Bloodhound, more like what he would hear from Ruby or Gideon.

“Of course I don't, but we’ve got Grimm and morons attacking villages, so what does it matter if the man sitting next to you at the bar has a pair of horns?”

Qrow shifted uncomfortably at what was probably a roundabout reference to Raven. How had he known?

“So, how’s Aurelien?” It was a weak attempt to change the subject.

“He’s doing well enough, him and his youngest were talking about going camping when I talked to them before I left. Jaune should be around Rae's daughter's age. Is Yam the Planeswalker?”

“Yang,” Qrow stressed, “and no, Ruby, Summer’s daughter, like I said. You met them before.”

“What makes you think I bothered to learn their names, boy?”

Qrow rolled his eyes at the former combat instructor’s words, “well, you should probably learn Ruby’s, she works with the Gatewatch.”
“That’s a good sign,” sarcasm dripped forth, “I thought Ironwood’s pair of wet-behind-the-ears ‘Specialists’ were going to be the worst thing I had to deal with, but now you tell me there’s some kids involved too?”

They stopped in front of the medical bay, and Qrow took a moment to direct a glare at the back of Albian’s head.

“Ruby’s a fighter, through and through. You’ll see.”

“She’s a little kid. It’s not like she’s some sort of veteran,” Albian scoffed, “I’m going to get this over with, the sooner this is replaced, the sooner we can get going.”

“See you on the other side then,” Qrow gritted out.

Albian had never been the easiest man to tolerate, and Qrow was starting to get sick of him already.

---

Ilia peered into the dimly lit tunnel.

This was the way to Mountain Glenn? It seemed too… orderly.

“Ilia!” Blake called, “over here!”

The rest of the group were piling into a abandoned subway cart. Ilia climbed aboard and looked around, taking in what everyone was doing.

Chandra was sprawled out the bench, already looking like she was ready to get back to sleep after being woken up at three in the morning, Thalia was pressed into one of the corners, eyes scanning the area, and Nissa was seated opposite Chandra.

Before Ilia had time to look around for Ruby, Yang, and Blake, the door slid shut behind her and
she was forced to grab onto railing to avoid being thrown forward.

Sliding into the seat, Ilia looked outside as the subway began moving.

“I’m surprised this still works,” Ilia muttered to herself.

“They have to,” the chameleon Faunus jumped slightly as the missing three stepped out of the conductor’s room, Ruby and Blake sitting across from Ilia while Yang went and found another empty stretch to lay down across, “They send Huntsmen through the tunnels every couple of months, clearing out any Grimm that got in and checking for damage that needs to be repaired.”

“Seems like a waste,” Blake said.

“Don’t have much of a choice, unfortunately,” Ruby mumbled, rubbing at her eyes, “The tunnels end runder Vale, so if enough Grimm flood the tunnels—”

“—They could break through,” Blake finished.

Ruby’s head bobbed, once, twice, thr-

Blake caught Ruby, laying the younger girl down.

“Rubes fell asleep?” Yang asked from her spot, eyes closed.

“Yeah.”

“Not surprised,” Yang said, “she hasn’t been sleeping much since you got back.”

Got back? They had gone somewhere?

“She hasn’t?”
“Nope,” Yang popped the P, “sneaks down to her workshop most nights. She thinks Dad and Uncle Qrow don’t know, but they’ve been keeping an eye on her. Even when she does sleep, she normally rolls around in bed.”

“I wonder why?” Blake asked under her breath, eyes glowing slightly.

“I dunno,” Yang stretched out, “Hey cloney! Wake me when we’re almost there so I can start stretching!”

Cloney?

A hand swung out in a thumbs up. But, everyone was in the room, so-?

Pushing herself up, Ilia made her way over to the door, peering inside.

Seated at the controls was another copy of Ruby, hands a blur as they worked at different buttons, switches, and levers.

How the heck-? Must have been her Semblance.

Ilia sat back down, watching as Blake pulled out a book started to read from it.

Within an hour everyone else had dozed off, leaving the two friends alone. Blake screwed up her face, rubbing at her eyes, and then placed the book behind her back.

“So…” Blake looked around, “you said Adam was in Vale? How is he?”

“He’s… ok.”

“You said Mom didn’t want him coming to find me?”
“Yeah, Adam was hoping you'd join the White Fang. Would you?” Ilia tried to keep too much hope leaking into her voice, “I mean, you were at the refinery, weren't you? You saw them start attacking the Fau-”

Ilia stopped at the look on Blake’s face, a combination of her being stricken and confused.

“What?”

“What do you mean, attacking the Faunus?”

“Well, the news said it was the Faunus who started it, but Adam said that didn't make any sense.”

“It was.”

“What?”

“It was the Faunus that started it,” Blake said quietly, “and… and… no, I won't join the Fang.”

“What? Why? We always agreed to-”

“That was… that was before,” Blake said the word like it carried some heavier meaning Ilia was unaware of, “I thought the Fang was, that all it would take was,” Blake looked like she was blinking back tears, “I thought the Fang was a way to help people. But what I saw there, nobody was helping. The minute my dad tried to calm them down, they turned on him, and so many people died. If that’s the way the White Fang is going, then I don’t be part of it, Ilia.”

“And being a Huntress does that? Let’s you help people?”

“It does. And,” Blake looked down at Ruby, who had latched onto Blake's hand at some point, “I have friends here, now. I should introduce you to Sun when he get’s back from Mistral, he’s a Faunus that I met through the Gatewatch. He’s a good guy, funny.”
“Like Adam?”

“Yeah, but less angry.”

“...What about me?”

“What do you mean?”

“Just… we were friends, what about now?”

“Of course we are. And if you ever want to talk, come over. Nobody in the Gatewatch will complai- actually, that’s not true, Liliana might, but that’s because she’s…”

“Kind of a bitch?”

Blake laughed, “Something like that. We should rest, last time we went on an adventure together, me and Ruby didn’t get to sleep for three days.”

“That sounds terrible.”

“It was.”

---

Winter ran a whetstone down Mohnblume, examining the blade.

“-an hour and a half. Where are th-”

“Gawain,” Winter cut him off, “one of them had to be fitted with that prosthetic leg, remember?”
Gawain Bronzewing sighed, collapsing back into his chair.

“I know. It’s just… why do you think General Ironwood choose us for this?”

“What do you mean? We were top of our class.”

“Yeah, but Ironwood made it seem like whatever this was something big, so why didn't he send someone with more experience?”

Winter paused halfway through running the whetstone down her blade again, thinking it over, “maybe he needs someone who isn't easily recognizable?”

“Then why would he send over the heiress to the biggest company on Remnant?”

That… that was a good point.

“I don't know, I suppose we’ll have to wait until they arrive to tell us.”

Gawain sighed again, throwing his head back and closing his eyes.

Winter popped the smaller blade out of Mohnblume, sharpening it as she waited.

Gawain was right, it was getting annoying.

Eventually Gawain turned on the screen along one wall of the airship, crashing down next to Winter and flicked open his Scroll, playing some fighting game on it.

“Shouldn't you be getting ready? General Ironwood said we were probably going to leave as soon as the procedure was done.”

“I am ready,” Gawain said, “I was ready when we landed.”
Winter rolled her eyes, slotting the parrying dagger into its groove and walking towards the kitchenette.

“Throw me a soda, would you? I have a few cans on the fridge door.”

*What?*

Winter tore open the door, eyes snapping from the door to her partner.

“*Gawain!*”

“Wha-? Whoa!” Gawain dropped his Scroll, juggling the thrown soda between his hands before grabbing it from the air, “what was that about?”

“What happened to my water bottles?”

“I put them in the cabinet,” Gawain turned away from her, picking up his Scroll and focusing on the game.

Winter grabbed the bottles, putting all but one in the fridge and heading back to the living area.

Four years. *Four years* of living with Gawain and he was still the boorish *idiot* she had been partnering with on their first day at Atlas. How had he managed to stay at the top of the class in the first place?

Winter had been hoping that they would be split up once they finished, but instead they had been sent on missions together for the last six months, and being given this ‘long term’ assignment didn’t bode well for them getting split up any time soon.

Winter walked over to the small bookcase, grabbing one of the books and sitting down.
It was another hour, according to the screen, before anyone showed up.

“You two Jimmy’s kids?”

Winter looked up at the man who looked to be in his mid-thirties.

“Jimmy?” she asked.

“Yeah, wears white, likes robots, has a stick up his ass about this- OW!”

Another, much older, man swatted the back of his head.

“You’re Ironwood’s?”

Winter nodded.

“Good,” He slammed the ship door shut, “listen to me you two. What I’m about to tell you doesn’t leave this ship unless you’re given explicit permission, understand?”

Winter nodded again, as did Gawain, who had dropped his Scroll to sit up straight. Winter could tell, whoever this man was, you didn't want to get on his bad side.

The man pulled out a Scroll, and after a moment Gawain’s game disappeared, replaced with a picture of a grinning man with red skin.

“This, is what is known as a Planeswalker. Beings with the ability to move from one world to another-”

Gawain snorted.

“-Something funny, boy?”
“‘Planeswalkers’? You’re joking right? We didn't get sent here to help some old geezer hunt down something as ridiculous as-”

Winter jumped up as the man blurred into motion, a blade being drawn out of his cane as he launched at Gawain. Mohnblume diverted the blade into the couch before coming up at his throat, only for a second blade to pop out from the bottom of the cane next to her throat.

After a tense moment, the man ripped his blade out of the couch and stepped back. As he turned away, Winter caught him muttering to himself.

“I’ve gotten slow. I’ll need work on that.”

That was slow?

“And to answer your question, boy, yes you are expected to believe that. If you have a problem with it, take it up with Ironwood. Now, who pilots this damn thing?”

“I do, sir,” Winter spoke up.

“Then start heading towards Mountain Glenn, that’s the last place he was at that I can for for sure with my Semblance. What’s your names?”

“Winter Schnee, sir. And this is Gawain Bronzewing.”

“I’m Albian Arc, and this is Qrow Branwen.”

As Winter walked toward the cockpit, she heard Gawain turn his game back on, and ‘Qrow’ sit down next to him.
Blake woke rather abruptly as something stuck her face. Scrunching up her face, she tried to ignore it.

Then it happened again. And again. And again.

Opening her eyes, Blake had just enough time to jerk back and avoid an elbow crashing into her nose.

What the-?

“No…” Ruby moaned out in her sleep, trying to thrash around in Blake’s arms.

“Ruby!” Blake dodged another strike, “Ruby! Wake up!”

The younger girl’s glowing eyes snapped open as a knife appeared in her hand in a spark of lightning, swinging at Blake.

Blake grabbed Ruby’s arms, sending them both to the ground as the knife went skidding away from them.

Ruby stopped moving, looking like a caged animal as she looked up at Blake.


“You were having a nightmare.”

“Oh,” Ruby looked like she was trying very hard to shrink into nothingness, “Sorry?” she squeaked out.

“Are you alright?”
“I’m- I’m fine,” Ruby insisted, “It happens you know? People eat something bad, or get to worked up over something, and then they can't sleep and-”

“Yang said you haven't been sleeping well.”

Those seven words seemed to take the wind out of Ruby’s sails. The Artificer staring down, looking all the world like a kicked puppy. In fact, Blake could see the tears building up in Ruby’s eyes.

“Hey- hey-” Blake climbed off Ruby, pulling her into a hug, “it’s fine. Everything’s going to be fine.”

“But…” Ruby stopped, before suddenly standing up and rushing towards the front of the train, gesturing for Blake to follow.

Looking behind her, Blake saw Nissa starting to stir. After a moment, Blake stood and followed Ruby into the conductor’s den. Once she entered, the clone of Ruby walked out towards Yang.

“What's wrong?”

“I’m just,” Ruby toyed with the hem of her dress, “I’m worried I might have done something dumb.”

“What?”

“I… I don't remember. What!?” she must have seen something she had thought was doubt on her face, “I don't!”

“Then why are you worried about it?”

“Because… because not remembering is the problem,” Ruby said finally, “I remember wanting to get Tezzeret, and I remember knowing I wouldn't have time to get him if I went looking for Elspeth, but I can't remember actually going to get him, or how I got him to work with me. We don't like each other, you know?”
“So you're worried that whatever you did was dumb?”

“Or dangerous.”

“And that's why you’ve been having nightmares?”

“Yeah,” Ruby started to nod, “I mean, what if someone gets hurt because of it?” Ruby was now nodding rapidly, “Tezzeret already hurt Ral, and who knows what else-”

Blake reached out and grabbed Ruby’s hand.

“If something does happen, we’ll deal with it ok? Between the Gatewatch and any other Planeswalkers you know, I’m sure we can deal with it.”

Ruby nodded, biting her lip, “but what if we can't?”

“If there’s something we all can't stop together, I think we have bigger problems then if you did something dumb. We stopped Emrakul, didn't we?”

Ruby opened her mouth, before sighing and nodding, “Yeah. We did.”

“Then let’s stop worrying for now, and get ready.”

The train stopped, allowing them to get off and walk towards the surface where they wandered until a strange Grimm came along.

The Ursa Major had green spikes sprouting from it, and when it opened its mouth to roar, Blake saw the same light come from within.

“Yang, Ilia, Thalia let’s deal with this while the others try to find Tibalt’s trail!”
“With,” Yang pulled her arm back as Ember Celica deployed, “Pleasure!"

The Ursa threw up its arms as a pair of Dust rounds smashed into it, before it charged through the smoke and at Thalia.

The cathar tried to dodge to the side, only to be grabbed and thrown into wall as the Grimm turned towards Yang.

Just before it hit her, it ducked, dodging below a strike from Ilia’s whip and allowing it to drive an uppercut into Yang’s torso.

Blake flinched slightly as Yang crashed into a building. Even with Aura, Blake was pretty sure Yang would be feeling that in the morning.

Though, considering the excited grin on her face, she wasn't feeling it now.

Yang plummeted, embers flaking off her skin as she drove herself into the Grimm, who backed up, trying to defend itself.

Blake threw Gambol Shroud around one arm, pulling it back to make it more difficult for the Grimm to block.

Ilia’s whip wrapped around the other arm, leaving the Ursa wide open to Yang’s barrage of blows.

As Blake helped Thalia up, Ruby cried in triumph.

“Got it!”

“Shh!” Nissa pushed them down an alley, eyes on the sky, “Something's coming, we shouldn’t be here when they arrive. On Drache, quickly.

As they climb on board the Drake, who had been grown until he was the size of a Bullhead, Blake heard the rumble of an engine.
Tibalt examined one of the bullets, watching the green liquid where there would normally be Dust.

“You're sure these will work?”

“Almost certain,” Merlot didn’t look up from where he was leaned over a test subject.

The small snake Grimm, a… damn, what were they called? T- Ta- Taiju? No, that wasn't right… Taijitu! That's what they were called! The Taijitu was writhing on the tray, it’s two heads straining to escape the syringe full of green liquid.

Tibalt closed his eyes, inhaling through his nose to take in the sweet smell of pain.

“You know, I really don't get you, Doc.”

Merlot grunted, eyes focused on the writhing serpent. One set of eyes had turned green, and the other head had turned, apparently try to tear off its mutated other off.

“I mean,” Tibalt leaned forward, slapping the revolver shut and storing it under his coat, “You're so focused on using these Grimm to ‘save’ this world. Why not do something else?”

Merlot didn’t answer, grabbing his Scroll and taking down notes as the mutated head started to bulge, forcing the other off it easily. After a moment, the non-mutated head started to go through the change.

“Interesting,” Merlot muttered, wheeling over to another station, “I should try…” Merlot hit a switch, causing a window to open, allowing Tibalt to see a Beowolf shackled to the wall.

“What are you doing, Doc? And you kind of I keep the snake?”

Tibalt released the Taijitu, taking control of it and letting it wrap around his neck.

Merlot grabbed another vial, mixing it around, and placed it in some sort of gun. He took a moment to line up the shot, before firing it at the Beowolf.

“Well,” Tibalt tisked as it stuck the Grimm’s arm, “That was a pretty big miss.”

“I said,” Merlot growled out as he shut the window, bringing the room up on the Scroll, “keep quiet!”

A simple button press let the shackles loose, allowing the Beowolf to move.

Or, more exactly, tear off its arm.

“Huh?” Tibalt blinked as Merlot laughed, grabbing another scroll and hitting a button. A black silhouette appeared, along with a voice.

“George,” the slightly ethereal voice said, “I take it from your call you have something?”

George?

“Yes!” Merlot said giddily, “The Grimm, if given the chance, will amputate their limb in an attempt to keep the mutations from happening. This implies that they have enough knowledge of their own biology to locate where the serum is!”

The voice hummed, “Interesting. And who is that man with you? I don't recall seeing him before.”

“Uh…” Merlot’s eyes flicked over to Tibalt, “this is Tibalt. He has an ability similar to you, ma’am.”
“Truly?” The slightest amount of interest leaked through, “Tibalt, was it?”

“Yes? Who are you?”

“My name is, at the moment, not important. If I were to send an acquaintance of mine over, would you be interested in coming with him to meet with me?”

“Why don-”

Before Tibalt could finish asking the question, a warning chime went off from Merlot’s Scroll.

“George?”

“A team of four people just entered Merlot Industries. I’m looking at their vita- ma’am.”

“Yes?”

“One of them is Qrow Branwen.”

She hummed again, “What could cause Ozpin to turn one of his eyes towards yo-”

“And another is Albian Arc.”

“...Pack everything of importance, I’m sending Tyrian over at once.”

“What? Is this Albian dangerous?”

“Not anymore,” she said, “He’s much too old and out of shape to be the threat he was in his prime, but his Semblance makes it so there’s not a better tracker on Remnant.”
Albian stopped as he stepped off the ship, eyes scanning the sky. After a few seconds, he lowered his gaze, moving forward.

“Everything alright?”

Albian waved Qrow off without a word, walking forward and placing his hand on the ground and opening his senses.

In his other hand was the knife the murderer had used.

Albian breathed in, before unleashing his Aura as a wave with the exhalation. Information flooded his mind, searching for traces that tied their man to this place.

It didn't surprise Albian when he found plenty of them. The security footage had shown that the killer wasn't particularly careful.

Standing, and ignoring the protest of his muscles, Albian walked farther into the city.

“Hey!” Ironwood’s brat called after him, “Where are you going!?”

Albian didn't answer drawing the blade in his cane, flipping it, and locking it into place.

The White Bloodhound walked through the streets, eyes locked on Merlot Industries, where most of the traces were.

Now what had the killer been doing there?

Albian stopped as he walked into the foyer of Merlot Industries, eyes dancing as a small pack of Beowolves slinked from the shadows. Young ones, missing the bone plates that normally grew in by their second year.
A perfect warm up.

Albian span his glaive around, lowering himself and letting a grin spread across his face. Spreading out his Aura, Albian found each Grimm.

Then he moved forward, ducking under one Beowolf’s claw and severing the right arm. Rolling around that side, Albian allowed one of the Beowolf’s siblings to crash into it, before plunging his blade through them both.

Drawing the weapon from its macabre sheath, Albian threw it into the third Grimm.

The improvised javelin struck the Grimm in the arm, causing Albian to curse under his breath. He had meant to hit the eye. He really had gotten rusty.

Before the Grimm could capitalize on his mistake, something red tore through its chest, a crescent of destruction gouging through the cracked tile.

The brat was standing behind the Grimm, a vented longsword in his hand and sweat rolled down his face as the last spiral of Aura wafted off his arm.

As the last Grimm turned, the brat’s Aura swirled back into existence. Red tendrils like smoke rose from his frame, coalescing at the vents on his sword.

An Aura condenser? Interesting.

At that moment, Qrow walked in, arms behind the back of his head. Looking out of the building, Albian saw the other kid whipping the oily blood of a Grimm off her blade with a black handkerchief, the substance smoking and evaporating.

Albian almost covered his face in shame. Sure, it had been over a decade and a half from the last time he fought, but this was downright embarrassing.
The last Grimm collapsed as the Auric blast tore through it, and Albian grabbed his weapon, turning away to hide his shame.

Was he too old for this? He was approaching eighty now. Maybe it would be a good idea to back down, decide to not work with them after all?

Eventually, the group arrived in George’s old office, where they found undeniable proof the killer had been there.

There were overturned tables and chairs, with a pair of dead body impaled to the wall by pieces of rebar. One was missing his left eye, and the other her ear on the same side.

“Whoa!” the brat cried in shock, “What- that’s- Maidens that’s-”

“Would you stop that?” Albian walked to the desk, moving aside pieces of paper with scribbled out pen marks.

“It’s just… who did that?”

“This Planeswalker we’re looking for,” while Albian didn't vocalize the ‘duh’ as the end of the sentence he was sure the brat picked it up.

“You didn't tell us he had been torturing people!”

Albian looked up from the desk, a manila folder in his hands. The boy looked agitated, pacing back and forth in front of the body.

“Well,” Albian said condescendingly, “clearly he does.”

“That’s,” the brat bristled, hand clutching his sword so tightly Albian was slightly surprised it hadn't turned white. It looked like he was considering attacking Albian briefly, before thinking better of it, “who were they?”
“I don't know,” Albian groused, returning to the folder, “Why don't you check his pockets for a wallet?”

Albian looked through the folder. It was bills of sale for several pieces of estate across Remnant.

As he reached the back one, one silver eyebrow curved upward.

Several important pieces of information were underlined, like someone had *wanted* to be able to find it quickly.

“They were married,” the brat said, “That’s weird.”

“What?” his partner asked

“The woman has a ticket for a cruise in her purse and the receipt.”

“So she was going on a cruise,” Albian said, “What’s weird about that?

“The receipt is for them both, but I can't find the man’s ticket.”

“Maybe he lost it?” Qrow asked from where he was leaning.

“Maybe?” the brat asked in agreement.

Albian keyed a set of coordinates into his Scroll, checking the results.

Nothing. Just some water in the middle of nowhere. Who the hell bought a piece of land that didn't have any land on it? It was just a bunch of water in the middle o-

Albian felt the points click as he activated his Semblance. He really *was* too old.
“Everyone back to the ship! He’s gone to sea!”

“Why?”

“That’s what I plan to find out.”

One last adventure, one last moment of glory.

---

Ruby clung to Drache’s ridges, a giddy laugh bubbling up as Drache skidded low, sending a spray of saltwater into the air as his taloned feet skimmed the surface. Grabbing the line of mana between her and her familiar, she watched from his eyes.

This, this took some of the weight off her shoulders. No questions about what she did during the three day long blank spot in her memories, no migraines as her mind finished repairing itself from being fractured on Innistrad, no sitting in the room her mom had once used for pottery, leafing through one of the slowly building up collection of mechanical journals, ‘obsolete’ Izzet alchemy papers, or tomes on illusion and mind magic from Jace in a monotone self-hypnosis ritual to try to fall asleep.

Drache listed slightly to the side, skimmed the water with his wing.

He stopped at a cry of outrage from behind Ruby.

“Can you not!?” Chandra cried out, struggling to cling onto the scales as saltwater dripped from her face.

“Sorry!” Ruby laughed, guiding Drache up, “We’re almost there, I think!”

Ruby pointed at the quickly approaching island, following the trail of mana.
“Good!” Chandra yelled back, “We’re buying a saddle before we ever do this again.”

Ruby ran a hand down Drache’s extended neck, giggling.

“It isn’t that bad! It’s fun!”

“Yeah, maybe from where you are, but I feel like I’m going to slide off any second now! Can we land and walk the rest of the way once we get to the island?”

“Fine! Fine!”

Drache folded his wings, diving towards the ground. Ruby heard Chandra cry out again, and sent a spike of warning at Drache. The drake flared his wings, slowing down and landing on the beach.

Chandra rolled off Drache, planting into the sand and sighing.

“Oh thank Jaya. I thought I was going to drown!”

“You don’t know how to swim?” Nissa asked, landing with significantly more grace, before turning and helping Thalia down. The Cathar drew her spear, leaning on the two pronged weapon as a wince ran through her.

What?

“No,” Chandra said hurriedly, “Of course I know how to swim, who doesn’t? All you gotta do is move your arms and legs around. I’m just wearing chainmail.”

Even as Ruby watched Thalia lean against a tree, looking winded, she could hear the silence that made it clear nobody believed the Pyromancer.

“We’re going to have to teach you to swim,” Nissa said after a moment.
“What about Blake!?”

“What about her? She knows how to swim. Or are you implying that she can't swim because she’s a Fau-”

“Thalia, are you alright?” Ruby cut Ilia off before a fight was started about the racist undertones of assuming a Cat Faunus was incapable of swimming.

It would probably be a smart idea to do a crash course on Do’s and Don'ts for Remnant, especially because there weren't Faunus on other planes.

“I’m,” Thalia gave a weak smile, more of a grimace, really, “I’m fine. Just some bruises from that Grimm. I don't know how Yang’s moving around, really.”

“I’m surprised your Aura went down after one hit,” Ilia chipped in, “did it really hit you that hard?”

“I-” Thalia was cut off as another wince flashed across her.

“Here,” Ruby took Thalia’s hands, channeling her Aura into the older girl.

To Ilia, it probably looked like Ruby was giving Thalia a transfusion of her Aura, but she was actually looking if Thalia had an Aura to unlock in the first place.

There were so many differences between Remnant and Innistrad that she couldn't be sure that Aura, something seen as the basis of fighting on Remnant, had transferred over.

After a moment of probing, Ruby felt a pulse from Thalia.

The cathar had stopped curling around herself, a thin golden sheet of Aura wrapping around her.

Ruby stepped back, eyes locking onto the point where she could see the mana as Yang handed her the shrunken down form of Drache, who climbed onto his owner’s shoulder.
“Let’s go.”

---

Thalia took the rear with Nissa, eyes jumping from tree to tree as she ran a hand along the healing bruises.

She had gotten too used to fighting with Traft, he could blunt the pain, allowing her to go on fighting well after everyone else had to stop.

And she had left him on Innistrad.

It was weird, and uncomfortable, to live without the geist, like something had been carved out of her.

It made her want to go back to Innistrad. Traft couldn't have picked up a new host that quickly, right?

Nissa slowed down until she was in step with Thalia, looking down at the torn leather of her armor.

“Are you alright, now?”

“Better,” Thalia rubbed the spot where she had been hit again, looking around.

There was a flash of green.

“What was that?”

“Eh?” the group turned, weapons in hand, as another Grimm waddled out from behind the trees overlooking a stream.
It was bipedal, but missing any arms, instead, a thick tail swished back and forth, green spines sprouting from its back.

“Oh,” Ruby turned away, “It’s just a Creep.”

“I’ve got it,” Blake lifted Gambol Shroud, pulling the trigger on it.

The Creep fell, unmoving.

Everyone other than Blake moved along. Once Thalia and Nissa were even with the cat Faunus, she turned and continued to move.

“Creeps are the weakest Grimm we know of, even untrained civilians can kill on-”

Thalia felt the hair on the back of her neck stand on end, throwing herself to the ground along with Blake and Nissa as black offal flew over their heads. A green spike impaled into the ground next to Thalia’s hand, and she heard a yelp from Yang.

“Did it-?! Since when did Creeps explode?!?”

“Maybe-? Ruby stopped talking with a grunt of pain, “Maybe it has something to do with that green stuff? Drache, stop tugging on that.”

“On what-?”

Thalia stopped talking as she stood, staring at the bloody hole in Ruby’s side where one the spikes had torn into it, stopped halfway through, something red fizzling next to the hole

“It broke through your Aura!?” Chandra grabbed Ruby, lowering her to the ground as gently as possible.
“My Aura’s still there, it just punched through it. If we can get it out—”

“You want us to pull it out?” Blake asked, kneeling across from Ruby, “No. Mom always says you should call for medical help—”

“We’re on an island in the middle of nowhere,” Ruby gritted out, hand fumbling on the rapidly bloodying shard of bone, “We don’t have time to wait from medical help. If we can get it out, I can heal it, but—”

“Dad’s going to kill us,” Yang moaned slightly.

“It will be fine,” Ruby insisted, “just—” she grunted again, “Just pull it out, I don’t think it’s in that deep.”

“Can’t we just wait for it to fade?”

“And risk it getting infected?” Nissa responded, planting her flag as she reached out to grab the shard of bone, “How long do Grimm normally take to fade?”

“Half an hour or so—”

“And she’ll be bleeding the entire time, plus she could get infected, and it could be poisonous. I’ll—”

“Wait!” Thalia pulled the bident off her back, holding it next to the shard of bone. As it approached, the bone turned grey, chipping rapidly, “This speeds up their decay!”

“That’s... weird...” Ilia said.

“I’m still pulling it,” Nissa tore a long strip of fabric from Chandra’s sash, stuffing it into Ruby’s mouth as a gag, “Ready?”

“Yes,” Ruby’s voice came from Drache.
Nissa didn't respond, merely pressed one hand on Ruby's shoulder, wrapped the other on the blood slicked bone, and pulled.

Thalia winced as Ruby screamed into the gag, trying to thrash away from Nissa’s hands, and tears running down her face.

After a minute, Nissa’s hand was covered with so much blood she couldn't keep it up, standing and walking back towards the stream.

“Don't stop,” Drache continued to talk in Ruby’s voice, “It’s almost out- I- I can feel it.”

“Rubes.”

“Chandra? Thalia?” Ruby cut off her sister.

“Ah,” Chandra grit her teeth, “What the hell? Sorry about this, Ruby…”

The process repeated itself, but the bone was definitely almost out by the time Chandra let go. The Pyromancer walked away, joining Nissa in holding her hands under the water.

“Blake? Ilia? Thalia?” Ruby’s voice wavered again, “Please?”

Blake breathed in deep, before grabbing the bone, “You're sure?”

Ruby nodded.

“Ok,” Blake tightened her grip, “ok.”

It only took one sharp yank to tear the bone out, and Blake immediately dropped it.
“Nissa! It’s out!”

Nissa rushed over, pressing her blood flecked hands onto either side of the wound. The blood flow staunched, and a light sheet of skin appeared over the injury.

Chandra walked over, pulling Ruby up and into a hug, “You’re alright now, kiddo?”

“Yea- Yang! Still sore!”

The blonde brawler had tackled both of them into a hug, apparently doing her damnedest to crush them both.

“Don't ever do that again! You hear me!? Do you know how painful that was to watch?”

“Probably not as painful as it was to have it happen,” Blake drawled out.

“...Shut up and get over here.”

“I’m not normally one for group hugs. That one on Innistrad was a spe- ak!”

Yang dragged Blake into the hug. After a moment of protest, Blake joined in.

“That,” a voice whistled out, “looked like it hurt.”

Before Thalia turned she caught the look of horror on Ilia’s face at the man’s voice.

“I mean,” he continued on, “I consider myself a connoisseur of pain, and that, *that* had to be *at least* an eight. Seriously, that looked like hell to go through *once*. And you did it three times! Sure, the last- woah!”

He dodged around the whip strike from Ilia, letting it tear into another mutated Creep, which he
turned and kicked into the forest before it could explode

“Ilia! I had thought I would have to go looking for you! I’m glad you decided you wanted to play some mo-”

“SHUT UP!” She snarled.

“Well,” Tibalt huffed, “that’s rude.”

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Gawain tapped his feet impatiently, eyes trained on the ocean out the pilot window.

“Are we almost there?” he demanded to Winter.

“Within five minutes,” she flicked on a couple of buttons, slowing slightly, “are you alright? I know how you feel about…”

“I’m fine,” he said.

Winter dropped her hand, guiding it forward, “Can you tell Mr. Arc and Mr. Branwen we’re almost there?”

“Yeah,” Gawain stopped halfway out of his chair, “What do you think about them?”

“Mr. Branwen… Qrow… he doesn’t seem that bad. I think he might be a lush, though, which might be a liability. Mr. Arc though… he’s… he’s…”

“An ass?”

Winter didn't agree, but also didn't reprimand him for his language, which was just as telling.
“You think he’s telling the truth? About these people being from a different world?”

“It sounds unbelievable. But I suppose if you're willing to open yourself to the possibility of there being other worlds, you have to consider that there might be people who can come from one to another.”

Gawain sighed, “I’ll go get them ready.”

Hitting the button, Gawain walked into main living area, looking around.

Qrow was on his Scroll, talking to someone, while Albian sat on one of the chairs, apparently brooding.

“Tai- Tai- TAI!” Qrow snapped, “have you called Gideon? Or Chandra? They're probably hanging around there. You know Ruby and Yang don't get along with Bai’s kids. I’ll be back by tonight, and if they aren't, I’ll go looking for them, ok? Ok. See you then.”

“Your husband?” Gawain asked.

Albian snorted.

“No,” Qrow threw a dirty look at the back of Albian’s head, “brother-in-law.”

“And Ruby and Yang are…?”

“Nieces,” Qrow typed a number in, bringing it up to his ear, “They’re supposed to be at home, their uncle and his kids are visiting.”

“And they aren't?”

“N- Hey, Pipsqueak! It’s your Uncle Qrow, call me back, would you? Your dad is about ready to
send out a search party again!” Qrow hung up, starting to dial in another number, “No. I don't blame them. They're all dicks.”

“How bad?”

“Bad,” Qrow pulled a face, “he’s not even their uncle. He’s Tai’s cousin, Tai just spent most of his teen years living with him, so Bai insists that, and I quote, “makes them as good as brothers”. I keep telling Tai he- Firecracker! You’re with Rubes, right? Call me back, I’ll think up some excuse to keep you away from Bai!” Qrow hung up, falling back into the chair, “I keep telling Tai he shouldn't let Bai over, but he never listens.”

Gawain grabbed a seat as he felt the ship start to dip down.

“What's wrong with him?”

“Sexist.” Qrow pulled another face, “his wife left him- oh… four years ago because of it. Messy divorce too. I’m actually glad Ruby isn't around, I’d hate to see-”

“Mr. Branwen? Mr. Arc? I’m picking up Aura spikes.”

“So something is happening,” Albian tightened his grip around on his cane, “bring us in as close as possible.”

The ship landed, allowing the door to open, and everyone to spill out.

It only took a couple of minutes to reach the spot of the fighting.

The killer had a sawed off shotgun in his hands, firing at a group as a horde of Creeps moved forward.

He could control Grimm? Yeah, they were Creeps (admittedly strange ones), but a serial killer who could control Grimm was bad news.
“Nissa!” one of the other fighters yelled, before swinging her arms around.

Was her hair on fire?

Three arcing missiles of fire smashed into three Creeps, burning away their bodies.

“Actually, nevermind!” the woman smiled, apparently uncaring about the flames licking around her hair.

Qrow unfolded his scythe firing at two of the Creeps. As they writhed, a pair of golden barriers snapped down around them.

“Watch out!” Gawain stopped at the young voice from one of the trees, “They explode when they di- Uncle Qrow?”

“Ruby? Where’s Yan-”

Another girl crashed through the forest, apparently wrestling with a Taijitu.

“Yang!” yet another girl appeared, landing on a branch, “Hold it still for a second!”

“Not that easy,” Yang growled out, holding both heads away from her body.

A double headed lance caught the Grimm, impaling to a tree as two more girls came out, one dodging whip blows from the other, striking out with a sheathed swords.

“Ilia! I don't want to hur-” she ducked under the whip, planting the sheathed sword into Ilia’s gut.

Well, he knew which fight he was joining.

“Winter! You deal with the Taijitu!” He yelled out as he ran towards the two fighting girls,
ignoring Winter’s protest.

“What’s wrong with her?”

“He can,” she ducked again, “he can release a smoke if he see’s anyone get too close to him. It lets him control them.”

“That’s bad. Why not just use ranged attacks?”

“Ruby’s working on it,” she threw up an arm, letting the whip wrap around her leather-clad arm, “Ili- Ahh!” the call devolved into a cry of pain as electricity jumped along the whip.

“Are you alright?” Gawain asked as he dodged the newly freed whip.

“Fine,” she had switched hands, using the still sheathed blade to bat away another strike, “Traft? Can you do anything ab- Withengar,” She cut herself off with a snarl of rage.

“Who?” Gawain looked around. He didn't see anything, other than a newly made wall of flames from Flame-Head.

“No, it’s just- Ruby! How much longer?!”

An unholy roar filled the air, and Gawain just barely caught something tear through most of the Creeps, before stone domes covered each just before they exploded.

“There!” Ruby dropped down, limping slightly closer to make the killer, “It’s over! Let Ilia go and give up!”

Ilia lowered her whip, blinking in confusion.

“Fine. You win,” the killer lowered his gun as they got closer, Gawain reaching for his handcuffs, only to be stopped by his fighting partner.
“What?”

“Didn't I say that he could take control of anyone who got too close?”

“Damn,” the killer muttered, eyes glowing “I had hoped you would be dumb enough to forget that. Guess I have to do this the hard way.

“What's that supposed to mean-” Gawain staggered as a rush of vertigo and a ringing in his ears. It reminded of when he had been hit with a Grimm stun baton as part of training.

“Ilia! Get over here, now!”

Gawain tried to stop her from moving, despite seeing triple. Then Albian stepped forward, grabbing her, only to jerk as the killer pulled out another gun.

“Alright! That’s it,” the killer raised his voice, “If any of you tries to stop me, I’ll kill he-”

An explosion of rose petals cut him off… literally.

Ruby had appeared behind him, his arm and head falling separate from the body.

“Ruby!” Qrow cried in horror.

“I had too,” she said, “he was going to hurt Ilia, and kill other people. I had too,” it sounded like she was trying to convince herself, “I had too, didn't I?”

“Oh course you did, Pip,” Qrow pulled Ruby into a hug, “but you’re bleeding pretty badly, so we need to get you to a hospital. It looks like you reopened a cut.”
Thalia walked through the halls of the chapel, noticing how quiet it was.

Once, there would have been sermons praising Avacyn, or the Saint of Geier Reach, or his heirs.

Thalia pushed open a door, following a familiar path through the chapel.

Eventually, inevitably, Thalia came to the room she had been looking for.

Walking forward, Thalia looked up at the picture, eyes tracing it again.

On it was a red haired woman, her left hand, missing the ring finger, wrapped around a sword, while her right hand stroked the blade.

Standing behind her was a hazy image of the geist of Traft, a hand on the woman’s shoulder. To the unknowing, it would look like the artist had used some technique to make the geist shimmer, almost as if it was following you around the room.

Thalia knew better.

“You can come out,” she said softly, “that trick doesn't work twice.”

*I would not know*, Thalia, the geist moved forward, leaving the painted facsimile behind, *I've never the need to use it more than once on the same person.*

Thalia nodded as Traft stepped forward, waving his ghostly hand over the grate. Blue flames ignited in the long abandoned fireplace, lighting up the room and, paradoxically, making it colder.

*What is it that dragged you back here?* he asked softly, *I did not believe I would see you again.*

“I- I came back to ask you to come with me.”
Traft stopped, hovering an inch above the seat he had settled into.

Come with you? You know as well as I that I can not leave Innistrad as you can.

“But you could if we shared a body again.”

And why would I do that? Traft asked, walking slowly closer, did you not believe you were equipped to fight the Gatewatch’s foes without me?

“No- I mean yes- I mean,” not good, starting off on the wrong foot, “I- I was wrong. I’m not ready yet. I need the advantages you gave me. Every time I’ve fought a Planeswalker, I’ve lost. I can’t, I’m just a detriment to the Gatewatch if I can't win. We fought one today, Tibalt-

Thalia jumped as Traft slammed his hands down, passing through the table silently.

Him? He was one?

“Yes. I should have been the one to kill him, but I couldn't. He used something like the madness we felt in Emrakul’s wake, and it stopped me for a moment. If you had been there, I could have stopped him, but instead Ruby, a girl little older than she,” Thalia gestured to the picture, “had been when you saved her, was forced to kill him. She was the only one fast enough. That failure-”

Is not your fault. Everyone makes mistakes, everyone underestimates their opponent, or overestimates their own abilities. If I had not, we would not be here, having this discussion.

“So,” Thalia continued, hating the weakness in her voice, “will you come with me? Please?”

I only have one question in return.

“What?”
Traft stepped forward, taking his hand like he had the first time they met.

*Will you take me in?*

“Yes.”

Traft smiled, then he stepped forward, filling her lungs as she inhaled deeply, turning her blood into icy fire, then it settled at the base of her skull.

Thalia snapped open her eyes, turning on the spot, and returned to Remnant.

Stepping into the building, Thalia walked towards the receptionist, opening her mouth, only to be cut off as Traft sent a warning, dodging a man rushing to the counter.

“I got a call about my daughter? Ruby Rose?” Tai panted out.

“One moment,” the receptionist pulled up a holographic screen, typing in a few words. Traft sent a spike of surprise through to Thalia, “Room 207. Can I help you?” The question was directed at Thalia.

“I was actually looking for Ruby myself,” she said politely, “hello, Tai.”

“Thalia!” Tai said in relief, “everyone’s alright?”

“On our side, yes,” Thalia said, falling in step with Tai, “a few scraps here and there, but other than Ruby’s wound, nothing remotely serious.”

Ok, wrong wording.

“It’s serious?” Tai asked in fear.
“No, I mean, nothing that required a hospital visit. The wound was already begin healing, and they had begun suturing the wound before I left.”

“What about ‘the other side?’”

“Ruby killed the Planeswalker we were tracking-”

Perhaps you should think before you speak? You’re only making him more worried.

Thalia sighed, Traft had a point.

“What!? Tai practically thundered, “she killed-?”

“He was too dangerous to let live, and nobody else could reach him before he killed Ilia,” she tried to calm him before they were removed from the building, “It’s far from a good thing, but it was the only path she felt we had. Meanwhile, someone on Qrow’s side was seriously injured. He was older too, so I can't be sure he’ll make it. Is this it?”

Tai nodded, pushing open the door, allowing them both to see inside.

Blake was curled up in a chair with a blanket, eyes closed and her chest rising softly.

Ilia was slumped against a wall, a bucket next to her. She had been ill after waking from Tibalt’s control, and hadn't shown much signs of stopping.

Chandra and Yang were laying up on the fold out bed, apparently trying to rest.

Finally, Ruby herself was sitting up in the hospital bed, eyes roaming a heavy tome.

“Ruby!” Tai hissed rushing over and throwing his arms around her shoulders, causing the little girl to practically disappear, “are you alright?”
“I’m fine, Dad,” Ruby said around the bear of a man, “I just needed some stitches. They said I’m clear to go home in the morning, and will be good to go in two weeks.”

“Where’s Qrow?”

“He needed to talk to Professor Ozpin, and Nissa is out on the roof.”

“I’ll go look for hi-” Thalia was cut off as Qrow pushed open the door, perhaps a bit harder than expected.

“What’s wrong?” Tai asked.

“Nothing,” Qrow said, “just heard you had gotten here.”

Why did it seem like he was lying?

Chapter End Notes

*Throws Albian away*

At least we didn't have to put up with him for long, eh?
Chandra pulled the bed sheet over her head, groaning at the noise.

“Go away,” she groaned, “it’s too early!”

“It’s noon,” came the voice of the resident Necromancer.

“I said it was too early!”

“Have you forgotten we have a meeting in two hours? I seem to remember that you take a long time to be fully ready, so I decided to wake you up now.”

“Wake me up in an ho-”

Chandra was cut off by a rumbling crash of thunder.

“It’s raining out?” Chandra groaned again.

It took more mana to keep her flames going once they’d left her body during storms.

“Hm? I don't think so, but it is summer. Ruby did say that Patch gets hit with heavy storms this time of year.”

“Like Ghirapur during monsoon season,” Chandra muttered, pushing herself out of bed and walking over to the dresser.

“What?”
“Nothing!” Chandra called, yanking out one of the drawers.

Empty.

Shit, Chandra yanked open another, shit, a third, shit, shit, shit.

How was she completely out of clean clothes? She could have *sworn* she had left some in the hamper for Gared yesterday.

“Are you getting up?” Liliana asked through the door after another rumble, which were growing in intensity and speed, “or am I standing here for no reason?”

“Yeah, I’ll be out in a moment!” Chandra grabbed a shirt off the burnt remains of an easel, a testament to Chandra’s not-there skill with painting, and scooped a pair of jeans up off the floor. Throwing off her night shirt, Chandra threw her arms through the sleeves, pulling it on, and thrust her leg through her pants, hopping towards the door as she pulled on the other, she threw it open, “Hey! What’s up?”

Chandra saw Liliana’s eyes jump from her hair, to her room, back to her.

“Have a good evening, did you?” Liliana asked, reaching out and pushing a clump of Chandra’s hair behind her ear.

“Stop that,” Chandra whined, knocking the hand away. She would need to wash it when this storm ended, not only was it knotted up, but it was starting to dry out and crack again, “I wasn't doing anything last night, just went to watch-” Chandra paused, “I just went to watch a movie! It had, uh, action?”

“You went out to watch the street race, didn't you?”

“Yeah,” Chadra admitted, grabbing her Scroll and goggles before stepping out of the room, “are you going to yell at me?”

“Of course not,” Liliana scoffed, “what say do I have in what you do? Did you at least have fun?”
“Yeah! I haven't done that since,” Chandra stopped. Kaladesh, she hadn't watched a race like that since Kaladesh. What was with her today? She kept reminding herself of her home, “I haven’t done that in a long time. Monks don't do races, you know?”

Liliana didn't call out her slip up as they started to head towards the kitchen.

“Thanks for letting us stay with you,” Chandra said, “Ravnica’s nice and all, but they don't do breakfast right at all, I mean, toast is a nice snack, but for breakfast? Bleh,” Chandra stuck out her tongue, “breakfast is supposed to be the biggest meal, so you have enough energy for the day!”

“Is that why you can’t wake up before noon?”

“Shut up,” Chandra laughed, pushing Liliana, “I’ll have to cook breakfast for you at some point. Methi Thepla, mix some ginger, chilis, and yogurt together,” Chandra felt her mouth start to water, “and mango! I don't care what anyone tells you, mango is the best, and anyone who says otherwise should be pitied for their wrongness.”

“Don't let Ruby hear you say that,” Liliana said, “I have no idea what a mango is.”

“It’s a fruit! There's nothing in the multiverse that tastes like it,” Chandra cocked her head, “well, nothing in the parts I’ve been too. It’s sweet and tangy at the same time, and when it’s ripe, the juice just runs down your chin. Actually…” Chandra activated her Scroll, sticking out her tongue as she sent the message, “’can you stop by the store and see if they have mangos before you get here? Thanks.’” Chandra snapped it shut.

“Ruby?”

“Yeah, they have those pomegranates Gids li-”

The windows on either side of the hall shook as another almighty roar of thunder echoed through the halls.

“Wow, it’s really-” Chandra blinked, “why isn't it raining?”
“What do you mean?” Liliana was cut off as something golden flew below the window, followed by another roar of thunder, “was that Beeslab?”

“I… I think it was?” Chandra pushed open the window, “Gids! You alright?”

“Fine!” Gideon pushed himself up, “me and Sun were just training, but we should probably be getting ready anyways.”

“Right,” Chandra drew the word out, “I’m getting some food from the kitchen, either of you want anything?”

“Yes please,” Gideon said, dusting off his pants, “We’ll meet you up there, ok?”

“Yeah.”

---X Line Break X---

“Dad?”

“Hm?” Tai turned around from where he was finishing packing Ruby’s lunch, looking over at the girl herself, who was looking up at him, kicking her feet, a red flower in her hands, before it shattered and faded in motes of red light, “What do you need, Rosebud?”

“Can…” Ruby paused, looking through the door where Yang was playing a game with one of her friends from Signal, “Can I talk to you? Alone?”

“Of course you can,” Tai said, “do you want to go for a walk? Or just in my room?”

“Your room,” Ruby said, hopping down from the chair and heading there.

“I’ll be there in a minute!” Tai called after her, finished the meal and putting it into the fridge.
Running his hands under cold water, Tai snagged a paper towel, drying them as he went.

“Alright, Rosebud, what-” Tai stopped, watching Ruby poke at the half an inch puncture scar on her side, wincing slightly each time, “are you alright? Do you need me to make another doctor’s appointment?”

As Nissa had predicted as a warning to Tai, the injury had gotten infected, sending Ruby on a series of antibiotics that she swore up and down were the most foul tasting items in the world, limiting what training exercises she could do, and an occasional soreness that the doctor had confirmed was typical for a while after a abdominal scar healed.

“No,” Ruby let her shirt fall, crawling up onto the bed and wrapping her arms around her knees.

“So,” Tai lowered himself into a chair, “what did you want to talk about?”

Ruby looked around, tugging at her hood, looking like she wanted to pull it over her head and disappear.

“Can, can you promise to not tell anyone? Not Qrow, or Yang, or the Gatewatch?”

The warm smile slid off Tai’s face, worry rising up.

“Why? What’s wrong?” Tai asked softly, reaching out to run a hand through Ruby’s hair. Ruby closed her eyes, leaning forward.

“Because if the Gatewatch find out, they’ll want to go, and, and we’re not ready for that.”

“That,” Tai frowned. That didn't sound like Ruby. She was was, if nothing else, confident in her skill as a fighter, “what’s it about?”

“There’s,” Ruby took a ragged breath, “there’s this plane, Mirrodin, I went there when I was trying to get home. And, and it’s terrible,” Ruby finished weakly, head still bowed.
“Why?”

“There are these things there, Phyrexians. They're like Grimm but,” a sob wracked Ruby's body, “but so much worse.”

“Why?”

“Because they can think, and-” Ruby’s voice broke, and she coughed, “and they’re machines that are made from living people. There’s one part, the Progress Engine, and they cut people open while they're still alive. I saw it. It's, it’s terrible.”

“Rosebud-”

“And there’s this other part, the Machine Orthodoxy, and they flay people, and another-”

Tai pulled Ruby into a hug, cutting her off. Ruby seemed content to stop talking then, burrowing her head into his shoulder and just crying.

---X Line Break X---

Blake leaned against the mainsail, feeling the rocking of the boat beneath her. Her hand strayed to her pocket, and after a quick look around the other side, making sure her dad and Grey had yet to come up from the water, pulled out her Scroll, flicking open the Scroll to see the message chain her and Ruby had started before the Belladonnas had climbed aboard the ship.

Blake

Blake

Blaaaakkeee!

What?
Hi!

...You texted me for hours just to say hi?

You weren’t answering!

That’s because there’s a time difference.

Not that big of one :P How long before you come home?

We’ll be there by your birthday, if that’s what you’re worried about.

No! I just miss my best friend. What are you doing?

Blake smiled, pulling up the keyboard as she did.

We’re fishing on the Mistral sea with a friend of dad’s, then we’re heading-

“Hey!” Blake cried in indignation as Sienna grabbed her scroll, eyes zooming across it.

“What’s this? Texting your girlfriend?” Sienna’s eyes scanned the texts, “how’s she doing? Kali says she keeps winding up in the hospital.”

“Ruby isn’t my girlfriend,” Blake made a swipe for her Scroll, only for Sienna to lift it higher, typing something out.

“Annnnd... sent! There now we can chat,” the leader of the White Fang threw Blake’s Scroll back at her. Blake looked down, catching that Sienna replicated exactly what she had been planning to type, before looking up at the tigress who was lounging on a chair, “So, how’s Ruby been?”
“Shouldn't you be working?” Blake asked as she returned the Scroll to its spot, “Between the hospital and White Fang…”

“I can take a day off here and there,” Sienna stretched out, “Now, Ruby?”

“Why do you even care? You didn't talk much.”

“When one my patients, even a former one, winds up in the hospital twice in less than a year, I get curious. So? How is she?”

“She’s fine,” Blake said, “a bit bored, because she can't train, but fine.”

“Right, well,” Sienna shrugged, “if you ever need a good doctor under the table, you know where to find me.”

“You’re on the other side of the world from us.”

“And you showed up on the other side from Atlas, so I’m pretty sure-”

“What are you two talking about?” Kali walked over, a harpoon in hand.

“Just what she’s been getting up to at Signal,” Sienna stood taking the harpoon from Kali and walking towards the edge of the ship, “I’ll talk to you later, ok Blake?”

After the White Fang leader dove over the side, Blake turned to her mother.

“There’s something I had wanted to talk to you before I go back.”

“What?”

“Why didn't you tell me Ilia and Adam were coming to Vale?”
Kali’s face pulled into a frown, “Why do you ask?”

“Because my friends were nearby for a month and I didn't know? Ilia is still refusing to let me meet with Adam.”

“That’s because,” Kali seemed to weigh something, “that’s because Adam is angry at you.”

“Angry at me? Why?”

“He didn't take you going to Signal well. Your father nearly threw him out of the house after some of the things he said about you,” Kali stopped, “can we talk about this later, Blake? I don't want to ruin your father’s trip. He hasn't seen Grey in years.”

“Ok,” Blake said softly, wondering what Adam had said.

---X Line Break X---

Tai started the engine, leaning against the wheel while he waited for Ruby to come out. At the same time, he flicked through his messages, before pulling up Qrow.

*We need to talk when you get home.*

After a minute, Qrow messaged him back.

*i didn't do it.*

*Didn't do what? I just need to talk to you about Ruby.*

*oh nevermind. What’s up?*
It needs to wait till you get home.

ok?

This was something he couldn’t keep secret from Qrow. While he understood Ruby’s desire to keep the Gatewatch from running off and putting themselves in danger, again, before Karn finished whatever preparations Ruby had mentioned, and Yang was too young to worry know this (Ruby should have also been too young) Qrow and him were going to need to figure out how to help Ruby deal with living with this secret.

Tai looked up as the back door of his truck opened, letting Ruby climb in.

“Ready to go?”

“Yeah,” Ruby ran an arm over her nose, “can we stop by Delaney’s before we go to the manor? Chandra wants some mangos.”

“Sure,” Tai said, shifting the car into gear, “I guess they have mangos in other parts of the multiverse, huh?”

“Looks that way,” Ruby said, “I mean, it makes sense, I guess. There’s humans on every plane I’ve been too.”

“Yeah,” Tai agreed, “anything else on other Planes? I know you haven’t seen any Grimm or Faunus, but other than that?”

“Animals,” Ruby said, “dogs, cats. If a Grimm has an equivalent animal, that animal probably exists.”

Tai nodded, asking Ruby simple but enlightening questions to kill the time while they drove up.

Was there anything on other Planes that they didn't have here?
Vampires.

What were those?

Normally some type of cursed human, though there are some exceptions born that way. They have to drink blood to survive.

Blech. Can you imagine having to drink blood? That can't taste good.

The ones I've met liked it. Sun hates them. He had a bad run in with one on of the planes he visited.

Anything else?

Wizards. Almost every plane has some sort of spell caster. Oh, are we here?

Tai stepped out of the car, opening it and letting Ruby out.

As they walked into Delaney’s, Tai looked over to where Ciara was talking with her husband, pointing for the Atlesian man to place down a large crate behind the counter.

Ruby broke off, heading towards the fruit section while Tai made his way towards the pair.

---

Ruby grabbed a mango, testing it slightly. How did you tell when one was ripe?

“Ruby?”

“Leenie!” Ruby span, grinning wide at her friend, who was holding a box of apples, “I thought you were on vacation with your aunt?”
“Got back early. There were Goliath sightings in the area,” she mumbled, pulling an empty box down and replacing it with full one, “I didn't know you liked mangos.”

“Oh! They’re not for me,” Ruby said, “they’re for Chandra, she was asking for me to get some before I came over today.”

“Oh,” Aileen focused on the box, “you’re going there today?”

Huh?

“Well, I haven't been over for a week, so I’m visiting,” the fact that Tamiyo had sent someone their way was deliberately obfuscated.

“You haven't been over in a week?”

“I was busy!” now that school was nearly out, Ruby had been stuck between reading her history book in a ‘bang your head against the wall’ method of learning for tests, cobbling together some new Artifacts for… whatever came next, and getting back into practice, “I had tried to call you to ask for help studying yesterday, but you didn't answer. When did you get home?”

“You… you tried to call? Why not ask Blake or one of the others?”

Ruby’s eyebrows met, “Blake isn’t here, and none of the others are good at history. Why? Do you not want to help? I was thinking we could hang out for a bit afte-”

“No! I mean,” Aileen shook her head, “yes! I’d love to, when?”

“Tomorrow, maybe? If not, next week, before my birthday. Do you mind helping me find some ripe mangos?”

Aileen helped Ruby, and they returned to the storefront together.
“Oh!” Mrs. Delaney said, “are you two talking again?”

“Huh?”

“Don’t worry about it.” Aileen said, “you should go, and, uh,” she ducked her head, “Tell Gideon I said hi,” then she rushed out back.

That was… weird.

---

Dovin Baan unclasped his hands behind his back, idly taking in the manor in front of him. It looked like one of the ones an Aetherborn would use for one of their many parties. Decadent and wasteful.

The Vedalken checked his timepiece, examining the face telling him the time of this plane, before shutting it and stepping forward. Curling his hand into a fist, Dovin knocked three times, before lowering his hand and stepping back.

After four minutes, the door swung open, allowing a hunchbacked human to look up at him.

“Are you Dovin Baan?” he asked.

“I am.”

The hunchback opened the door, gesturing for him to enter the artificially lit foyer. As Dovin walked in, he briefly looked around.

A grandfather clock ticked away in one corner, and several other humans, some with animal features, stood around the room. The room smelled of… Dovin breathed in again… rot? Necromancy? Interesting, while he hadn't been to as many planes as most of his fellows, he had generally gotten the idea that they weren't trusted.
“I’ll bring you to the meeting room,” the hunchback said limping forward, “some of the masters and mistresses are already waiting for you but others will be a bit later.”

Dovin followed the man up the main steps, looking out the windows lining the back of the room. Sections of the yard were scorched bare, while others had cratered in, and yet others were choked with brambles or shaded by monoliths of metal and runes. One particularly unlucky spot appeared to have had all four happen to it.

The hunchback followed his gaze, “Oh! Don’t worry yourself with that, merely the masters and mistresses training. Come, we shouldn’t keep them waiting.”

After a few minutes of walking, the human stopped in front of a door, raising his hand to knock.

“Send him in, Gared,” a voice called before his hand touched the door, and instead Gared swung it open, stepping aside as Dovin walked in.

In the center of the room was a large rectangular table, around which the Gatewatch, Dovin assumed, was seated. Turning his attention away from them for a moment, he examined the rest of the room.

Behind them was a fireplace, the flames snapping and warming the room. In each of the four corners were lamps, lighting up the room. If Dovin had eyebrows, he would have raised one.

Aether? No, it didn't have the telltale blue glow Aether had in a plane. Then what?

“How do these work?” he asked aloud, not really paying attention to the rest of the room. He reached up with one hand, tapping a spot on his filigree, causing an eyeglass to spin up in front of his right eye.

“They use Dust to make energy,” a young voice called.

Dovin turned, examining the people he was to be meeting with.

On either side of the fireplace were a pair of men, one in white armor and the other wearing blue
robes. Next to each of them were two women, one wearing green robes with monochrome green eyes next to the man in white and the other wearing a dress next to the man in blue.

Next to the green woman was a young girl wearing black with a red cloak around her and a leather bound book in her hand, while the corresponding chair was empty. A young woman with blond hair sat next to the girl, and a boy around the girl's age next to the empty chair.

Finally, there were three extra empty chairs.

“Hello,” the armored man smiled, “it’s nice to meet you. Would you like to take a seat while we wait for the last member to arrive? Two aren't able to make it, I’m afraid.”

---

Gideon watched as Dovin looked at the chair, but didn't take his seat, taking in the man. His skin was blue, and his face had high cheekbones, ears that ended in a point, and fuchsia eyes that, like most Planeswalkers, glowed faintly. There was an extra finger on each hand, and he was wearing a red suit covered in spirals and filigrees of brass. Something about the basic design almost reminded him of…

As if his thoughts had summoned her, the door slammed open, and Chandra came into the room, rushing over to her seat next to Liliana

“Shall we start with introductions?” Gideon asked.

“That seems like a good place to start, yes,” Dovin agreed, though he still didn't sit down.

“Very well,” Gideon coughed, “I am Gideon, this,” he gestured to his right, “Is Jace, next to him is Lil-”

“Liliana Vess,” the resident necromancer introduced herself, standing and giving a curtsey, before sitting back down.

“Yes,” Gideon said, sharing a nonplussed look with Nissa, “this is Nissa, Chandra, Ruby, Sun, and
“And the two currently missing?” Dovin asked.

“Oh, Ral and Blake couldn't make it. Ral had work to do, and Blake was visiting her family when we got your message.”

“I see,” Dovin said, “and you will be adequately suited to deal with my request, even without two members?”

“We should be,” Gideon said, “should we begin?”

“Yes,” Dovin said, “I am here to discuss the matters I mentioned in my letter to Mister Beleren.”

Gideon looked at Jace, “not everyone here has seen this letter, so if you could start from the beginning?

Dovin breathed in through his nose, “I see,” Gideon got the feeling Dovin didn't think they were very smart, “I will recapitulate.”

Dovin started to pace slowly, “I am here as a duly appointed official of the Consulate of the plane Kaladesh,” Gideon saw Liliana give Chandra a strange look, while the pyromancer had suddenly tightened her grip on her chair, “I have done my research on the government of Mister Beleren’s plane, unlike Ravnica, with its guilds in competition, the Consulate is a single, centralized government. All resources are evenly distributed, and nobody wants for any-”

Chandra leapt from her chair, heat rolling from her frame, “That’s the biggest pile of horseshit I’ve ever heard!”

Dovin didn't look intimidated, “It might sound unbelievab-”

“What about all the people with Aether shortages!?”
“I don’t recall mentioning Aether,” for the first time since the conversation started, Dovin’s tone changed, “have you been to Kaladesh, Miss…?”

“Nalaar,” Chandra growled out her last name, her hair raising up on drafts of heat as embers made themselves known.

“Ah,” Dovin gave Chandra a look like she was something disgusting Drache had dragged in, “I see,” he turned to Gideon, “I’m sorry, but it appears that you associate with the kind of… refuse that we don’t want. I’ll show myself out.”

Dovin span on the spot, and Gideon thought for a moment that Chandra was going to attack him while his back was turned, especially with the gathering flames at her hair, before the door slammed shut.

“Chandra!” Gideon barked, “what was that?”

“I,” Chandra hung her head, smoke rising, “I have a lot of explaining to do, don’t I?”

---

Chandra fell back into her chair, waiting for someone to say something. Finally, someone grabbed her hand under the table. Jerking her head up, Chandra stared at Nissa.

“What’s wrong?” the Animist asked softly, “did you know him?”

“No,” Chandra shook her head, ignoring the still smoking strands striking her cheeks.

“Then why did he know you?” Gideon asked, frowning, “obviously not well enough to recognize you on sight, but he recognized your last name.”

“...The Consulate killed my parents,” Chandra admitted reluctantly, “and tried to execute me.”

“What?” Gideon’s eyebrows met, “I thought it was the Order of Heliud that did that?” he sounded
like he was accusing her.

“I never said that,” Chandra defended, “You assumed that on your own.”

“But it’s what you wanted me to assume,” Gideon rebutted, “right?” When Chandra didn't answer, he repeated himself, “right?”

“Giddy,” Gideon flinched at the dreaded nickname, the fact that Drache, now the size of a full grown cat, crashed onto the the table a second later probably didn't help, “that’s not what’s important right now.”

The look on Gideon’s face said that he wasn’t of the same opinion, but also didn't want to argue with the girl who currently had a large drake on the table, “Right, of course, you were saying Chandra?”

Chandra sighed as Drache crawled up her arm and curled around her shoulders, Chandra shot a thankful look at Ruby, even if she didn't find much comfort in having a large reptile on her, “They killed my parents, and tried to do the same to me.”

“Why?” Thalia asked, “I know there can be corruption in something that large, but-”

“Magic is illegal on Kaladesh,” Chandra cut in, “and fire magic is like, super illegal, so they wanted me dead.”

It was ultimately Jace who broke the silence that fell after that answer, “weren't you born with your magic?”

“Yeah,” Chandra didn't say anymore, didn't need to say any more, as everyone grew even quieter.

“Well,” Nissa was the one who broke it this time, “I’m glad you spoke up.”

“What do you mean?” Chandra asked, trying to ignore the prickling of tears forming. She hadn't talked about this in years. Of her dad lying on the ground bleeding out, and Baral standing above him, blood dripping from his blade as he negated Chandra’s magic.
“We're a…” Nissa stopped, “I’m sorry, I can't think of quite the right word-”

“Family?” Ruby offered, “it’s not that hard.”

“I was trying to avoid it so I didn't accidently offend anyone,” Nissa responded quietly.

“Who would you offend?” Ruby sounded legitimately confused.

Chandra felt something brush against her mind, a gentle request. Something about the fact that even Jace was treating her like she was glass actually irritated her even more than if had just barged in, “What?”

“Oh?” Ruby looked worried, “do you uh-”

“Not you.”

I was just going to say that I’m fairly certain she did offend Lili, Jace carefully inserted an image of Liliana looking startled for a moment into her head. Looking over, Chandra saw Liliana’s face was pulled into a sharp frown of worry.

“Here’s a question though,” Sun spoke up, “what do we do about whatever he was here for? What?” he defended as everyone looked at him, “yeah, the Consulars-”

“Consulate,” Ruby cut in.

“Yeah, those,” Sun said without missing a beat, “they’re asses, but there are plenty of people who didn't do anything wrong that could get hurt.”

“…He has a point,” Nissa said reluctantly, “so we’re going to have to go to Kaladesh.”

“I can't,” Jace said, “I’m sorry, I really want to help, but I have paperwork ,” he spat the word like
a curse, “and I need Gideon’s help… maybe Thalia too.”

“Help with your paperwork?” Gideon sounded confused

“No, well, sort of,” Jace said, “High ranking members of the Azorius Senate have been eliminated over the course of the last year.”

“Eliminated?”

“Turned to stone,” Jace hesitated, “I think I know who did it, there was a gorgon assassin with a chip against the Azorius last year. A Planeswalker,” Jace sighed, “I know whatever is happening at Kaladesh is important, but you’re my best hope for this one Gideon. I’m busy, so is Ral, and you’re the only member of the Gatewatch actually part of a major guild. If you say that Thalia is your student…”

“I see,” Gideon said, “then me and Thalia will go to Ravnica, and Ruby, Sun, Liliana and Nissa will go to Kaladesh-”

“What about me?” Chandra asked.

“I-” Gideon hesitated, “I don't want to make you go back there if you're not ready-”

“I’m not glass, Gids,” Chandra stood up, “my parents became Aether smugglers because they wanted to help the people the Consulate was ignoring. If I just abandoned them when they need help, I’d be spitting on my parent’s grave. I’m going.

Got a question for you, oh reader mine.

Over on the SV thread, I did a series of snarky posts explaining Magic the Gathering (that is, snarking at Magic the Gathering, NOT snarking at the reader for not knowing it.

Would you want me to post some of them on Ao3 as a side story? Kinda a cross between World of Remnant and the Planeswalker's guides, with a bit of actual story mixed in of it being a REALLY crappy initiation presentation for new members of the
Taskforce.
Chapter 9

Ruby ran a hand along the accumulating tattoos appearing along her right arm. If she kept using
seals, she was gonna have more than Jace, wasn't she? She couldn't think of a way to keep these all
around, though, and you never knew when she’d need them…

Did that make her paranoid? Probably, but after Mirrodin, Zendikar, and Innistrad, she felt she
deserved to be paranoid. The only problem was that it was becoming harder and harder to hide
them in her day to day life. They’d probably form anyways, Jace and Nissa both had tattoos from
their mana use.

“Chandra?” Ruby asked, “can you tell us about Kaladesh? I want to be sure I’m ready.”

“Yeah,” Chandra said from where she was getting into her armor with Nissa’s help, “what do ya
wanna know?”

“You were talking about Aether? I thought spells were illegal?”

“We didn't use them for spells,” Chandra paused, wincing, “Ow! Nissa, you caught my left…”

“Oh! Sorry,” Nissa adjusted the armor.

“Anyways, we used it as a clean energy source. Kinda like Dust. We were a plane of Artificers—”

“Artifacts!” Ruby’s head popped up, eyes gleaming, “there are artifacts there!?”

“Oh boy,” Sun sighed, “now you’ve done it.”

“Yeah,” Chandra laughed, “there are plenty of artifacts.”

“This is gonna be great! We’re gonna save the day, see artifacts. Bla—” Ruby stopped, looking
around for her friend, “oh… right.”
“Hey!” Sun threw an arm around her neck, dragging her into a headlock.

“Ahk! Sun, let go!” Ruby whined as Sun noogied her lightly.

“Come on! It'll be you and me, just like old times. I was starting to think you didn't want me around. Like you said, we'll save the day, and then be back by your birthday so you can see your crush!”

“Sun!” Ruby whined again, struggling in the headlock, “let go!”

“We’re ready to go whenever you two are, kiddos.”

“Where will we be starting?”

“Ghirapur. It’s the largest city on Kaladesh, and where the Consulate is strongest,” Chandra cracked her neck, “see you on the other side everyone!”

Chandra span on the spot, fading out of existence as she took a step forward. After a few minutes, enough that they were sure that she had reached Kaladesh, they each planewalked after her.

It was hard to explain the Blind Eternities. You couldn't see anything, not even darkness, your lungs burned for air that didn't exist, but you could feel the aether lashing at you on all sides, trying to find a weak spot to tear you apart. By the end of a walk, you could feel it about to break through, flaying your flesh from the bones, and then destroying those bones. The only thing that existed was the trail of mana you were following, either a natural one, or from a Planeswalker.

Ruby staggered as she stepped out of the space between worlds, gasping for air as Chandra caught her. After a moment, where she saw Sun come out much the same way, she stood up, looking around.

“Wow,” Ruby span in place, eyes scanning their surroundings. It was a city, kinda like Vale. Cars drove down the street, and heli- thopters flew above them. The sidewalk they were on was full of people, some of them giving the Gatewatch dirty looks as they ducked around them.
Aether powered vehicle, mass produced off plans made by Ahana Chopra. Three years old.

Aether powered vehicle, custom made by Jayesh Sodhi. One year old, used in illegal street races.

Thopter, mass produced off plans made by Faiyaz Barsar. Six months old, used to broadcast reports.

Automaton, mass produced off plans by Consul of War, Samar Johar. In use for two months, for combat against Renegades.

“Hey!” Sun pushed Ruby, “come on, don't shut down on us now. We still have a lot to do.”

“Yeah,” Ruby shook her head to disperse the plans that had appeared inside them, “yeah. Right. Let’s go.”

---X Line Break X---

Chandra bit her cheek as the quintet made their way around Ghirapur, taking in how the city she had grown up in had changed over the years. The answer of which was that it really hadn't, except everything was bigger.

Skyscrapers of brass and glass rose above their heads, tubing with blue aether carrying power to the top of the buildings. Chandra felt her mouth water as a familiar scent caught her nose.

“Ladoos!” She breathed, wondering which type.

“What do you mean?” Sun asked.

“Ladoos! They're made from lentils, or flour. I wonder why they're being sold.”

“What do you mean?”
“They’re normally made during festivals. Jaya, I wish I had money to buy some-”

“We’re on it,” Sun said, moving forward with Ruby.

“Hey-”

Before Chandra had finished, Sun had ruffled Ruby’s hair, and the girl had dropped her cloak, shrinking down as Sun did the same to his own hair. Sun handed Ruby Ruyi Jingu Bang, which she hid in a tattoo.

“What do you think they’re doing?” Nissa asked as the duo approached the booth, grabbing Ruby’s cloak.

“I don’t know,” Chandra said, “what do you think, Liliana?”

“I don’t know,” the necromancer said, “but if I had to guess, they’re stealing you some of those Ladoos.”

Sun stepped towards the counter, talking to the woman behind the counter. Behind him, Ruby was looking up, doe eyed, with magic shimmering in them.

Sun seemed to be weaving a story, with the occasional sniffle from Ruby, moving his hands like he was pleading.

The woman had a sad smile on her face as she handed over a small container with ladoos, the sugary balls steaming as she waved them off down the street. As they did, something cold pressed against their minds.

Meet us at the end of the next street.

“That was actually quite impressive,” Liliana said quietly, “should we go meet them?”
“Yeah,” Chanda said, “Yeah. Let’s do that.”

Chandra led the older Gatewatchers around the corner, looking for Sun and Ruby. The were sitting on a bench, the ladoos next to them, and giggling as people passed by. Ruyi Jingu Bang was folded away behind Sun’s back again.

“What’s so funny?” Nissa asked as she handed back the cloak, which Ruby threw on.

“I was just telling Sun how I could bring down that thopter with one rock,” Ruby was pointing at a thopter spinning over the river, “wanna see?”

Chandra watched the thopter hovered in air, a glassy orb at the bottom while blue aether pumped out of the body and into the rotors. Something about it set her on edge, like it was watching them…

“Do it,” she said. They couldn’t be too careful, she was, as far as she knew, still a wanted criminal here.

“Ok!” Ruby grabbed a rock before throwing it at the thopter, where it shattered the tube, sending it crashing into the river.

“Here,” Sun pushed the ladoos into Chandra’s hand, “I told you we could get them!”

“As touching as that is,” Liliana said dryly, “we still need to find whatever Baan wanted us for.”

---X Line Break X---

Liliana stayed slightly behind the rest of the group, hand gravitating towards the hidden pocket she kept the Chain Veil in. The spirits were, for once, mercifully silent. It let her focus.

Her eyes gravitated to Ruby. The young Artificer was skipping along, talking animatedly with Sun as they went.

Family? They weren’t family, Josu had been her family. The Gatewatch was little more than pawns,
bodies to be thrown in between her and the demons.

“Mommy! Look at the people in the funny clothes!” Liliana’s head snapped towards the kid pointed at them, “do you think they’re for the Inventor’s Fair? They don’t look like they’re from around here!”

You don't know the half of it, brat, Liliana thought,

“Did you hear that?” She asked aloud, “there’s an Inventor’s Fair.”

Ruby’s head snapped around so quickly Liliana was certain it should have given her whiplash, eyes widening in excitement and joy.

“An Inventor’s Fair? Sun, did you hear that? There’s an Inventor’s Fair!”

“Not now,” Nissa said, “we need to find the threat.”

“Oh,” Ruby deflated, “yeah.”

“Unless,” Liliana inserted her back into the conversation smoothly, “the threat is at the Inventor’s Fair. Where else would they be in a place that puts so much importance on Artifice?”

Nissa’s grip on her staff tightened, “You have a point,” she reluctantly agreed, “but we need other things first, a base of operations, a feel for the city, a- a-” she trailed off, looking to the side, “what is that?”

They were next to a long stretch of park, hundreds of plants stretched towards the sky in full bloom. They were arranged in patterns that, while aesthetically pleasing, couldn't possibly be natural.

“It’s a greenway,” Chandra said, “they’re sections of Ghirapur maintained by the elves. They’re supposed to be keeping them natural but,” she shrugged, “I guess everything in Ghirapur has to be pretty.”
Nissa clicked her tongue, before turning away from it, “we need to find some way to get money-”

Sun and Ruby opened their mouths, “-that doesn't involve stealing. What you did before was very

nice, but we can't steal everything we want. Chandra, do you know any way to get money quick?

Or a place to stay?”

“What about things we need?” Sun asked under his breath.

“No?” Chandra sounded worried, “I- it’s been a long time since I was here. Wait! Yeah, I do! There

used to be a mine outside Ghirapur, from before the Aether boom. I had a hammock down there,

back before… everything. I don't know if it’s still there, or if they built over it, but if it is, we can

use that.”

“A mine?” Liliana cut in, “you want us to stay in a mine? Isn't there anywhere else?”

“Not without money,” Ruby said, “trust me, it’s the mine, or a warehouse. It took me weeks to

clean up my warehouse, almost a month to set it up. A mine is big enough that we can divide it up,

especially if we need to bring the rest of the Gatewatch in. Why don't a couple of us go look for it,

while the rest continue searching?”

Liliana could work with this, she knew it, “A fine idea. Nissa, Sun, why don't you two do that,

while Chandra, Ruby and I look around?”

“Why us?” Sun asked.

“Chandra has the greatest knowledge of Kaladesh’s culture, and Ruby can identify any Artifacts

we come across. Meanwhile, you’re good with cities, and Nissa can, hopefully, mold the mine into

something more… acceptable.”

“But we don’t have any idea where it is,” Nissa argued.

“Then you and Chandra go,” Liliana didn't miss a beat, “and I’ll stay with the kids.”

“I’m not sure-” Nissa started.
“I insist, dear. What’s the worst that can happen? If something goes wrong, Ruby can send Drache
to find you. You can still track Sparks through him, right?”

“Yes,” Ruby said, “but-”

“Besides,” Liliana continued, ruffling Ruby’s hair in a way she hoped came off as sisterly, “I
haven’t spent any time with you two yet! We’ve been working together for months now, Sun, you
live in my house, but we’ve barely spoken! How can we call each other family if we hardly know
each other?”

Especially since it wouldn’t do well to have them decide she wasn’t worth defending when the time
to confront her demons came. Or, Urza forbid, Bolas came knocking to call in her debt again.

“I-” Ruby pushed her hair down, “I guess?”

“...Fine,” Nissa acquitted, “we’ll meet up at-” she looked around, before pointing to the largest
skyscraper, so large it touched the swirling Aether, “that tower-”

“Bad idea,” Chandra cut in, “that’s the Consulate’s base.”

“We’re helping them.”

“We’re helping the people ,” Chandra stressed, “and I might still be wanted. Let’s not go walking
in front of the home of a group that wants me dead, eh?”

“Then where do we meet?”

“Here?” Chandra said, “or Freejam or Bomat. Someplace that you guys can find by asking around.
I’d say Eleven Bridges, but that was where the Consulate enforcer’s headquarters was, last time I
was here.”

“What’s Freejam?”
“Skyships and aviaries, stuff like that,” Chandra shrugged, “Bomat is the docks.”

“Freejam,” Ruby said instantly.

“Bomat,” Sun said just as quickly.

The two looked at each other, before breaking into a quick game of rock, paper, scissors. Sun chose rock, Ruby paper.

“Yes! Freejam!” Ruby grinned.

“Right,” Chandra drawled, “see you there.”

Liliana waited for the two women to disappear before turning to the kids, “come on, let’s go find that Inventor’s Fair.”

“But Nissa-” Ruby started.

“Needs to lighten up. If our problem is planning to attack the fair, he isn’t going to wait for us to be ready. Besides, it will be fun, and I’m sure we can find some way to get some money while we’re there.”

“I don’t know-”

“You shouldn’t overthink these things,” Liliana said.

“Aren’t you supposed to be the responsible adult?” Sun asked.

“I’ll let you two in on a little secret,” Liliana dropped her voice into a playful stage whisper, “there doesn’t need to be a responsible one.”
Nissa waited for them to be far enough away from Liliana, before planting her hand on the greenway’s ground. A twig broke from the ground, twisting and warping until it formed into a pair of small four legged Zendikari beasts.

“Follow them,” she said quietly to one, which turned, rushing off with speed only Ruby and Sun could surpass.

“What’s that about?” Chandra asked.

“I don’t trust Liliana,” Nissa said, “take it from someone who uses Black, she has some sort of ulterior motive for this. They always do.”

“You don’t, Blake doesn’t… I don’t know about Sorin, but I don’t think he does.”

“I paid the price for my arrogance alongside the people of Zendikar. Sorin always had an ulterior motive, even if it was just him not wanting his home plane destroyed. Blake doesn’t,” Nissa agreed, “but that’s because she's already caught the side of her that could. Even if Liliana doesn't have one, which I severely doubt, I’d prefer to have something to stop her but not need it, than to need it but not have it.”

“You sound like Jace,” Chandra said.

“That’s because Jace knows he shouldn't trust her either, but does against his better judgment. Lead the way,” Nissa stood up, gesturing for Chandra to lead the way.

They walked down the street for a while, and every few streets, Chandra would stop, looking around.

“Are you looking for something?” Nissa looked around warily, ready to draw her sword at the first sign of trouble.
“No,” Chandra sighed, “aren’t you supposed to come back to your hometown and realize that everything wasn’t big, you were just small?”

“I don’t know,” Nissa said, “my home is gone.”

“Oh yeah…” Chandra said quietly, “I know a place nearby, can we stop by it?”

“Why? What’s there?”

“It was one of my parent’s safehouses. I want to check if there’s something left, maybe an old artifact Ruby can patch up so we can sell it.”

“Of course we can,” Nissa didn’t have the heart to point out it had been over a decade, and that even if there was something still there, Ruby wasn’t a miracle worker, “but sell it? Wouldn’t you rather keep it?”

“Yeah,” Chandra ducked into an alley, “but we need money, and if we can sell it,” Chandra ducked down another, “it will make things much easier to help everyone, and I think-” Chandra stopped talking, staring at the mosaic across from them.

It was circular, and the small tiles that made it up had started to chip and fall off at some point. Despite that, Nissa could still make out the original image.

An inventor, judging by the goggles pushed up onto his forehead. He wore a red jacket, and the arm pointed towards them had a metallic shoulderpad. Reddish brown hair feathered around his goggles, the same color as the goatee on his chin. The look on his face was one of soft amusement, fatherly, almost.

“Do you know him?”

“My dad,” Chandra lifted up a fragment of tile from the ground, pressing it against the mosaic, “Kiran.”

The moment she let go, the tile fell, cracking on the ground. Despite the sound of people not all
that far away, it echoed through the alley like a gunshot.

“What was he like?” Nissa reached out, placing a hand on Chandra’s shoulder. She wasn't the best at these things, but her friend was hurt, so she could try.

“Kind,” Chandra, “and calm. I used to get so frustrated trying to make stuff. This one time, I started mashing together two pieces of metal together, cause I wanted to be like them sooo much. And he walked over and took them from me, and he said ‘Chandra, even if you don't become an inventor, me and your mother will be proud of you.’”

“Do you think they would be?”

“I don't know. I did a lot of dumb stuff, but I helped too. But what's this doing here?”

“Do you want to go for that safehouse?”

Chandra was quiet for a couple, “No.”

“Why?”

“Because this is where it should’ve been.”

---X Line Break X---

Thalia followed behind Gideon as the approached the house. As they approached, the pair standing in front looked up, the woman stepping forward.

“I’m sorry, sir, ma’am. This area is currently cordoned off until—”

“Gideon Jura,” Gideon raised a pair of badges, one with a red fist on it, the other with the symbol of the newly made Living Guildpact’s investigation division. In other words, the Gatewatch, “special investigator for the Living Guildpact.”
“Do you have any evidence of this?” she asked.

Gideon put the medal in her hand, where she turned it over a couple of times, muttering an incantation. Eventually, she handed back the badge, nodding.

“Everything seems in order Investigator Jura, but who’s that,” the woman acknowledged Thalia’s existence for the first time.

“Thalia,” she introduced herself, sticking to the story they had decided on before, “Investigator Jura’s apprentice.”

The fact that Gideon stood a head taller despite being only a year older than her somehow led credence to that.

“I see,” she nodded, “go on in, but be warned, we have a Orzhov coming in a few. They’re going to try and pull his soul back for a few minutes so we can ask questions. Would you like to be there for that?”

“Yes. Come on, Thalia,” as they entered the house, Gideon’s entire posture changed, becoming more relaxed, “you did well out there.”

“So did you, where’d you learn to act like that?”

“Bant, it’s the plane you went to when you spar-” Gideon’s hand suddenly impacted his face.

“What’s wrong?” Thalia reached for her saber.

“I forgot about Bant,” Gideon said, “I had been planning to look into it, but between Emrakul, Tibalt and coordinating with Ozpin’s taskforce, it slipped my mind.”

Thalia nodded. The taskforce was only surpassed by the Gatewatch itself in how many unlikely alliances there were among their ranks. Faunus worked with the ex-heiress to the SDC, the poor
worked with the rich, and more.

They view Planeswalkers as a threat, perhaps rightly so, Traft pitched in for the first time that day, your kind leaves destruction in your wake more often than not.

“Do you want to do that later?”

“Maybe when we catch the killer, and the rest of the team finishes with Kaladesh.”

At that point, they finally stopped procrastinating, pushing the door open.

Inside was a stone man, his face locked in a scream of fear, and if Thalia wasn't already aware of what it actually was, she would have written it off as an incredibly well made, if strange, statue.

He was a portly man, probably in his late thirties to early forties, judging by the lines impeccably captured on his face. He was wearing robes that had every line, every crease recorded in stone, “Who was he?”

“Senator Agoston of the Azorius Senate,” Gideon rifled through the notes Jace had given them before they set off for the most recent killing. So recent, in fact, that the report came as they were being briefed on the situation, “Jace said he would have Lavinia run more info down when-”

They both jumped as a banging came from the closet door. Sharing a look, the two Planeswalkers drew their weapons, approaching it carefully. Thalia muttered a single word, but knew the request came loud and clear, “Traft?”

The geist that shared Thalia’s body stepped forward, sliding smoothly out and through the door in front of them. He was gone for less than ten seconds before reappearing and returning to Thalia’s body.

Two children. One has their legs bound.

“Hello?” Thalia took another step forward, sheathing her sword and suddenly glad she had left Avacyn’s spear at her apartment, “Can you hear me?”
“...Yes.” Came the voice of a little girl.

“I’m Thalia,” she said quietly, “what’s your name?”

“Alivia.”

“Are you alright, Alivia?”

“’m fine.”

“Is the closet locked?”

“Yes.”

“Alright, is there room for you to step back? I’m going to try and break the lock.”

“How’s my daddy?”

Thalia froze, turning to look at the statue, “actually, can you stay in there for a bit longer, sweetie? There something we need to move real quick.”

Normally Thalia would never use the word ‘sweetie’ but her lessons as a Cathar had involved learning to get information out of kids.

“I need the potty.”

Great.

“Can you hold it for a few minutes? We just need to move something.”
“Ok.”

Thalia turned to Gideon, “I’m going to keep her distracted, go get the guards and move Agoston.”

“Are you sure that's a good idea?”

“I don't know, but do you want to help me interview a kid while their father is in the room and turned to stone?”

“Good point,” Gideon turned and left.

Thalia turned back to the door, pulling out a small journal and pen. Flicking past notes of Ravnica, Remnant and Liliana’s behavior, Thalia stopped on the first empty page.

“Alivia, I’m gonna ask you some questions ok?”

“Ok.”

“How old are you?”

“Seven.”

“Is there anyone else in there with you?” There was, but she hadn't gotten that information.

“Yeah, my little brother Adrian.”

“How old is he?”

“Three.”
“Is he alright?”

“He’s napping. Fell asleep a while ago.”

Thalia looked behind her, watching Gideon and the two guards lift the petrified Agoston and carry him away. She would give them a few minutes to find a place to hide him. As awkward as talking to the girl through a door was, it really wouldn't be any better if she knew her father was dead.

“Why are you in the closet?” A very good question, one she probably should have asked before.

“She made us.”

“Who?”

“She was this scary lady, she came into the house earlier. Daddy yelled at her to leave, and she punched him real hard and he fell asleep, that's when she made us go into the closet. She tied Adrian up when he didn't, Daddy woke up yelling, then things got quiet.”

“I see. I'm going to get you out now,” Thalia lifted up her sword, still in the scabbard, only for Traft to cut her off.

There’s a lock. Twisting it sideways should do it.

Right.

Thalia did that, opening the door. On the other side of it was a small girl wearing a light blue dress and red hair, there was a little boy wearing some sort of robe, his feet were bound with rope.

“Why don't you go to the restroom while I get the rope off your brother?”

“Ok!” she left the room, humming.
Thalia returned her sheathed sword to its resting place, drawing the knife she kept handy and quickly cutting the rope.

Storing the knife away in one of the pockets Ruby had enchanted, Thalia lifted the boy up, walking him over to the bed and tucking him in.

A couple of minutes later, Alivia skipped back into the room, smiling.

“I’m good!”

“Alright, I just have a few more questions to ask you, then you can go to bed. You must be tired.”

“Yeah.”

“What does your dad do for work?”

“He works for one of the guilds! The Azorius Senate!”

“What’s he do there?”

“I don’t know.”

That was fine, they could get that information off Jace.

“Do you remember anything your daddy said to her?”

“Uh…” Alivia nibbled her lips, “Yes! But I’m not allowed to say it. It’s a bad word.”

“Tell you what,” Thalia leaned in close, “it will be our little secret.”
“He called her a Golgari,” Alivia looked around, before dropping her voice even further, “he called her a Golgari bitch.”

“One last question, Alivia. You’ve been doing great and have been really helpful. Do you have any family? A mom, grandparents, aunts or uncles?”

“Mommy's gone,” Alivia said, “but I still have my uncle Aurel. He lives down the street!”

“Ok, Alivia you can go to be-”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Sure.”

“Why are you here?”

“Me and my friend are looking for the mean lady for the Living Guildpact.”

“You know the Living Guildpact?” Alivia’s eyes sparkled with joy. Probably for the last time in a while.

“Yes,” Thalia paused, before flicking to a new page and tearing it out, writing her apartment’s address down, “that’s my home. If you ever need anything, don’t hesitate to come by. Even if I’m not there, you can leave a message with someone.”

Everyone on her floor of the apartment complex were either Planeswalkers or knew they existed.

“Is something wrong Miss Thalia?”

“Don't worry about it right now. Sleep.”
“Ok,” Alivia crawled into bed next to her brother, and was out like a light.

Thalia stepped out of the room, making way to the male guard.

“Ma’am?”

“I need you to go down the street, find a Aurel. He needs to know.”

“Yes, Ma’am. Anything else before I go?”

“Where's Gid- Inspector Jura?”

“Outside, we moved the victim to the back yard.”

“And why didn't you find the kids before?”

“We only did a cursory search, ma’am. We found him and reported it. We were ordered to stay here until support came.”

“Very well, you’re dismissed,” Thalia turned on her heel, making her way to the back yard as he left.

Gideon was standing in front of the stone man. As she approached, he started to talk, “We had gorgons on Theros. Did you have them on Innistrad?”

“Not that I know of.”

I never encountered them.

“Traft says the same.”
“The story goes that the first Gorgon was a woman named Aikatrine. She was so beautiful that her father wouldn't let her out, didn't want to risk her beauty because he knew someone would pay a high bride price for her hand. But she wanted to be free, to do something other than be locked away. So one day she snuck out, and all who saw her fell hopelessly in love. So in love, in fact that they wanted to take her and lock her away, so that beauty could never be tarnished.”

*Interesting, but what does this have to do with anything?*

“So she ran, chased by the entire city into the forest. And all the while she prayed, to each and every god in the Pantheon, but only three answered.

To Nylea, goddess of the hunt, this was a sport hunt, which she wouldn't accept. Arrows rained from Nyx, tearing through the closest hunters.

Phenax’s blessing was to warp her beauty and ravage her mind, anyone who saw her would become petrified at the sight.”

“That doesn't sound like much of a blessing.”

“It’s what you get when you pray to the god of deception. He’s the second worst of them, in my opinion.”

“What was the last blessing?

“Pharika, goddess of medicine changed her further, recreating Aikatrine in her image. Legs turned to a tail, her hair to snakes and her blood was granted great healing properties. But Pharika is also the goddess of poison, so her talons would poison any who touched them.”

“They… they don't seem like very pleasant gods.”

Avacyn, before her fall, had been worth worshipping. Even if she never smiled at her work, she would save anyone. From a scared child to a elder, if she could save them from the darkness that encroached at every moment, she would. Bruna and the Flight of Alabaster had refused to stop protecting when Avacyn was sealed in the Helvault, and Thalia had trained with a member of
Gisela’s flight at one point. Even after everything, Sigarda and the Flight of Herons defended Innistrad.

“They aren't. They meddle and ruin people's lives for their own amusement,” Gideon was quiet for a second, “do you think that’s how people view us?”

“What do you mean?”

“Planeswalkers, all of us. We appear out of nowhere, normally just prior to something going wrong, and then we leave. We don't have to deal with the fallout of our actions, but everyone else does.”

“What caused this train of thought?”

“We got mail the other day, I was planning to talk to everyone about it when Blake got back.”

“What?”

“We got invited to go to Signal.”

“Really?”

“Yes,” Gideon said, “Qrow vouched for us. Everyone other than Ruby, Jace, and Ral. I don't know what to do.”

“Why wouldn't we?”

“We’re supposed to be dedicated to stopping multiplane threats, but-”

“We spend so much time on Remnant that it doesn't feel right to just do nothing.”
“Yes. Just, everything with Chandra, and this, it got me thinking, worrying.”

“We’ll figure it out. Just put it out of mind right now. The Orzhov should be here-

“-Now,” another voice cut in, a man wearing priestly garb, “this is him, I take it?”

“Yes,” Gideon stepped aside.

“Well then,” he raised his symbol and Thalia felt a familiar and not unpleasant thrum of mana, “let us begin.”

---X Line Break X---

Ruby walked around the Inventor’s Fair, smiling widely as they passed through crowds towards the center area.

“Damn,” Sun whistled, “look at that.”

Ruby looked over where Sun was grinning at the speedway. Aether powered vehicles were being shown off. Currently tearing across the course was a motorcycle.

“Uh…” Ruby looked up at Liliana.

“What?” Liliana said, “I don't care if he goes. He can take care of himself.”

“Go ahead, Sun.”

“Woo!” Sun span in place, jogging in place, “I’ll meet you… You know what? I’ll find you! Shouldn't be that hard!”

“You know,” Liliana said, “it just occurred to me that you might need money to get in there.”
“Sun’ll have enough by the time he gets there,” Ruby said, turning to watch a peacock made out of bronze, adding the design to her increasing mental library. Maybe, if she got enough, she could bury them.

Ruby yelped as Liliana pulled her out of the way of an elf rushing by with a cart.

“Well, that was rude,” the necromancer huffed, “are you alright?”

“Yeah. I wonder what’s got them so worked up?”

“Well, at least everyone else seems to be having a good time. Are you enjoying yourself?”

“Yep!” Ruby’s eyes sparkled with joy as she looked around, “Look! They're testing weapons over there! Maybe I’ll find something to upgrade Crescent Rose!”

“That does sound grand,” Liliana agreed.

“Is there something you want to do, though?”

“No, I’m fine with doing what you want for now. However, let's talk while you look around.”

“Ok? About what?”

“How about that trick you and Sun did earlier, Little Rose,” something about the pet name sent the hairs on the back of her neck on end, “I suppose you couldn't have been completely clean, what with you apparently knowing Tezzeret, but you always seemed… I don't know, moral,” Liliana said the word like it was an insult.

“Is there something wrong with that?”

“It’s just, why limit yourself? You could do so much more, be so much more, so why restrict yourself?”
“Just, imagine for a moment that we all wake up tomorrow to discover the Weakening never happened. Can imagine that, Little Rose? You wake up tomorrow and anything you wanted was yours? That you could be anything? A wave of your hand and all those pesky Grimm on Patch just disappear?”

We are less.

“I just. What’s wrong with helping my friends?” Ruby asked weakly, feeling a pounding headache start to form.

“Friends? There's nothing wrong with helping them, but others? Why should you help them, what have they done to deserve it? But back to the original question, where did you learn to do that?”

“I- when I got back to Remnant after my first walk, I was stuck in Vacuo. I still didn't have enough skill to find which strand led to Vale, and I couldn't think of any way to sneak into the CCT and call home, so-”

“You were, for all intents and purposes, stuck.”

“Yeah, so I met Sun, and he would occasionally sneak me some food, but it wasn't enough so-”

“You learned how to steal, play heartstrings. How devious of you.”

“I didn't like doing it!”

“I never said you did. But you could.”

“No-” Ruby shook her head wildly.
“Oh, come on,” Liliana said, “it’s not even anything too bad.”

“What’s that?”

“We ditch Sun, who I’m willing to bet is having the time of his life, and we go and do our own thing. Explore Ghirapur to its fullest, before Nissa comes back and ruins the fun.”

“But we agreed to meet them at Freejam—”

“Oh, Little Rose,” Liliana planted a hand on Ruby’s shoulder, already steering her towards the exit despite her protests, “things like that are made to be broken.”
And with this, we're officially caught up (Yay)!

On the downside, I'm working on Fur and Fire for the moment, so it will take a bit for the next chapter.

Weakness could be chipped away, you can build a perfect machine from imperfect parts.

Ruby picked up the axe, feeling the weight.

“Can you do anything with it, Artificer?” the Vulshok said, “It’s been in my family since before the Vanishing. I’d be loathe to give it up if I didn’t-”

Weakness could be chipped away, you can build a perfect machine from imperfect parts.

“Give me-” the ten year old looked up scanning for the sun. Oh, right. She was in a tent, and there wasn't one in the Quiet Furnace, “give me a couple hours. I can do a bit, but not much.”

She didn't have much left in the way of supplies, even her mana was running low.

Slowly, painfully, Ruby started to etch symbols onto the head of the axe.

Weakness could be chipped away, you can build a perfect machine from imperfect parts.

How long had they been here? Of the small, ragtag group of Planeswalkers, she was pretty sure only Venser had actually gotten any meaningful sleep.

Weakness could be chipped away, you can build a perfect machine from imperfect parts.
The name Quiet Furnace was far from true, she could hear forges roar in the distance, forging armaments for the Phyrexians. Compared to where they had already passed, it was mercifully silent.

Weakness could be chipped away, you can build a perfect machine from imperfect parts.

Ruby wasn’t sure why she was reciting the mantra, just that it helped her stay awake. What weakness could be chipped away? Using Mel-Meli-whatever to keep them from being compleated? The flesh to make room for metal? Wouldn’t that just make them Phyrexian?

The second part didn’t fill her with any more hope. They could make a perfect machine from imperfect parts, but couldn’t the Phyrexians do it too? Wasn’t that what they were doing?

Ruby steadied her shaking hands. She couldn’t ruin the design, if she did, all the work they had been putting towards-

“Ruby!”

Ruby span, dropping the hammer and swinging the chisel at the throat. Halfway through, calloused hands wrapped around her own, pushing them down.

Ruby squinted through the exhaustion and designs, duly noticing the flickering spark in front of her, “Elspeth? What are you doing here? I thought you were- were-?”

What had Elspeth been doing? What had any of them been doing? She knew Venser hadn’t felt well and was resting behind her, but she couldn’t remember what Koth and Elspeth had been doing.

“Venser sent me. He said you hadn’t slept since we got here.”

“Venser? Venser’s-” Ruby’s voice died as she turned back to the tent. The older Artificer was gone, “Oh. When’d he leave?”

“A while ago. Are you alright?”
“I’m fine!” Ruby insisted, maybe a bit too quickly.

Elspeth… could be scary. Every time they came across a group of Phyrexians, she would either freeze up, or fly into a rage, killing everything that got too close. And then there was her sword.

It should have been more, that thought came every time Ruby laid eyes upon it, it was meant to break a tyrant’s hold. They feared the creator, they didn't know what he knew. You had to destroy the old to create the new. ***D had to die. The mortals would thank him for this one day.

“Why are you here?” Elspeth asked suddenly.

“What? I’m working on this,” Ruby raised the axe, “I should really get back to Working on it.”

“Not that,” Elspeth cut her off, “here. You’ve seen the Phyrexians. Why haven’t you left? You could go anywhere in the Multiverse. As far away from this place as possible.”

“I-” Ruby stopped, “I don't know. I don't have anywhere else to be?”

“No home?”

“Not one I know how to get back to. I was hoping you or Koth could help. That’s why I tracked you down.”

“How’d you do that in the first place?”

“Your spark. They're harder to find if you aren't looking, but I was looking.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”
“Finding sparks?”

“Your home.”

“Oh,” Ruby looked down at the axe, “you don’t need to worry about that. You all have enough—”

“I want to,” Elspeth sat down next to Ruby, her armor creaking. She seemed… hungry. Like Ruby’s home was as important to her as it was Ruby.

“Ok,” Ruby focused back on the axe, continuing the carving, “where do you want me to start?”

“What’s it called? What did you do before your ignition?”

“My plane is called Remnant,” Ruby said, “I lived on the island Patch with my Dad, sister, and uncle.”

“No mother?”

“No,” Ruby paused, “my mom… my mom died years ago. Dad says I look like her.”

“Do you remember her?”

“Bits,” Ruby said, rubbing at her eye with her wrist, “mostly pictures though. I was young when she died.”

“You’re still young.”

“Younger,” Ruby corrected herself, “but, yeah. Just the four of us. We live in a log cabin. It’s nice there, but Grimm show up sometimes,” Ruby tightened her grip on the hammer.

“Grimm?”
“They’re these…” as much as Ruby was scared of them ‘monster’ didn’t seem right. The Phyrexians were monsters, “creatures on Remnant. They’re attracted to bad feelings.”

“But you like it? You want to go home?”

“Yeah,” Ruby said, “just because something’s dangerous doesn’t mean we should avoid it. We wouldn’t be here if that was true, right?”

Ruby saw Elspeth swallow, “What do you mean?”

“Well, Planeswalkers, we can be the ultimate cowards if we wanted to,” Ruby wasn’t the first person to say it, and she knew she wouldn’t be the last, “We could run away and never worry about the Phyrexians. But we’re staying, we’re trying to find Karn.”

“Are you saying you’re not scared?”

“No,” Ruby shook her head, “I’m scared. Why shouldn’t I be, after what we’ve seen?” What she now knew, “but we can’t give up hope. Mirrodin is counting on us. What’s your home like?”

Elspeth was quiet for a long time, “I don’t have one. It was destroyed.”

“Then you can come with me!”

“Huh?”

“To Remnant. We can find a place you can live there! It can be your home too.”

Everyone deserves a home. Elspeth might be scary around Phyrexians, but she deserved a home.

“I don’t think it will be that easy. You said you didn’t know where Remnant was.”
“Oh,” Ruby deflated for a second, “then I’ll come back! As soon as I can, I’ll come back for you! And Venser and Koth, if they want to come!”

“I-” Elspeth went quiet, “what if I’m not alive when you do? What if something killed me?”

Ruby tightened her grip on the hammer, trying to ignore the fact that she was going to have to sleep soon. That she would have to confront the designs soon.

If the Phyrexians killed Elspeth? There was only one thing she could do then.

“I’ll kill them,” Ruby said, aware that she had too many teeth in the grin, like she had thousands of them, “that’s another promise.”

Then she returned to the Great Work before her.

---X Line Break X---

Nissa frowned as she saw through her elemental’s eyes that Liliana was guiding Ruby away from the Inventor’s Fair.

She was willing to turn a blind eye to them going to the Inventor’s Fair, Liliana had been right that their prey was probably there, but this is where she drew the line.

“We need to go,” Nissa stood, walking towards the mine entrance, leaving a pair of elementals to shape the stone like clay.

“What’s wrong?”

“Liliana,” Nissa said, “She’s doing something.”

Nissa silently urged her elemental as close as she dared, and the one clinging to her shoulder
opened its mouth.

“Nissa-” Ruby’s voice stuttered out.

“Doesn’t need to know,” Liliana’s voice practically crooned.

“Too late,” the Animist snarled, “I knew she was up to something. I knew it.”

“Why? And where’s Sun?”

“She’s a parasite,” Nissa was aware that she wasn’t talking to Chandra anymore, that she was just ranting, “I don’t know what she wants from Ruby, but she isn’t getting it.”

Nissa planted her staff into the ground, and the earth rose up like one of the floating islands of Zendikar, carrying Nissa and Chandra up to the top of the quarry.

“I’m going to catch her red handed,” Nissa muttered, “I knew we couldn’t trust her. We should have gone as a group. She didn’t want to look around, she’s hoping to corrupt Ruby!”

“This place looks good,” the necromancer’s voice came from her elemental.

“But, we still don’t have any money-”

“You worry too much.”

“No she doesn’t,” Nissa snarled, “don’t worry, Ruby. I’m coming.”

Niss looked over at Chandra as the human snorted, jogging to keep up with the elf’s longer stride, “What?”

“You kinda sound like you’re her mom,” Chandra said.
“I don't want Liliana sinking her claws into Ruby,” Nissa said, smashing her staff into the ground again and causing another island of dirt in the air, this time flying over the people of Ghirapur as she scanned for Ruby’s spark, “I knew we shouldn't have trusted her.”

Nissa filed away the two unidentified sparks to look into later, when Liliana was dealt with. As Chandra had said, there wasn't the criss-cross of mana lines formed from wizards dragging mana from across the world, though she could feel the ley lines roaring below her. Blue and Red, mostly, but splattering of Green, White, and Black.

Meaning was an important part of shaping the world. Mana was attracted to where living creatures placed importance. Where birds came to rest every year, Green mana would slowly be shifted towards. People looked to the Consulate as a bastion of order, and places they were strong radiated White.

Nissa was aware Ruby had wanted to run the Implicit Maze on Ravnica at some point over the summer. To examine a perfect example of how people placing importance could shape the ley lines of a world.

“I guess you were right,” Chandra sat down on the speeding pile of stone, “you sure this is a good idea? This is kinda an obvious magical thing.”

“Do you have a better way for us to get there?” Nissa really didn't want to walk among all the people below them again. She might have slightly acclimatized to these many people after living near Vale and Ravnica for a year, but she still didn't enjoy it. She’d much rather stay in the forests of Patch, tending to the small garden of Zendikari plants she had planted.

“No,” Chandra said, “And I’m not saying this is bad, but I thought we were supposed to be laying low.”

“We'll find a way to once we get Ruby away from her.”

“Table for two,” the elemental said.

“Two adult? Or would you like a kids menu?”
“Adult, of course,” Liliana scoffed.

Were they at a restaurant? Liliana knew they didn't have any money!

Nissa sped up the moving isle, pulling mana from the ground as they went, infusing her self with it.

“So,” Liliana’s voice came again, “you use Dominarian sigils for your enchantments. Have you ever been?”

“Yes. I was there for a month when I was trying to get home.”

“Oh? Where were you?”

“Urborg.”

Liliana’s voice tutted, “The Tomb? Is it still a Phyrexian infested hellhole?”

“Yes,” Nissa stared at the elemental at the pure hatred in Ruby’s voice, “all over the place.”

“Disgusting things, aren't they?” Liliana said, like she was discussing the weather, “I lived in the Caligo forest before my Spark ignited. Some knight would go south on occasion, the lucky ones never made it back.”

“The unlucky ones were compleated?” Ruby’s voice hadn't lost any of the anger.

“And sent back to cause havok. Did you visit any of the other islands?”

“No. I left after that.”

“Where did you go?”
“I don't want to talk about it.”

“Oh,” Liliana said, “you can tell me.”

“No,” Ruby said sharply, “I won't.”

The stone shifted into a gentle slope as they reached the building, allowing them both onto the ground as Nissa reconfigured it into golem.

“Whoa! Nissa, isn't that a bit much?”

“We'll see when we get there,” Nissa said, but her instincts told her no, it wasn't.

“Hell-” the elf standing behind a podium stopped, eyes jumping between the two Planeswalkers and the elemental behind them. He coughed into his hand, “Hello. How may I help you?”

“We're looking for a pair of… colleagues of ours,” Nissa tightened her grip on her staff, “would you be willing to point us towards them?

“If they're here, of course,” he looked to the elemental again, “can you tell me anything about them?”

“One has black hair,” Nissa watched through her elemental as Liliana poured something from a pitcher into a glass, pushing it into Ruby’s hand. Was she trying to get Ruby drunk? “and purple tattoos-”

“Oh,” he looked relieved, “Yes. She’s in the back. Last table on the right.”

“Thank you,” Nissa said as politely as possible.

“Can your,” his eyes flickered to the elemental, “assistant stay outside?”
“Of course,” Nissa sent it to stand outside as she climbed up the small flight of stairs with Chandra.

“What do you think?” Liliana asked.

“It’s sour,” Ruby said, putting the glass down.

“Really?” Liliana took the glass, drinking from it, “Oh, you’re right. Excuse me,” Liliana called to a passing waiter, “can we get some form of sweetener? This is quite sour.”

“Yes, of course.”

“Thank you,” Liliana smiled, only for it to slide off her face.

Must have seen them.

“Ma’am?”

“Oh, it’s nothing. Do you mind getting us another pair of menus? It appears our friends just arrived.”

“Of course?”

“Nissa! Chandra!” Liliana smiled coyly, “I take it you finished your errand? Sun’s still looking around, Ruby was hungry.”

No she wasn't.

“Good,” Nissa smiled. They couldn't make a fuss here in front of all these people, “We were getting hungry too! I hope you're paying?”
“Oh, I’ll think of something…” Liliana said, the smile not leaving.

Nissa slid into the booth next to Ruby, watching as Chandra did the same.

---X Line Break X---

Blake groaned as the knocking came, trying to pull the comforter over her head. It came again, causing Blake to slide further down, curling into a ball under the comforter.

“Blake,” Kali’s voice came from the other side of the door, “can you wake up? You have a phone call.”

Blake emerged from the bed, frowning at her mom's call. Who called someone up at- Blake took a moment to check the clock, three in the morning?

Blake walked over and swung open the door, staring at her mom, “What?” Blake rubbed at her eye.

“Tai’s on the phone. He needs to talk to you.”

“Can it wait?” Blake asked, confused and irritated that her friend’s dad would be calling this early.

“I asked him the same but, well, he’s worried. I can tell him to call back at-”

“I’ll talk to him,” Blake practically ripped the scroll from her mom's hands, lifting it to her ear, “Professor?”

“Blake!” that Tai didn't protest the use of the title outside the classroom said how out of sorts he was, “Have you heard from Ruby?”

“No?” Blake pushed off the doorframe, her interest in getting this done so she could get back to sleep disappeared at the tone in Tai’s voice, “Why?”
“I just went by the manor to pick her up. There was a Planeswalker coming by today-”

There was? Why hadn't anyone told her?

“-and when I got here, Gared said they had all Planeswalked out after the meeting.”

“I-” Blake’s eyes jumped to her mom, “have you tried calling them?”

“Yes. No signal.”

Of course there wasn't.

“I need to talk to my parents. Can I call you back?”

“Yeah,” Tai sounded exhausted, “yeah.”

Blake hung up, “Is Dad up?”

“Yes,” Blake’s mom looked around, “is something wrong?”

“I’ll,” Blake sighed, “I’ll explain when we’re with Dad.”

It was a quick jaunt down the hall, where her dad was sitting in the bed.

“What’d he want?”

“The Gatewatch had to deal with something. Ruby left without telling him.”

“Oh,” Ghira yawned, “that’s-”
“I need to go.”

“Where?”

“After them.”

“Blake,” Ghira sighed, “if they didn't come get you, it probably isn't something they felt was important enough to interrupt your vacat-”

“And what if it is?” Blake paced, “We didn't think Innistrad was going to be that bad, and it ended up being a mess! I should go, I really, really should go.”

“Why? Blake tensed slightly as her mom tugged her over to the bed, “wouldn't they come get you if things were that bad?”

“Yeah, but…” Blake sighed, “things tend to go bad really quick for us. Like, one second we’re joking about Chandra not being able to swim, next Ruby has a half foot bone impaled into her side.”

“I’m sorry,” Ghira cut in, “what? Ruby got impaled? When was this?”

“That hospital visit. We got into a fight with a Planeswalker, he had these mutated Grimm with him. The Creeps exploded.”

“That’s what happened? Why didn't you tell us?”

“I told Mom!”

“But not me?”

“No,” Blake looked away, “I was scared.”
“Of what?”

“That... that you would make me leave the Gatewatch. You already weren't happy with me being in danger, and I was worried—”

“Do you want to leave them?”

“No!” Blake shook her head, “I- they’re my friends! I don't want to lose them!”

“Then I won't make you leave, Kitten,” Blake leaned into the hug as her father wrapped his arms around her, Kali joining in seconds later, “do you really want to go?”

“Yeah. If something happened to Ruby, or the rest, and I could have stopped it…”

“Then you should go. We’ll head back to Menagerie and fly out to Vale when you get back. But wait till morning.”

“Why?”

“Because you’ll only be endangering yourself if you’re tired.”

“...Ok.”

---X Line Break X---

Liliana bunched up some of her dress in her hand, right over the Chain Veil, the only outward sign of her displeasure.

Why did they have to show up now? She had been so close to making a breakthrough with Ruby. Something about Phyrexia riled the girl up. Strange, as the Invasion was before even Liliana’s time.
“Nissa,” Liliana said like her plans hadn't just been ground to a halt, “try this drink, it’s delicious.”

Nissa looked at the glass with something resembling disdain, “I don't think this is the time to be drinking.”

“Oh please,” Liliana smiled, “it’s not alcohol. Try it, I insist.”

Nissa glanced down at it, before taking a sip. The Animist’s eyes widened, and she gave a hum.

“You’re right, it is good,” she said, finishing the glass and placing it down, reaching for the pitcher, “do you mind if I have some more?”

So that’s how they were playing this, was it?

“Go right ahead. Getting that mine ready must have been exhausting,” Liliana didn't break her smile as she looked to Chandra, “Chandra, I’m glad you’re here. Me and Ruby were looking at this menu, and we didn't recognize most of the dishes on it! Be a dear and tell us what you think is good. You are our expert on Ghirapur after all.”

“Yeah, sure,” Chandra took the menu, eyes scanning it.

“So, how is that mine? Still there?”

“Yes,” Nissa said, “I’ll need a bit longer to make it perfect, but it will do.”

“Oh? Then why aren't you doing that?”

“I can do it any time,” Nissa smiled, “but there are artifacts in the mines. I thought it best to get Ruby, didn't want to break anything that could cause problems.”

“Oh!” Chandra said, “they have Goan vindaloo! You’d probably like that! And-”
“Hmm,” Liliana didn't break the smile, “but what about searching for the threat? We need Ruby on hand for that. What if he’s an Artificer?”

“-Malika Masoor Dal! It’s got mangos and-”

“Just order whatever you think is good, Chandra,” Liliana maintained eye contact with Nissa, “I think Ruby’s old enough to decide where she wants to go, don't you?”

“Like the Inventor’s Fair?” Nissa asked, “Sun must still be enjoying those tests.”

Liliana’s eyes snapped around the room, her hands clenching together. She had been watching them? How?

“Yes. Like the Inventor’s Fair. You seem to think you’re in charge of this mission. I don't remember us choosing a leader.”

Nissa leveled a glare at Liliana, “and I suppose you counted every non-vote as a vote in your favor? Or did you and that thing ,” there was only one thing that could make Nissa so agitated on Liliana’s person, “have a vote?”

“Nissa,” Liliana did her best to sound hurt, “I thought we were over this! The Chain Veil isn't a problem.”

Ruby mumbled something. Over the course of the exchange, she had slowly shrunk further under the table. Looking like she’d rather be anywhere but between the two of them.

“What was that, Little Rose?”

“I want to go to the mine,” Ruby said, “the Inventor’s Fair is still going to be there tomorrow, and they’ll be doing live showings of the inventions.”

Liliana bit the inside of her cheek. Damn, looks like she hadn't broken through nearly as much as
she thought.

Instead, Liliana gave a dramatic sigh, grabbing a napkin and placing it on her lap, “Oh, fine. We’ll go to the mine. *After* we eat.”

“You still haven't told us how you’re paying for this.”

“Oh, I have my ways,” Liliana said, fingering the golden Dominarian coin under her table.

There was always someone greedy enough to take the coin and look the other way. Always.

---X Line Break X---

Gideon moved the grating, grunting slightly as he did so, “I really hope Jace is right about this.”

“Yeah,” Thalia said, nose wrinkled, “Me too.”

“Do- uh,” Gideon looked down, “do you want to go first, or me?”

“I will,” Thalia said, “if someone's waiting to jump us, my Aura will block it. You’ll take a second to get your barrier up.”

“Good point,” Gideon said, he really did need to get that done.

Thalia slid down into the sewer, and after a moment to look around, gave Gideon the all clear.

Gideon followed her, landing on the cement next to the flowing river of… Gideon didn't want to know. The smell was beyond repugnant.

“This is a pretty big sewer,” Gideon said, “wonder why?”
“Jace would know,” Thalia said.

“Yes,” Gideon agreed, “maybe in the notes?”

“Good point,” Thalia grabbed the notes from a pocket in her coat, and a small penlight from the other, “Let’s see… Here! The Golgari don’t just work down here, they live down here. The first layer of the Undercity, they call it.”

“I don’t want to see the lower levels then,” Gideon said under his breath, “Hopefully Vraska stayed close by.”

They both knew she hadn’t. If she had, she would have been in range for them to sense her. She was either long gone, or suppressing her Spark. The real question, was *where* she had gone. Further down? To another district? Had she left Ravnica completely now that she had dealt with Agoston?

Upon returning to Jace’s office, the duo had quickly learned the connection between Vraska and Agoston. Namely, that he had been the one who signed the blanket warrant for the arrest of Golgari Swarm members that had led to Vraska's imprisonment.

“Keep the flashlight out,” Gideon said.

“Of course,” Thalia put the notes away, “weapons out?”

“Not yet,” Gideon shook his head, “we don't want to send the wrong message. We’re here for information, not a fight.”

“Are you sure that is a wise idea, Gideon Jura?” Thalia’s grey eye were ringed with blue flames, a clear sign that he was no longer speaking to the cathar.

“Yes. If things go wrong-”

“I will be ready,” the flames disappeared.
“Let’s go,” Thalia said, like a ghost hadn’t just possessed her.

“Does that feel strange?”

“What do you mean?”

“Being…” what was the right word for it? “Possessed like that. Does it feel strange?”

“It did at first,” Thalia said, “now it’s natural.”

“Hmm.”

It took them a bit to reach the first collection of Golgari. A motley crew of undead, gorgons, and humans gathered around a bar. Gideon heard the creak of leather as the approached. Looking down, he caught that Thalia had balled her right hand up.

“Hello!” Gideon began politely, stepping forward.

“whatdayawant, human?” one of the undead said.

Gideon took a moment to parse what he had said, “We were hoping you could assist us. We’re a pair of special investigators for the Living Guildpact.”

It was like a lever had been pulled, every Golgari in the room snapped to attention, staring at him. Gideon heard Thalia drop the penlight, reaching for something.

“What’s the Livin’ Guildpact want with us?” Another undead asked, standing up. This one was so large that his- her- its back scraped along the roof, its chest was as large as Gideon, and one arm had rotted so much that Gideon could see the cracked bone, “‘E’s never cared before.”

What? No, not right now.
"We’re looking into a murder. If you help, I’ll talk to Jace about—"

“A murder?” the thing walked towards them, allowing Gideon to see the individual rotting strands of sinew on its arm, “What kinda murder would ‘ave the Livin’ Guildpact send a pair of Boros dogs down ‘ere?”

“We’re not with the Legion,” the Gideon had been told to keep his badge from when he had, with the unspoken invitation to return.

“Could a fooled me,” its breath was repugnant, even compared to the Undercity, “You walk like ‘em. Like you can't be hurt.”

That's because he couldn't. Not so long as he could see it coming.

“We don't want to hurt anyone. We just need to know if you know anything. I can try to get food sent down here, or medicine, or whatever you need.”

“Then who ya lookin’ for, surfacer?"

“Vraska. She’s a gorg-”

“Vraska’s back?” one of the gorgons croaked.

“Yes. I take it you didn't know?”

“Yes,” the creature in front of him stared, “you’re sure it’s her?”

“Yes.”

“We haven't seen her,” it said, “nobody here’s seen her in months, though Vaitta,” it jerked its head at one of the gorgon, “was in prison with her.”
“I see, I’m sorry for wasting your ti-”

“But I’ll guide ya to the Ochran,” it said, “if Vraska’s back-”

“Svogthir save us,” Vaitta whispered.

“-there will be plenty of people who want her dead, and that would be the place to start.”

“Thank you-?”

“Thrask,” it said, “and don't thank me, surfacer, I’m sending you to your death.”

---X Line Break X---

Chandra was exploring the woods, the vent pack her father had given her tapping against the small of her back. She didn’t like it, but understood why she had to have it. A lot of people could get in trouble if they knew about her magic.

She didn’t remember the skyship flying above her, intent to ruin everything.

Eventually, she knew she had to go home. Her father would do that thing he did when he got upset. Where he would tweak her nose with a soft scolding, then go off and tinker for a while. He would lock the door, leaving Chandra to deal with her mom.

Normally, that meant embroidery. She didn’t like embroidery and they both knew that was why it was a good punishment.

As Chandra returned to the village, though she immediately got worried.

Men in bronze armor were rounding up the villagers, forcing them into buildings. Each of them had a snapblade strapped to his arm, and many were holding lanterns, despite it being the middle
of the day. Chandra, however, focused on one man.

He was wearing a blue achkan over a pair of cream pants. His shoulders, and right arm, were covered in brass, ending in a long, sharp snapblade. His hair was long and black, and did nothing to hide the look on his face.

Baral, the man who had hunted her and her parents for the last year. Now, he had found them.

Chandra’s neighbor was struggling against the wall of brass, “What’s this about? You come in here and-”

Baral’s hand lashed out, the one not covered by the blade, thankfully, and struck her across the face.

Chandra’s vent pack was letting out a steady supply of steam, and Chandra did the only thing that made sense.

“Hey!” she called, “You’re looking for me right?”

The guards turned as one, “Sir, it’s her, it’s the Nalaar girl!”

“I can see that,” Baral said in a voice like gravel.

“My name is Chandra! And leave them alone, take me!”

“We will,” Baral said, “because you and your family are a danger. You may go,” he threw the last part behind him, to the gathered villagers. Chanda watched her neighbor bundle her two kids into the house, pulling the door shut, and locking it.

“I’m not a danger!” Chandra span in place, showing Baral the vent pack, “see?”

“You’re very existence is a danger, child,” Baral stepped forward, “why do you think we’re here? The people gave you up.”
“You’re lying! My parents said they were protecting us!”

“Your parents’ crimes are many, what is lying to a child compared to them?” Baral raised his snapblade, “but what about your crimes? How many have you killed, pyromancer?”

“No one! I just melted some of your toys!”

“Oh,” Baral’s lip curled up into a sneer, “that can’t be right. From what I heard, you killed dozens in this village alone,” he looked to the side, “do it.”

The guards threw their lanterns into the thatch, flames licking at the sides.

“No!” Chandra’s vent pack was releasing a storm of steam, but also restricted her fire.

“Chandra!” Kiran came around the corner, throwing something at the feet of Baral’s goons, “run!”

The explosion of light blinded Chandra just as much as it blinded the guards, so she squeezed her eyes shut and ran to him.

Halfway there (she thought) something wrapped around her leg, causing her to trip.

As the light disappeared, Chandra looked down at what had caught her leg, and felt all feeling leave her.

“Mother.”

It was her mother’s shawl, the one she always wore (unless they were was aether smuggling), with it’s golden embroidery in the shape of a bird. It was smoking, and Chandra realized, quite suddenly, that they were next to her house.
“Mother!” Chandra called again, listening for anything.

There wasn’t.

Baral was approaching now, a smug grin on his face, “Excellent. The Ghirapur arena will have a wonderful show,” his voice hadn’t raised an inch, “the consuls love to punish dissenters, and the people love a show of force.”

Chandra’s father put him between Baral and her, arms spread wide and goggles askew, “Enough! She’s just a little girl! I yield, make me your show.”

Baral’s snapblade folded back, and he placed the hand on Kiran’s arm... and plunged the dagger into his stomach.

“Father!”

Chandra stifled the call as she woke up, pushing herself off the floor. After taking a minute to calm herself, she immediately stomped outside.

Then she let the explosion happen.

Fire exploded from her hands, lashing up her arms and setting her hair on fire, her eyes turning to flames as she started to throw fiery blasts at the quarry wall.

“Stupid! Consulate!” each syllable was followed by another blast, “Stupid! Ghirapur! What! Did! They! Do! Wrong!?”

Chandra threw everything she had into the last blast, creating a massive ball over the pond in the center of the quarry.

“Feeling any better?” the familiar, calming voice of the Gatewatch’s elf came from the mine entrance.
“Nissa! You, uh, you saw that?”

“Yes,” Nissa stepped forward, reaching out, “are you-?”

“Fine! Just... bad dreams. About Kaladesh.”

Chandra had thought she had put this behind her when the Purifying Flame spiraled around her and whispered that she was forgiven. But it had never gone away, the burning feeling that it what had happened was her fault.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“No!” wait, “yes.”

Telling Gids about it back on Regatha had helped, even if only for a little.

“Ok?” Nissa sat down on a ledge.

“I... I told you about the consuls, right? That they killed my parents?”

“Yes.”

“They burned down the village we were in, to frame me. My mom, she was... she was burned alive. I never saw her body, but-”

“You didn't need to.”

“Yeah,” Chandra pressed a hand against her eye trying to remove the tears on the verge of spilling, she wasn't normally this weepy, “and then, my dad tried to save me. He told them to take him and leave me.”
“And they didn’t,” Nissa said.

“Baral stabbed him, I- I held him as he died. He was calm. No, that's not it. He was- was-”

“Resigned?”

“Yeah. Like, he looked more like he was disappointed I couldn't get away than angry.”

“Do you think he should have been?”

“Yes! No! I don't know,” Chandra buried her hands in her face, “it was my fault. Baral was looking for me, and he killed everyone because of me.”

“That’s not-”

“It is!”

“He killed them because he was a monster,” Nissa said, “did you try to fight him?”

Nissa’s eyes were a deep green, Chandra noticed, and shimmering with worry. Impossibly deep, like, like… dammit, she should be able to think up something… like the pond behind them! There had been stories about the pond, when she was a kid, that if you fell into it, you would never reach the bottom. Like that.

“No,” Chandra said, “I had this thing on, called a vent pack. It turns energy to steam.”

“So he started the fires?”

“Yes.”

“And the people didn't do anything wrong?”
“No.”

“Then it was his fault, not yours.”

“But I- I had been messing around with my magic a couple of weeks before. Someone must have seen me. They died because I was being reckless. And I keep doing that.”

“No you don't-”

“I do! The first time Gids and me met? I had just blew up a museum-”

“I'm sorry, what?”

“Yeah,” Chandra laughed slightly, hollow, “like, a whole wall, BOOM!”

Nissa jumped at the noise, “and how is that you being reckless?”

“There were people on the other side of that wall. Kids and parents and grandparents. How many of them did I hurt? Did I kill?”

“Chandra-”

“And now, I exploded at Baan and we don’t know what threat there might be-”

“Chandra,” Nissa said, “if you’re guilty, I am too.”

“No you aren't-”

“When I unleashed the Eldrazi,” Nissa said, “my entire people were wiped out. The first thing
Ulamog did was turn the entire continent of Bala Ged to dust. I’m the last Joraga elf, and that is my fault.”

“No it isn’t!”

“How?” Nissa asked, “isn't it the same thing? We were both reckless, and our home was destroyed.”

“But-”

“And you were a lot younger than I was when I made that mistake.”

“But I was older when I blew up the museum.”

“And you remember it. Unlike,” Nissa cast another look back at the mine, “a certain necromancer, you haven't forgotten. If you had a chance to do it again, would you?”

“No? Of course not, I regret it-”

“Then you learned from it,” Nissa said, “and that's what matters. Not that you make a mistake, but that you learn from it, so it wasn't for nothing.”

Chandra let a smile spread, throwing her arms around Nissa in a hug. She smelled like flowers, and a forest after a rainstorm. After a moment, the Animist returned it.

“I guess you’re right,” Chandra said, though she wasn't completely sure.

Then both of them snapped apart as Blake suddenly Planeswalked in.

“Blake?” Chandra sputtered, “what are you doing here?”
“Uh, hi,” Blake looked like hell. Her hair was messy, her clothes were wrinkled, and she had a backpack thrown over one shoulder, Gambol Shroud poking out from it, “Professor Xiao Long-Tai called. He said you had all run off for something.”

“You were on vacation!”

“Yeah,” Blake said, “we’ll pick it up when we deal with everything. Where’s Ruby? I can sense her Spark.”

“Down in the mine,” Chandra pointed her thumb down the cave.

“That’s good,” Blake yawned, “I’m, I’m going to sleep, didn't get much sleep after the call, you can explain what’s going on in the morning.”

Chandra watched Blake go, before turning back to Nissa, “Well, at least Ruby will happy, right?”

---X Line Break X---

Ruby yawned, pushing herself off the ground. Compared to the hard concrete of her Vacuo workshop, or Mirrodin’s metal, the dirt and gravel was comfortable.

Looking across the little area she had declared her own (not that it mattered, as Nissa had easily rearranged the mine into something livable) Ruby’s jaw dropped. Drache looked up from his place on the workbench she had also been able to reposition with help from Nissa, crooning softly at his master's confusion.

“Blake?”

The faunus was on the other side of the room as her, head resting on top of a backpack.

“What-”

“She showed up last night,” Ruby’s head turned to where Chandra was standing in the ‘doorway’, a
pair styrofoam cup in hand, “scared the crap out of me and Nissa. Want some hot chocolate?”

“Where’d you get that?”

“Me and Nissa couldn't sleep last night, so we jumped back to Patch to grabbed some stuff and let your dad know you were ok.”

The moment Chandra said it, Ruby felt a rush of shame. She really needed to get better about telling her dad when she went out to deal with something.

“What’d he say?”

“That he wished you would call him first, and hopes everything works out,” Chandra walked over to Blake, pushing her toe lightly into the black haired girl’s side, “Wake up! We’re heading out soon.”

Blake sat up slowly, squinting around the room, before taking one cup from Chandra, mumbling a thanks.

“Where’s everyone else?”

“Already up, we just decided to let you two sleep in.”

“Hm,” Blake said, sipping from her cup. Her and Chandra were the two Gatewatch members who slept the hardest, and took the longest to wake if something wasn't going wrong.

“What did you get?” Ruby asked taking her cup and letting Drache climb up her arm and disappear.

“Sleeping bags, some granola bars, stuff to make drinks, a Dust powered hot plate. Your dad sent some tools,” Chandra listed, “Nissa put them on the workbench.”

Ruby span, how had Nissa gotten past her?- No, didn't matter.
“Mh,” Blake staggered upright, still half asleep.

“You should probably do something about your hair,” Chandra gestured around her head, “don’t want to go looking like weirdos now, em?”

The comment was probably aimed at Blake, as Ruby’s hair rarely went so far out of control that it couldn’t be fixed with a few swipes of a hairbrush, but the faunus was still too out of it to respond.

“Do you have a brush we could use?”

“One sec,” Chandra ducked away down the tunnel before returning, “catch.”

Ruby caught it, “whose is this?”

“Nissa’s. Yeah, surprised me too,” Chandra shrugged at Ruby bewildered look, “but she does braid her hair.”

Ruby nodded, putting her drink down and guiding Blake to the wooden chair. Blake sat there quietly, drinking her coffee as Ruby worked the knots out of her hair.

“I’ll go make sure we still got food for you two!” Chandra yelled as she disappeared down the halls. Blake flinched slightly at the noise, her ears, exposed at the moment, flattened.

Neither of them said anything for a bit, Blake was still on autopilot and Ruby was content to silently work at the silky hair.

“Ruby?” Blake finally said, “can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“Why didn’t any if you let me know something was going on? I would have come back.”
“We were originally going to find out what was going on before we decided to ruin your vacation,” Ruby said, “but Chandra kinda has a bad history with this plane and the man we were meeting with left. Then we wanted to figure things out before we grabbed you.”

“But everyone else is here?”

“No. Giddy, Thalia, Ral and Jace are at Ravnica.”

“Oh,” Blake sounded mollified, “you would have come and got me?”

“If things were serious? Of course we would! Why wouldn’t we?”

“I dunno,” Blake leaned back, giving a strange noise as Ruby continued her work on Blake’s hair, “Guess I was worried.”

“About what?”

“Just that something would go wrong.”

“It does seem to happen to us a lot, doesn't it?”

“Yeah,” Blake said, “almost done?”

“Yep!” Ruby worked out the last knot, putting the brush on her workbench, “ready to go?”

“One sec,” Blake reached into her bag, pulling out a pair of ribbons. One was black and the other purple, “which one do you think I should use?”

“I dunno,” Ruby wasn't one for fashion, “do you have a red one?”
“No,” Blake gave something between a giggle and a chuckle, returning the purple one to her bag, “do you think I should get one?”

“Yeah,” Ruby said, “there should always be more red. I think you’d look cute in it.”

…

…

Oh Dust. Had she really just said that?

“I- I mean, it would look good on you!” not better, “Uh… I- Uh…”

Abort, abort. Think of something else, something as far away from Blake as possible.

*The first step is to prepare the porcelain-metal fusion. The next was to remove the fle-*

**NOT THAT!** Ruby desperately threw that as far back into her mind as possible, **ANYTHING BUT THAT!**

*The enchantments make the blade kin to that which it was meant to cut. Existing as a dream and reality at the same time-*

Better!

Ruby continued to focus on that particular weapon, trying to ignore her blush.

If Blake noticed Ruby’s silent freak out, she didn't say anything, merely made the noise again, “maybe I should. Do you mind helping me? I could use some help, I don't have a mirror.”

“Yeah!” Ruby grabbed the ribbon, “I- I don't know how to do this.”
“Watch me,” Blake took the ribbon, repeating the motion several times, “got it?

“I think so,” Ruby took the ribbon back, sticking out her tongue as she worked on it. This was the closest she had been to Blake’s ears, she didn't leave them exposed very often, “there!”

“Thanks. Should we go?”

“Yes!

---X Line Break X---

The meal of oatmeal was quick and they brought Blake up to speed as they walked to the fair. As they approached, Ruby pulled out a pamphlet she had grabbed, handing it over to Blake.

“That zoo looks interesting,” Blake said, “but where did they get a hundred acres in the middle of a city?”

“That’s a good question,” Sun said, leaning over dropping his voice, “Sooo. You two wanna try and ditch the adults when we get there?”

“We got in trouble for that yesterday,” Ruby hissed.

They had?

“Oh, yeah,” Sun deflated, “guess you’re right.”

“Why’d you get in trouble?”

“Liliana,” they chorused as if that explained everything, and on some level it did.
“Hmm,” Blake cast a look behind them. What had Liliana done this time?

“Where are we starting, kiddos?” Chandra clapped her hands on Ruby and Sun’s shoulders, causing them all to jump out of their skin, “anything you didn’t get to check out last time?”

“I had wanted to look at the weapons,” Ruby said, “and they’re also announcing the winner of yesterday’s round of judging.”

“Then let's see that!” Chandra grinned, “Nissa! Come on!”

“We’re supposed-”

“Come on,” Chandra said, ducking away from them and throwing an arm around Nissa’s shoulder. The Animist tensed for a moment, tightening her hold on her ever present staff, “all that shouldn’t take more than an hour or two. What’s the harm?”

“Oh, fine,” Nissa sighed, “A look around won’t hurt anyone.”

“See,” Sun whispered, “that’s why in this family thing we got going on, Chandra's the best sister.”

Family? Blake considered it briefly. Yes, the Gatewatch was like a second family. Though she wasn't sure how Ruby fit into that equation.

As they reached the Inventors fair, Blake felt her jaw drop. Fences of brass stretched as far as she could see, behind which a wide variety of colorful tents and buildings were set up.

“They don't do things by half, do they?” Blake asked. How much could all this cost? When, according to Chandra, people were suffering from a lack of Aether.

As they reached the wide arch coated in brass swirls and entrance, a brass robot rolled forward.

“Hello!” It said, “Welcome to the Inventor's Fair, the intersection of creativity and genius! Is there anywhere I can direct you too?”
“We’re looking for—” Chandra started.

“Don’t miss the dragster races! Buy your tickets now!”

“Already seen them,” Sun cut in, “We want—”

“Then how about the hundred acre zoo? The animal constructs were created by the greatest lifesculpters in Ghirapur!”

“Maybe later,” Nissa cut in, “we’re trying to—”

“I know!” it cut her off, cheerfully unaware how annoying it was being, “you look like the kind of people who like quicksmithing! There are daily tournaments in the secondary arena! Test your mettle against the best, or just watch!”

Blake turned to Ruby, who was looking around, “can you deal with this?”

“Huh?” Ruby snapped back to attention, “Sorry, what?”

“Are you alright?” Blake asked, suddenly worried.

“Yeah, just,” Ruby shook her head like a wet dog, “No, nevermind. I just thought I sensed something. It’s probably nothing. What did you want?”

“Can you deal with that?” Blake tilted her head to the robot, which was now advertising something about clockwork architecture.

“Oh,” Ruby examined the robot for a second, “Yeah. It’s easy.”

The subtle glow in Ruby’s eyes, a semi-perpetual symptom of being a Planeswalker, lit up even brighter as she raised one hand, curling the fingers inward.
“Please remember that grem-” the light in the robot’s eyes stopped, and it shut down slowly.

“There,” Ruby sounded satisfied, “come on, let’s go.”

“What did you do?” Nissa asked as they walked away from the robot, which suddenly sat up, continuing its conversation.

“Made a barrier in the primary Aether pipe,” Ruby said, “imagine a blood clot, it’s like that.”

That was, quite frankly, terrifying. Did that mean Ruby could do that to someone if she wanted?

There was a crackle, and then a voice echoed throughout the fairgrounds, “We will be announcing the winner of yesterday's inventions in ten minutes in the main arena!”

That was convenient. Though she supposed it made sense, it wouldn't do any good if the winner lost track of time and wasn't there.

They quickly got into arena, though Blake noticed Chandra suddenly grabbed Nissa’s arm as they entered. Nissa didn't look much happier herself, but didn't say anything.

“I wonder what won,” Sun muttered, “it’s got to have been something good, right?”

“Yeah.”

A man in blue and red robes stepped onto the podium in the center, a strange invention on his arm. Next to him was a tarp covering something. “Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls! We saw many amazing inventions yesterday! From a modification to the snapblade that increase the strength by forty three percent, to the so called ‘walking ballista’! But our judges,” he waved his hand at the men and woman behind him. Blake’s eyes locked onto the one wearing a hooded jacket, hiding his face.

“What’s up with him?” She muttered down the line.
“I-” Ruby frowned, “does he seem familiar to anyone else? Like his name is on the tip of your tongue?”

“Not really,” Sun said.

“Actually,” Liliana spoke up, “you have a point, Little Rose-”

_Little Rose?_ Blake thought as Ruby squirmed in place next her.

“-you’re right. He does seem familiar. Maybe he’s suppressing his Spark?”

“Maybe,” Ruby still looked uncomfortable.

“Hey,” Blake grabbed her hand, “are you alright?”

“I-” Ruby’s eyes were still trained on the hooded man, “I don’t know. I know him, _I know_ I know him.”

“Do you want to look into it after?”

“Maybe,” Ruby leaned her head on Blake’s shoulder, “I just-”

“But they had to make a choice!” the announcer continued, “and choose they did! The inventor that will be proceeding on to the next round is…” the entire arena seemed to hold their breath as one, “Rashmi and her matter transporter!”

The announcer ripped away the tarp covering the invention as an elf in the Inventors section leapt up with a cry of joy. Ruby’s grip on Blake’s hand suddenly became tight.

The ‘matter transporter’ was an ornate gold ring, about the size of a large hula hoop. Along the size of it was clear piping, and in the center was a gaudy vase.
“This invention,” he continued, “which, due to unfortunate circumstances wasn't shown off yesterday, uses Aether to move objects from one place to another! Behold!”

The announcer hit a button on the matter transporter and Aether flowed into it, lifting it in the air right at the top of the vase. Sparks of electricity jumped from the ring, and Blake felt her ears snap up as the transporter started to descend, passing over the vase. It was a familiar trick, and just to be sure, Blake activated her mana sight.

There, right where the transporter was, was a hole to the Blind Eternities. The vase disappeared into it, before reappear on a table a ways away.

“A planar portal,” Liliana said softly, “I had thought those didn’t work anymore. Since the calamity.”

“Apparently they do,” Ruby said grimly, “fifty lien says that’s what whoever we're looking for is after.”

Rashmi ran to the judges as people started to file out, shaking their hands. As she approached the hooded one, she grabbed onto a strange metal hand. It had three fingers, and they seemed to be disconnected from the palm. It did look familiar...

Ruby’s grip on Blake’s hand suddenly became a vice, and she her breath was ragged. The moment Rashmi let go, the man turned and started to leave, accompanied by several consulate guards.

“Guys,” Ruby said, “we need to follow him.”

“Why?”

“He’s our target. He has to be. Come on.”

“Are you sure? He’s with the-“
“Ruby’s right,” Liliana said, “I know him.”

“Must be some heavy Spark suppression if he was standing right in front of us and we didn’t notice,” Ruby muttered, “the only person with that is…”

Ruby redoubled her pulling, shoving past the people leaving the arena with reckless abandon.

“He’s there,” Sun pointed at the man, “Ruby, what’s going on-?”

Ruby didn't answer, making a beeline for the man.

The man, and his retinue of guards, stopped in front of an older woman. As they approached, the man spoke, “Renegade Prime,” Blake could practically hear the sneer, “I finally found you. Did you really think whatever you’re planning will work in my fair?”

The woman spun, pushing her welding goggles up onto her brow. Blake heard Chandra’s breath hitch, even as Ruby let go her hand and, as if they were of one mind, stalked forward with Liliana.

The woman had auburn hair with streaks of grey, and a shawl wrapped around her, embroidery of a bird in flight on it.

Liliana grabbed the man, whipping him around and yanking back his hood. The moment she did, Blake realised that Ruby and Liliana were right. They had met the man before.

Grey hair was styled into dreadlocks, and tattooed on his brow was a pair of horns in red. He had a small beard, and as he saw them, the sneer on his face became more pronounced.

“Tezzeret,” the two in front of him snarled as one.

“Vess, Rose,” he said, “I had been sure that oversized mushroom had killed you,” he looked behind them, “Oh? I don’t see Beleren. Did he die? I suppose it wasn't a complete loss then.”

“Why?” it was like a switch had been flipped. Liliana’s entire stance shifted, “Afraid he’ll...
lobotomize you again? I’m not sure how you’re still walking around, but I’m sure he can find time in his busy day to do it again.”

“Funny,” Tezzeret said, “listen, I’m busy, so I’ll give you one warning. Walk away. Go enjoy the Fair, pilfer as many designs as you want! But leave me alone. I-”

Chandra stepped passed Blake then, tears in her eyes as she stared at the woman behind Tezzeret. The woman’s eyes widened in turn, before tears appeared in them.

“Chandra?”

“Mom?”

And then as one, “they told me you were dead.”
Ruby took stock of everything at once. Tezzeret in front of them, six guard automatons and two fleshy ones. All in between them and Chandra’s mom (Apparently she wasn’t dead?)

Ruby raised her hands, slowly closing them, planning to cut through the Aether tube. Dangerous, but it would permanently stop the automatons.

Halfway through, Tezzeret’s fake arm wrapped around her right arm, forcing it open as the metal dug into her tendons. It stung, though Tezzeret was probably hoping her arm was on the brink of breaking.

Ruby heard the sounds of weapons being drawn, but focused on the mana she had been building up. Plan A had failed, it was time for-

Tezzeret grabbed her with his other hand, before letting go with his metal arm and slamming it into her throat, causing her to gag as he hoisted her into the air. As he did, Ruby felt like something was being ripped from her as she kicked weakly.

“Put the weapons down,” he growled, “or I’ll break her neck.”

Ruby struggled for air, lifting up one hand and trying desperately to remove the metal crushing her throat. Asphyxiation was one of the only things that could reliably get around Aura, along with specially made rounds and (to a lesser extent) high quantities of electricity.

“Sir,” one of the two guards had stepped forward.

“What?” Tezzeret whipped around, the metal arm remaining in place. Ruby tried to maintain a grip on the white and blue mana she had grabbed, shaping it to what she needed, but it seemed harder than it should. Like something was breaking her ability to shape mana.

“May I remind you where we are?” the guard was looking around furtively.
“Isn’t that the head judge?”

“Is he… strangling that child?”

“She can’t be older than… ten? Eleven?”

“Strange clothes, though. All of them.”

“What’s that matter? He’s still killing her!”

Over the course of the confrontation, fairgoers had gathered around them, drawn by the confrontation.

Tezzeret sneered, but loosened his grip on her slightly, enough for her to breath and, as her control reappeared, finish the spell. Guards were gathering, keeping everyone back from the collection of Planeswalkers.

“Hey,” Ruby croaked, “Tezzeret.”

“What?” he snarled at her, no doubt agitated that he had been pulled into this position.

“You left your legs open,” Ruby smiled at him, before ramming the four barrier-blades she had formed into his knees and his ankles.

Tezzeret roared in pain, dropping Ruby as his legs gave out from under him. Ruby fell on her butt, and Tezzeret lashed out at her. Before he hit her, something smoky black covered her, the temperature around her plunging in seconds.

An arm wrapped around her, pulling her up and out. Blake pulled Ruby close, Gambol Shroud, coated in so much of the same smoky darkness that it was almost impossible to identify, held out in front of them like a… a… sword! Oh, yeah. Gambol Shroud was a sword.
Ruby lolled her head back for a moment, breathing in deep, trying to shake off the cobwebs in her mind. Casting that shouldn't have taken this much out of her, maybe combining it with a lack of air had left her dizzy?

“Ruby,” Blake said quietly in her ear, and Ruby closed her eyes, enjoying the feeling of Blake’s breath on her cheek, “are you alright?”

“Just dizzy,” Ruby said, “that was a cool trick you did.”

“Thanks,” Blake said, “I’ve been practicing.”

Ruby watched as Sun disconnected one of Ruyi Jingu Bang’s shotguns, working the lever as he fired shot after shot at Tezzeret. The ferromancer had thrown up a shield of metal shards the moment Sun grabbed his weapon, and when Sun stopped firing to reload, launched them in a storm of flechette, his eyes and hand glowing with magenta. A purple wall of light appeared at Liliana’s careless gesture, the metal cracking and shattering as it passed through, before disintegrating completely.

“You didn't have that trick last time we met, Vess.”

“That was four years ago, Tezzeret,” Liliana said, the graceful smile on her face ruined by the sprawling demonic script that covered her body glowing purple and leaking blood, “You couldn't comprehend how much power I have. Let me show you.”

Before Liliana’s spell went off, Chandra grabbed her arm, snapping the necromancer’s hands down, “My mom,” was all she said at Liliana’s silent glare.

Ruby heard the several voices from the crowd still gathered, leaning around the literal wall of robotic guards to watch.

“Are they using magic?”

“No way. I’ve never even seen a mage. Now we have six of them in the middle of the Inventors’ fair?”
Ruby breathed in again, taking in the surrounding area. They were walled off, and if they took to the skies, there would be a storm of thopters chasing after them in seconds. Which left…

Ruby’s eyes widened as Tezzeret sent two more streams of metal at them, the heavy fragments of metal streaking towards them with much more grace then they should have.

Screwing up her face, Ruby focused at two points as hard as she could forcing two barriers into existence right in front of the shards.

They slowed, but were eating through her barriers. Ruby felt her sweat drip down her face, and-

Nissa pointed her staff into the sky, green mana seemed to crystalize the air around her as it met the metallic shards. They still continued to move, like a fish swimming through molasses, but they seemed to be rusting at high speeds.

“Nissa,” Ruby’s voice was rough, “can you open a hole in the ground?”

“What?”

“We need to get out of here with Chandra’s mom. Can you open a hole in the ground?”

Nissa crouched, placing a hand on the tiled floor, nodding.

“What about Tezzeret? He’ll be able to track our Sparks,” Blake said.

“No he won't,” Liliana said, “Tezzeret’s horrible at it. That metal he replaced his chest with ruins it both ways. We won't be able to reliably track him, but he won't be able to find us.”

“Sun,” Ruby, “How far can you go?”

“At the drop of a hat?” Sun licked his lips, “five.”
“Do it. Take out the robots.”

“Not Tezzeret?” Sun’s blue eyes were slowly lightening to a couple of shades off white, and the smell of ozone lit the air.

“We need to get away for now. It’ll be easier if he isn’t dead,” as much as Ruby wanted to make Tezzeret pay for Ral’s arm.

“Alright,” Sun said, raising his right arm to the sky, currents of racing mana under his flesh causing an almost tribal design to appear in red, “I get it.”

What happened next took a little over ten seconds. Five flashes of light slammed into Sun, each one bringing with it a wave of heat and an unholy roar. The ground shattered, shards of tile flying into the air as a wave of blistering heat washed over the area.

In the center of the destruction, Sun looked completely calm. Not a single hair out of place as the mana started to circle throughout his body.

“Nissa. Get that hole open.”

“Are you-?”

“Yes.”

“What are you idiots doing?” Tezzeret was yelling the be heard over the roar of energy, “stop hi-”

Before he finished the order, Sun exploded from his place too fast for anyone except Ruby to hope of stopping.

To the casual observer, it would look like Sun had moved with the speed more fitting for a jet than a fourteen year old, giving quick punches to each of the robots, before stopping at the last one.

That same casual observer was probably surprised when each of those robots shattered like they
were hit with a canon ball.

“Mom!” Chandra called as she turned towards the wall of guards behind them, making her own wall of fire, “Come on!”

“Don’t mo-” the guard was cut off by a heavy wrench smashing into the side of his face. Mrs. Naalar ran over to the hole Nissa had made, jumping down to the Animist, followed by Chandra and Liliana.

“Blake!” Sun said, wincing, “get Ruby in there, I’ll be in right after.”

“No,” Blake snapped, “That’s the sort of thing they say in books when that person isn’t going to be there. We’re going together, or not at all.”

“Let me make that decision for you,” Tezzeret swung both arms at them, the shattered remains of the guards flying at them.

Ruby threw up her hands, creating a giant barrier around them. She shook as the blades dug into it. She couldn't hold this for much-

Then she was falling, the ground swallowing them whole as Ruby collided with something soft.

They had gotten underground, but needed to go deeper if they wanted to be able to dodge sewage and stuff. She would need to tell Nissa, that was important.

Ruby let her eyes drift close, just… just five minutes. That’s all she needed, five minutes to-

--- X Pia X---

Pia stood in the dark, mentally running through what had happened. First, she had been accosted by Tezzeret, which made sense. Second, a pair who looked like they could have been sisters march up and trade threats with Tezzeret. Stranger, but she wasn't surprised someone as brutish as him had enemies. Then Chandra, her daughter Chandra, who was supposed to be dead, executed by Baral, had shown up with what appeared to be an entire group of powered individuals. Who she was now
“Chandra,” Pia jumped at the unfamiliar voice, before realizing it was the elf that had been with them, “can you give us some light?”

Heat blossomed into existence as Chandra’s hair suddenly burst into flames, allowing Pia to see around the small cave they were hidden in.

The black haired girl was clutching the brown haired one tightly, her sword in one hand as she took long breaths. The other wasn’t moving beyond her own breathing.

The boy was leaning against a wall with one arm, the other hanging limply at his side. His whole body seemed to convulse, and something brown and red escaped from his mouth.

“Whoa!” Chandra reached out, steadying him, “you alright there, kiddo?”

“Fine,” he winced, “Aura should be fixing the damage, but I think my arm is shot. Hurts a lot.”

“Let me see,” the elf hovered her hands over the hand over the arm, “Oh my.”

“What?” the black haired girl extracted herself from under her friend, sliding the sword she had in a sheath hidden by her backpack, and started to shake her friend.

“Sun,” the elf continued, “I thought Aura protected you?”

“It does, unless you get hit by something really strong, why?” the blond haired boy, who must have been Sun, responded. Aura? Wait, was that a monkey tail?

“Because your arm has at least ten hairline fractures, and your hand…”

“Completely wrecked?”
“A very good way to put it, yes,” the elf’s hand glowed green, “I can heal the fractures, and make sure your hand sets properly, but I don't have the time to heal it fully. We need to move.”

“Go ahead,” Sun said.

“Alright,” the elf frowned, “I’m sorry.”

“Sor- DUST!” Sun screamed in pain, “Fucking- piece of-”

“Do you really need to be so loud?” the woman with the bleeding tattoos, which she was dabbing at with a handkerchief, asked dully.

“This hurts a lot,” Sun’s eyes were still screwed up, “Nissa, what are you doing?”

“Healing your hand,” the elf, Nissa, continued the healing.

“I thought you said you were just setting the bones?” the black haired girl looked up from where she was continuing to shake the brown haired girl, “Ruby, wake up,” worry leaking into her voice.

“This is setting the bones,” Nissa said, “you- Sun, you very nearly crippled this hand with that move, some of the smaller bones are powder. How many bolts do you normally use?”

“One?” Sun’s voice squeaked at the end, “three max? I’m still ramping it up.”

“And you used five?” the black haired girl asked, “are you trying to kill yourself?”

Pia found herself feeling like an outsider, everyone so focused on Sun, with his occasional outbursts of swearing, or the girl who was still unconscious, that they had hardly spared her a glance. Even Chandra had walked away, instead focusing on poking Ruby.

“I’m done,” Nissa stood up, looking towards the two crouching over Ruby, “Is Ruby alright?”
“She isn’t waking up,” the black haired girl said, sounding incredibly worried, “Ruby’s a light sleeper.”

“Yeah she is,” Sun rubbed at his arm, “I’m never going to try sneaking up on her again. Do you think something’s wrong?”

“I’ll check,” Nissa crouched, waving her green covered hand over the girl's body, “her mana’s low. Was she casting a lot before we left?”

Mana?

“No,” the black haired girl said.

“Looks like Tezzeret learned some new tricks,” the tattooed woman said, “did you sense it, Nissa?”

“What?”

“That metal of his. It was eating through the mana. Ruby’s barriers, your spell. It probably would have done the same to mine if I hadn't used the Chain Veil.”

“You-” Nissa stopped, “you’re right. We should move, there has to be a drill in the-”

“What’s going on?” Pia finally asked aloud, drawing attention to herself, “Chandra. Who are these people? Where have you been?”

--- X Chandra X---

Chandra froze at the question, turning to her mother.

Pia hasn’t changed much over the years, a few streaks of grey in her hair and a few lines on her face, but otherwise the same. A shawl over a long, sleeveless jacket which in turn was an equally sleeveless kurta. Heavy welding gloves covered her hands and arms, and a pair of goggles like her
dad used to wear around her neck.

Chandra swallowed, standing from her place next to Ruby. Glancing back at the youngest member of their group, she found Nissa’s green eyes staring up at her.

“Go,” the elf said softly, “Ruby will be fine. Mana loss is an easy fix.”

“I-”

“Chandra,” Nissa said in a tone that brokered no argument, “that’s your mother. Go talk to her. Now.”

Chandra walked towards her mom, continuing to drink in every inch of the woman’s face. What did you say to a parent who you hadn’t seen for years? Who you had been sure had died?

“Hey mom,” Chandra tried to sound natural, “these are- I-”

Chandra froze for a second as her mom stepped forward, heedless of the flames around Chandra’s head, and wrapped her in a hug. Chandra swallowed, and after glancing back at Nissa, who nodded meaningfully, put herself out.

Without the danger of accidentally burning her mom in the way, Chandra returned the hug with all of her strength.

Pia still smelt the same, of Aether, oil and metal. Her clothes were softer though, closer to what she had worn when the Nalaars lived in Ghirapur then when they had been on the run. She must have been in Ghirapur for a while before now.

“Mom?” Chandra croaked out, feeling her throat tighten, “How? I- You weren't at the execution, and-”

Pia tightened her hold, causing Chandra’s chain mail to rattle.
“I was imprisoned,” she said gently, “I only found out about it after, Baral came to gloat. He said he had killed you.”

So Baral had survived Chandra’s ignition. She had never been sure, but had always hoped she had fried the bastard.

“He tried,” Chandra said, “but I don’t die easy.”

None of the Gatewatch did. They were survivors at the core, had to be, when their lives can be recorded as a particularly long stretches of fighting, to the points where they weren’t felt more like calms in the storm.

And that was the path they had chosen for themselves, glady and of their own free will.

“I’m glad,” Pia said softly, “Now, who are these people?”

“We don’t have time for that,” Ruby croaked, a flashlight suddenly turning on, “Not at the moment. We need to get somewhere safe, then we can do introductions.

“I-” Chandra felt Pia nod, “You’re right. And I know where we can go.”

“Where?” Chandra asked.

“To Oviya’s home,” Pia said simply.

--- X Thalia X---

Thalia toyed with the pistol hidden under her coat as her and Gideon followed Thrask. They had been traveling for hours to reach the Ochran hideout.

Do not worry, Traft whispered in her mind, You are not being watched.
Thalia loosened her grip on the pistol. She could trust Traft on that, at least. The geist was capable of sensing the living.

“We’re almost there,” Thrask said roughly, “I hope you know what you’re doin’, Boros.”

“We’re not Boros,” Gideon said for the hundredth time since they had set out.

“If it walks like a Boros, talks like a Boros and, judgin’ by the way you’re goin’, not have any instinct to keep itself alive like a Boros, it’s a Boros to me.”

“Fine,” Gideon’s lips tugged, “We can find the rest of the way.”

“Alright,” Thrask turned, pushing passed the two and almost disappearing from the low light of the Undercity before she stopped, “And, if you survive this, do me a favor and put in a good word to the Livin’ Guildpact, eh?”

“We will,” Thalia said for Gideon, who was focused on the hidden path in front of them.

“Good luck, then,” Thrask faded into the darkness, leaving Gideon and Thalia to stare down the hidden tunnel.

“How are we doing this?” Thalia asked, eyes scanning the area.

“Weapons out. These are trained assassins, so I’d rather not take the risk.”

Thaila nodded, unsheathing her saber and feeling Traft’s presence shift, preparing to use the trick they had been working on. At the same time, Gideon’s sural uncoiled, the strangely flexible strands of metal at the ready.

Thalia and Gideon walked for ten or so minutes before the tunnel opened up into a large common room. People of all races on Ravnica were watching them, ready to fight. As they walked further into the room, Traft shifted further.
Finally, a palid skinned man stepped towards them. Through his dirt encrusted hair, a pair of ears tapered into points, marking him as an elf, but something about him didn’t seem right. Like they were looking at an empty shell.

“Gideon Jura,” the man’s voice was similarly empty, no beyond that, it was hollow, in some metaphysical way Thalia couldn't easily identify, “Welcome to my humble abode.”

“You know me?” Gideon said, apparently trying to do his best to keep an eye on everyone.

Having a geist sharing her body had it’s benefits.

“I make it my job to know the powerful,” he said calmly, hooking his thumb around the second joint of his middle finger from below. Jerking his thumb towards his body, the finger gave a sickening crack, bending at an unnatural angle, “And you are one of those. Your comrade and her… interesting companion, however I can't say I know. You are…?”

“Thalia,” the cathar said.

“Thalia. It is a pleasure to meet you. And you are-?”

Thalia’s eyes widened slightly, “There’s no one he-”

“Oh, don’t be like that,” the man said, giving a hollow facsimile of a smile, “I can see him clear as day.”

Thaila felt half her face shift into a scowl as Traft took control of it, “And who are you to demand my name?”

“I haven't demanded anything,” the man said, “I merely want to know the identity of the spirit who enter my home. Would you not do the same, Gideon, Thalia?”

Thalia let Traft take full control for a moment to steady herself. This thing wasn't normal, the only things she had met more unsettling were Emrakul and Her brood.
“...I am Traft. You are?”

“See?” the man smiled. If he wasn't so wrong, it would have been a calming thing, “Was that so hard? Would you three like anything? Food, drink? You are guests in my house, so help yourself to anything I can give.”

“You could give us the location of Vraska?” Gideon said.

The man staggered back, a true look of shock appearing for a second, before he gave an equally real bark of laughter, “Well played, Gideon. Unfortunately, while I am a man of my word, I don't know where Vraska is either.”

“You don't keep track of your men?” Gideon asked.

“Normally I do,” the man said, “but Vraska has an interesting ability to avoid my means of detection. You missed her by hours, my friends. If you desire, I can send a messenger your way when she reappears.”

“That would be helpful,” Gideon agreed, “but how will we know you sent it? We don't know your name.”

“Call me Father,” the man said, “It is the only name I have use for. The messenger will identify me as such.”

--- X Ajani X---

Ajani fumbled briefly, trying to get his footing with the gauntlets and grieves he had forced his paws into. He hated these things, though he was thankful for Grandmother acquiring them. A six foot tall bipedal lion would cause more than a bit of a stir walking around Ghirapur.

Ajani breathed in, picking up the familiar scent of Grandmother… and several unknown scents… *Planeswalker* scents. The naturally-unnatural scent of unprocessed Aether radiating from them, so unlike the cracked metal smell that the Aether used to power everything in Kaladesh had.
One, two, three, four, five, six. The most Ajani had ever come across at once outside of Tamiyo’s story circle. Why were they here? Were they looking for him?

Ajani suppressed his Spark as well as he could (and as a hunter used to stealth, that was quite well) and dropped into the bushes. It wouldn't be enough if any of them were looking for Sparks, not at this range, but it was better than nothing.

“This is really good, Mrs.Pashiri!” One of the Planeswalkers said, a young girl in a red cloak. Ajani silently reached up, touching the gold hem of Elsp- his cloak. The girl carried the scent of flowers and metal.

“Thank you, dear. It's an old family recipe.”

“Sun,” the black haired girl sighed, “Slow down.”

“Sorry, that’s exhausting. I really don't get how you can go that fast all the time, Rubes,” the blond boy said. Ajani filed away the name for the inevitable confrontation.

Those two, the black haired girl and Sun, had a strange scent about them. Ajani couldn't place Sun’s, but he recognized the one around the girl. Feline, and not like she owned one, like she was one.

“Why do you think I eat so much?” the cloaked girl said. Rubes.

Ajani moved as silently so possible to make his way to the other side of the balcony, allowing him to see the other four guests. Damn it, he had been so focused on the Planeswalkers that he had missed the extra scent.

The reprimand disappeared upon noticing that it was one of Grandmother’s Renegade friends. Nothing to worry about.

The Planeswalker seated next to the Renegade had a mane of red hair, a pair of goggles pushed up onto her forehead and was wearing a set of armor made up of chain mail and tubing.
Next to her was a woman wearing a long coat that appeared to be made of leaves. Her pure green eyes were scanning the area before, quite suddenly, jumping to him.

“Come out!” she called, standing, “I know you’re there!”

Ajani stood, prepared to throw off his gauntlets and face down the group if the need came.

“Ajani!” Grandmother smiled, “When did you get here?”

“Just a few minutes ago,” Ajani said, keeping his head in the confines of the hood, as he looked around. ‘Rubes’ was squinting at him, her head turned to the side, “Who are these people, Grandmother?”

“Oh,” Grandmother’s smile turned sheepish, “Of course. You’ve met Pia before, right?”

“Once,” Ajani said simply.

“Well, this is her daughter, Chandra,” Grandmother waved a hand towards the red head.

“And the rest?”

“Friends of hers. Nissa, the one in the coat, Liliana,” the one he hadn’t gotten to before his cover was blown, wearing a purple dress and smelling of rot, Blake,” the girl who smelled of cat, Sun, the boy, “and Ruby.”

“A pleasure to meet you,” Ajani said, “might I-”

“Your cloak looks familiar,” Ruby cut him off, ignoring the discreet elbow to the side from Blake, “Do you know someone called Elspeth?”

The name was like a dagger to his gut. Ruby knew Elspeth? How-?
“Yes.”

“Oh,” a wide smile stretched across Ruby’s face as she stood, walking towards him without a care, “Good! I’ve been meaning to find her. I can feel her spark, but it’s muddy. I can’t get it right. Would you min-”

“Ruby,” Ajani lowered his hood, ignoring the sounds of movement at him exposing his head and knelt. He needed to look her in the eye for this, she deserved that much, “Elspeth’s-” Ajani felt his voice try to stick in his throat, like admitting it would tear open the wound, but he forced it out, “I’m sorry, but Elspeth’s gone.”

There was something painful about watching the revelation sink in. It seemed to happen in slow motion, starting with her eyes. They dilated, the joy filled silver darkening to a tarnished grey, made all the worse by the smile frozen onto her face.

Then that crumpled, replaced with a stricken look as she stepped back, “She’s- she’s dead?”

“Yes, I’m sorry. She spoke of you a lot,” a lie. Elspeth had mentioned Ruby once, in passing.

Ruby seemed to ignore Blake and Sun standing up, each reaching out for her, tear brimmed eyes staring into his one, “How.”

It wasn’t a question. It was an order.

“We… We were on a plane, Theros,” Ajani heard Pia say something, before being shushed, not unkindly, by Grandmother and her daughter, “Another,” Ajani’s eye jumped to Pia briefly. Did he-? No, the secret was out. leonin didn’t exist on Kaladesh, “Planeswalker used a ritual to become a god. We, me and Elspeth, killed him… and the leader of the gods, Heliod,” Ajani spat the name, “rewarded her by killing her with her own weapon. I,” Ajani’s voice weakened, “I was right there. I should have done something, anything. I-“

“It’s not your fault,” Ruby said from the tangle of limbs holding her, “It was his… Heli-” Ruby’s eyes seemed to grow wide with a realization, before hardening, “Heliod.”
Ruby freed herself from the hug, marching past Ajani and towards the balcony.

“Ruby!” Blake called, “Where are you-”

“Don't,” Ruby snarled, “follow me.”

Then she was gone, a single step forward saw her body start to fade from existence, and by the next she was gone.

Blake stepped forward, but Nissa grabbed her by the wrist, “give her time.”

“But-”

“We’ll give her until tomorrow morning,” Nissa said, “and if she isn't back by then, I’ll come with you to look. We need to plan our next step anyways. I think we know what Tezzeret is after… but now what?”

The rest of the group nodded, frowning.

“Couldn't we just destroy it?” Sun offered.

“That'll be our last resort,” Nissa said instantly, “We- I need a map of the city.”

“There’s one in the closet,” Grandmother pointed towards it.

Even as Sun grabbed it, Ajani frowned. They were clearly going through the motions, worry about their friend taking precedent.

So where had she gone?

--- X Koth X---
Koth’s eyes were open by the time he heard the second scraping noise. By the third, he was ready to fight.

Had the Phyrexians found them? He had been sure their current base, a set of artificial cavern deep in the heart of a mountain with no way in or out without a geomancer, would have lasted for longer.

Koth cleared the space between his ‘bed’ and the passage. If the Phyrexians were here, he wanted to be ready for them.

So he was understandable befuddled by the preteen pushing a giant crate down the passage.

“Ruby?” Koth asked, “What are you doing here?”

“I need you to make something,” Ruby grunted, continuing to push the crate towards his room.

“Ruby,” Koth placed his hands on the crate, easily stopping her movement, “It’s not safe here, you know that. Your plane must have artisa-”

“Koth,” Ruby said, looking up for the first time and exposing her red rimmed eyes, “This… it’s not a normal piece. It needs a master and you’re the best I know. Please.”

“I- Ok. It can't hurt to hear you out. Do you have a desi-?”

Ruby continued to push, “I’ll show you once I finish moving this.”

“Here,” Koth calmly pushed Ruby aside, only for his eyes to grow wide as he wasn't able to move it any more than she was. What was in this? “Actually, can you help?”

“Yeah,” Ruby grabbed one side of the crate and Koth grabbed the other. Together, they pushed the crate into Koth’s room.
“What’s in this?” Koth asked. Ruby produced a large bar of metal with a curve on one end, wedging it into the corner of the crate and popping off nail. She did this on all four corners before opening the crate for him to see, “Metal?”

Stacked in neat rows were bars of metal. So much, Koth realized, that it could keep the resistance stocked for months.

“Earth Dust infused steel,” Ruby nodded, “It’s stronger than normal, but heavier.”

Koth took out one bar, weighing it as he let his power do its work. Power resonated through the metal, ready and excited to be shaped, “But why so much?”

“It’s easier to explain a crate going missing then a few bars,” Ruby said, “and I wasn't sure how much you’ll need anyways. If this weapon is going to work, it needs to be perfect.”

“You stole this?” Koth asked, “This much metal, this strong- we’re depri-”

“We have plenty on Remnant,” Ruby said, “it was made to create weapons. That’s what it will do. Keep the rest, use it against the Phyrexians.”

Koth put down the bar, looking at Ruby, “What is this weapon?” Ruby rolled up a sleeve, and Koth’s eyes were immediately attracted to the scar in the shape of a burning heart nestled among the mana filled marks, “And where did you get that?”

Ruby looked down, tracing it, “I- I don't remember.”

“It’s deliberate,” Koth observed. Scars didn’t natural come in that shape, “do you know the symbol?”

“It’s my sister's,” Ruby said, “but I don't remember why I have it.”

Koth nodded, not saying the last bit as he ran one metal encrusted finger along the symbol of New Phyrexia gouged into his own wrist. The mark was self inflicted, “The design?”
Ruby touched one of the marks, a red and white swirl, and a large rolled up piece of blue parchment was in her hands. She looked around briefly, looking for a place to put it, before Koth made a table of stone rise up next to them.

The moment Ruby had finished spreading it, Koth immediately recognized it, “Ruby, this is…”

“I know.”

“Why?” Koth asked, tracing the blade in front of him. The long double edged blade, the larger than normal hilt, embedded with two gems, the hilt just long enough to fit a hand and a half, the golden pommel that ended in a point.

“Elspeth’s dead,” Ruby said, “She- they… she’s dead.”

Koth closed his eyes for a second, giving himself that long to mourn his friend, “Then why-?”

“I promised her I would kill whatever killed her,” Ruby said, “This is the easiest way to do that. It’s what it was made to kill the one who did it.”

“It was?”

“Yes. Can you make it?”

“…Yes. But it will just be a sword. I can’t-”

“I’ll handle the enchanting,” Ruby said, “and- Koth, when it’s done, when it’s ready… can you leave Mirrodin for once? I know, you don’t like to but,” Ruby’s hand shook as she balled them on the floor, “My friends, they won’t want to help. I need-”

“I will,” Koth said, “Just this once. Elspeth was my friend too. I won’t sit by and let her murder go unanswered.”
Vengeance. Koth could understand that well. Mirrodin was all but gone, all he was doing now, going to do until he died, was fight to avenge it.

Koth grabbed the first bar. This would be one of his finest works, it had to be.

Elspeth’s blade had been the finest weapon Koth had ever seen, and it’s replica would be much the same.

--- X End X---

Chapter End Notes

AN: Oh yeah, motherfuckers. it’s on. I’ll give you one guess of what I call the arc after Kaladesh.
Chapter 12

Blake leaned on the balcony, waiting for the sun to set and the rest to fall asleep. In the distance, the fair continued on into the night, apparently uncaring of the confrontation that had taken place there that morning.

Looking back, Blake sighed as she saw Ajani, Nissa and Pia hunched over the map unfolded on the table, planning their next move. Chandra was sprawled out on the couch next to her mother, resting her head on Pia’s thigh as she watched something with her Scroll. Content, apparently, to just be near Pia for the first time in over a decade.

Sun and Liliana had departed for the moment, sneaking back to base camp to grab the bedding there so they could stay at Mrs. Pashiri’s place for the night. Giving them a second base closer to the heart of the city, closer to Tezzeret.

Blake scowled in the direction of the fair, even though she wasn't sure Tezzeret was there. He didn't seem like the type to sit around running damage control about throttling an almost-twelve year old.

Which brought Blake back to why she was waiting for everyone to sleep. She needed to go find Ruby, even if it angered her friend. She couldn't just leave Ruby alone like this. Ruby was… pure, she shouldn't be alone when she was mourning Elspeth… Whoever that was.

Blake fished around in her head for any memory of the name. It sounded familiar, but she couldn't remember where she had heard it.

It felt a bit like a chase, Blake realized. She had followed Ruby to Kaladesh, only for Ruby to run off to Remnant briefly and then some other unknown plane and leave Blake behind.

“Are you sure you don’t want to sit down, dear?” Blake jumped in place as she turned to see Mrs. Pashiri placing a platter onto the balcony table, a brass tea kettle on it, “They're not going to sleep for a while yet, so you will be waiting.”

“Waiting for what?” Blake did her best to feign innocence as Mrs. Pashiri shut the balcony doors.

“Oh,” the grey haired woman smiled kindly at Blake, “Don’t be like that. I’m not blind, I can see
you plan to go after Ruby when you can.”

“I-” Blake wilted, “I can't just leave her alone.”

“Oh, I understand both sides, dear,” Mrs. Pashiri said, pouring the content of the kettle into the two mugs, “Here, drink some chai. It will help you feel a bit better.”

“Thank you,” Blake said on instinct as she took the warm drink, “What did you mean, about understanding both sides?”

“I used to be an experienced Lifecrafter. Well, I still am, but I was more public. When my wife died,” Mrs. Pashiri sighed, “I retreated from the public.”

“Oh,” Blake said, “I’m sorry for you loss.”

“Thank you, but that's unnecessary,” Mrs. Pashiri said, “It’s been almost twenty years now. I’m… well, I’m not over it. You never truly get over something like that, but I’ve made my peace with it.”

Blake nodded, “and the other side?”

“Some people like to be surrounded by friends when they grieve,” Mrs. Pashiri put down her mug, “I’ll give you a bit of advice, Blake. You and Ruby are clearly close, you clearly care about her a great deal. If you think Ruby should have your support, then go to her. Don't worry about the others, I’ll take care of them.”

“But…” Blake paused, “What if I make Ruby angry?”

She didn't want to misread the situation. Ruby was already dealing with grief and… whatever had been going through her mind before she had planeswalked off, she didn't need to be angry at Blake.

“Dear,” Mrs. Pashiri said, “If Ruby cares about you anywhere near as much as you care for her, she won’t be.”
Blake nodded, putting down her untouched drink, “Thank you.”

Mrs. Pashiri nodded, giving a smile, “Go.”

Blake turned, taking one step forward and plunging into the Blind Eternities.

The moment she was out of it, she took a shuddering gasp of air… and was promptly grabbed by the front of her shirt and sent crashing against a wall. Forcing her eyes to focus and steady, Blake looked at her assailant.

He was tall, at least six feet possibly more, and his skin was on the darker side. Blake was fairly sure he wasn't human, despite looking like one… humans didn’t have spikes of metal growing from their body.

Where his hair should have been was a set of metal spikes jutting backwards and a smaller set from his chin, giving the appearance of a goatee. The arm holding her, his left, had another pair of growths. One coiled around his shoulder and the back of his neck, the other coating his lower arm and hand.

His other hand, which was glowing a deep red, was in the same state. As was his entire lower half, his feet ending in metal talons.

“Who are you?” he growled, molten eyes staring into hers, “What’s a Planeswalk-”

“Koth!” A familiar voice called, stopping the man, “Don’t hurt her, she’s my friend!”

Koth let go, stepping back as Blake nearly fell on her butt, only her shadow stopping it. Looking around, Blake actually took in her surroundings.

They were in a high ceiling cave, the only noticeable things being a stone forge in one corner, a crate next to it, and the table Ruby was sitting at.
Piled around the girl was weapons, from axes to hammers to spears, Crescent Rose was in front of her and Drache laying next to it.

“Ruby!” Blake jumped up, running passed Koth and around the table and pulling Ruby into a hug.

“Blake?” Ruby asked, “What are you doing here?”

“I was worried about you,” Blake tightened the hug as she felt Ruby start to shake, “You ran off-”

“You were never supposed to be here,” Ruby said, “You need to leave. It isn't safe.”

“And Innistrad wasn't?” Blake argued, “Tibalt wasn't? Where are we?”

“I-” Ruby sighed, “I'm not going to be able to convince you to leave and forget about this am I?”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby’s heart was hammering in her chest as she stared at Blake. This wasn't safe. What to do, what to do?

The idea to return with Blake and then immediately scrub every memory of Mirrodin from the older girl’s mind rose for half a second before Ruby brutally crushed it. She would never violate Blake’s trust like that. She was too important to Ruby.

But she didn't want Blake to know about Mirrodin. The threat there was one that technically fell under the Gatewatch mission statement… but there was no way they were ready.

“Then you need to promise me you won't tell the others about here,” Ruby said, knowing it came off as less a plea and more an order.

“What?” Blake recoiled back, “Why? Where are we?”
“Promise me,” Ruby repeated.

--- X Blake X---

“I- I promise?” Blake stuttered. Why was Ruby so serious all of a sudden?

Ruby sighed, “We’re on Mirrodin. It’s… we’ll need to go way back to explain everything.”

“Ok,” Blake said, sitting “Go.”

“You know about Dominaria, right?” at Blake’s nod, Ruby continued, “Well, a long time ago, there was a nation on Dominaria, the Thran Empire. Towards the end of the Thran, there was a man… a genius named Yawgmoth. He was a monster, maybe not the worst the Multiverse has ever seen, but definitely up there.”

“Why?” Blake asked, sitting down across from Ruby.

“He, he found a way to convert organic creatures into machines. He used it to create an army, the Phyrexians.”

Koth growled from where he was hammering away at a bar of metal. It didn't look all that much like he was actually making much of anything.

“So what happened?”

“He was sealed in an artificial plane, incapable of reaching Dominaria for four thousand years. They used planer portals, like the one that elf made, to assault other planes.”

“And then what?” Blake leaned forward, enraptured by the story. She had never really thought about how much history existed outside of Remnant. Of other Planes, or even just Planeswalkers.

“The Brothers’ War happened,” Ruby said grimly.
“The what?” Blake asked, “I don't know Dominaria’s history like you do. Why do you know that?”

“Know your enemy,” Ruby and Koth said as one, before Ruby continued on alone, “The Brothers’ War was a war Phyrexia manipulated the brothers Urza and Mishra into having after they accidentally undid the device keeping the Phyrexians out. The Multiverse’s dating scheme is based around the year they were born.”

“That big?” Blake asked.

“Doubly. The Brothers’ War was cataclysmic. At the end, Urza discovered the Phyrexian influence and detonated something, destroying the island they were on, plunging Dominaria into an ice age, sealing it and eleven other Planes off from the rest of the Multiverse.”

“But what’s that got to do with here?”

“I’ll get to that in a bit. Urza was at the center of the blast, his body obliterated until his Spark ignited-”

“What? How? We can't do that,” Blake cut in.

“It was a different time, the Spark burned so much brighter then. Planeswalkers willed their desires upon the worlds, and the worlds obeyed. Ask Liliana, she’s from before the Catastrophe.”

Catastrophe? Blake really needed to sit down with Ruby and pick her brain for everything she knew about the history of the Multiverse.

“Urza was one of the strongest Planeswalkers to ever live. I’d put him in the top four.”

“And the other three?”

“Sorin, Ugin and Nicol Bolas.”
Blake briefly fished around in her head, “Didn't you say you met Nicol Bolas? Something about saying no thanks to an offer to serve him?”

“I lied,” Ruby said without missing a beat, “I couldn't talk about meeting a dragon at the time, could I? I ran away the moment I could. There are only three types of people in the Multiverse, Blake. People who have never met Nicol Bolas, those who have and would rather never do it again and those who have and want him dead. He is the oldest Planeswalker.”

“Even I’ve heard of Bolas,” Koth said.

“Anyways, eventually the shard was popped and Urza returned Dominaria. Urza and Phyrexia fought for another four thousand years until The Invasion happened. The Phyrexian invasion of Dominaria. It ended with Urza and Yawgmoth dead and Phyrexia destroyed.”

“I’m sensing a but here,” Blake said.

“Do you remember that Planeswalker golem from the fight with Emrakul? Karn?”

“Kinda?” There had been a lot of Planeswalkers there, and Blake hadn’t gotten all of their names since her and Sun had gotten there late.

“He was made by Urza using a Phyrexian heartstone. It had a drop of Glistening Oil in it.”

“And a single drop is all it takes,” Koth said.

“It replicates, Glistening Oil, and creates new Phyrexians. That’s its nature. Each time Karn Planeswalked, he left a small drop of Oil behind while the one in his heart never disappeared.”

“That includes the Plane he created,” Koth continued, “Here.”

“Argentum,” Ruby said

“Mirrodin,” Koth said.
And then as one, grimly, “New Phyrexia.”

Blake stared at Ruby, “You want me to keep this a secret? This is the exact thing the Gatewatch was made to fight.”

“We're not ready for it,” Ruby said venomously, “I hate Phyrexia more than almost anybody, but I know our limits. We’re not ready.”

“Are you sure? We beat Emrakul.”

“Emrakul beat herself. The only faction we could hope for that happening is the Quiet Furna-”

“The Furnace is gone,” Koth said, “a lot has changed since you were last here.”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby sat back down, staring at Koth, “What do you mean, the Furnace is gone?”

“The Orthodoxy attacked. Norn got even more militaristic once Karn was gone. I don't know what happened to Urabrask, but the rest were either destroyed or became part of one of the other groups.”

“Oh,” Ruby said simply. Urabrask had been the only Praetor she could stand. He might of felt like they were wrong to reject compleation, but he hadn't forced it on them like Jin-Gitaxias or Norn.

If there had been any Phyrexians it would have been possible to live with, it was the Quiet Furnace.

“On the upside, they also took out most of the Seven,” Koth said, “but that’s a double edged sword.”

“Unity,” Ruby said immediately. The Orthodoxy was White aligned, they would do anything for it.
Without the Thanes poisoning the other factions effort, the other two could be trusted to fall in line to wipe out the remaining survivors, “Anything else?”

“Ezuri was compleated.”

Ruby’s eyes widened. Ezuri was a jerk, a hero by necessity rather than any desire to do good, but he didn’t deserve compleation. *Nobody* deserved compleation, “Which-?”

“Progress Engine.”

“Melira?” The elf was the only hope for a pure Mirradin, immune to Glistening Oil and able to inculcate others.

“Safe. Her and Thrun got away, but they were near the Tangle last I heard.”

That was safe? That was the domain of Vorinclex and Glissa.

“Ruby,” Blake cut in, “We can't just stand aside and let this happen! We promised to protect the multiverse!”

*I ran away last time I was here, but other people couldn't.*

“I-”

*Never again.*

“I’m-”

*For everyone who can't run away, I'll keep watch.*

“You’ve known about this since before the Gatewatch formed! Why haven't you mentioned it? Do
“I was scared,” Ruby croaked, looking down as she felt the pickling of tears, “I’m still scared. Phyrexia isn’t like the Eldrazi or Tibalt. There’s no head to cut off, we’d be walking into a losing war. Nine Planeswalkers aren’t enough to win this war, we had so many more at Thraben and we were struggling to even slow Emrakul down.”

Shame stabbed into her gut, had she broken her oath before it even began? She knew that there was no chance of them winning a year ago but if she had been honest, what could have changed? Could they have been training, working with Koth?

“There has to be something we could do,” Blake voice had taken a pleading edge, “Anything.”

“It’d take an army, Blake,” Ruby said, “Trust me, I’m probably the person who knows just how bad Phyrexia is, but we’re not ready.”

“For what it’s worth,” Koth said, “I agree with Ruby. We weren't ready, you aren't ready. Records of the Invasion said it took nine Planeswalker to take down Old Phyrexia and even that didn't work in the end.”

Nine Planeswalkers and a plan four thousand years in the making that couldn't be replicated. She could recreate the Weatherlight given enough time, but it wouldn't hold the same power as the original. At best Ruby would be able to get it flying. Going through the Blind Eternities? Not a chance.

“But…” Blake looked lost, like she didn't know what to do, “But we…”

Ruby stifled a sad sigh. That was the crux of the matter. Underneath the sarcasm and attempts to appear as impassive as possible, Blake was still an idealist. She held the same beliefs as her parents, that Faunus and Humans could live together without the violence that the White Fang had resorted to. She believed that the Gatewatch could succeed against every threat.

Ruby didn't have that luxury anymore. Her first months as a Planeswalker hadn't been among a group of friends in Ravnica learning in a controlled environment. It had been a bloody, fearful dash from one Plane to another in a desperate search for knowledge, Remnant or, barring that, a Plane that was safe.
Ruby had wanted to keep New Phyrexia buried and gone. To never think of the piles of butchered bodies in the core, or the desperate rush to Karn as Glissa hunted them with her pack. One where Tezzeret of all people had saved them by showing up with his own group of Phyrexians in an attempt to eliminate Glissa.

That was the problem with the agent of Bolas, he was mercurial. He could go from giving them someone immune to phyrisis to assaulting their camp with Phyrexians in a couple of days.

“This isn’t a war that we can win,” Ruby repeated, “We can win in Kala-

“Innistrad was a battle we couldn't win. We can get help!”

“Who!? Who would come to this place? Fight for a plane they don’t care about, that they have no connection to?” Ruby was hardly aware that she had leapt to her feet except for Drache’s confused croon.

“That’s what we do! You said the old Phyrexia invaded other planes, what about this one? When does it become our problem? When they show up on Kaladesh? Ravnica? Remnant?”

“I-!”

“ENOUGH!” Koth slammed his hands against the table, “both of you! Ruby’s right, a few Planeswalkers won’t change this on their own. But,” Koth sighed, “Blake’s right too. I hadn't considered it, but the Praetors must have some idea of the existence of the multiverse. It’s only a matter of time before they discover a way to travel between worlds.”

“Then what do we do?” Ruby asked, “We’ll-"

“Work on it,” Koth said, “I have some ideas, but I’ll need time. I’ll work on it over the next month or two. You mentioned another war?”

“We think so,” Ruby said, “Tezzeret’s a big guest at a fair on the plane of Kaladesh, we think he might be a threat.”
“I’d hoped we had blown him up,” Koth sighed, “We’ve been surviving, we’ll be able to survive until you deal with that. I’ll try to get Melira, Thrun and any other survivors.”

“What about the others?” Blake asked.

“We’ll keep it quiet for now,” Ruby said, “We shouldn’t be trying to split our focus between more than two things. Once we’re done on Kaladesh, we’ll tell them.”

And hopefully Koth would have finished the blade by then.

“Ok,” Blake said reluctantly, “Ready to head back?”

“Yeah,” Ruby said, standing and wrapping her arms around Koth’s midsection, “Thank you.”

Koth froze for a second, before reaching down and lightly returning the hug, “I told you, Elspeth was my friend too.”

Ruby nodded, stepping back and turning to stand even with Blake, heading towards Chandra and Nissa’s sparks.

---

Gideon stepped back into Jace’s office, blinking as he found Liliana and Ral sitting around the desk.

“Did something happen?”

“Sit down, Beefslab,” Liliana gestured to one of the two chairs, “You too, Cathar.”

Gideon watched Thalia grab the chair next to Ral, putting her as far away from Liliana as possible, one hand in the pocket of the suit coat she had over her armor. Sitting down himself, Gideon repeated the question, “Did something happen?”
“Oh, yes. It’s been an eventful couple of days. Blake showed up, Chandra’s mother is still alive, Ruby was throttled by Tezzeret, anoth-”

“What!?” Gideon cut her off, “Ruby’s-?”

“Fine,” Liliana waved him off without a care, “She stabbed Tezzeret’s legs to get him to let her go.”

“That isn’t the point,” Gideon resisted the temptation to grind his teeth.

“Tezzeret’s there?” Jace took over.

“Yes,” Liliana said, “and he’s after something. We’re sure of it.”

“What?” Gideon gritted out slightly.

“A planar portal.”

Silence fell at those word, Ral even stopped fiddling with the inner workings of the mechanical arm the General of Atlas had sent their way upon Winter reporting it.

Gideon wasn’t sure how he felt about it. He was a soldier by trade and he was sure that Ironwood had some ulterior motive to help them since he had begun requesting a meeting with them.

One that was less than a month away.

“A planar portal? ” Thalia’s eyes were burning with a corona of blue fire, “I assume that this would allow beings that are not Planeswalkers to pass through the Blind Eternities?”

“Yes.”
“Why would Tezzeret want that?” Thalia asked.

“That isn't the question,” Jace cut in, “is it, Lili?”

“Most likely.”

“Then what’s the question?” Gideon asked.

“What does Nicol Bolas want with a planar portal?” Jace asked.

“Who?” Thalia asked, voicing Gideon’s own internal question.


“If he wants that portal,” Jace said, “Then it’s definitely in the multiverse’s best interest that we make sure he doesn't get it.”

“This must have been what Baan wanted us to do,” Gideon said, climbing to his feet.

“Not quite,” Liliana said, “Tezzeret is working with the Consulate.”

“Maybe Baan realized that Tezzeret was a threat?” Gideon offered, “even if he is, we can't let him get something like that.”

“I agree,” Jace nodded, “We’ll have to put the search for Vraska on hold. You and Thalia should go to Kaladesh with Lili and start planning, me and Ral will finish up work and catch up with you.”

“Right,” Gideon stood, turning to help Thalia up, only to realize she was already standing, “What preparations did you make?”
“We have two bases, ones a mine and the other at a friend of Chandra’s mother,” Liliana turned, walking away and into the Blind Eternities.

On the other side of the familiar void, Gideon looked around. They were in a living room that wouldn't have looked out of place in Remnant, which had several sleeping bags on the floor.

“Morning, Gids,” Gideon turned to see Chandra leaning on a table, watching Nissa and an older woman work in the kitchen. The woman turned, jumping.

“Oh!” She raised a hand to her chest, “That will take some getting used to!”

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” Gideon said, “We-

“It’s alright, dear,” she smiled, looking back at the elf, “you might need a bit more ingredients, Nissa. I’m Oviya Pashiri, it’s nice to meet you too.”

“I’m Gideon Jura, and this is-

“Thalia,” the Cathar added, before her eyes ignited.

“And I am Traft,” Gideon suppressed a shudder as the saint took control of Thalia’s body long enough to introduce himself. That wasn't normal.

“I… Well, sit down, get comfortable,” Pashiri smiled, going back to the kitchen.

“Where’s Ruby, Sun and Blake?” Gideon asked as he sat next to Chandra.

“Still asleep,” Chandra looked at a nearby door, lowering her voice, “They didn't get to sleep till after midnight.”

“Why?”
“There, uh… there's another Planeswalker here. Him and Ruby had a friend they both knew. He, uh, he told Ruby she died. Ruby Planeswalked off, Blake went after her, and they didn't come back for a bit.”

Standing, Gideon pushed open the door quietly, looking in. The three kids were asleep in a pile on a large bed, their sleeping bags around them and bedding pulled over them. Sun and Blake each held one of Ruby’s hands. Stepping out, he quietly raised an eyebrow.

“They didn't want to leave her alone. I don't blame them, she took it hard. She looked like she wanted to kill the guy who did it when she left. Leave them alone, they’re not doing anything wrong.”

“I didn't say they were, I’ve just never seen Ruby let anyone touch her when she’s asleep,” she had punched him on instinct when he woke her up during a camping/training trip the month before.

“Says how badly she took it, eh?”

“And how much she trusts them,” Nissa said, sitting down beside Chandra ask Pashiri grabbed the ingredients she had been preparing, “I don't think Sun will have to worry about Ruby accidentally hitting him again.”

“It might be different is he wakes her up out of nowhere,” Gideon said, shutting the door quietly and stepping away, “She’d be too asleep to notice.

Gideon knew what Ruby was going through, losing a friend. He had lost too many.

--- X Ajani X ---

Ajani stepped down the stairs of Grandmother's home, looking around for the two new Planeswalkers. It didn't take long for him to find them, they were at the table eating.

“Hello,” he said carefully, continuing the rest of the way down the stairs.
The man turned before standing with a smile. He was a head shorter than Ajani, which, seeing as Ajani was pushing seven and a half feet, meant he had to be over six feet tall, “Hello! I’m Gideon Jura, it’s a pleasure to see a leonin again after so long.”

“Ajani Goldmane,” Ajani said politely, reaching out and shaking the extended hand with one paw.

“This is Thalia,” Gideon gestured to woman in the chair next to his.

“Hello,” She said.

“Did Ruby not come back?” Ajani asked.

“She’s still asleep,” Chandra said, head on her arms and looking like she would love to be in the same boat, “Why?”

“I-” Ajani hesitated, “There’s a group of Planeswalkers I met with sometimes. It’s not as… organized as you are, we just stop by and share stories. They,” Ajani’s voice caught in his throat, “They knew Elspeth. They helped me after, after…”

After Heliod ran her through. After Brimaz’s men dragged him away from her dying form. After he had gone among the people and told them that her story, that their gods were fickle tyrants that had turned on a girl who had done nothing wrong, exalted her when she fixed it and then killed her for knowing something they could not.

“You were close?” Gideon asked.

“She was my student, in some ways. A friend and a hero,” Ajani turned away, “but stories don’t always end like they’re supposed to.”

Elspeth would have carried him in her heart, but would have continued on. Would have lived happily with Daxos on Theros.

“It wasn't a peaceful death, then?” Ajani growled as Gideon wrapped an arm around his shoulder, only stopping when he realized Gideon was guiding him out onto the balcony. Away from the rest
“No. She was murdered in front of me,” and he hadn't been able to do anything to stop it.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Gideon said, “I know what that's like. I... I had a group of friends, when I was younger. Kytheon’s Irregulars is what we called ourselves.”

“Kytheon?”

Gideon gave a sad chuckle, leaning against the balcony, “That was my name at the time. Kytheon Iora. I changed it after my ignition.”

“Why?”

“You know, I've never thought about it? I suppose I wanted to leave Kytheon behind. Kytheon was a hot headed hubristic fool who got his friends killed.”

“You-?”

“Yes. I threw a spear at a god from my plane, Erebos,” Ajani realized with a jolt that Gideon was from Theros, “he returned it with enough force to kill everyone, I only survived because I can make my skin indestructible. I ignited after that, landed on a plane called Bant-“

Ajani couldn't stop the laugh that came, despite nothing of the matter being funny, “I’m sorry. It's just... I met Elspeth on Bant and she died on Theros.”

“Small multiverse, huh?” Gideon joined in the laughter. What a strange sight they had to be, a man and a lion laughing at the most bizarre, coincidental bit of the tragedies they had each lived through, “How long ago was it? That she died?”

“Six months,” Ajani sat down in one of the chairs, feeling it groan.

“I’ll give you a bit of advice,” Gideon said, “The hardest part is to stop blaming yourself. Yes, I was an idiot and my friends died because of my pride, yes, Elspeth died and you no doubt think
you should be in her place. But they wouldn't want us sitting around blaming ourselves.”

Ajani didn't say anything. He didn't agree with Gideon at all.

“Anyways, if you think it'd be good for Ruby, I won't stop you from offering,” Gideon smiled.

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby followed Ajani down the path, smiling at Sun and Blake, “Thanks for…”

“Hey,” Sun pushed her lightly, “Come on. This isn’t you running off. And by the way, never do that again, ok? If Blake had told me she was going to look for you instead of leaving while I was out, I woulda come. Instead I spent the rest of the night with Nissa keeping an eye on me. She sat down outside the bathroom when I went!”

Thank Dust for that. She was already unhappy about Blake knowing about New Phyrexia. She didn't want Sun worrying about it too.

“Still,” Ruby said quietly, reaching down to touch the mark holding Venser’s journal. His death hadn't hurt like this. The older Artificer had died, if not content, then at least helping a friend. Saving Karn from becoming the new Father of Machines, “Thank you.”

Ruby ran a finger along the palm of her left hand, tracing the newly added symbol of the Mirrian resistance. She wouldn't remove it until New Phyrexia was gone, she would never let herself try to bury them again. Like Koth.

“So,” Sun continued, “What’s that? I’ve never seen it.”

“Something that was important to Elspeth,” Ruby said.

Elspeth had lost her family, her home, to Phyrexians, before she even knew it. She would have wanted them to continue fighting.
“Why’d you never really mention her?” Sun asked, “Like, I can think of maybe twice I’ve heard her name before.”

“I wasn’t sure where she was,” Ruby lied. All stories she had with Elspeth involved Phyrexians, “And now…”

“I don’t think she’d want you beating yourself up about it,” Blake said.

“You didn't know Elspeth,” Ruby smiled sadly, “She always seemed weighed down. She didn't have a good life and…”

“And?”

“A home,” Ruby said quietly, another spear of guilt stabbing into her. She had promised to get Elspeth when she got back to Remnant, to bring her home.

Had Elspeth died waiting for Ruby to do that or had she given up, assuming that Ruby had abandoned her?

“MISTER CAT!” Ruby jumped as something flew at Ajani as he turned to one home, realizing it was a girl a year or two younger than her, “You’re back!”

“Isn’t that one on Tamiyo’s species?” Blake asked, “A moonfolk?”

“Looks like it,” Sun said.

“Hello, Rumi,” Ajani said.

“We were soooo worried! It’s been months, one sec, I’ll get mama!” the girl turned, running back the way she came, “Mama! Mamaaaaa! Mister Cat is back!”

“I heard,” Ruby’s eyes widened as Tamiyo floated out of the house. Ok, this was starting to get silly. The Multiverse was huge, how was it Planeswalkers seemed to come together like this?
“Welcome back to Kamigawa, Ajani, and who ar-? Oh! Hello, Ruby, Sun, Blake. You know Ajani?”

“We just met yesterday,” Ajani said, “but Ruby knew Elspeth.”

Tamiyo breathed, reaching out to Ruby lightly, “I’m sorry. If I had known, I would have told you-well, that probably isn't true, we were very busy last time we saw each other.”

Ruby stepped forward, throwing her arms around Tamiyo like she had Koth the day before, completely ignoring how it might look to the people passing by. Different Planes had different cultures.

Luckily, Tamiyo had been a Planeswalker for many years and apparently wasn't perturbed by the hug. Instead, she just ran one moon white hand through Ruby’s hair.

“I’m sorry about what I said to you and Jace on Innistrad,” Tamiyo said calmly, “I wasn't in the right mind at the time.”

“I don't think any of us were,” Ruby said into Tamiyo’s robe.

“Hm,” Tamiyo hummed, “Well, we should probably go in before you all catch your death. It should be raining before too long.”

Tamiyo guided them into the house, sliding a shoji open and leading them into the room, “Do you want something to eat or drink?”

Ruby shook her head along with Blake, but Sun just shrugged, “Sure. What do yo- OW! Blake!”

“We’re guests,” Blake said firmly as Sun rubbed his arm where he had pinched him.

“We have tea, if you like,” Tamiyo said with a kind smile.

“That sounds good,” Ruby said.
“I’ll be right back,” Tamiyo floated out of the room, Ajani following her. After a few seconds, a smaller head popped around the corner, looking at them, “Is Mama here?”

“No?”

“She’s gone!” the call seemed to be the trigger of a mass of moonfolk children to pour into the room, dragging someone who looked like a bipedal rat in with them. The one that had first looked in sat next to Sun, giving a wide grin showing teeth growing in, “Are you like mama?”

“Like mama?”

“Can you walk behind the air? I think you can, you came with Mister Cat, but…”

Walk behind the air? Did she mean, “Do you mean Planeswalkers?”

The girl nodded, grinned broadly, “Are you?”

“Yes.”

“Wow! We’ve never met ones so young before! Tell us a story!”

“A story?”

“It’s a rule,” the girl nodded, “guests have to give a story.”

“I,” Ruby’s eyes flickered to Blake. There was one story she could tell.

“Don’t worry Ruby at the moment,” Tamiyo sailed into the room, “She’s-"
“I’ll do it,” Ruby said.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” Ruby didn’t break her stare at Blake, breathing in and started.

--- X Story X---

There once was a girl-

“How old was the girl?

“Around your age-?"

“Rumi.”

There once was a girl who was lost in a desert, holding onto her staff as two suns beat down on her. She was a long way from home, and she didn’t know how to get back.

The girl had been in the desert for two days, trying to get to the giant pair of horns in the distance.

“Horns?”

“Yes. They were a pair of fake horns that looked the same no matter where in the desert you were. Always facing towards the slower sun.”

“Weird. What did they look like?”

“One second.”
“Wow, you’re a good drawer…”

“Blake’s better.”

But this desert, it had a curse. Anything that died in it stood back up, cursed to wander until the last scrap of flesh fell from their body.

Slowly, a pack of dead jackal headed-

“What’s a jackal?”

“Please, Rumi, Ruby will never finish her story if you keep interrupting her.”

“Sorry…”

“It’s fine. They’re a bit like dogs.”

A pack of jackal headed men stumbled towards her. Gripping the magical staff she had, the girl reached out, grabbing energy from the world below her and unleashed an explosion of energy beams to destroy them.

As the last was eaten by the beam, however, something landed behind her, temporarily blocking the suns from hitting her. Turning, the girl stared up at a giant dragon.

His scales were gold, his eyes a deep green and his horns were exactly the same as the ones on the horizon. As the girl stepped back, she bumped into the tail of the dragon, which was as big as a tree trunk. Her head suddenly ached, sending her onto her knees.

“Hello?” She squeaked.

“What,” the dragon’s deep voice seemed to shake the air and the girl’s chest, scaring her further, “are you doing on my plane?”
“Oh,” the girl said, “is it yours? I’m sorry, Mr-?”

“Is it not customary for a guest to give their name first?” While the dragon had phrased it as a question, the girl got the feeling it was the only time he would do so.

She gave her name, “Very well, I am Nicol Bolas, and this is my Plane.”

“Then I’ll leave,” The girl froze as he put his paw down behind her, creating a wall.

“Not yet. I would have use for someone with your talents.”

The girl wondered what he meant. Did he mean the attack, “I’m honored. Can you bring me to somewhere so you can explain?”

“I sup- the minute the dragon lifted their paw, the girl turned, diving into the space between worlds-

“That’s boring!”

“It’s what happened.”

-but despite that, the girl got the feeling she had only escaped, hadn’t been running down, because the dragon had been expecting her to do so.
Chapter 13

Ruby stepped back into Mrs. Pashiri’s home, feeling lighter after talking about her encounter with Bolas. Even if she had kinda removed the two week stretch she had spent in Bolas’s meditation Plane before she had realized the type of person Bolas really was.

She knew the others would understand, but… but…

But it didn't seem right!

Ruby nodded to herself, walking to where Nissa, Jace and Gideon were leaning over the map. Looking down at it, Ruby scratched her head in confusion.

Wrapping New Phyrexia and Bolas in a cloud of fog, Ruby mentally nudged Jace. Seconds later, memories rushed in.

Half formed plans, attempts to figure out how to expose Tezzeret as the power hungry psychopath he was, but nothing concrete. Not without revealing the existence of Planeswalkers.

“It’d be easier to know what to do if we knew why Bolas wants the portal,” Jace muttered aloud.

“Destruction, tyranny,” Ruby said, incapable of keeping the dry distaste from her voice, “multiplanar chaos. A better question is why does he need a portal for it.”

Jace nodded, “He has to be planning to move something big. Bolas used to run a interplanar smuggling ring, the Infinite Consortium. Me and Lili used to work for it.”

“Yeah,” Chandra butted in from where she was helping her mother with something in the kitchen, “you jumped me for a scroll at Keral Keep.”

Jace winced, “Right. I had forgotten about that. Anyways, we managed to get large items from one
plane to another. And we’re just humans, Bolas is a massive dragon—"

“and can shift sizes,” Ruby said under her breath.

“How do you know that off the top of your head?” Sun asked.

Ruby chewed on her lip, trying to think of something. What would Bolas need a planar portal for?

“Dunno. Bolas does what Bolas wants, heck, he might not even do it until we’re all dead. He’s pre-Urza, I think, he was born a long time ago. Four thousand five hundred and sixty six.”

“How do you know that off the top of your head?” Sun asked.

“She’s saying the current year,” Ajani said, moving to join the war table, “Bolas is much older than that. I’ve gathered information on him when I can, he had my brother murdered and caused widespread destruction on my home plane.”

“Any idea why he would want it?” Gideon asked.

“He only wants one thing,” Ajani said, “power.”

Ruby nodded, sighing. They were just talking in circles now, “Let’s take this one thing at a time. First, how do we make sure he doesn’t get it? We can worry about why he wanted it after we make sure he can’t have it.”

“I still say we should just break it,” Sun said, “he can’t use it if it doesn’t exist.”
“I agree with Sun,” Gideon leaned back, sitting on the sofa and crossing his arms, “arguably, it’s our duty to do it. Planeswalkers create enough destruction as is, can you imagine if an army invaded another Plane?”

“Something similar happened on my Plane as a result of Bolas’s manipulation,” Ajani said, “Alara had been shattered into five shards long ago, each lacking two colors-”

“That’s possible?” Sun asked, “I thought bad stuff happened if you didn’t have all five?”

“It was possible before the Calamity,” Liliana said, suddenly looking interested, “but those Planes were still unstable, yes. I’ve never heard of something like this from a natural Plane. What happened?”

“Bolas manipulated events on each of the Shards for when the Conflux, the natural merging of the Shards, so each one was ready for war.”

“Why?” Blake asked, “What does he get from that?”

Ruby closed her eyes, pulling up a familiar blueprint, an engine burning with enough energy to travel, “Power. Destroying a Plane lets loose an amazing amount of magical energy, if five fragmented Planes collided, the point of impact would…”

“And you add in the power gained from spilt blood,” Liliana sounded worried, “That’d probably be enough to…”

“To what?” Nissa asked.

“To return him to the power he held before the Calamity,” Liliana finished weakly.

“It makes sense, that’s what he’s always wanted,” Ruby sat down, legs shaking.

“‘We were gods once’, ” Jace started, sounding just as shaken, “‘Did you know that? The Spark burned so much brighter then.’”
“‘We willed our desires upon the worlds and the worlds obeyed,’” Ruby continued, “But then, the Catastrophe on Dominaria and we are less’... and now he isn't.”

Ruby fell silent for a long time, staring blankly ahead. Bolas had the power of a Pre-Calamity Planeswalker? Was that what she had felt when she was near him? How were they supposed to even begin to…?

“It’s not quite that bad,” Ajani cut in, “I interrupted him before he could absorb all the energy. But, yes. Bolas regained much of his power.”

“One thing at a time, everyone,” Gideon said, “Tezzeret and the portal first, we can deal with Bolas after.”

There was a loud chime, followed by a projected voice, Ladies and Gentlemen! There has been a change of plans for the final round of the Fair!

“What?” the Gatewatch whipped around. Had Tezzeret made his move while they were here?

Instead of being a ticketed event, it will be open to the public! Now, don’t worry if you bought tickets, you will be refunded! But we couldn't deprive others from seeing our once in a lifetime pre-show!

“Aren't presh-” Ruby shushed Sun quickly.

A week and a half from today, in this very arena, our head judge Tezzeret will duel the dangerous Renegade, Pia Nalaar, in the quicksmithing duel of the century! A clash of ingenuity and skill that hasn't been seen before! Don't miss it!

The PA system shut off as Ruby ground her teeth, words coming around before she could stop them, “that son of a bitch!”

Sun’s head jerked to look at her, “Whoa! What’s that about Ruby? He’s bluffing, Mrs. Nalaar is right here.”
“That’s the point,” Nissa said, her grip on her staff so hard her hand had lost blood flow.

“You have to give him credit,” Jace said quietly, “he knows exactly how to get us.”

“Not quite,” Liliana’s voice had become smug, “he’s actually made things easier for us. We know where he’ll be then.”

“I still don’t get it,” Sun said, “If he doesn't have Mrs. Nalaar why would he be there?”

“Because he’s planning to kill someone else in her place and say it’s her,” Ruby growled, before feeling a grin start to spread as she met Jace’s eye, “it’s a trap, he wants us focused on the arena…”

--- X Blake X---

Blake stepped onto the balcony outside their room with a tired sigh, walking over to Ruby, “Is it just me, or does it always feel like things go crazy once we get off Remnant?”

“What do you mean?” Ruby asked, running her finger along the new tattoo as her eyes were pointed towards the fair.

“We’ve only been here a couple of days, but we’re already plotting to trigger a trap to fight another Planeswalker. Do you think this will work?”

Ruby nodded, closing her eyes with a deep sigh, “I know it will.”

“It doesn't feel like it’s only been a year since we met, right?” Blake asked, changing the subject.

Ruby nodded again, “Yeah.”

Blake gently guided Ruby into a chair on one side of the table, sitting across from her, “School will probably be out by the time we get back. Any idea what excuse your dad is using for you
“Dunno,” Ruby sounded distracted, “Family emergency on my mom’s side, maybe?”

“Are you alright?” Blake asked, “You seem…”


Blake breathed in, trying to figure out what to do. She hadn't… she hadn't ever really gone through something like this. Life had been fine on Menagerie and after she had the Gatewatch at her back. Finally deciding to follow what would happen in one of her books, Blake grabbed Ruby's hand under the table, “Do you want to talk about it?”

Ruby nodded, shoulders sagging, “I had promised Elspeth I would find her after I got back to Remnant. That I’d bring her there so she could have a home.”

“Ruby-”

“Instead, I hung around Vacuo and Vale,” Ruby stood back up, pacing, “I didn't want to think about Mirrodin so I didn’t think about her.”

“Ruby, you’re just a kid. Elspeth had to of known you probably wouldn't find he-“

“Then I should have proved her wrong!” Ruby’s fist collided with the table, shaking it and sending a red flash along her hand, “I should have remembered! I should have found her! If I had just done that, she'd still be alive! It’s my fau-!”

“Don’t you dare say that,” Blake cut the tirade off as she pushed herself up, “It’s not your fault anymore than it’s Ajani’s. If Elspeth would hold this against you, then she doesn't deserve your friendship! You didn't know what was going to happen-“

“Isn't that my job, though?” Ruby argued, “That’s why I have these!” Ruby ripped the right sleeve of her shirt up, showing the massive tapestry of marks going up her arm, each a artifact, “I’m
supposed to be ready for-”

“Ruby,” Blake said, taking a step forward, “calm down. You’re acting-”

“I should’ve;” Ruby’s voice cracked again as her head turned, looking lost, “I should’ve…”

Blake stepped forward, wrapping her arms around Ruby, “I’m sorry.”

“How many people are going to die because of us?” Ruby asked, voice broken, “I know Tezzeret, he won’t go down without a fight. If we don’t stop him at the duel, there will be a war.”

“How many people will die if we don’t?” Blake said softly, sitting them on the bed, “not just on Kaladesh, but wherever they’re planning to go next.”

“I know,” Ruby said, hand clenched so hard veins bulged, “but that doesn’t make it easier.”

--- X Winter X---

Winter stepped into the office with a barely hidden sigh. Gawain was grumbling about the Gatewatch disappearing without any warning, waiting for Qrow to show up so he could ask the older man about if he knew where his niece had gone.

The taskforce had been jumping from hotel to hotel as they waited for a more stable housing arrangement to be worked out… to several members irritation, since the Gatewatch had a nice home… if you ignored the corpses.

That alone set portions of the Taskforce, Winter included, on edge. While much of the Gatewatch were friendly enough, their use of dead bodies for labor was beyond off putting.

Sitting at the desk, Winter typed in her password, ignoring the revolving logo on the desktop. Once it opened, she clicked over to the CCT app and typed in a familiar number.

After a tense moment, a balding man with brown eyes appeared, “Schnee residence, how can I-
Winter smiled, feeling tension flee her, “Klein!”

“Are you alright?” Klein asked, eyes lightening to yellow, “Weiss has been worried about you.”

But not her father or Whitley… not that she expected much. Her father was an arrogant madman, the Faunus members of the Taskforce and Gatewatch had made that clear, and her brother was, if anything, *worse*.

“Is she there?” Winter asked.

“Yes, do you want me to go get her?”

“In a moment, I’d like to talk to you. We haven't seen each other in…”

“Months,” Klein said, pulling up a chair and sitting in it, “so, what have you been up to? General Ironwood mentioned something about sending you on a special assignment. Something that nearly sent your father on a warpath, by the way.”

Winter gave a small smile, her father hadn’t been happy about her joining the Atlesian military since it essentially destroyed any control he had over her, “Yes, I’m working with a group in Vale.”

“Oh? Is it nice there?”

“Yes,” Winter nodded, “it’s warm, even in winter.”

“What about now?” Klein asked.

“It’s a bit too hot for my tastes,” Winter said, “We’re only just entering summer and it has been so hot we’ve kept the air control on.”
“Well,” Klein said, “make sure you stay hydrated and all that.”

“Of cour-” Winter stopped as a knocking came from Klein’s side, “Who is that?”

“Probably your sister,” Klein said, “I’m supposed to drive her to her combat lessons before too long. Would you like to talk to her now?”

“Yes, that’d be nice.”

“Right then,” Klein pushed himself up, walking away. The microphone just barely picked up him and Weiss talking. After a few sentences, Weiss came rushing onto the screen.

“Winter!” Weiss was smiling wider that she had in awhile, “I was worried-”

“I’m fine, Weiss,” Winter said, trying to calm her sister’s worry. Weiss hadn’t grown all that much the last few months, “I’ve just been busy.”

“Do you think you’ll be back, soon?” Weiss asked, “Father hasn’t really talked about you…”

“No,” Winter shook her head, “I’m probably going to be here for several more months at least. Maybe Klein could convince Father to let you come down and visit me next month?”

“I can work on that,” Klein said, “It is summer, after all. What part of Vale do you work in, if you don't mind me asking?”

“A lot of time we’re in the main city, but there’s been talk about moving to the island of Patch off the coast.”

“Is it nice there?” Weiss asked.

“Yes,” Winter said, “there’s a small town to accommodate the students of Signal. A third party we’ve been working with, the Gatewatch is stationed there already.”
“They are? Why?”

“One of their members has family there,” Winter explained.

“What are they like?” Weiss seemed transfixed. Their father had done his best to limit Weiss’s contact with the outside world, feeding her a steady stream of pro-SDC propaganda.

“They’re…” negligent, destructive, irritating and almost shamelessly irreverent about the law, “interesting. There’s a couple of members your age, I’ll introduce you.”

--- X Ilia X---

Ilia hid her flinch as Adam threw a vase at the wall with a roar of anger. The bull stomped out of the room, ranting to himself, “Adam.”

“She’s a traitor!” Adam didn’t stop, “First she leaves me to become a Huntress,” Adam spat the word as he marched through the halls, “Then she starts living with these humans -!”

“And a Faunus,” Ilia pointed out, deeply regretting caving into Adam’s demands to bring him to where Blake was staying. Her hope had been that they could talk to each other, only for Blake not to be there… or any of the other inhabitants.

Adam didn’t respond to her, “-like she’s some kind of pet-”

“That’s-”

Before Ilia could continue, Adam smashed open a door, marching into the room. Recognize it as Blake’s room, Ilia reluctantly followed Adam into it, looking around.

The blinds over the window were open, allowing the evening light to shine through the doors. As Adam looked around, his grip on Blush growing so tight the metal groaned, “What the hell-?”
“She stays here,” Ilia pointed out, leaning against the violet bed, “You can't expect her to-”

Adam grabbed a picture off the mantle opposite the bed, staring at it. Turning, he practically shoved it into Ilia’s face, “Who are these?”

Ilia briefly glanced into one corner of the room, where a persistent dark shadow was. Apparently catching Ilia’s gaze, the shadow stretched itself until it was needle thin and rushed along the wall and out of the room. Looking back, Ilia took the picture.

On it were the members of the… Gateswatchers? Blake was closest to around a picnic table, “The one in red is Ruby, that’s Sun, Nissa and Chandra-”

“Sun,” Adam grabbed the picture pack, staring at it intently, “are they close?”

Ilia suppressed a laugh. Oh, was Adam barking up the wrong tree, “They’re friends.”

It had sucked when Ilia had noticed Ruby and Blake’s affections for each other. She had been so sure Blake was interested in boys, in Adam, that she hadn't ever tried to drop hints. By the time she had realized it, it was when it became clear she was almost certainly out of the running.

Adam growled again, not breaking his stare as he apparently ignored Ilia again, “How close?”

“They’re friends,” Ilia repeated, pulling out her scroll behind her back and starting a message to Kali and Ghira. This wasn’t healthy. There were plenty of humans that deserved Adam’s anger, but the Gatewatch wasn-

“When will they be back?” Adam asked, pushing past Ilia and marching towards the door.

“I don’t know,” Ilia said.

“Tell me when the- who’s there?” Adam’s head snapped to the side, where shuffling feet could be heard. Oh, boy…
Peering out as she finished the message, Ilia watched the group of shambling men and woman, human and faunus move towards them. At the top of the ceiling was the dark shadow, watching them.

“What the hell?” Adam grabbed Wilt’s hilt as a shiver rose up Ilia’s back. Liliana’s Semblance was still creepy… at least they were weak.

--- X Kali X---

Kali stepped back as Ghira shook, starting at the message, “Dear…”

“I told him to stay away from her,” Ghira said.

“I know.”

“What’s wrong with him?” He asked, “Blake isn’t some sort of possession, she’s allowed to do what she wants. Be friends with who she wants…”

“Love who she wants?” Kali said.

“Caught that too?” Ghira joked, “I wouldn't rush to call it love-”

“Ghira,” Kali rolled her eyes

“That’s a bit young to jump to that is all,” Ghira said, clearly trying to appease her, “but when it does get to that point, yes.”

Kali sighed as she sat down, “Do you think they’re alright? I know they're skilled, but they’re still kids.”

“I don't know,” Ghira said quietly, “all we can really do is pray, right?”
Blake’s determination to go after the Gatewatch had force one sobering fact into mind. They dove headfirst into dangerous situations, determined to save people.

“Do you ever regret it?” Kali asked, “agreeing to let Blake join the Gatewatch?”

“I would be lying if I said it hadn’t crossed my mind,” Ghira said, “but I think it was the right choice, in the end… from her too. I really do believe that she would have run off with Adam and joined the Fang if Gatewatch wasn’t in the picture.”

“You trust them more than the Fang?” Kali asked, reaching over to rest one hand on Ghira’s arm.

“I…” Ghira sighed, grabbing the remote and turning on the screen they had gotten to stay in contact with Blake. He opened a recording, allowing the news to play.

“Chloe Beryl, a major shareholder in the SDC was found dead today,” on the screen was an grey haired woman in a deep green suit, a smile on her face as she cradled a baby, “Two men have come forth claiming respos-”

Kali grabbed it from his hand, shutting off the video, “What-?”

“Seems to be happening all the time,” Ghira said, looking down, “Grey said the same. Ever since the riot, since I stepped down… the Fang’s been heading towards extremism.”

“That’s not your fault,” Kali murmured, leaning over to rest her head on his shoulder, “Sienna, Grey… Adam. They should be the ones that should be dealing with this, instead…”

“But it’s only been a year,” Ghira said, nudging her back, “How much worse is it going to get before it gets better? Will it get better?”

“Maybe…” Kali said quietly, “Maybe we should reenter the limelight? It might have sent the wrong message, leaving as we did.”

Ghira shook his head, “I don’t know. Would it even work? I’m-“
“We’ll think about it,” Kali said, “this isn't a decision to be made in the heat of the moment.”

“You’re right,” Ghira said, “but if we do, where would we start?”

“Vale, maybe? We told Blake we’d meet her there, and it would give us a chance to talk with Adam.”

“I-” Ghira stopped as the front door opened, standing and looking through the window dividing his study from the rest of the room, “Blake!”

“She’s back already?” Kali asked, jumping up and joining her husband. Looking down, Kali felt the stomach drop as she saw Blake's ears practically flat, “Blake? Is something wrong? Did something happen?”

“Yes,” Blake paused, “No… I don't know. Can I talk to you, please? I’m… worried about Ruby.”

Kali shot a look at Ghira, curving one eyebrow up. Not call it love?

Ghira rolled his eyes at her, before looking back down at Blake, “Of course, you can always talk with us, Kitten. Kali, do you want to get some refreshments?”

“Don't start without me,” Kali said, stepping down the stairs. As she passed Blake, Kali reached out, “is everyone alright?”

“Nobody’s injured,” Blake’s eyes were downcast, “but… I’m worried about Ruby. Really worried.”

“And we’ll do whatever it takes to help with that,” Kali said, “Trust us.”

--- X Blake X---
Blake took the steaming cup from her mom, smiling weakly, “Thank you.”

“Of course,” Kali said, sitting next to Ghira with her own cup, “Now, what’s wrong? You said you were worried about Ruby?”

Blake flinched. There was no going back now, “Yeah…”

“Why? You had made everything sound well before you left,” Ghira said, “and you said nobody was hurt.”

“Ruby’s…” Dust, how to put it? “been having a rough time. She’s acting…”

“Acting?” Kali urged gently.

“I don’t know the right word for it,” Blake admitted. Unhinged jumped to mind, but that didn’t feel right. She was still capable of planning with Jace...

“Why don’t you start at the beginning, then? That normally helps.”

Blake nodded, drinking from her tea to calm herself, “So, we’re on a plane called Kaladesh… it’s actually Chandra’s home plane. We’re… uh… We’re not done there quite yet, hopefully within a couple of weeks, though?”

“Call us when you finish,” Ghira said, “or stop by.”

Blake nodded, “Anyways, the main problem is that there's a Planeswalker there, Tezzeret. Ruby knows him… well, Jace and Liliana too, but-"

“-Ruby's the important part,” Kali said firmly, “Let’s focus on that, ok?”

“Yeah,” Blake nodded again, taking another sip, “They don't like each other, Ruby and Tezzeret, but that’s not the main problem.”
“Then the important part is?” Blake got the feeling her parents were aware she was trying to stall for time.

“There’s another Planeswalker there too, Ajani. He’s,” Blake laughed nervously, “a lion.”

“Like,” Ghira said slowly, “He’s brave?”

“No,” Blake shook her head, pushing her hair back out of her face immediately after, “Like he’s a bipedal lion.”

Blake had to keep from laughing at her father's bug eyed look, “How is that-? No, That’s not important right now.”

“Ajani and Ruby” Blake sighed, no more delays, “They had a friend they both knew, Elspeth. Ajani told Ruby that Elspeth died… was killed and Ruby’s been…” Blake hesitated, “melting down ever since. She ran off to another Plane to talk with someone, uh,” What was his name? “Koth, I think? And even after I brought her back, she's been… having problems,” Blake finished lamely.

“It sounds like she’s just grieving, Kitten,” Ghira said, “everyone-”

“I know,” Blake sighed, “the problem is that Ruby tends to handle stress badly.”

“How badly is ‘badly?’” Kali asked.

“She,” Blake stared into her mug. Ruby would forgive her for this right? “I followed her when she went to talk to Koth. She’d been hiding a Plane from us the entire time, she kept insisting that it was too dangerous and got angry about the idea of the Gatewatch going there-”

“What did you say?” Ghira asked, voice hesitant.

“I told her that we had to tell the others and she asked if we could at least put it off-” Blake stopped
as her dad gave a heavy sigh, planting his face in his hands, “Dad?”

“Blake,” Ghira said, “it’s more than grief.”

“What do you mean?”

“Blake,” he started gently, “I understand why you want to let the others know but… sometimes, things happen to people that… it’s like a scar, it never fully goes away and hurts long after it heals. Has Ruby been acting strange? Angry, maybe?”

“Yeah,” Blake nodded, “Why?”

“You… I’m sorry, but you probably did more harm than good, Blake,” Ghira said, taking her hands, “She’s grieving, but you’ve also hurt her without meaning to. If she’s so scared of this place she hasn’t mentioned it, she’s probably terrified of what will happen once you’re done with Kaladesh and everyone knows, especially if she thinks they’ll react like you and want to go, so she’s lashing out.”

“I didn't- I” Blake looked away. She hadn't wanted to hurt Ruby.

“I’m not saying you meant to do it,” Blake’s father said, “but you’re still kids, Blake. Ruby’s not even a teen yet. Do you want my advice?”

“Yes,” Blake nodded.

“Step back,” Ghira said, “tell Ruby you don't need to tell everyone immediately. Talk to her, let her get comfortable with you knowing before anything. Maybe, maybe take a break from Planeswalker things for a bit.”

“Like what?” Blake asked.

“Like, take a vacation,” Kali said, “Somewhere on Remnant or another place you both know that’s safe with some of your friends.”
“Like here?” Blake asked, “I- Ruby’s been to Menagerie and you two know more about this than I do…”

“That’s because we’re adults and have seen this before,” Kali said, “You didn't do any of this because you wanted to hurt Ruby-”

“I would ne-!”

“Exactly,” Kali said softly, “We all know that and I’m sure Ruby does too. As for staying here, so long as Ruby agrees to it, I don't think either of us would mind.”

“Of course not,” Ghira nodded, “I’ll call Tai after you leave to talk to him about it. I’m sure he’s probably aware something is up. We’d be able to fit,” he turned to Kali, “Four, five extra people, counting Blake?”

“That sounds about right,” Kali nodded, turning to Blake, “Why don't you go talk to Ruby about this? We should probably call Tai before too long.”

“Uh… Yeah,” Blake jumped up, rushing around the coffee table to hug them both, “I love you both, see you when I get back!”

“We’ll see you then,” her dad said, smiling.

As Blake stepped into the Blind Eternities, she heard her mom say something that made her go bug eyed.

“What was that about it not being love?”

--- X Qrow X---

“For the hundredth time,” Qrow sighed, “I don't know where they went yet!”
Brothers, he had just got back from checking on Amber, he wasn't ready to deal with this!

One of the members from Mistral, Iris, laughed. The mess of scars normally hidden by her hair were visible as she leaned forward, “Do you make it a habit to lose track of people we’re supposed to be watching, Branwen?”

“I had to do something for Oz,” Qrow shot back, “besides, it’s not our job to know where Gatewatch is all the time. If they’re off world, that’s not our problem.”

“I thought our job was to monitor Planeswalkers?” Iris asked, “Or do these not count because one of them is your daughter?”

“Niece,” Qrow corrected her, hitting the button to ignore a call from Tai, “We’re supposed to be worrying about Planeswalkers that are a threat. Ruby and the Gatewatch aren’t.”

“That’s not what Lionheart said,” Iris turned to her compatriots, “right, Chern?”

Chern, a heavyset man with a hammer, nodded, “He did say that…”

The two of them stopped at the looks they got, “What?”

“If that’s our job,” Adham, a tall bald man with weathered skin, “It’s the first I’ve heard of it.”

“The General seems to see them as allies,” Winter said, “They’re… Except for Jura, they don’t particularly listen to the law, but never in ways that make them a threat.”

“…Huh,” Iris looked around the room, “I wonder why he’d tell us that.”

“Same,” Qrow said, “I-” Qrow stopped long enough to hit the refuse call button again, “I don't know where Rubes is, but- damn it, I’m gonna have to take this.”

“Fine,” Iris pulled out a lighter, hitting the button, “Where’s Goodwitch?”
“Still dealing with Beacon,” Qrow said, stepping out of the room, “Alright, Tai, what is it? I’m in the middle of someth-"

“Can you get home quickly?” Tai cut him off, “We need to talk.”

“What about?”

“Ruby.”

Of course it was. Ever since her ignition, Ruby had been the subject of more calls than Yang, “What about her? Is she alright?”

“Kali and Ghira called. They need to talk to us, as soon as possible.”

“Alright,” Qrow said, “I’ll be right there.”

Hanging up, Qrow shoved his head into the room, “I’m done for today. Something came up.”

“He-"

Shutting the door, Qrow opened the nearest window, shifted, and took off as fast as he could. As the bird flew, it was a matter of minutes to get to Patch.

Landing, Qrow opened the door, looking around.

Tai was seated on the couch, head in his hands. Next to him was Zwei, ears flat as he learned on Tai, while in front of him was a bottle of whiskey and two glasses.

Walking over, Qrow sat down, “Hey, everything alright? You said Kali and Ghira had something to talk to us about?”
“They're going to call back in a few, they wanted to eat before it got too late on their end. I… I wanted to give you a basic gist of what’s going on, so you don't get too surprised.”

“Ok?” Qrow said, “What's wrong, man?”

“They… they want Ruby to spend at least part of the summer at Menagerie,” Tai said.

“What’s wrong with that?” Qrow reached out, shaking Tai slightly, “are you not feeling well or something?”

“I…” Tai stopped, downing a glass, “I’ll let them explain. I thought I could, but…”

“Tai, man, you’re scaring me,” Qrow said, “is Ruby alright?”

Tai shook his head, but Qrow couldn't tell if it was a refusal to explain or him saying she wasn't.

All Qrow could do was wait for the call. The second it did, Qrow hit the button.

“Qrow,” Kali said as the screen turned on, “How’s Tai?”

“He’s having a panic attack,” Qrow said bluntly, “What’s going on?”

“We,” Kali sighed, “We think Ruby has PTSD.”

Qrow’s mind ground to a halt, looking over at Tai. Yeah, missing something like that would send Tai into a freak out, “Alright, I’m gonna need you to talk me through this one, Kal.”

Ghira snorted a laugh, “We’re kinda running off what Blake’s said, so we might need you to fill in some blanks. Tai too, if he can calm down.”
“Right,” Qrow nodded, shaking Tai, “What’s up?”

“Ruby apparently found out she lost a friend and ran off, Blake followed her and found out about a Plane—”

“Mirridan?” Tai asked.

“Blake didn’t say a name,” Kali said, “Apparently Ruby kept insisting that the Gatewatch couldn’t go there. Blake tried to push Ruby to tell them after they were done on Kaladesh and Ruby’s been… aggressive.”

“So,” Qrow said, “You want to bring her to Menagerie?”

“We told Blake that Ruby should take a vacation and she suggested Menagerie. We’d be happy to have her, but it’s ultimately your decision.”

“I should have caught this before now,” Tai moaned.

“You’re not giving yourself enough credit. I take it Ruby had mentioned this to you?”

“A bit, yeah, but—”

“That alone says how much Ruby trusts you. Blake only found out because she followed her, but Ruby was willing to confide in you before that point. We’d be glad to have you over too, if that’s what you’re worried about. We’re just trying to move Ruby away from the Gatewatch a bit while keeping things low stress.”

“I—”

“And for what it’s worth,” Ghira cut back in, “I think it would be better if you were here. It’ll help Ruby feel more comfortable.”

“I— I don’t know. I’ll have to think about it. Coming along, that is. I’m fine with her going.”
“We’ll call you back in a couple of weeks then, ok?”

“Yeah,” Tai nodded as the call ended.

“You’re going,” Qrow said immediately, “You need a vacation too. Come on, let's get packing.”

“Hey!” Tai yelped, “What about Yang?”

“I’m sure they'll be fine with her too!”

--- X Mahesh X---

Mahesh looked over as a woman wearing a shawl sat next to him, a black haired girl with another next to her, “Hello?”

“Are these seats taken?” she asked.

“No,” he said, “Do you want them? The rest of my family doesn't care for qucksmithing, so…”

“Thank you,” She sat down, smiling, “I’m Rima, and this is my niece Reenu.”

“Mahesh,” he said, “You got lucky, these are probably the last front row seats in the place.”

Rima nodded, “It’s supposed to start soon, right?”

“Yes,” Mahesh shifted uncomfortably, “Do you mind if I ask you something that might seem strange?”

“Go ahead.”
“Does this seem… wrong to you? Turning an execution into some sort of public affair?”

“It does seem wrong,” Reenu said, amber eyes locked onto the automaton bringing two large crates into the arena.

“Ladies and Gentlemen!” An elf stepped forwards, “Please, grab your seats, our event will be starting soon!”

“I mean,” Mahesh said, “I’m not a Renegade sympathizer, but I’d have thought we were better than this!”

“Apparently not,” Rima shot back, voice icy.

Out of the door in front of them, the head judge walked in, flanked by another pair of automatons. Mahesh frowned as Tezzeret walked to the crate on his side and checked the contents, “He’s cheating!”

“How?” Reenu asked.

“You’re not allowed to see the parts until the duel starts,” Mahesh explained, “It could give you an unfair advantage.”

“Since when has Tezzeret cared about that?” Reenu asked as the door opposite them opened, letting the four into the arena.

It, once again, left a bad taste in Mahesh’s mouth as the first guard moved to the side, allowing her compatriots to all but throw Pia Nalaar into the arena. Judging by the muttering throughout the arena, others felt much the same.

If the elf heard them, he didn't show it, ”Good luck, both of you!”

There was an explosion of boos and jeers from around the arena as the bell for the match start went
off. Tezzeret calmly reached into the crate, taking parts out and snapping them together.

Pia pushed herself up, running to her crate with a look of determination on her face. Occasionally, her one not blackened eye would flicker up to look at Tezzeret before jumping back down. Each time this happened, she would grab a piece from the crate and add it on.

"It appears Renegade Prime has no idea what she is-" the commentator was drowned out by more boos.

A sharp tone filled the air and both sides stepped away, clutching their creations. Neither was pretty, especially compared to the likes of Saheeli Rai, but they were combat worthy.

Tezzeret’s was a crawler the likes of which Mahesh had never seen. Eight grey legs pushed it up until it towered over him, causing Rima to scoff, “He’s not even trying to hide that he’s cheating!”

“I suppose you can get away with it,” Reenu said, leaning against the divider, “when you’re making the rules.”

Pia’s small creation, looking like a cross between a crab and a cone, froze for a second as Tezzeret’s crawler walked towards it, causing several people in the audience to laugh. As the crawler raised its leg to crush Pia’s, however, the crab struck.

A high pitched whine filled the air as the top flipped open, allowing the ballista within to launch a spike into the crawler. The crowd gasped as the crawler staggered backwards before collapsing.

“Yes!” Reenu said under her breath, leaning even further forward.

Again and again this happened, Tezzeret would create something only for Pia to make something else to counteract it. Finally, after a dragon fell to a squid, the judge howled something barely intelligible, “ROSE!”

“What’s wrong, Tezzeret?” the voice that came from Pia’s lips was that of a young girl, her entire body shimmering before taking the form of a girl with silver eyes, “Isn’t this what you wanted, to lure us out?”
“I only see one child here, Rose…” Tezzeret raised his hand, the metal from his broken creations rising as the two that had stepped into the arena with him came forward, “Not very fair, is it?”

“Who said anything about fair?” A voice called from the crowd opposite them as a stream of fire crashed into one of the creations. A woman with flaming hair jumped down into the arena, followed by an elf and a blonde boy shortly after.

“I thought you would have learned by now,” a voice echoed from the arena without a source. After a second, two people stepped out of thin air, a man in turquoise robe, and a woman in purple, “We don’t do fair!”

“Guards,” Tezzeret barked, “Deal with them.”

“Now Tezzeret,” the woman’s smile was calm, but still set Mahesh on edge, “Why would they ever do that?”

Three more mirages disappeared around the guard, revealing a giant lion, a woman with a sword covered in blue fire and another man with a bronze arm.

Reenu jumped the railing, landing behind Tezzeret as the shadows in the arena seemed to grow darker and stretch towards him. Yanking off the shawl, she plunged the arm holding it into the shadows as if it were a pool of water. When she pulled it out, she had a black sword.

--- X Blake X---

Blake felt her shadow pulse beneath her, ready to attack as Pia rushed out of the arena. Looking behind her, Blake breathed in… and sent it at the guards rushing towards them.

Blake was dimly aware of the bestial roar that echoed out of the surging tide of darkness followed by the horrified screams as the monster reached the guards. In the time it took for Blake’s heart to beat twice, her shadow rushed back, curling under her feet.

Opposite them, the guards were stopped by a man covered in ghostly blue flames, a longsword in hand as he exploded out of Thalia’s back. Seconds later, lightning was launched from Ral’s arm.
Tezzeret’s automatons are blocking my telepathy, Jace’s voice echoed through her mind, I need you all to break them.

“On it!” Sun grabbed one of his shotguns off his back, leveling it at the closest one and blowing a fist-sized hole in it. Within seconds, metal coiled up the automaton, repairing the hole in its side as the same happened to the one Chandra had melted, “Come on! Really?”

“Stay focused!” Blake yelled at him as she launched her shadow forward. It grabbed one of the automatons in its massive hands cracking it before dashing it against the wall.

Crackling symbols appeared around Ruby, launching silver beams of energy into another automaton as Drache landed in front of her at full size, “Why does Bolas want the planar portal, Tezzeret?”

Tezzeret froze for a second, reaching up to touch the horns tattooed on his brow, “So you figured that out? I’ll tell you the truth... I don’t know.”

“You expect us to believe that?” Liliana asked, “You don’t know?”

“I don’t,” Tezzeret shrugged, “I just know he wants it, and I’m not dumb enough to defy him.”

“Then you’re going to be in for a bad time when you have to tell him you failed!” Ruby said.

“Have I?” Tezzeret laughed, “are you sure?”

Blake let her eyes widen, “He made sure we would be focused on him!”

“Figured it out, have you?” Tezzeret laughed as a massive shadow fell over them, a ship hovering over the arena, “Too late, unfortunately. We’re already moving the finalists to keep them safe from you Renegades!”

“Bullshit!” Sun barked, “You kidnapped them!”
“I suppose it depends on how you look at it,” Tezzeret shrugged again, “but I look at it as having won.”

“Have you?” Ruby asked, Crescent Rose trained on Tezzeret’s head as he floated up, “are you sure?”

Tezzeret laughed, as he rose up, “Yes.”

As he disappeared into the clouds, Blake joined the rest of the Gatewatch in fleeing the arena. Dodging into an alley, she breathed a sigh of relief, “Think he fell for it?”

“Only one way to find out,” Ruby said, “come o-”

Halfway to Mrs. Pashiri’s home, a loud chime came, followed by a frantic voice, “Ladies and Gentlemen, I have terrible news! The winner of the Inventor’s Fair, Rashmi, has been kidnapped by the Renegades! The Consulate is offering a reward for information that leads to her rescue!”

“Yep,” Sun grinned, “They fell for it.”

Gideon was waiting for them when they reached Mrs. Pashiri’s home, a smile on his face, “She’s inside.”

“Did she agree to come?” Ruby asked, looking worried.

“Once I explained, yes… well, I had a bit of help. Come on.”

They walked into the room, catching the tail end of a sentence, “-old me!”

“It’s not supposed to be something you talk about. If I hadn't learned Tezzeret was a Planeswalker, I wouldn't have told you now.”

“It still explains so much! Your vacations, where you got the ideas for some of your creations, how you always had such skill with Aether and metal-!”
“You’ve said that three times now,” one of the woman at the table said, before looking over to them, “Oh, you're here!”

She stood up, brushing herself off and smiled to them. Blake felt her jaw drop at the metal wrapped around the woman, which seemed to have a rainbow sheen to it, “Uh…”

“I’m Saheeli,” she said with a smile, “Thank you for helping Rashmi out.”

“Oh!” the elf behind her smiled sheepishly, bowing, “yes, thank you!”

“Don’t worry about it,” Ruby gave a brief smile, before letting it crumble, “but we’re not done yet. Tezzeret has the prototype, right?”

“Right,” Rashmi nodded.

“Then we need to destroy that,” Ruby said, before stopping, “I’m sor-”

“There’s no other option?” Rashmi cut her off.

“No,” Ruby said, “Tezzeret will use it to… well, we’re not sure what, but it will be bad.”

“Then I understand,” Rashmi said.

“It’s probably in the Aether Spire,” Pia said, “It won’t be easy getting to it.”

“What do we do?” Blake asked, turning to Ruby, Jace and Gideon.

“We need to act soon,” Jace said, “before Tezzeret decides to grab the portal and run.”
“How would we get into the Aether Spire?” Gideon asked Pia.

“The only way on at the moment would be a skyship,” Pia explained, “which I can get us, but we need Aether… which we can get in two ways.”

“How?” Ruby asked.

“First is by raiding the Aether siphons, the second is to seize control of the Aether Hub for long enough to get what we need.”

“Dangerous either way,” Gideon said, pacing slightly.

“I…” Ruby chewed her lip, “I need to check something, Blake, Sun, come on.”

Blake shared a confused look with Sun and the rest before shrugging and following Ruby into the Blind Eternities.

Chapter End Notes

Opinions on the chapter? Good? Bad? Meh?
Sun popped out of the Blind Eternities with a strangled gasp, and heard Blake do the same a second later.

“Woah!” he breathed, looking around the swamp they had appeared in, “Ruby, where are we?”

“Dominaria,” Ruby said, standing up from where she was hunched over some kind of knight. Spikes of black metal poked through the armor and its head was a splatter of black on the ground as Ruby lifted her left hand. When Ruby turned to Sun, he saw her silver eyes were borderline grey, “Urborg, the tomb of the Lord of the Wastes.”

“Who?”

Ruby’s face grew darker, “Don’t make me say his name, Sun. Names have power, and his is especially strong here.”

“But… if this is his tomb isn't he dead?” Sun asked.

“He is,” Ruby said, “but his servants aren't. I’ll tell you when we’re done here, Sun, but not here, not now.”

“Alright,” Sun said with a shrug, “So… why are we here?”

“There’s something I need to check here. Weapons out,” Ruby said, tapping the mark holding Crescent Rose.

Sun shared a look with Blake, drawing his weapon as Gambol Shroud rose from her shadow. Leaning towards the other Faunus, Sun asked a question under his breath, “Any idea who the ‘Lord of the Wastes’ is?”

Blake shook her head, looking around, “No. Can I ask you something?”

As they headed towards… wherever, Sun buttoned up his shirt to avoid a bit of the chill, “Shoot.”

“It’s actually a couple of things,” Blake said, walking alongside him, “I’m… I’m planning to invite Ruby to Menagerie after we’re done with Kaladesh. My parents think it might be a good idea for us to take a break from the Gatewatch. Do you want to come?”

“You want me along?” Sun joked, “Are you sure? Because I was starting to feel like a third wheel between you two.”

Blake looked away, a deep blush across her face, “You’re not a third wheel. We- You and Ruby are my best friends. Of course I want you to come.”

“Of course I’m coming, I was just messing with you!” Sun grinned, hitting Blake on the shoulder lightly, “what was the other one?”

“Do, uh…” Blake looked around, “Do you think Ru-”

A loud shriek echoed through the air, causing Blake and Sun to look around quickly before turning
Ruby had frozen in place, eyes wide and face pale as she looked in the direction of the noise. Crescent Rose hung loosely in her hands as her breath quickened.

“Ruby?” Blake asked, “What’s wrong?”

“i know that noise…”

“What?”

“This was a mistake,” Ruby breathed, staggering backwards, “Why did I think this was a good idea?”

“Hey…” Sun grabbed Ruby by the shoulder, “Rubes, you're starting to scare me.”

“Sun,” Blake said quietly, grabbing him by his shoulder, “I think we should be scared…”

“Why-? What the hell!?”

The creature that was walking out of the trees looked like a Creep… if a Creep was made of metal, had two stubby arms, like, a million teeth and just as many spines across its back. Looking behind him, Sun gave a worried hiss as he saw Ruby had staggered backwards, dropping Crescent Rose and summoned Drache at full size in front of her.

Creating two clones, Sun let a bunch of electric jolts run up his arm as he charged forwards, barely noticing the two shadows moving at it in step… What he did notice, however, was it smashing through both his clones and Blake’s shadows and into his gut, sending him flying back.

Digging Ruyi Jingu Bang into the ground, Sun used it to stop himself as he flew back. Throwing the electric bolt at the monster, Sun grinned as its armor cracked, “Blake!”

The full form of Blake's shadow magic, a constantly shifting mass stuck to… well, stuck to her shadow tore across the space in a wave of black, transformed into a spike and smashed through the damaged spot. Black oily blood poured out of it as Sun turned to Ruby, “So, uh… what was that thing?”

“That was…” Ruby croaked, “That was one of those servant. A Phyrexian.”

--- X Blake X---

Blake looked back at the monster, before turning to Ruby, “That’s a Phyrexian?”

Those were the things that scared Ruby senseless? They had taken it out so easily!

“A weak one,” Ruby mumbled, eyes still locked on it like she was expecting it to stand back up, “Shouldn't have locked up, dealt with worse…”

Blake shared a look with Sun, who nodded before they both stepped forward and hugged Ruby. The younger girl tensed briefly, before sinking into the hug, shaking, “It’s alright. We’re here.”

“I shouldn't have come here,” Ruby choked out, “I knew it was an infested mess, but…

“I dunno what you’re talking about,” Sun said, breaking the hug to reach down and grab Crescent Rose. He hit the button to fold it up and handed it to Blake, grabbing Ruby and guiding her away, “but let's get away from that thing, now. The sooner we get what you needed, the sooner we can
leave and forget that thing ever existed.”

“Drache,” Ruby murmured, “We can use Drache, avoid any more…”

“If you wanna,” Sun said, stopping long enough for the drake to rush around them, “C’mon, Blake.”

“Yeah,” Blake nodded, dropping Crescent Rose and Gambol Shroud into her shadow and climbing onto Drache, “Where are we going anyways?”

“I have a place here,” Ruby paused, “Well, it’s not really mine. But the owner is… gone… and neither of the other two who might want it do, so it’s mine in all the ways that matter.”

Blake peeked her head up to meet Sun’s eyes over the crest of spines. How many people had Ruby met and lost on her way back to Remnant?

“So,” Sun said, “Who was it?”

“Venser,” Ruby said quietly, “It’s not as bad as Elspeth’s death. It was a good death. Drache.”

The drake tilted down, slowly gliding down.

“We’re there already?”

“It’s much quicker flying,” Ruby’s smile didn’t quite reach her eyes as they landed. That smile immediately disappeared as she stared at the building.

“So-" Sun was cut off as Ruby reached down, grabbed a rock and threw it at the open door, “What the-?”

Ruby didn't answer, rushing inside and down the steps with a strangled cry. A white runed rod with one sharp end appeared in her hand as she moved down the stairs.

“Ruby!” Blake cried, before rushing down the steps after her, Sun right on her tail.

“Hey! Who are-!?” The question was cut off with a cry of pain and when Blake and Sun reached the bottom, they found a man pinned to the wall with the rod, white mana leaking from it to hold him still. They had just enough time to see Ruby ram her shoulder into another man, sending them both flying out of sight.

“Is it just me?” Sun asked, “Or does Ruby channel Yang when she gets pissed?”

Blake didn't answer, jogging down the hall to drag Ruby off her unfortunate target, “Sun, do you have something that can throw this guy out?”

“Yeah,” Sun closed one eye, biting the corner of his lip, “I… there!”

In a whirling rush of Aether a large ogre appeared. It reached down, it grabbed the looter by the leg, dragging it from the room.

“So,” Blake said as quietly as possible, trying to calm the quaking girl in her arms, “What are we here for?”

“It’s…” Ruby pushed out of Blake's arms, beginning to search, “I’m not even sure it’s here anymore or if it would even work…”


“What?” Sun asked, looking around, “come on, it’ll be easier if you tell us.”

“Powerstone,” Ruby said absentmindedly, searching one desk, “Small gem, tons of mana. It could power a ship, dodge getting Aether. I could probably—” Ruby cut herself off with a sigh, practically sagging as she fell into a chair, “What’s the point?”

The silence that fell was oppressive. Ruby was asking what?

“Rubes?” Sun asked, walking forward, “Everything alright?”

“It’s been a rough couple of weeks,” Ruby said, “What happens if I do find one? What goes wrong then?”

“Ruby,” Blake started quietly, “Why don't you head back to Remnant for a day? See your dad and Yang. We’ll finish up here and let the others know.”

“I—”

“You’re no used to anyone if you're this tired,” Blake said, “no matter what we do, we need a few days. We’ll come get you, right, Sun?”

“Right,” Sun nodded.

“Ok,” Ruby said, standing and staggering into the Blind Eternities.

The moment they were sure she was gone, Sun spoke out, “Alright, what’s going on?”

--- X Sun X---

Sun tapped his fingers on his upper arm, “I’m waiting.”

“I don’t know what you mean?” Blake said, “What makes you think something is going on?”

“Let’s see,” Sun grabbed a chair, spinning around to straddle it as he ticked off points on his hands, “Ruby’s been in a heavy funk since you guys got back… which, by the way, you’ve been dodging saying where you even went. Then we get here, Ruby refuses to say some guy’s name, you want us all to take a break from the Gatewatch, Ruby freaks at that Phyrething. We find out Ruby had another friend who died a ‘good death’, Ruby flips again when we get here, pins a guy to a wall, starts Avacyning his friend and then just kinda gives up? Blake, a rock could tell something is up.”

“...Avacyning?”

“Yeah,” Sun said, “Avacyning, ‘to beat someone so hard you wreck an eye and have to be yanked off them’. You know, what she did to Avacyn and was trying to do to that guy?”

Blake turned away, opening a desk to look for something. Sun growled, “Blake.”

“What?” Blake turned to him, but didn't meet his eyes, “There’s nothi-”

“Bullshit!” Sun pounded the chair back, “Listen, I get that you and Ruby got a thing for each other, and that means she’s willing to trust you more but I’m getting sick of this whole ‘lets keep Sun in the dark’ thing.”

“There’s no-”

“Really? ‘cause it sure feels like there is something. You’re visiting your family and get a call
asking what was going on? I missed a Planeswalker fight that sent Ruby to the hospital and didn't hear jack about it until I got back! Now Ruby is having some sort of breakdown, you know what it’s about and you aren't telling me!”

“I- Sun- I-”

“Please, Blake,” Sun pled, “I love her just as much as you. She’s my best friend. If I hadn't met Ruby, I’d be… Hell, I don't even know. Shade? Sanctum? Point is, I’d have never met you or the others, probably wouldn't know I had a Spark. If something's up, if Ruby needs help I want to be there to give that help. Isn't that why you wanted me to come to Menagerie?”

“I-” Blake grabbed another chair, “Yes, but… I promised Ruby I wouldn't say anything. It’s… apparently it's fairly traumatic.”

“Yeah but you already broke that promise, didn't you?” Sun shot back, “or were you planning to have us just rock up to your parents place and make ourselves at home?”

Blake laughed, shaking her head, “No, you’re right, I already got permission, but that would be funny.”

“Blake,” Sun said, “I’m not going to take no for an answer here. I’ll handle the fall out with Ruby. Now, what’s going on?”

“...There's a Plane,” Blake started, “full of Phyrexians.”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby staggered out of the Blind Eternities, staring down at her shaking right arm. The sleeve of her sweat jacket hand been ripped apart. If her Aura hadn't immediately worked to deal with the damage, her arm would probably be the same.

As it was, the few patches of unmarked skin were a deep red. And the less said about her cloak, the better.

Ruby unzipped her jacket, grabbing the key inside a pocket and raised it, shaking, to the, lock. She’d knock, but everyone would be at school at this time…

Ruby pushed open the door, leaning on the frame for a few seconds and closing her eyes. Nap. She could so use a nap while she waited for-

“Ruby?” Ruby’s eyes sprang open, staring duly at Aileen. The other girl was sitting next to Yang, a controller lowered, “Where have you been? What happened to your arm?”

Yang for her part, threw down her controller and thundered up the stairs, “Dad! Daaaaaad! Ruby's back!”

Ruby looked down at the myriad sigils tattooed her flesh. Each holding hours of work inside or a collection of mana… and not the type of thing a kid her age should have.

“Whut’r’yu’doin’here?” Ruby slurred, trying to keep from swaying.

“I-"

Before Aileen could finish, Tai came down the steps, stopping at the end, “Ruby!”

“Dad,” Ruby mumbled, “whut’s’e’ryone doin’ere? School?”
“Rosebud… It’s the weekend,” Tai said, coming closer, “Are you alright?”

“‘Tis?” Ruby blinked, rubbing an eye, “‘M tired.”

“I can see that,” Tai said before reaching down and picking Ruby up, “C’mon, Rosebud. Let’s get you to bed, we can talk when you’re done.”

“‘K,” Ruby let her eyes drift shut without protest. She was too tired to wanna.

--- X Tai X---

Tai gently pulled the bedding over Ruby, balling up the sweat jacket as he stepped out of the room. Qrow pushed off from the wall as Tai closed the door, “How is she?”

“She’s got a bit of a fever,” Tai said, “and was asleep before I put her down.”

“Can you blame her?” Qrow asked under his breath, “with what Kal said-”

“Not now,” Tai said quickly, stepping back into the living room. Seated on the couch was the complication Ruby’s sudden arrival had created. Ciara Delaney.

The store owner examined them closely, running one hand through her hair, “So. Do either of you two want to explain why your daughter’s arm is covered in tattoos?”

“It… has to do with her Semblance,” Tai said, “The more she uses it, the more those appear.”

Not technically a lie, if you subscribed to the theory that Aura was a manifestation of the soul. The more Ruby Planeswalked, the more she built artifacts, which she subsequently added to the sigils.

“Really?” Ciara said, “I’ve never heard of something like that.”

“Weird stuff happens with Aura,” Qrow shot back, “I mean, the Schnee’s pass down their fu-errr,” Qrow’s eyes jumped to where Aileen was trying to stay as far from Zwei as possible, “friggin’ Semblance. Tai starts causing heat hazes and embers when he gets going and Gids becomes a glowing brick. How’s Ruby getting a bunch a marks any weirder than that?”

“Alright,” Ciara reluctantly said, “next question. Where’s she been for the last two weeks and why’d she look like she was mauled by a Beowo—” she cut herself off, wincing right alongside them, “Alright, bad choice of words. You get what I mean.”

“Training trip with Gideon and company,” Tai lied, “They’re just here for a day or two before heading out.”

“I don’t trust them,” Ciara crossed her arms, “and I don’t get why you do either.”

“Maybe became Ruby doesn't have a crush on Gids? They're good guys, Cir.”

“Oh, shut up,” she hissed, “that Vess woman is ‘good’?”

“Nobody trusts Liliana, Cir,” Qrow continued, “I don't trust her, Ruby doesn't trust her, the Gatewatch does-"

Qrow’s eye widened suddenly as Tai stepped on his foot but it was too late. Ciara stood up with a smug smile on her face, “Gatewatch? I hadn't heard that before. Aileen, come on, we’re leaving!”

“Ok.”
Just before she shut the door, Ciara smirked at them, “Make sure to invite us to Ruby’s birthday!”

Tai turned to Qrow. “You know she’s not gonna let this go.”

“Yeah, well, what’s she gonna do? Look up Gatewatch at the CCT and get ‘Dimension traveling superheroes?’”

Tai nodded, “Good point. Speaking of it, what should we do for Ruby’s birthday?”

“We could always have it on Menagerie. It’s already late, what’s a bit later?”

---

Ruby’s transition between sleep and consciousness was quick. One second she was squirming in bed, the next she was blinking groggily and the third fully awake.

She soooo wished she wasn't.

Ruby forced herself to stand, looking out the window to see the trees. Closing her eyes, Ruby breathed in. One, two, three, four, five. Get up, face life.

Ruby used her rudimentary skill in mind magic to lock away all emotion. Logic, now, don't stop to consider each step. What would they need on Kaladesh if her powerstone plan fell through?


Ruby snapped out of her thoughts as Yang suddenly pulled her into a bone breaking hug, the mind magic quickly wearing off, “Do you know how worried we were?”

“Yang,” Ruby winced slightly, “You’re kinda-”

“You keep running off without telling us! We don't know where you are or what's happening, or-!”

“You can chew her out later, kiddo,” Qrow said, leaning against the door, “me and your dad gotta talk to her.”

“I-" Yang looked between them, “but-"

“Just give us a chance to talk to her, Firecracker,” Tai said pushing Qrow out of the way with an annoyed glare, “Then she’s all yours. How long are you staying?”

“Just a couple of days,” Ruby said, feeling another spike of guilt over running off without telling anyone. She should bring something back as an apology present.

“See? You can harass her about it all tomorrow,” Qrow said, “We just need a bit.”

“Ok,” Yang said with a sigh, walking out of the room. Qrow effortlessly kicked it shut, dropping into one of the chairs as Tai sat at the foot of Ruby's bed.
“Feeling any better, Rosebud?” Tai asked softly, “You looked like hell earlier.”

“Yeah,” Ruby nodded, “I’m… I’m doing ok.”

Tai seemed to search her face for a long time, “So, what’s going on? We got a bit of the story from Chandra and the Belladonnas, but I take it something went wrong?”

“Yeah,” Ruby felt her voice crack, “Really, really wrong. There’s gonna be a revolution there, dad. And we have to-

“No,” Tai’s face had immediately turned to stone.

“but-

“No,” Tai repeated, “I’m putting my foot down here, Ruby, and I’m sure Kali and Ghira would do the same. You’re kids, if the rest of the Gatewatch wants to be involved then fine, they're adults, but you, Blake and Sun shouldn't be involved in something like this!”

“But-

“Ruby,” for the first time, Tai’s voice cracked, “I already lost you once. I can't do that again, don't make me do that again.”

“There’s a Planeswalker there, Dad. He’s got a planar gate and works for someone who will abuse it. If everything goes according to plan, we’ll do this in a matter of days from the first move.

“And if it doesn’t?”

“Then Tezzeret will escape with the gate,” Ruby said, “and it won’t matter either way.”

“Qrow,” Tai turned to the other man, “help me out here…”

…

…

Qrow was staring at Ruby, his hand on his chin, “We might be able to get you equipment, if you’re willing to make a deal with someone.”

“Qrow!”

“What the hell are we supposed to do, Tai?” Qrow barked, “Have someone within arms reach of her at all times, watching her? The best we can do is make sure this goes smoothly!”

“What kind of deal?” Ruby asked, feeling a spike of pain and reaching down to touch the heart shaped scar on her arm.

“Jimmy's been bugging me about talking to you since he found out about the Gatewatch. He wants you to look over a couple of things his eggheads have been stuck on for a while now.”

“But I’m a kid, I can't be smarter tha-"

“He’s not saying you are. But you hit a roadblock, you try a different way. Science isn’t working for him, so maybe magic can. You and the Gatewatch have what he wants. That’s why he’s been sending regular gifts to ‘promote cooperation’. The newest one of those came in, by the way.”
“So you want me to trade magical knowledge for…?”

“Guns, ammo, hell he’d probably throw in a few of the old AK-100’s if you make it worth his while. Gods know they’re just sitting around waiting to be scrapped now that they’ve got the new models.”

Ruby bit her cheek, weighing her options carefully. This could stop Tezzeret, but could it cause problems on Remnant?

“...I guess?” Ruby said.

“Come on then, we have a call to make.”

--- X Sun X---

Sun stared at the shard with a happy sigh as he leaned on the couch in the Gatewatch’s home. Hopefully, this is what Ruby had meant?

Blake entered the hall, a look of worry on her face, “Gideon!”

“Yes?” the Planeswalker asked, the bag he would be packing full of extra food on the ground by his feet.

“Someone broke in while we were gone.”

Everyone turned to look at her as one, the tension that had mostly disappeared as they relaxed in their home ratcheting back up, “How can you tell?”

“The pile of dismembered bodies,” Blake started dryly, “missing picture and that I keep a shadow in my room?”

“Any idea who it was?” Sun asked.

“Ilia… and Adam. He stole the picture of our picnic.”

“Why’d he steal that?” Chandra asked.

“I think…” Blake hesitated, “I don't know. The shadow left to trigger the zombies.”

“Weird,” Sun said with a shrug, “We’ll have to get that picture back when we’re done on Kaladesh.”

“You don't have to-"


Blake smiled lightly, “Thanks.”

“Anytime,” Sun grinned back, “Wondering what’s taking Ruby so long?”

“Yeah,” Blake sighed, sitting next to him, “and worried about… you know.”

How Ruby would respond to Blake spilling the beans about New Phyrexia, the same thing Blake had spent the week worrying herself silly over.
It was funny, Sun thought, how things stretched out. The Consulate had cracked down, forcing them to dodge around Tezzeret’s goons while they waited for the ship the Renegades had been working on. With Saheeli, Rashmi and Rashmi’s vedalken assistant Mitul, progress on the Tezzeret’s Ruin had sped up considerably. Not as quickly as if Ruby was there, in Sun’s opinion, but they were almost ready.

When Sun had the time, he had traveled back to Dominaria and re-ransacked the already thoroughly ransacked workshop. Ruby deserved something resembling good news.

“Don’t worry about it,” Sun said, pushing her lightly, “I’ll handle it.”

“Thanks,” Blake smiled again, before sighing, “Why do you think she took so long? We said a couple of days, but…”

“She’s probably burned out,” Sun said, “Tezzeret, Elspeth… everything else. I’d take a week off too! Besides, she knew if we wanted to move early, we’d get her.”

“It’s an important thing to do,” Nissa agreed, “at one point on Zendikar, Gideon very nearly worked himself to death.”

“Yep,” Chandra said, stretching, “Once we kick Tezzeret’s ass, I think we’re all due for a vacation.”

They sat around for a bit longer, until they heard the sound of a truck pulling up. Sun met Blake’s eyes, before following just behind her.

Ruby jumped out of the cab with two backpacks in hand, looking a lot better than she had since they landed in Kaladesh. Hair clean, the bruising that had grown more prominent under her eyes with each day all but gone and her clothes replaced… including one obvious example.

“Where’s your cloak?” Blake asked the question on Sun’s mind.

“It… it got damaged during my Planewalk back,” Ruby said, “I didn’t have time to get it fixed and when I went to buy a replacement, I kinda realized how, you know, obvious it would be in Kaladesh. So Dad’s gonna get it fixed while I’m gone, should be ready when we get back.

“I seriously hope you’re right,” Sun said, “You look weird not wearing a cloak.”

Ruby stuck her tongue out at him light heartedly, “I know right? Not enough red.”

“We’ll steal you one of those coats like Pia’s when we get there,” Sun grinned, “There’s a curfew, guards all over… should be fun, right?”

Ruby laughed harder than Sun had seen her since Ajani broke the news. One hand covering her eyes as she shook her head, “You’re having way too fun with this.”

“Too much?” Sun said, “Compared to Innistrad, what’s not to love about Kaladesh?”

“You’ll have to take some pictures,” Tai said as he stepped out of the truck, lifting the five duffle bags in the back and carrying them to the door. Placing them down, Tai turned, crouching and spreading his arms towards Ruby.

Ruby rushed forward, hugging her father tight, as a rush of longing went through Sun, “Love you.”

“I love you too,” Tai said, pressing his lips to her forehead, “I’ll see you when you get back. Stay
Ruby nodded, pulling back and letting Tai stand. Walking over to them, Tai planted his hands on Blake and Sun’s shoulders, “You too, stay safe. Blake, we’ll talk about that trip when you get back. I take it Sun’s coming?”

“Of course I am,” Sun said.

“Good to hear,” Tai said, opening the door to the door to his truck. Sun saw Tai’s hands tighten on the wheel before he pulled out of the spot.

“Come on,” Sun said, reaching down to grab one of the bags, “We got a few hours to hang out before we should sleep. Got plenty to talk to you about. Dust, what did you put in these bags, Rubes? Guns?”

--- X Blake X---

Blake stared at the contents of the bags, before looking up with a wry smirk, “I’m pretty sure Sun was joking, Ruby.”

Inside two of the bags were a set of rifles and pistols. In the other three ammo. Blake looked over at Gideon, who was examined the contents with a worried look on his face. Finally, he looked up at Ruby, “Ruby. I’m not sure about this. We’re trying to stop Tezzeret, not win a wa-”

“Bit late for that, Gids,” Chandra butted in, “Tezzeret is camped out in Consulate HQ and in charge of their guys. We’re gonna have to fight our way to him.”

“She’s right,” Jace agreed, “and we can stop this from being another Ravnica situation, Gideon. Ruby, are you sure you can take it out?”

“Get me close,” Ruby smiled, “and I’ll have it broken really quick,” then she frowned, “I… Does anyone else think Tezzeret wants something else? Why wouldn't he just cut and run?”

“You’re right, it does seem that way ” Gideon sighed, “We’ll… We’ll have to consult Pia when we get back.”

“Mom did say she’d have Renegades ready to meet with us when we get back,” Chandra threw out.

Ruby nodded, handing Thalia a package, “General Ironwood sent that for you…”

Thalia took the package, weighing it before pulling out a dagger and using it to open the box. Blake watched as the cathar’s eyes widened as she reached into the box, pulling out a revolver, “Ruby?”

“Just under three pounds,” Ruby said after a brief glance at it, “barrel is 6.5 in length, chambers .44 rounds, six bullets, double action.”

Thalia nodded as her eyes ignited. Ghostly flames rushed down her arm, enveloping the gun for a moment before flickering out.

Gideon had closed his eyes, giving a mighty sigh, “We should relax a bit, then rest. Tomorrow, we fight a war.”

The small group muttered in agreement, Chandra snuffed out the fireplace with a click of her fingers as they left the room and split up.
Blake, Sun and Ruby walked toward where their rooms. Blake stopped a moment to smile at the now unpetrified Gared as he cleaned the smashed vase left behind from Adam's break in. The bodies had already been moved by their fellow zombies, “Thank you.”

“All right, Mistress,” the hunchback gave a smile back, “It gives me something to do.”

“You want people to smash vases?” Blake joked, “because I’m pretty sure I can get Sun on that real quick.”

“Oh, no,” Gared pushed himself up, “not at the moment! I have too much to do and so little time! Dust everywhere!”

“Then I’ll leave you to it,” Blake said, walking to the open door at the end of the hall. Upon reaching it, she shut the door to keep the cold air in.

It ultimately wasn’t practical to cool the entire manor, so they restricted it to the rooms most lived in. Their bedrooms, the kitchen and dining room, and the parlors/dens in a couple of places. Like here.

Ruby and Sun were hanging around the room. Sun laying across the couch, throwing a ball up and down, while Ruby was scanned a bookshelf for something.

Sun caught the ball and Blake's eyes, before gesturing towards Ruby. Time to bite the bullet. But ho-?

“So,” Sun started, “Rubes, when were you planning to tell me about New Phyrexia?”

Damn it. Blake curled in on herself, ears flattening against her head.

Ruby had frozen at the words, hand on the spine of a book she had been about to pull out. Slowly, almost mechanically, Ruby turned to look at Blake, “You… You…”

“Hey!” Sun popped up, lightly throwing the ball at Ruby, “Don't be like that! You weren't exactly subtle about something being up, and I wasn't gonna take no for an answer. Now, why didn't ya tell me before?”

“I… I didn't want anyone to know, you’d all want to go and probably sti-”

“Not really,” Sun cut her off, “Rubes, I know you. You're the girl who went looking for a serial killer, beat the everloving shit out of an angel and helped kill two Eldrazi the size of mountains. If you think we’re not ready for something, We’re probably not ready for it.”

Well, Sun was wasting no time making Blake look bad, was he?

“But… I… I was…”

“What, was scared? Am scared?” Sun hopped over the couch, grabbing his ball and throwing it into the air before tossing it to Ruby, “Everyone’s afraid of something, Rubes. I mean, look at us. Blake would sooner jump off the Beacon CCT before going into a heavy crowd, Nissa still hates loud noises, I’m not ever heading back to Vacuo if I can avoid it. There's nothing wrong with you being afraid of something.”

Ruby turned away from them, shoulders shaking, “but-”

“No buts,” Sun said, turning Ruby around, “You didn't do anything wrong, so stop beating yourself
Blake stepped forward, throat tight. This was her one chance to make up for… “Right. I… I wasn't a good friend on New Phyrexia, Ruby.”

“Yeah,” Sun said, walking them towards each other, “All it took for her to realize that was her blabbing to her parents about it and them pointing it out.”

“Yeah,” Blake said, “I… We don't have to tell everyone about it when we’re done on Kaladesh.”

“It’ll wait until you’re ready,” Sun continued, “Even if that means I need to learn a spell to permanently glue Blake’s mouth shut.”

Ruby’s shoulders shook for a moment, then she threw her arms around their necks, barely keeping them from smacking their heads together, “Thank you.”

“Hey, heyheyhey,” Sun pushed her away gently, “No crying. Not yet, at least.”

“Not… Yet…?” Ruby sniffled.

“Yeah,” Sun reached into his pocket, dropping something into her hand, “Took me a few days, but I found that. Considering an early birthday present.”

“It’s past my birthday,” Ruby said, examining the shard.

“There wasn't a party, so it doesn't count,” Sun said, “That what you were looking for?”

“Yes… and no,” Ruby said, “it’s a shard of a powerstone. It won't power a ship, but there’s plenty of stuff I can do with it.”

“Good,” Sun said, hooking an arm around both girls, “Now, lets play a game or watch a movie or something. I don't know how long this revolt thing is gonna take, but I want to relax for a bit before it happens!”

---

Chandra sniggered as she pulled out her scroll. Snapping pictures of the three kids passed out on the couch, she sent their parents (well, Ruby and Blake’s parents) copies before reaching down to shake Blake, “Alright, kiddos, time to get up.”

Blake sat up, nudging Ruby as she went… and tilted her head just enough to dodge the fist that sailed by. Ruby's head shot up as she looked around, a knife in one hand, “What?”

“Time to head out,” Chandra said, “I hope you’re ready?”


“Yep,” the faunus easily popped up, “Ready when you are.”

“Come on then,” Chandra said, “We’re supposed to be waiting for the Renegades when they get to the meeting. Gideon and Thalia have moved the guns, so…”

They all nodded, popping into the Blind Eternities one at a time.

--- X Kari X---
Kari Zev walked into the room, looking around before walking to one of the empty tables and kneeling on the cushion, “They aren’t here yet?”

Depala joined her shaking her head, “ Doesn't look li- nevermind.”

Kari followed her gaze, watching the group of six people walk into the room. Slowly, each of them lowered their hoods and two of them stepped forward, “Renegade Prime?”

“Apparently,” Depala said, “I can't wait to hear how they plan to take on the Consulate without weapons.”

Instead of Renegade Prime stepping up, the younger woman walked forwards, “Hi. I’m, I’m Pia’s daughter, Chandra. Kiran’s daughter. Some of you probably knew him… probably better than I did… and that’s… that's not alright. Because of the Consulate, you got to know my dad better than I did. They took him from me and my mom. And when she decided to fight, you sat by and let her. They hadn't taken enough from you.”

“That’s-” a voice started, a dwarf climbing to his feet.

“Now have they?” Chandra paced on the stage, “Now that they've taken everything? Your invitations, your blueprints and your tools? When does it become too much? When they take your parents, your husband or wife, your kids? Wh-”

“Listen,” another woman climbed to her feet, “What happened to your dad sucks, but like you said, they took everything. My ship is impounded, that’s all I had to fight, and it’s gone.”

“They stripped my workshop,” the dwarf said, “they stripped everyone’s workshop.”

Everyone joined in, complaining about taken inventions. Whipping themselves into, Kari noticed, an angry fevor. Clever.

the youngest of the group stepped forward, a bag in hand and tried to say something, but the crowd was too loud. After two attempts to say something, she gestured to a blond woman. Something grey was drawn, pointed into the roof and giving a loud roar.

All talking ceased and the girl stepped forward, “That’s where we come in.”

Dropping the bag, she continued, lifting out a black object, “These are step two to beating the Consulate. We’ll need to hit the lockup first, get those inventions back-”

“They'll have us beaten in minutes,” Kari cut in, “it’s one of the most high security areas in Ghirapur and we have,” she did a quick headcount, “forty people.”

“You think you're the only people in Ghirapur feeling angry?” the other girl asked, “That’s step one.”

--- X Ruby X---

There was, as the Renegades expected, a heavy crowd protesting the Consulate’s newest Aether restrictions outside the enforcers base.

Ruby stood above them, loading the last bullet she needed and turning her scroll to short range communications, “Ready.”
“Same.”
“Roger.”

A single exasperated sigh came from Blake, “Really, Sun?”

“Let me have my fun!”

“If we screw this up, people are going to die.”

“Then we won't screw it up,” Gideon said, “Jace, Thalia, Nissa, Liliana?”

“Just say the word.”

“Yes.”

“I’m also ready.”

“Didn't we do this less than a week ago?”

“If it ain't broke, don't fix it,” Sun said, “but you’re not wrong.”

“That’s why we’re doing it,” Ruby said, “last time we showed them the Renegades help their own, now we show them that we’re on their side.”

“And it lets Pia, Ajani and the Renegades get close enough to attack the base,” Gideon said.

“Which is the ‘if it ain't broke’ part,” Sun said.

“Blake,” Ruby said softly, “are you…?”

“Fine,” Blake smiled at Ruby from the balcony next to a Consulate banner.

“Whenever you’re ready, Chandra,” Gideon said.

Aether access is restric-

People of Kaladesh. My name is Chandra Nalaar and I am one of you! Chandra's voice echoed from the speakers.

What?

We trusted the Consulate once but they betrayed us!

Once this threat is dealt with, we will return your confiscated inventions!

Why would they even need to confiscate your inventions? Don't be blinded by Tezzeret’s lies! He claims to have moved the winners of the fair for their safety… using threats and force? Refusing to allow them contact with other people! We saved Rashmi, they sent armed enforcers to take her in!

Comply w-

The Consulate sends ‘peacemakers’ to threaten you, to arrest you if you don't cower and obey and calls that safety? They take your inventions without a warrant, revoke your licenses without warning and deny you Aether access and calls that freedom?

Ignore this agitator!
Do you feel safe?

“No!”

Do you feel free?

“NO!”

Then-

Enough! Tezzeret’s voice came across, but the man didn't show himself, Execute crowd control.

Don't you dare touch the-!

Disperse this rabble.

If you want a fight… we’ll give you one!

There was the sound of thunder as Sun leapt from Drache, smashing into the mobile garrison the peacemakers had been coming out of. The machine exploded around him, causing Ruby to worry for a second before two crackling clones charged out of the smoke punching the peacemaker and exploding.

Chandra fell from the sky shortly after, smashing into a gearhulk with a ball of flames in her hands. The fire pushed through the construct, melting its joints. Seconds later, Drache landed to help Chandra finish the job.

Ruby angled her first shot into the sky. Once it cleared the highest roof the barrier engraved into it ignited, bringing fifty layers down around the area.

The ships still within the barrier tried to aim at them as lashing vines grabbed them and slowly crushed them. Nissa made herself known, dropping several seeds that ground that grew into thorny creatures.

One enforcer was grabbed by several tassels of white mana as he swung at a rioter. Gideon stepped forward, staring him in the eye as two others broke their snapblades against his glowing skin, before ramming his skull into the other.

The guards in front of the base locked up for a second before crumpling unconscious as Jace eliminated them. Thalia and Liliana moved up the stairs, waving their arms to guide people inside as the Renegades ran into the base. Two Enforcers ran to stop them but were tackled from behind by rioters as Ruby took out the ones still fighting with Sun with Crescent Rose, “Blake?”

“On it,” Blake rushed into the empty square, moving the grate leading to the tunnels under Ghirapur.

Ruby watched the crowd come out, clutching, when possible, the inventions they had worked so hard on. Then she turned away, both to keep from recording them and to focus on the Consulate headquarters. A giant flying skyscraper in the heart of Ghirapur.

One step closer to Tezzeret.

“Ruby! Bring it down!”

The barrier around them winked out and Ruby smiled down at Blake, climbing down to join her as Thalia and Liliana passed them, “meet us at the mine?”
“With any who want to join,” Liliana rolled her eyes, “of course.”

“See you then,” Ruby closed the grate.

One step closer to Tezzeret. Next up, the Aether Hub.

Chapter End Notes

Opinions on the chapter? Good? Bad? Meh? (It's Bad or Meh, isn't it?)
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

--- X Sun X---

Sun entered the part of the rapidly growing complex of tunnels below their mine that the Gatewatch had made their own. Nissa was seated on a cot, panting, “You alright?”

“Just,” Nissa stopped, smiling weakly, “just tired. I used a lot of energy carving the rocks.”

“You should take it easy,” Sun said, “We might not even be here that long. Have you seen Blake or Ruby?”

“Both of them are in that room,” Nissa pointed towards it, “They were asking the same question about you.”

“Then I’ll go see what they want,” Sun said, ducking passed her.

Blake was sitting on a bed, eyes scanning a book as she played with her ribbon. Her eye jumped up and she gave a small smile before pressing a lip to her finger, pointing to Ruby.

Ruby was seated at a workbench, slowly scratching symbols into the bullet. Once she finished, glowing energy ran across the bullet. Like someone had poured a white-gold glow into the array. Putting the completed one aside, Ruby reached for another, turning towards Blake as she grabbed a bullet from Gambol Shroud. The moment she saw him, she dropped the bullet, “Sun!”

“Hey! What’s up?”

“I’m getting things ready for the Aether Hub! Including,” Ruby reached under the bench, “These!”

“Slugs?” Sun asked, picking up one of the shotgun rounds and turning it. Red symbols ran across it, ready to fire.
“I know it’s not what you usually use,” Ruby started, “but they're easier to enchant than normal shotgun rounds. They're not hand loaded either, I don't have my tools for that. So they're probably not as good as normal, bu-”

“Ruby,” Sun grabbed the girl by her shoulders, “I’ve got four shotguns. I can use slugs for one. What else ya got for us?”

“Oh! I was working on Blake's bullets. I got most of mine done, but Pia and Kari are trying to figure out how to get into the Hub.”

Sun had to admire the confidence of the Renegades, a week after they had got the stuff (he still wasn't quite sure what) out of the Consulate lockup and they were already getting ready for something even more ballsy, making inventions as they went, “-So why aren't you there?”

“Why would I be?” Ruby asked, “I’m not in charge of anyone.”

“Yeah, but this is a plane of Artifacts. Nobody knows that like you do. If you were with them, they'd have thirty ways into the Hub right now and we’d be ramming the ship right into Tezzy's face.”

Ruby blushed, reached for a hood that wasn't there, “I’m not that good!”

“Blake, help me out here!”

Blake snapped her book shut, standing up and walking to them, “Ruby, you're perfect for this job. Once we got that block out of the way, you instantly knew what Nahiri was doing on Innistrad. This building, it’s one giant flowing stream of Aether. That has to count, right?”

“I… Yeah, probably.”

“Then go,” Blake said, “the quicker we get this done, the less the people of Kaladesh need to suffer because of Tezzeret.”
“Yeah,” Ruby nodded snagging a revolver and single shot pistol off the workbench and storing them away, “Thanks guys.”

“You don't need to thank us,” Sun said, grinning as Ruby rushed out of the room in a flurry of petals. Once he was sure she was gone, he turned to Blake, “Think we’ll be getting ready for Menagerie this time next week?”

“That’s a bit much,” Blake said, smiling slightly, “I’d say two weeks.”

“You’re on!”

“It’s not a bet, Sun.”

“That’s become you know I’m right!”

---X Pia X---

Pia eyed the projector the Gatewatch had gotten from off plane. The blue cloaked man, Jace, had hooked it up to his Scroll, examining a blueprint of the Aether Hub. Kiran would have had a field day at a field of new technology to explore.

“The problem,” Gideon finally said, “is that something this important will be so heavily guarded, a conventional assault would be pointless.”

“I’m thinking,” Jace said, tapping one foot as he stared at it, marching over to a machine one corner and refilling his mug with pitch black liquid, “Where’s Ruby? She might be able to help.”

“I think she’s working on something in her, Sun and Blake’s room,” Gideon said, sipping from his own mug. Everyone had been given one, but Pia hadn’t drank any after the first sip of the bitter liquid.

Kari Zev spoke from where she was leaning back in her chair, her cup down to the dregs, “Rubi? Is that the Arms Dealer?”
Gideon choked on his drink, spitting a bit out as he coughed, “Arms dealer? Where'd you get the idea that Ruby’s an arms dealer?”

“She sure seems to do stuff with weapons,” Kari patted the weapon on her hip with a confident smirk, “like this! We’ve never seen anything quite like it, have we, my prince?”

The last part was all but cooed to the monkey on her shoulder. Gideon and Jace not so subtly shared a look of confusion.

Kari Zev and her ‘prince’ Ragavan, had been a staple on the Consulate’s most wanted list for almost four years now. She was the only captain alive known to have survived a battle with the Skysovereign. No small feet from a girl just over fifteen.

“Yes,” Gideon coughed, “Well…”

“She’s over there,” Kari said casually, pointing down the hall, “I think she’s been waiting for a few minutes to talk to you.”

“I didn't want to interrupt,” Ruby walked in with a bashful smile, “What did you need Jace?”

“What can you tell me about this place?” Jace asked, gesturing to the blueprints, “Any weaknesses we should know about?”

Ruby sat down, leaning forwards and grabbing Jace’s scroll. The young girl grew silent as her glowing eyes scanned the blueprint, Pipes.”

“What?”

“It’s,” Ruby grunted, “it's easier to show you. Go ahead.”

Jace closed his eyes, before nodding, “That could work… Pia, Kari do either of you know how to cause the pipes to drain?”
“Not from the outside, but…” Pia snapped her fingers, “Send an Aetherborn through, they don’t need to breathe and can withstand the flow.”

“That’d work,” Gideon said, “cause enough havoc they shut off the pipes to check, then charge in before they can sound the alarm.”

“Then we can redirect the flow to the Ruin and away from the Consulate bases,” Pia said.

“But that doesn't explain how we get in,” Ruby said.

“We blow two holes…” Kari jumped up, examined the map, “Here and here. Junction Nine and Twenty Three. All they lead to is Consulate bases.”

“Tonight,” Jace said, “Under the cover of darkness. Ruby, I want you there, you can counter any artifacts they throw at us.”

“We’ll need everyone,” Pia started, “We’ll hold the area leading to it after-”

“Not everyone,” Jace cut her off, “We’ll have… Lili stay with the Ruin, that way we can fly it to the Hub the moment we take charge. Meanwhile, we will have several teams raid other locations as a distraction. Thalia and Sun?”

“They can do it.”

--- X Sun X---

Sun cracked his knuckles with an excited grin as the small group entered into the greenbelt, “You guys ready?”

The small group of Renegades nodded… except for one in the back who shook his head, “Why are we doing this? The Consuls aren't going to be here.”
“That’s why we’re here,” Sun said, “if the Consulate can focus on the Hub, we won’t get anything done before they take it back. So we’re causing a distraction. I wouldn’t like my house getting hit, would you?”

“No-”

“Exactly!” Sun grinned, “Now, give me a sec.”

Sun burst from the swirling bushes, grabbing the passing guard by the upper arm and span him around. He had just enough time for his eyes to widen under the faceplate of his stupid swirly helmet before Sun grabbed him by the helmet and rammed his knee into it.

The guard collapsed like a sack of bricks as Sun turned back to them, “So, as I was saying, we cause havoc with the house long enough for them to take the Aether Hub and get the defenses set up, then we get out. Ready?”

Everyone nodded.

“Good!” Sun walked towards the front gate, raising his arms as the two guards tensed, “Hey~! Why don't you guys take a break, make things easier for everyone?”

The guards’ snapblades locked into place, a thin sheen of Aether appearing. Sun's grin widened, “Yeah, I thought so.”

Sun whipped out Ruyi Bang and Jingu Bang snapping them together and rushing at the guards. The runes Ruby had added to the weapon at the start of school blazed as Sun threw his staff at one, transferring the magical energy into an explosive burst of speed.

At the same time, Sun reached the other guard. Catching the arm with the snapblade, Sun span around, throwing him into the shrubs and walked into the house.

“You do know he’s still awake, right?” Someone asked.

“Yeah,” Sun span Ruyi Jingu Bang and rested it against his shoulder, “Settle in, boys. We don't
know how long they’ll take to get here.”

“Why’s the kid in charge?” one muttered.

“Do you have combat training?” nobody said anything, “Yeah, that’s what I thought.”

“...That's sad.”

“What?”

“You can't be older than what? Fourteen? Why do you have training?”

“It’s what we do,” Sun shrugged, pulling out his scroll and calling Ruby, “Now, be quiet…”

“Sun?” Ruby's voice was tense, “What's happening? Are you alright?”

“Yes. How’s Thalia doing?”

“I don’t know. She hasn't called in yet.”

“Ya want me to go check?”

“No, not yet.”

“Ok,” Sun said with a yawn, “I can't believe you sent her to the docks instead of me…”

“We’ll go together after this thing is done,” Ruby said, “It’ll be nicer when there isn't a revolution going on.”
“Sounds good,” Sun said, “How’s things on your end?”

“The pipes aren't off yet, but should be soon. We’ll call you when we have the Hub.”

“Yes,” Sun nodded, “See you then.”

“And Sun?”

“Yeah?”

“Stay safe.”

“You too, Rubes,” Sun said, hanging up. Looking around, Sun cocked his head at the looks he was given, “What?”

“Girlfriend?”

“No? Ruby's just my friend.”

“If you say so.”

--- X Jhoira X---

Jhoira looked out over the horizon of New Zhalfir, at the rocky spikes that was all that remained of the original Zhalfir. Logically, it made sense to stay here, it was the closest city to Urborg that wasn't ruled by the Cabal, but that didn't make the ache any easier.

Teferi had never forgiven himself for phasing Zalfir out of sync from the rest of Dominaria during the Invasion. In the sixty years since the rifts, since Jeska’s sacrifice, the Planeswalker hadn’t been to the city founded by Femeref.
Former Planeswalker, Jhoira reminded herself. Teferi’s spark had, as far as they could tell, been snuffed out sealing the rift above Shiv. Even worse, her oldest friend had all but retired to raise his daughter, Niambi.

She should visit before she returned to the Burning Isles to find the Weatherlight. Niambi had to be… what, twenty now? Maybe more? To have them both on the Weatherlight would be amazing, and she was certain they were on the cusp of finding it.

There was a knock on her door, snapping her from her thoughts, “Come in!”

One of the two men she had hired to try and find Venser, Adnan, stepped into the room. Jhoria immediately noticed the bandage wrapped around one side of his head, broken nose and split lip of the Rabiah-descended man, “Jhoira.”

“What happened to you?” She asked, offering a chair to him, “and Venser…?”

“We found his workshop,” Adnan said.

“And?”

“Give me enough time to think,” he said, looking like he wanted to shake his head, “It had been raided before we got there, Cabal, most likely. No sign of anyone like you said.”

“Most likely?” Jhoira asked, watching him and trying to keep the worry for her friend down, “You don't know?”

“We were ready to do research on it,” he said with a shrug, “You always paid more than our father asked, but then…”

“Then?”

“I’m sorry,” Adnan laughed, “this will sound insane, but we were jumped by a little girl.”
“I’m sorry?”

“I said it was insane,” he laughed again, “little girl, couldn't of been older than thirteen, comes charging down the hall. Pins Haidar to the wall with some sort of artifact and tackles me! That’s how this,” Adnan gestured to his face, “happened. She hit like a Talruum berserker.”

“You wouldn't of happened to get the artifact?”

“Her friends left it in my brother's shoulder,” Adnan handed over the sharp metal rod, “I think they'd forgotten he was there, it-”

“Put him into a stasis,” Jhoira said, turning the rod in her hand. She could have done the same with a quarter of the work, but this Artificer was most likely self taught and it was not half bad with that taken into account. Though something about it felt familiar.

She would have to look into this while she was in the Isles. You didn't come across preteens this good very often.

“Yes!” Adnan said, “She your daughter or something?”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“She had hair like yours,” Adnan gestured around, “Dark that became red. Not daughter, niece?”

“No,” Jhoira said, putting the stick back, “You mentioned friends?”

“Yes. There was a girl with black hair, yanked her off me and a boy with blond hair and a tail. He was a spellcaster of some sort, summoned an ogre to drag me out.”

A human spellcaster with a tail? In her thousand years, she had never heard of something quite like that on Dominaria before. A Planeswalker then?
“Thank you for your help, Adnan. I take it you’re also here for your pay?”

“And a bit more than we agreed on, if you can spare it. Healers aren’t cheap these days and Haidar needed one.”

“Of course,” Jhoira said, reaching for her coin purse.

--- X Thalia X---

Thalia watched the patrol pass below her, drawing her saber as they passed. Then she, and her group, jumped down into the alley, eyes trained on the gate to Freejam.

The locked gate to Freejam, “You’re sure you can get it open?”

“Easily,” the elf calling herself ‘Shadowblayde’, and she had been very insistent on the existence of a random ‘Y’ in the name, nodded, “Get me to it and I’ll have it open in the time it takes to blink.”

Thalia nodded, feeling her blood turn to cold fire as Traft made his presence known, “And these ‘friends’ of yours will be here?”

“Also yes.”

“Good,” Thalia said, stepping out of the alley and into the path of the guards.

“Who-?” The guard on the left jerked, before regaining his composure, “It’s after curfew, ma’am. Return to your home immediately or-”

“Don’t be an idiot,” the other growled, activating his snapblade, “She’s out after curfew, has a sword and is wearing some sort of armor. She’s a Renegade!”

“Renegade?” Thalia asked, seeing her breath condense as Traft’s flames ran down her sword and...
her Aura kicked in, “Yes… and no.”

“What the-?” The left guard took a step back, before deploying his own weapon, “Stay back!”

Thalia moved, moon-blessed silver flashing as she impaled the first guard, sinking through the brass armor like it wasn't there. As the other guard tried to capitalize on her weapon being stuck, another hand lashed out, holding a slightly translucent black sword.

Thalia span, freeing her sword as she went. The second guard’s head fell from his shoulders shortly after and Thalia beckoned her team forward as she sheathed her sword.

Shadowblayde whistled, toeing one body, “Woooow, I’m not sure where Prime got you mercs, but I’m glad she snagged you before the Consulate got you, Bright Eyes.”

“Bright Eyes?” Thalia asked, not bothering to address that the Gatewatch was not a mercenary organization.

“That’s your codename, ‘cause you got that little glow always and when you did that flamey sword,” Shadowblayde over pronounced the ‘w’ in sword, “bit, they go like woom! Fire.”

“I don’t need a codename.”

“Yeah you do! We’re agents in a rebellion, we need codenames! Haven’t you ever read a book?”

Had she just implied Thalia was an idiot? “I don’t need a codename.”

“Yeah you do.”

“No, I really don’t.”

“C’mon! I’m gonna give one to everyone! What do you think that guy with the tail would like? Golden Ape? Monkey King?”
“I- just get the gate open,” Thalia sighed, feeling a mounting headache.

“Harumph,” Thalia closed her eyes breathing deeply to keep herself calm as Shadowblayde literally said ‘Harumph’ aloud, “I did that while you were fighting.”

“How?” Thalia asked.

A brass beetle flew around before landing on Shadowblayde’s hand, “This is Mr. Pincer! Say hi to him.”

“...Hi,” Thalia said, deciding that going along with this headache was the best way to get things done, “Let's-”

“Halt!” Thalia span, grabbing her gun and pointing it at the new guard. Before she could pull the trigger, inevitably giving them away before they wanted to, he seized up. A grey hand latched around his mouth to muffle the scream that came from him as blue energy was pulled from the guard. Thalia heard a muffled scream from the person on the other side as the guard stopped moving before dropping… dead.

Before them was an Aetherborn, the blue eyes that made up the only features on its face staring down at one hand. Their voice came a second later as they clenched their grey hand, “That will never be pleasant.”

Thalia stepped in front of her team, drawing her sword and preparing to defend them if the Aetherborn attacked. There were vampires on Kaladesh? “Who are you?”

The blue eyes jumped to meet Thalia’s, “I’m sorry for that, Darling. It’s something I would have never done if I could avoid it. You are one of Mrs. Pashiri’s friends?”

“You know Oviya?”

“We have been in similar circles before,” the Aetherborn started to hold out a hand, before apparently thinking better of it, “I am Yahenni. I wish to join the Renegades.”
“Why?” Why would a vampire want to join the Renegades?

“I’m not long for the world, Darling,” Yahenni said in a tone that made Thalia think that if they had a mouth, it would be pulled into a wry smile, “I have… twenty days left and I would sorely like for it to not go higher than that.”

“What does that mean?” Thalia felt Traft rouse himself slightly.

“I… I am a rare breed, Darling. I can drain the essence from living creatures to extend my own life but… I feel it all. Every time I do it, I am both the killer and the killed. I am living on borrowed time, so I feel I should make good use of it.”

_I don't believe she is lying_, Traft said, _and it would not be the first time you met something that shunned expectations like this._

“…Alright,” Thalia said, sheathing her sword, “Come on, we need to release the locks on the ships.”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby leaned against the pipe, staff next to her as she loaded a pistol. Cocking the gun, Ruby looked over as Blake laughed, Gambol Shroud in pistol form, “What?”

“How many guns do you have?” Blake asked, “I’ve counted at least four.”

“Enough,” Ruby said, grabbing her staff. Uncapping a marker, Ruby began to scrawl runes onto the junction, counting down in her head. They needed a better way to talk, “Remind me to buy earpieces when we get home. We need to be able to talk without pulling out our scrolls.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Blake said, “Shall I get you coffee while I’m at it? Organize your meetings?”

“Hot chocolate would be better, thanks” Ruby responded, “but we don't really have time. And we’d
be at the same meetings.”

“I was joking,” Blake sighed.

“Oh,” Ruby said, “sorry. I’m bit busy trying to keep us from blowing up.”

…”

“That was a joke, right?” Chandra asked.

“Not really,” Ruby said, “this isn't the easiest thing to write on, so if I slip up... well...”

The entire group, except Blake, took a large step back. Ruby continued the runes.

Finally, the set flared Red and Ruby took her own step back, “Time?”

“I wasn’t keeping track,” Blake said, “I thought you were trying to make sure it didn't blow up?”

“You aren't keeping track of the time?” Ruby asked, “can’t you pull out your scroll? I’d do it if my hands weren't full.”

“Oh,” Blake said, doing so, “I thought you were asking how long it took,” Blake looked down with a hiss, “Mine’s still on Vale Standard. Anyone have a watch?”

“It’s two minutes to one,” one person said.

Two minutes. That’s all that was left between them and combat. Ruby wrapped her mind in a layer of Blue.

Further down the way, another pipe exploded. Firing a bolt from her staff, Ruby detonated the array.
For a few seconds, blue Aether vented from the pipe. Ruby took another second to make sure she had everything for a close quarters fight. Staff, knife, guns…

“This is insane,” one of the Renegades whispered, the piston strapped to his arm hissing slightly, “Never thought we’d be assaulting an Aether supply depot. Hell, the Aether supply depot.”

“Welcome to working with the Gatewatch,” Chandra said, “We consider the day wasted if we haven't done six insane things before breakfast.”

“Not gonna have that problem today,” he said as the hum from the Hub stopped and the last of the Aether escaped into the atmosphere, “Once we have the Hub, the quicksmiths are gonna have a field day. Unrestricted Aether access? Consulate won't know what hit them.”

Ruby stepped aside, offering Chandra the lead. Chandra climbed up into the pipe, hunching slightly to fit and began moving.

Ruby climbed up next, turning to help Blake up, “Worst part of this is that we’re stuck with the stuff that can fit through the pipes and into the halls.”

“You’ll have plenty of time to use Crescent Rose later,” Blake said.

“I know that,” Ruby said, continuing forwards.

Less than a foot from the exit, Chandra pulled down her goggles, embers licking along the ends of her hair. The pyromancer tensed for half a second before exploding out of the pipe, twin whips of fire lashing around the hall.

Ruby rushed out of the pipe, aiming and firing before the guard had time to blink. The bullet punched through his brass armor as Ruby turned, firing two beams of light down the hall and through the guards.

Ruby felt Blake press against her, the taller girl literally covering her back, “How many on your side?”
“Seven,” Ruby fired two shots from her gun and launched a glowing spike at another. The two she had shot at, predictably, dropped as the bullets hit their skull, but the last rolled away, “Make that five.”

“Ten on mine,” Gambol Shroud barked twice, “Ei-”

The was a familiar whoosh of fire accompanied by an explosion of heat and screams of pain, “Zero?”

“Zero,” Blake agreed, spinning and firing at three of Ruby's targets. The bullets were followed with a streak of pure black, like an inverted tracer, and each caused the guards to drop on impact.

Ruby prepared to launch another spike before the ‘maulfist’ rushed past her and hit one guard with a haymaker that would leave Yang impressed. An elf holding a pair of short swords followed after quickly, catching the guard’s snapblade. A bang came from behind them as the guard crumpled, a splatter of blood hitting the wall, and the unfortunate elf, as a chunk of the guards head was blown out.

Ruby turned with Blake, staring at the dwarf squinting down the sights of a lightly battered battle rifle. She stood up, shaking her head, “That’s disgusting.”

“Since when has combat been pretty?” the elf asked, stepping away from the body.

“I know,” the dwarf shook her head, “but you don't normally see a man's head do… that unless you’ve got a hammer or a maulfist.”

“Well,” the man said, “it might be disgusting, but it gets the job done quickly. That’ll help against the Consulate.”

“Ruby,” Blake said under her breath.

“Hm?”
“I’m starting to wonder if you made a mistake getting those guns.”

“They already have projectiles. Harpoon cannons. These aren't that much more. Besides, I have an inventory and a list of names, I’ll get them back before we go.”

Blake muttered something too low for Ruby to hear as they followed Chandra down the hall.

--- X Thalia X---

Thalia opened the newest door unlocked by Shadowblayde, streaking across the room to take out the guards. Her sword sang through the air, ending their lives before they could respond. Looking back, Thalia nodded, “How much farther?”

“Hum,” Shadowblayde said, leaving Thalia to close her eyes and pray to Sigarda, “Should be two rooms down!”

Those two rooms went down just as easy as the previous ones. Thalia stepped aside to let her group work their magic.

Her eyes drifted towards the Aether Hub, she wondered how-

Oh, *damnit*. She should have called in half an hour ago!

Thalia fumbled with her scroll, pulling up Ruby and waiting with bated breath. Finally the young Planeswalker picked up, relief in her voice, “Thalia! You’re late… is something wrong? We still have the guys in the gre-”

“We’re fine for now,” Thalia said, “it just slipped my mind. Are you alright?”

“Pushing towards the control room now,” Ruby said and Thalia could almost hear the grin in her voice, “I- one sec.”

…
“Hello?” Blake suddenly came on, “Thalia? Sorry, Ruby just handed this to me, they moved a weird barricade in front of us and she’s dealing with that.”

“I just wanted to let you all know we’re in, working on the locks,” Thalia said, “We should be ready any minute now.”

“Good,” Blake said, “I’ll let Ruby know. Should be Ruby, what are you doin-!?”

A rushing roar of noise cut off Blake, “Hello?”

“Right,” Blake sounded distracted, “Good to hear. We’ll meet back up with you when you’re done. Bye.”

Thalia looked down at the scroll, storing it away, “How much longer?”

“Just hit that button,” one technician said, pointing at it, “but the Consulate will know we’re here.”

“That’s what we want,” Thalia said softly, reaching out at the same time Shadowblayde pulled out a small tube, “Ready?”

“Yep!” Shadowblayde grabbed the end.

“Then here we go,” Thalia said, hitting the button.

There was a series of flashes below them as the clamps on many of the airships were fused into place. At the same time, Shadowblayde lit her flare, swinging it through the air as the Aether burned blue.

Thalia turned to the door, drawing her revolver and pointing it the way they had come. The moment the first guard came running towards them, a demand on his lips, Thalia fired.

Ice crawled away from the puncture wound, thickening his blood and slowing him. A arc of Traft’s flames shattered him just in time for several more to enter. The gun howled several more
times, sending Thailia’s ears throbbing. With each shot, another guard dropped, shards of ice sprouting from their bodies.

Thalia holstered the gun, moving to meet the next target, only for him to drop, Yahenni muffling a scream as she drained him. Thalia grabbed the grey hand, ignoring the puff as part of the skin crumbled away, “I thought you said you didn't want to do that?”

“I don’t, but I also don't have a weapon,” the vampire argued.

Thalia grit her teeth, fighting with herself. The Gatewatch was supposed to work with-?

_Is Liliana some form of special case?_ Traft asked, _am I?_

_You never-_

_And what of her?_ Traft urged.

...She doesn't hold the same interests as the rest of us. I know that, you know that. I’m waiting for when she reveals what she does want.

_And what of where we stand? We are not on Innistrad anymore, Thalia. We are fighting a war, do you believe the people on the other side are as irredeemable as the vampires you once hunted?_

Thalia couldn’t quite find an answer to that. Werewolves and Vampires had been evil, but she had stood beside them at Thraben. Angels and Cathars had been good, but she had fought them…

_I don’t know what to believe anymore._

Traft didn't say anything for a long time, _We know Tezzeret is a threat, I do not doubt he must be stopped if this Bolas is as dangerous as the others believe. Focus on that, Thalia. Any other decision comes after._

Slowly, Thalia let go of Yahenni’s arm and turned to the window. There was a crowd forming
below, charging the guard. Shadowblayde’s ‘friends’, “Come, we need to escape to the Cowl…”

----- X Sun X-----

Sun laughed as he caught a blast of electricity from one of the enforcers standing across from them. Clenched his hand shut, Sun watched the explosion of energy, “Lightning? Really?”

A dwarf pushed his way in front of the men, holding a brass bullhorn-thing, “We want to talk to the leader of these Renegades.”

“You are,” Sun called back.

“Son,” the dwarf said, “I don't know what the Renegade said to make you think they're right, but they aren't. If they're letting you think you're in charge, it’s a trick. You're a kid, come over here and we’ll bring you home. No record, this can be-"

Sun rolled his eyes, focusing on one of the automatons standing in the back. There was a massive flash and the crash of thunder as the automaton was blasted to pieces by Sun’s lightning.

Man, he loved magic.

“Still think I’m just some random kid?” Sun asked as the entire line bristled. Sun laughed slightly as he changed the side to the door he was leaning on to get a better look and every turret, automaton and shock gauntlet followed him, “Outta curiosity, does pointing an army’s worth of weapons at a kid make you feel safe, like you're heroes? If so, keep it up! I wouldn't want you to get uncomfortable while my guys are relaxing!”

Sun smirked as he heard the laughter through the door. The dwarf looked back, whispering something to the blue guy behind him as he was handed a piece of paper, “Sooo...? What are you guys waiting for? You’d be attacking now if you could, sooooooo...?”

“Are you... Sun Wukong?”

“That's my name,” Sun said, “don't wear i-"
“We were ordered,” the dwarf continued, “to inform you that your forces at the Aether Hub have fallen. We have captured your friends, Mses. Ruby Rose and Blake Belladonna,” the dwarf stumbled over the names, unaware of the fact that Sun’s heart had almost stopped, “Minister Baan has ordered us to offer you a deal. If you surrender and give us all the information on the Renegade bases you know of, you and them shall be released and allowed to return to- how do you say that,” the last bit was directed over his shoulder.

“Remnant,” Sun gritted his teeth, feeling his nails dig into the palm of his hand. How the hell had they captured Ruby and Blake?

“Uh, yes,” the dwarf looked completely surprising at Sun’s answer, Blake probably woulda used a bigger word, they had her… they fucking had Ruby and Blake, “Thank you. You will be allowed to return to Remnant while the others stand trial. Minister Baan and the Grand Consul understan-”

“Get on with it,” Sun growled, “This might surprise you, but when you’re trying to ransom my friends to me, I don’t exactly give a shit about Dovin and Tezzeret’s attempts to make them sound like they’re in the right.”

“Uh, Yes, well,” the dwarf coughed as the entire line bristled, apparently realizing they were on the wrong side of an angry mage, “You have ten minutes to make your decision Mr. Wukong.”

Sun span around, slamming the door shut behind him as he began to walk around the room. One of the Renegades stepped towards him, a woman holding two spears made from spare pipes. Like...

“Wha-”

“Shut up!” Sun snapped, pulling at his hair. The Consulate had Blake and Ruby? How? Couldn't they have just Planeswalked away? Did the Consulate have something to stop Planeswalkers?

“You can't seriously be thinking-”

“I’m trying to think!” Sun sat on one of the benches, pulling out his scroll. There had to be something he could do without risking everyone else. Someone-

Thalia and Liliana! They hadn't been with the others. Now all he needed to do was convince them to work together.
Sun waited for the call to go through, “Come on, come on…”

“Hello?” Thalia answered first, sounding distracted, “I don’t want to sound rude, but is this important, Sun? I’m a bit busy.”

“The Consulate,” Sun throat was dry, “They have the others.”

“What!? One moment, Traft’s going to…” Sun waited as Thalia let her passenger take charge of their body, “Alright, I can talk. Are you sure?”

“That’s what the guys standing out front said.”

“But… how? I was talking to Ruby and Blake ten minutes ago!”

The hammering in Sun’s ears dulled, “You were?”

“Yes… you aren’t thinking that maybe…?”

“They were trying to trick me? They wanted me to surrender and rat on the Renegades. Promised to let Blake and Ruby go…”

“Then they would reveal that they never had them in the first place,” Thalia's voice had changed, becoming softer, almost detached, “Clever.”

“Hey, Traft,” Sun said, “I thought you were playing autopilot?”

“I know more of the topic of hostages that Thalia,” the ghost said, “So I’m talking for the moment.”

Sun heard a muffled question on the other side of the phone, “You do?”
“I died due to one,” Traft said, “Though in my case, they actually had the girl they claimed they did. But this is not the time for that story, though I will tell it gladly when this is all over, if you wish to hear it. What do you intend to do, Sun?”

“I’m gonna call Ruby,” Sun said, “I’m gonna make sure they’re fine. Once I’m sure they are, I’m gonna fuck these guys up. Give them a message Tezzeret can see from wherever he’s hiding.”

“Crass, but understandable. Will you need assistance?”

“No,” Sun said, before stopping, “Well, maybe a pickup, I’ll be fine otherwise.”

“Well,” Traft said, “We very recently acquired a fair few ships and the Consulate lost many. We’re almost out of the tower now, we will send someone to retrieve you. Before we head to the druids.”

“Thanks,” Sun said.

“Sun,” Thalia returned to control, “if things get dangerous, make a run for it. They won’t be any happier if you get hurt or captured then you were.”

“I know that,” Sun said, standing up, and looking around, “So, things are looking like I’m about to do something really crazy. Backdoor is that way, if any of you want out.”

“We’re in the manor of a Consul,” one of the Renegades holding a spear and pistol said, “as part of a combined effort to do several attacks on important locations while we seize the Aether Hub. We’re already doing something really crazy.”

“Good point,” Sun said, hitting Ruby’s contact and waiting. With each ring, Sun’s heart beat faster until finally, finally, Ruby picked up.

“Sun?” Ruby’s voice was tired, gasps for air clearly coming across.

“Uhhhh…” Ruby sounded surprised, “We just took the Aether Hub, yes and yes?”

“Good,” Sun breathed, falling back into his chair, “Someone said, someone said you guys had lost. I was... you’re both fine?”

“Bit winded,” Ruby said, “and with way less mana than normal, but yeah. We’re good. The Renegades are setting up the defenses now.”

“Cool,” Sun said, “Thalia and Traft are sending an ship to pick us up. I’ll see you when I get there.”

“Yeah,” Ruby yawned, “see you then, Sun.”

Sun walked towards the door yanking it open and stepping out. The weapons immediately pointed on them, “Hey! I got an answer for you!”

“Yes, Mr. Wukong?” The dwarf said.

“Yeah. But first, I got something I wanna say.”

“What's that?”

“Next time you decide to try to trick me into surrendering by threatening MY! FAMILY!” several guards stepped back as thunder rumbled with Sun’s words, “And that also means Chandra, Nissa, Gideon, any of them. Next time you are stupid enough to try that, make sure I don't have a way to know you're bullshitting me.”

“I assure you-"

“-all you want!” Sun cut him off, “but I just got done talking to Ruby! Listen. I believe that you think that they lost, but Tezzeret's a liar. Don't believe him. Walk away or I’ll make you regret it.”
Forty weapons were aimed, many of them on the vehicles. Sun sighed, “Well then…”

Sun grabbed the shotgun loaded with slugs, drawing it and firing at the mech at the same time lightning tore from the sky and struck several vehicles. The lucky troops got away before the Aether ignited, others were eaten by the flames.

Burning bodies was something you got used to when you hung out with a pyromancer.

The slug was visible by the arrow of red light in its wake. When it hit the mech, there was an explosion as all the mana was forced forward.

A pair of spears flew past him, hitting two guards in the chest. Another Renegade, holding a hammer, ran forward but was hit by several turret blasts. Sun dropped a bolt of lightning on those in retaliation.

“Thopters!” the dwarf yelled, diving behind a blast shield, “We need thopters!”

Three thopers rose, green wings fluttering as the pointed Aether cannons at Sun and company. Oh, this was gonna suck.

There was a flash of blue as one cannon fired, blasting Sun off feet, and several of his men to bits, before another set of blue flashes came from over the building. An airship flew into view as the three thopers exploded, “You boys need some help!?”

“Are you our ride?” Sun called back, grinning, “You’re late! We were getting ready to walk there!”

Sun pushed himself up, thunder rumbling as he raised a hand… and pointing behind him. Making a show, sending a message.

Part of the manor exploded as a lightning bolt rammed into the roof. Sun span, pointing at a couple more spots and hitting them with lightning. Yeah, he couldn't use the magic he had ripped off from that vampire without hurting himself… but that didn't mean he was useless.
Gideon looked out the Aether Hub’s central window, watching the Renegade set up choke points… or more accurately, repurpose the Consulate choke points. This was Gideon's element, more than anything. Jace was good at coordinating everything, he did rule a plane. Ruby was good at planning things in advance, at creating the plan. But once things got going, Gideon was in charge. And that meant the defenses around the heart of the Hub needed to be made to his orders.

And now that they were making progress, it was time to deal with another problem. Ruby.

The young girl was seated on a chair in one corner of the room, eyes closed, head leaned back and a gun dangled from one hand. Gideon coated himself in a sheet of gold, stepping as directly into the potential line of fire, especially as Chandra was in the room, as he could and reach out toward Ruby.

“I’m awake,” she said before his hand touched her, opened her eyes to look at Gideon, “did you need something, Giddy?”

“I just wanted to check how you are,” Gideon said, “I think this has been rough on you.”

“I’m fine,” Ruby smiled at him, “that move just took a lot out of me.”

Gideon looked behind him, towards the hall with twisting scorch marks down its length, “That's not what I mean.”

“Then what do you mean?” Ruby asked.

“Kaladesh,” Gideon said, “You found out you lost a friend, Tezzeret… everything.”

He needed to check in the Chandra after this. Make sure she was alright.

“I’m fine,” Ruby said, “Just… I don’t think I’ll be coming back to Kaladesh if I don't have to.”
“Ruby,” Gideon crouched so he was even with the girl, “I can tell something’s wrong. What is it?”

“I- don't worry about it. We should focus on here,” Ruby said.

“If something is worrying you, it’s going to distract you. What's wrong?”

“Don't worry abou-!”

“Too late,” Gideon said, “that you're trying to dodge the question has me worried. What’s wrong?”

“I don't want to-"

“Ruby,” Gideon said. He hadn't wanted to do this but… “if you're not willing to trust us with this, you're a liability. We can't trust you, so I’m giving you a choice. Either you tell me, or I swear to Heliod, I will personally bring you bac-”

“Shut up, Gideon,” Ruby snarled suddenly, “don't you dare mention that name to me.”

Gideon jerked back, feeling like someone had punched him in the gut. What-?

Ruby apparently realized what she had just said as she sagged in her chair, “I’m sorry. You didn't deserve that.”

“What's wrong?” Gideon asked again, “Ruby, I don't want to act like that, but you're worrying me.”

“I… I feel like something up,” Ruby said, “How did Tezzeret get so influential with the Consulate that they just handed him the big chair? It seems weird.”

“But that's not all, is it?” Gideon urged.

“I’m… you mentioned Heliod,” Ruby asked, “How did you know about him?”
“I’m from Theros,” Gideon said, “Why? Is something wrong?”

“Ajani said Heliod killed Elspeth,” Ruby said, “for being a Planeswalker.”

Gideon wanted to immediately refute it. He could imagine Mogis doing that, or Phenax or Erebos, but not Heliod. Heliod ruled over the very laws that gave Gideon his strength.

But then Gideon took a moment to think about it. Really, truly think about it in the way only a Planeswalker could. It was a Planeswalker’s blessing to be able to see other planes and with them, things wrong with their plane.

Before his ignition, the gods’ behavior had seemed normal. Of course they were allowed to act as they wished, they were gods! Now, he wasn't so sure. The angels of Bant had been worshipped without causing volcanic eruptions or unleashing hordes of minotaurs upon people.

How many problems had the gods caused on Theros? If Heliod ruled them, why hadn't he stopped it?

Not that Planeswalkers were much better. If their blessing was to see other planes, their curse was the destruction they inevitably caused.

Not the time for pessimism. Deal with Ruby, “I’m sorry. If I had known, I wouldn't have said that.”

“‘S fine,” Ruby mumbled.

Gideon spread his arms slightly, catching the young girl as she threw her arms around his neck. Gideon winced at the vice grip around his neck, “You’ve gotten strong.”

“Crescent Rose is heavy.”

“I know,” Gideon said, “but you’ve changed a lot since we first met.”
That was an understatement. If you had told Gideon the little girl he had saved from an Eldrazi would end up fighting alongside him, he would have laughed.

“The Multiverse makes you grow up fas-”

“Yo!” Sun marched into the room, “We’re back! Or, y’know, here.”

“Unless you’re Sun,” Ruby finished with a giggle, turning to Sun, “Hi! How’d thing go?”

“You know,” Sun said, stretching, “blew up some stuff, destroyed a mansion, normal stuff. Where’s Blake?”

“Sleeping,” Ruby said, “it was a long night. I’d be in the same boat, but I wanted to make sure you were alright. You sounded worried when you called.”

“I’m fine now,” Sun said, “I was, well, I was worried about you. C’mon. Let’s get some sleep.”

Chandra snorted as they disappeared, pulling out her scroll at his look and showing him a picture on it. The three kids passed out on a couch, “I sent that to Ruby and Blake’s parents.”

“Why?”

“’Cause it’s cute,” the ‘duh’ was clear in her voice.

“You’re right,” Gideon said, “but you probably only riled Tai and Ghira up.”

“Don’t care,” Chandra shot back, “still cute. Any idea where Mom is?”

“Meeting,” Gideon said.

“I’ll see her when I wake up then,” Chandra said, walking out of the room.
Thoughts? Good? Bad? Meh? I'd like to get a mention on TV Tropes eventually, but doubt that'll ever happen (Self-deprecation, ho!)
Dovin stepped onto the command deck of the Sky Sovereign, finding that the Grand Consul was already scaring the orderlies into submission. Seated at different points around the area, though still in plain sight of the situation table, were three high ranking members of the Consulate. Bahari Achar, Consul of Law Enforcement, Samar Johar, Consul of War and Ranaj Kaleka, head of the Enforcers.

In Samar’s case, the title is was incredibly misleading. ‘Consul of Weapons Design and Manufacturing’ was more accurate, but it was decided accuracy was less important than brevity.

Tezzeret turned around, face pulled into a snarl as he saw Dovin, “Where the hell have you been!?”

“I was acquiring information on the Gatewatch,” Dovin said, clasping his hands behind his back, “as I was requested to by Enforcer Kaleka.”

“I did,” Ranaj said with a nod, a tick at the corner of his jovial smile, “I wanted to know about the small army of mages that have shown up and torn through my men like ghee.”

“I’m curious myself,” Samar said, “I design my automatons to last, and make sure the same about those under me, but they’ve repeated destroyed them. Mostly that little girl.”

“Rose,” Tezzeret snarled to himself, stalking over to the speaking tube “I knew I should have broken her fucking neck while I had the chance. Chief of Compliance Baral, to the bridge, now.”

“Because that’s what we need,” Ranaj said under his breath, “How do you make a rebellion look even more justified? Have it against a man who broke a child's neck in front of half of Ghirapur. If he wasn't in charge… Why are you calling Baral?”

“He was in charge of the Nalaar case,” Bahari said.

“A case we told him to drop,” Ranaj said, “Kiran Nalaar was a well liked man-"
“He was a smuggler,” Bahari said, though that he didn't outright refute the claim for such an order was telling.

“Compared to what it got us, what was a couple of containers of Aether?” Ranaj scoffed, “instead we gave the Renegades a martyr, a way to legitimize this revolt and make us look untrustworthy.”

“A martyr his daughter killed,” Bahari continued, “How quickly will they lose sup-

“That's according to Baral,” Ranaj said, “Who also signed off on death certificates for Pia and Chandra Nalaar at the same time, but guess who my men have spent the last two days standing off against at the Aether Hub?”

Bahari quite bowed his head, conceding the point to his subordinate. Even if he hadn’t, Dovin knew Ranaj was completely correct. As part of his research, he had tracked down the certification in question. Both were recorded as dying in the flames of Bunarat, along with everyone else.

Down the hall came a heavy gait, causing Dovin to turn so he could examine the source. Baral was a large man with a heavy limp, an equally lame arm and part of his face twisted by burns, “What?”

“Baan here was going to give a briefing about the Renegade mages,” Tezzeret said, “I want you here for it.”

“Isn't one of them the Nalaar girl?” he asked.

“Yes,” Ranaj said to his former subordinate, “the one you said was dead.”

--- X Baral X---

Baral looked down at his arm at the spike of pain. Had to be a hallucination, he hadn't felt anything like that from his left arm since the Nalaar incident.

The damn bitch had ruined him. Turned one knee into a twisted mess of scar tissue, made it nearly
impossible to move his arm, turned the left side of his face into a landscape of crests and seared his hair from his scalp while burning right through his negation magic. His only solaces had been that the little monster had blown herself straight to whatever hell waited pyromancers and taunting Renegade Prime with that fact.

Now Prime had escaped the Dhund, the mage had turned up alive and they were leading an insurrection against the Consulate, “It was chaotic at Bunarat, I assumed they were dead—”

“Then you should have listed them as presumably deceased,” Baan said, “if you didn't have a corpse, they could be found to be alive, which they have .”

Renegade Prime wasn't supposed to ever see the light of day, rotting in the hidden jail under Ghirapur and the monster would have died at his snapblade. What did it matter? “Just give us the report.”

Baan’s nostrils flared, but he didn't refuse, “Very well. The Gatewatch is an organization of mages, as you know. They claim to fight ‘Planar threats’, something I was slightly aware of when I moved to recruit them.”

“Alright,” Ranaj cut in, “I already have two questions. One, ‘Planar threats’? Two, you moved to recruit them?”

“Threats that endanger the safety of many people. My contact had said that and I had believed they would see the threat the Renegades posed to the people of Ghirapur and assist us.”

“They’re mages,” Baral said, “They’d never be reasonable.”

“I don’t know,” Ranaj said, “They seem to be working with the Renegades just fine.”

“I didn't say they weren't smart.” Baral shot back, “but you can't reason with monsters. They only care about whatever black and white ‘I’m the center of the world’ view they hold.”

“Continuing on,” Baan said, “They currently have ten members.”
“We’re acquainted,” Bahari said, his voice as soft as ever, “but I’m not sure if Chief Baral is.”

“I still want to know,” Ranaj said, “We don't know their names, the specifics of their magic and such.”

“Which I have gathered to the best of my ability,” Baan said, “First, as you are most likely to clash with him, is Gideon Jura. Mister Jura is what is known as a Hieromancer, a practitioner of the magics of Order.”

“I think Kaleka wants you to take this seriously, Baan,” Baral snorted, “magic of ‘order’. Ridiculous.”

“Continue,” Bahari said, shooting him a reproachful look, “What does it allow him to do?”

“He uses it to empower his whip, restrict movement, make his skin unbreakable and create barriers.”

“How do you take that out?” Ranaj hissed as Baral clenched a fist behind his back. He could do it, easily.

“Wait for him to exhaust himself. He needs to have mana to maintain it, difficult, considering his nature, but not impossible.”

“His nature?” Samar said, “is there something special about him?”

“The entire Gatewatch holds what is known as a Spark, it allows them to draw more mana than an average mage.”

“Because that's what we want to hear,” Ranaj all but groaned, “We’re not just fighting mages, we’re fighting mages that are powerful even by mage standards.”

“Next,” Baan continued, “is Jace Beleren. He is a mind mage, he is capable of reading minds, rewriting memories.”
“Lobotomizing you,” Tezzeret growled.

“Most likely.”

“It wasn't a question.”

Baan inclined his head, “Nissa Revane is an Animist, she can tap into the Leylines, the trails of mana, of the world and summon creatures made of the elements. She has a preference for plants and earth.”

“Like the elves of Peema,” Samar said, “and explains the barricades of plant life that, quite literally, sprang up overnight.”

“Liliana Vess is a Necromancer, mages who use death magic. Rot and blight, the reanimation of corpses.”

“So a walking PR nightmare,” Ranaj said, pointing towards the corkboard with the known key members of the Renegades, “Which one's she? Actually, nevermind, I answered my own question. The ones with tattoos all over, right?”

“Scars,” Tezzeret said from where he had broken away to glare at an orderly whose finger was hovering over a button.

“What?”

“They're scars,” Tezzeret turned back to the briefing. The orderly quickly hit the button, sinking one of the pegs in Weldfast into the table to be replaced with a black one.

“Thalia is the aberration,” Dovin continued, “She has the potential to be a mage, but does not actively use magic at this point. Instead, she shares her body with an entity known as Traft. His presence manifests in the form of pale blue flames, generally along her sword, but there is at least one recorded instance of the creature exiting her body to engage enemies on his own. He takes the form of a young man in black leather armor wreathed in the same flame.”
“A creature made of magic?” Baral asked, feeling his scars pull tight as he grinned. He could deal with that easily, see how the mage was without her pet.

“I can't confirm that,” Baan said, “I will explain the three children at once, as in all likelihood, you would be combating them in that state.”

“Speaking of the blond kid,” Ranaj said, any semblance of joy gone, “What the hell did you do? He killed twenty of my best men-”

“-and thousands of rupees worth of equipment that would have been helpful,” Samar cut in.

“We took a calculated risk,” Baan said, “it did not end in our favor.”

“And that risk was…?”

“We lied that we had the other two children in captivity, we had believed that he would willingly surrender if we were to release them and him after the end of this uprising.”

“And he was willing to risk them,” Baral cut in, looking at Ranaj, “See? Not a shred of reaso-”

“-however, he had a way to contact the others and discovered our deception. Everything from there was…”

“Sending a message,” Ranaj said, “You tried to back a mage right into a corner and my men paid the price for it.”

“The children are incredibly close,” Baan defended himself, “I had been sure two being in danger would convince the third to stand down-”

“A good plan,” Baral laughed, “Make a monster frantic enough and it will bite off its own leg.”
“Suddenly the collateral reports make so much sense,” Ranaj said, “because when that monster uses fire, or ice or the like, they take things with them. We’re supposed to take them in quickly and quietly. Did you do that to the Nalaar girl, is that how she was able to burn a town and everyone in it to ash?”

“She. Is. A. Mage,” Baral growled, was Ranaj sympathizing with them? “She doesn't need an excuse to burn a town down. What do the children do, Baan? I want to make sure they don't escape like the Nalaar Monster.”

“Inspector Baral,” Baan said, “I would like to remind you that you are a man of the Consulate, we do not murder children. If they personally attack you, you may defend yourself, but you are not to target them.”

“What are their abilities?”

“The girl wearing a bow, Blake Belladonna, uses a form of shadow magic. She is able to create copies of herself and also has a tendency to cover her sword with Black,” Baral could hear the capital B, “Mana. The boy, Sun Wukong, uses lightning and soul magic to empower his body. It has a rather,” Baan’s lips twitched, “explosive effect.”

“An understatement,” Samar said.

“The other girl is Ruby Rose. She is an Artificer, someone who blends technology and magic together. The most common form we’ve seen is the weapon she uses, which fires slugs of engraved metal at high speeds. The engravings are used to deliver spells, a variant of runic magic.”

“So get her away from those and she loses?” Ranaj asked.

“No. Ms. Rose also uses runes to store artifacts on her person, we don't know if any of those runes can be used offensively, but even if they aren't, she can create them from nothing to some extent,” Baan said, “further, Ms. Rose also has a drake familiar she calls Drache. I would not suggest engaging those three together if it is possible to avoid doing so. They will work in tandem. Mr. Wukong will enter close range with you while Ms. Rose picks you off. Ms. Rose will provide covering fire to allow Ms. Belladonna to use her shadow on you. Grand Consul?”

Tezzeret stopped threatening a dwarf, hoisting her be the front of her shirt with his metal arm, “what?”
“I have concluded my report. May I be excused-?”

“No,” Bahari said, “I want you both here for the planning of this assault. I want your advice on these mages and I trust Baral for combating them.”

Baan inclined his head again.

--- X Sun X---

Sun leaned against the railing, glaring at the Consulate men standing across the way, “I’m getting real tired of that damn music…”

“I think that's the point,” Ruby said, grinding her teeth, “Blake's…”

Sun looked over to where the third member of their trio was curled up, giving slight whimpers and clasped her hands over the top of her head… over her ears. Growling, Sun grabbed a shotgun, leveling it at the damn speaker blaring a sped up song as loud as possible, “I’m going to break it.”

Ruby reached over, gently pushing the gun down, “Don't waste your ammo.”

“…Fine,” Sun said, “I’m going to blast it.”

“Mana is easily refilled,” Ruby gritted out.

Thunder crashed as a second sun lit up the spot Sun dropped a bolt on. Behind them, Blake's whimpering stopped as silence fell across the Hub for the first time in a day. Beside him, Ruby stopped grinding her teeth with a relieved sigh, “I need to call Giddy.”

“Go ahead.”

Ruby’s scroll hung from one hand as she all but draped herself across the railing, yawning. No one
had gotten much sleep last night.

“Ruby? What is it?”

“The Consulate will probably attack soon.”

“Are you sure?” Gideon asked, “How can you tell?”

“One of the gearhulks moved its arm,” Ruby said, “Those things burn through Aether like Chandra through ice. They wouldn't be on-”

“-if they weren't planning to use it,” Gideon said. A second later, the speakers came to life, “EVERYONE, GET TO YOUR PLACES!”

Behind them, Blake woke with a squawk, jumping up, “Are they-?”

“Which one?” Ruby muttered, eyes scanning the four as a shield appeared in her hand, “Sun, grab Blake!”

Sun didn't wait to figure out why Ruby said that, he just grabbed Blake and pulled her tight, aware of Ruby appearing right in front of them and barriers forming around them to fast to count. Then there was fire.

Sun!

Jace?

Thank Azor, the mind mage ‘sighed’, Hold on, this is going to be disorienting.

Then a bunch of voices entered his head as Jace connected him to the Gatewatch, What just happened? With the Consulate, I mean.
They’re using a gearhulk to burn us out! Ruby’s voice echoed in his head even as the girl in front of him was making the, strangely cute, cross between a grunt and a squeak, Tezzeret’s probably laughing his butt off right now! I- wait, cute?

Sun froze, tightening his grip around Blake, “Uhhhhhh…”

Not important right now, kiddo, Chandra snapped, how do we stop it?

Jace?

On it… You know, Ruby, I’ve been meaning to ask you, every time I try to read your mind, there’s three-

JACE! the entirety of the on hand Gatewatch, including Liliana, mentally bellowed.

Right, sorry. Chandra, Gideon, Nissa, here’s the weak point on the arm. Lili, call Thalia, let her know we’re going to need Ajani and the druids, now. Ruby… hold on.

No, she was just planning to let this shield drop, Chandra’s mental voice somehow managed to convey an eyeroll, Come on, Gids, Nissa. We have kids to save.

"We’ll be here!” Ruby said out loud, arm shaking, "Maybe a bit toasted, but here!”

--- X Chandra X---

Chandra ran over the roofs, growling as she watched the flames pour down the hand. They were trying to kill the kids now?

Actually, Ruby was the same age Chandra had been when Baral attempted to execute her, so of course they would. But why so long-?

Chandra looked past where the silver gold barrier was, a grin spreading as she realized the flames were being forced away from the barricades behind it. That’s-!
Then the grin collapsed as one of the layers of Ruby’s barrier shattered. Chandra sped up, rushing past Gideon and Nissa towards the divide between them and the Consulate. The turrets turned towards her, blue Aether canisters being quickly loaded.

Chandra swung her arms up, letting her fire spin around her and turn into a bird. If she wasn’t so pissed off, she might have laughed as the turrets wasted their shot trying to hit the bird.

Chandra opened herself up, drawing as much mana as she could from the planes she had been to. Zendikar and Innistrad, Regatha and Remnant.

Lessons from Serenok came to her, one of the last he had ever given her. A small flame could be just as dangerous as a big one from a skilled pyromancer. He had been right, of course, as the abbot always had been.

Chandra jumped across the gap, casting the lessons and logic aside for one much more basic. One that she had learned in the arena so many years ago.

Fire logic.

The guards had enough time to look horrified before Chandra’s flames burned their skin to ash. Chandra punched air, heat ripping the air along into two explosions of fire that melted the brass on two more guards.

Several heavy brass shields dropped in between her and her goal. Chandra barked a word, one that had been passed down to the people of Keral Keep by Ja- yada yada yada .

The wall exploded, throwing the shields, and the men behind them, back. Chandra rushed through the gap, spinning and unleashing a river of fire on the others. Finishing the whirl, Chandra started towards the edge of the roof… only for a glowing gold arm to latch around her wrist, “What?”

“Calm down,” Gideon said, looking down at her with those ‘broken kaleidoscope’ eyes twinkling.

“The kids-“
“Are in danger,” Gideon finished, “I know. And if I ever find out who gave this order, I’ll be right there with you, but killing the Consulate doesn't help-”

“Doesn't help?” Chandra was surprised at how high pitched the laugh she gave was, “Were you expecting them to let us past?”

“No,” Gideon said, cocking his head, “but Nissa built a bridge.”

Chandra followed his head, staring at the green eyed elf standing on a bridge to the Gearhulk’s inner workings, sword in hand, “Oh.”

“Yes,” Gideon chuckled, “Oh. Come on, we need your special brand of creativity in there, Chandra.”

“It looks expensive,” Chandra grinned, “I love breaking expensive Consulate things.”

“I know,” Gideon said, then stopped, “I-

“Then let's get to it!” Chandra said, rushing towards the stone bridge.

---X Gideon X---

Gideon sighed as he climbed onto the Gearhulk, grabbed Nissa’s offered hand. So close. He had been so close to telling Chandra, saying the three words he had become more and more certain about in the last year of living together.

Somehow, Gideon felt like fighting off the entirety of Ulamog’s brood alone and weaponless would be easier that managing to just admit to Chandra that he was in love with her. Hixus hadn’t trained him for this. Nowhere in his time in prison had there been a course on what to do when you fell in love with someone like Chandra…

As Gideon stepped into the inner workings of the Gearhulk, he found Chandra already fast at work
doing what she did best. Her hair danced as flames burned on it, her eyes molten as she used her chaotic, untamable magic.

...Probably, Gideon realized, because Hixus never had expected such a thing. The warden had been focused on transforming Kytheon Iora from a street rat to a hieromancer. There was no order in love, in emotion. Certainly not when you were in love with someone like Chandra Nalaar.

And none of his friends could give him advice on this… Well, Jace probably could, he was the one in a semi-steady relationship, but that relationship was with Liliana. Something told him that a relationship with her didn't follow normal standards.

Gideon sighed pushing the thoughts away, stepping in front of a technician putting on a snapblade as quickly as possible, “I'm sorry for this.”

“What?” was as far as the hapless man got before Gideon's shield crashed into the side of his head, smashing him into the ground. He’d be lucky to wake up.

“Gids!” Chandra called, “C’mon!”

Gideon took the lead, climbing up the stairs built into the inside of the Gearhulk’s chest. As they climbed, Gideon took a deep breath and reached out, Jace?

What do you need?

We’re in the Gearhulk, where’s the way to turn the flamethrower off?

We have two ways. First is the Aether tubes in the arm, which is quicker. The second is to take control of the Command Center.

Why would we take the slower route?

Less risk of blowing up, and we can fire on the Gearhulk once it’s off. Take it out for good.
And the people on it?

What about them?

Jace!

What do you want me to say, Gideon? the Living Guildpact asked, We’re fighting a war. If we can take down that Gearhulk, less of our people will die.

This isn’t Innistrad, Jace. We can still reason with them.

Yes, we could. But do you know what I see when I look outside the window, Gideon? I see a bubble with three kids in it, waiting for you to turn off that Gearhulk and save them. It’s shrinking Gideon, fast. You can save those kids or stop that Gearhulk peacefully, but you can’t do both.

Gideon clenched his fist, I know, but…

Gideon, the people in that Gearhulk put us in this situation. They could have turned off the flames by now, and they would likely die if you break the Aether tubes.

“Gids!” Gideon looked behind him, staring down at Chandler, Nissa and the collection of earth behind them, “You alright? You stopped walking.”

“I was talking to Jace.”

“Can it wait? We’re kinda running on a really tight schedule. Unless you want to be the one explaining to Tai why we brought his daughter back crispy.”

‘There’ll be a day where you need to choose between what you want to protect and what you need to protect,’ Hixus’s voice rang in Gideon’s ears, ‘and that means protecting as many people as possible.’

But then other images flashed across his mind. Zenon, chest caved in, green cloak staining red.
Drasus, a shard of metal lodged in his throat. Olexo, eyes gone from another shard of metal, arm torn off.

All burned, his fault.

_Jace. How do we get to the control room?_

_Through the guard lounge in front of you, then up the next flight of stairs._

Gideon grabbed the door handle, jimming it. Locked. Looks like they were doing this the hard way.

Gideon smashed into the door with a glowing shoulder, forcing it open with the sound of wrenching metal. Around the room, staring right at him, were a group of ten guards. Gideon gave a winning smile, “Hello!”

Then he dove to the side, allowing Chandra to unleash a swirling vortex of fire into the room. Gideon came up, spinning to let his sural hit several guards, the bladed whip glowing with mana as it tore through skin and armor.

“An urumi?” one questioned aloud, lowering his arm, and weapon, in shock, “Who the hell actually uses an uru-?”

The question was cut off as Nissa ran her sword through him, the glowing green metal slick with red as it came out the rib cage. Her dirt had transformed into a small ondu, and was in the midst of goring two other guards on its horns.

Gideon looked down at one guard, burned and moaning from Chandra, and lashed out with his sural, feeling a stab of pity as he did, “Come on.”

The next staircase, like the one below, was built around the winding gears. It was, however, mercifully shorter. Another broken door, and they were in the command room, staring down thirty wide eyed technicians, “Listen closely! Turn off the flames, and nobody gets hurt.”
“You-” One said, all but quaking, “You don't scare us, Renegade!”

“Really?” Gideon asked, letting the strands of his sural lift on their own, “are you sure?”

“Oh shit,” the leader said, “You're the mages… men! Turn it off!”

“But sir!” another technician said, “the Grand Consul-”

“Doesn't have the right to punish us for this. Complying with their demands will keep us alive.”

---X Blake X---

Blake watched on as Ruby sank to her knees, one hand still planted on the shield. Red energy covered it, a sign of how quickly her Aura was draining, “Ru-

“Stay back!” Ruby snapped as her Aura shattered, the skin of her hand already clearly blistering.

“Rubes,” Sun started, “You’re hand is-”

“Not the first time,” Ruby gave a forced laugh that immediately sombered as another layer shattered, “Guys…”

“Yeah?”

“I- Ruby's hand shook, “I don't think I can keep this up much longer. Tell dad-"

“We’re not leaving you,” Blake snapped, rushing over.

“You might not have a choice,” Ruby winced, “I’m out of Aura. If Gideon and Chandra don't stop the fire soon, this is gonna drop and…”
“We’re not gonna leave you,” Sun agreed, “I’d carry you first.”

*Jace?* Blake thought.

*What is it?*

*Do you know if Gideon will get the flamethrower soon?*

*Any second now.*

“Just hold on,” Blake said, reaching out to touch Ruby's arm, staring at the hand, *We need Nissa.*

*She’s with Gideon and Chandra.*

*Jace, Ruby's hand is starting to char. We need Nissa.*

*That’s… less than ideal… Jace said, I’ll call her back.*

“It’s alright,” Blake said quietly, “They’ll have it off soon. Sun?”

Sun nodded, crouching in front of Ruby, “C’mon…”

Finally, the torrent of fire shut off and Blake carefully guided Ruby's right arm off the shield, letting it drop to the ground, and onto Sun’s shoulder as Sun pulled her left arm over the other and picked her up, booking it towards the Aether Hub as Blake rushed to the edge and jumped off. Right behind a pair of Consulate men hacking away at Nissa’s brambles.

“You,” Blake growled, feeling her shadow rise up. The enforcers turned, taking a step back as the saw the shadow elemental Blake had created and bound to her (a difficult ritual even for a Planeswalker, she had failed ten times before succeeding), “*Run.***”
For added measure, Blake’s Shadow turned into some animalistic shape and roared at them. That, unsurprisingly, sent them running away in fear. Blake gathered the Shadow beneath her, preparing to launch it after them and-

“Blake!” Blake turned at the call of her name, seeing Nissa, Gideon and Chandra on the rooftops, “Where’s Ruby?”

“Sun took her back to the Hub,” Blake said, “I’ll be right up there with you!”

By the time they reached the Aether Hub, one of their ships had fired on the Gearhulk, destroying it and Ruby was out of her coat and part of her shirt. A Renegade was rushing around, wrapped the burn in damp bandages. Nissa stepped between him and Ruby, “Are there others injured?”

“A few, yes,” he said.

“You go help them. I’ll take care of Ruby.”

“You know first aid?”

“Healing,” Nissa said, turning to Ruby. Green mana whirled around her hand as she reached out and touched the end of the burns. The mana leached into the skin, slowly crawling up Ruby's hand, “Ruby?”

“Yeah?” Ruby whimpered, eyes scrunches shut in pain.

“I’m healing your hand,” Nissa said, “can you talk to me about how it feels while I do? I want to make sure nothing goes wrong. Can you feel anything?”

“Yes,” Ruby said, “it burns.”

Blake shot a look at Sun as he snorted, “Really?”
“Sorry,” Sun said from his spot next to Ruby, one hand pallid as Ruby kept a vice grip on it.

“That’s good,” Nissa said quietly, slowly unwinding the bandage around Ruby's arm so she could follow the green going up it, “if it wasn’t burning, I’d be worried. That’s a much worse injury.”

Ruby’s whimpers grew quieter as the burn faded. Finally, Nissa laid the hand down on the cot. Sun sighed as the grip on his hand also disappeared.

Closing his eyes, Sun’s Aura radiated around him, slowly seeping into Ruby. He stood, gently letting go of her hand.

Blake sighed, closing her eyes and sagging. Everything was quiet save for Ruby’s pa-

Wait...

Everything was quiet. Why was everything quiet?

**Chandra Nalaar**, Chandra froze, turning towards the way the rasping voice was coming from. I *know you can hear me…*

“Chandra?” Gideon asked, “Who is th-"

I was wondering, have you told all your friends our story? There was a cruel laugh, echoing through the speakers and causing Blake to flatten her ears on instinct, *About how you got your daddy killed? How you got your mommy locked up for five years?*

“Chandra,” Nissa asked, standing up and walking to Chandra, hovering at one shoulder, “is it… is it… is that who I think it is?”

Chandra nodded, waves of heat rolling off her, but no fire.

*Your mommy and I talked every day,* the voice continued, *I reminded her of everything you*
did, every day. Did she tell you, or was she too ashamed?

“Chandra?” Blake asked, reaching for the pyromancer’s shaking hand, “Chandra, who is that?”

Some days she cried, curled up in a ball in the corner of her cell and bawled at me to stop when I told her about how your flames took your daddy. How he died screaming, skin charred as he died cursing your bir-

“That's a FUCKING LIE!” Chandra shrieked as Jace rushed into the room.

“Thopters!” He barked, “an army of them!”

“What!” Gideon yelped, rushing to the window and looking out it as another taunt came.

So many people died that day, the voice spat, Little Monster. Just like today, when you got your little friends killed.

“I’m going to kill him,” Chandra hissed, “he wants to act like I did that? He wants fire? I’ll give him fire.”

“This is a trick, Chand-

“Shut up,” Chandra snarled, rushed out of the room as Nissa grabbed Blake's wrist.

“Chandra!” Gideon called again, lunging after her, “Chandra he’s-! Nissa, why didn't you stop her?”

“Why should I?”

“It’s a trap,” Gideon said, repeatedly looking between the door and Nissa, “He’s trying to lure her into an ambush. She’s not thinking, just feeling!”
“This is who she is, Gideon,” Nissa said.

“I-“

“Jura!” a voice called from the hall, “The Gearhulks and Consulate are advancing!”

“I-“ Gideon stopped at the door, looking both ways, “I… You’re going after her, aren’t you?”

“I intend to,” Nissa said.

“I’ll come too,” Blake offered.

“…Keep her safe,” Gideon said, running the opposite way as Chandra.

“Nissa,” Ruby said from where she was struggling to sit up.

“What?”

“I-“ Ruby held out the revolver she had been loading at the mine, “Take this. Just to be safe.”

Nissa’s hand hovered over it, “You won't need it?”

“No,” Ruby pushed it into Nissa’s hand before trying to stand. Sun caught her as her legs crumpled.

“Ruby!” Sun grunted.

“I need to get to Crescent Rose,” Ruby said, “I’m not in a position to fight, but I can give covering fire.”
Sun met Blake's eyes, “...Fine. Blake, stay safe.”

“I will,” Blake said following after Nissa and Sun helped Ruby towards the tower and Heart of Kiran.

--- X Nissa X---

Nissa rushed over the rooftops, hearing Blake pant as she struggled to keep up with her. The gun Ruby had given her was stored away in a sack, leaving her hands open for her staff and a small handful of seeds.

“Nissa?” Blake asked.

“Yes?” Nissa jumped from one roof to another, clearing the space with familiar ease as she tracked Chandra by the occasional spout of fire and moved to cut them off.

“Why did you keep me from stopping Chandra?”

“This is who she is, Blake,” Nissa said, “can you imagine Chandra ignoring someone taunting her like this? It would eat at her.”

“But… What if she gets hurt?”

“Then we’ll be there to help,” Nissa said, “That's an advantage we have over the Consulate.”

“He could call in support too.”

“But he doesn’t care about them,” Nissa said, “and they don’t care about him. Not the way we care about Chandra.”

Nissa strained her ears, listening for the explosion of curses that came from Chandra as she rushed
towards Baral. In the distance, the steady crack of gunfire echoed from the Aether Hub. Nissa skidded to a halt on the edge of the roof, throwing down a few bloodbriar seeds and accelerating their growth until there was a barrier of vines across the road.

“-off enjoying life?” Baral’s taunts echoed off the alleys seconds before he rounded the corner. The armored man stop, staring at Nissa’s barrier as the elf slunk towards a single tree in one corner.

Nissa reached out, rousing the tree to life as she her Chandra wretch behind her, “Blake?”

The faunus dropped, diverting the blade on Baral’s arm from Chandra as Nissa continued to animate the tree. Nissa stopped at Blake's gasp, turning in time to see the Black mana that surrounded Gambol Shroud disperse as it hit the thin layer of Blue around Baral’s.

He was a mage?

Nissa weighed her options, preparing to break from what she was doing to join Chandra and Blake. Before she could, the elemental sped up, twisting into a Zendikari beast as Baral’s taunts resumed, “Look at this, Little Monster. You’re so weak an even smaller monster had to sa-"

Chandra lunged up, lighting the vines behind him on fire and shoving him into them. The bloodbriars came to life, lashing around Baral, searching for a spot to begin consuming him from. Blake's Shadow charged forward, roaring… before exploding into wisps as it touched the barrier of Blue radiating from Baral’s hand.

“Chief!” Nissa turned to the pair of thopers flying over to them just in time to see one of the Gearhulks collapse, the tree making up its spine blighted and cracking. The elemental Nissa had created swung up, vines wrapping around one of the thopers and beginning to crush it as Baral grappled onto the other.

Nissa rushed to Blake and Chandra, helping the pyromancer to her feet as Baral yelled into a megaphone down at them, Do they know, Little Monster? About the village that burned be-

“Because of you?” Nissa asked, “Yes, I know. Baral. That you burned down a village to frame Chandra and murdered her father when he surrendered.”

Is that what she told you? You believe tha-?
“Who should I believe? Somehow, I’m inclined to not believe the mage who has spent years prosecuting other mages. Why aren’t you dead, if you're so determined that mages are all monsters to the point where you tried to execute an eleven year old?”

“Nissa,” Chandra said, head bowed.

“Does it make you feel strong?” Blake asked, moving so she was in front of Chandra, “Blaming your victim for the crimes you did?”

Baral yelled something at the pilot, flying away from them... Towards the Aether Hub.

“Come on,” Nissa said, helping Chandra up.

‘I’m gonna burn him,” Chandra said.

“We’ll be right there with you,” Nissa said.

---X Baral X---

Baral didn't meet Baan's eyes as the thoper carried them towards the Aether Hub, ignoring the vedalken’s pointed cough, “Chief Inspector.”

“What?” Baral growled.

“I would like an explanation for what Miss Revane said back there.”

“What do you expect me to say, Baan? Nalaar lied.”

“I’d be inclined to agree, if not for the buildup of evidence contrariwise.”
“Like what?”

“During your attempts to provoke Miss Nalaar, you boasted about taunting Pia Nalaar about her husband’s death while she was imprisoned. However, we have no recordings of Pia ever being arrested or imprisoned to begin with. You reported her deceased.”

Shit, “I was trying to rile the monster up, it was a lie.”

“You seem quite adept at those,” Baan continued, “You have worked for the Consulate for over twenty years. At no point did you go through the proper channels to be recorded as an registered mage.”

“I-” the thopter shook, warning sirens blaring as the thopter shook, “What was that!?”

“Something hit us! Damaged the fuel tank!” the pilot yelled, “We’re losing altitude fast!”

To the left, another thopter listed to the side, a trench ground into the side. Seconds before they smashed into the ground, Baral saw the other thopter crash into the only remaining Gearhulk, the Torrential, sending it staggering.

Baral pushed himself up and ripped off his smoking cape. Taking a second to check the pilot and finding him with his neck at an unnatural angle, Baral crawled out of the wreckage, stumbling backwards as the ringing in his ear destroyed his sense of balance.

Leaning on a water tower they had crashed into, Baral ripped off his mask, throwing the dented and warped filigree aside as he sucked air. As he did, he scanned the battlefield in front of him.

Animals were smashing into the Consulate forces, longtusks and arborbacks, tigers, elephants and rhinos, even a damn hydra. Must of been from the elf mages from the Cowl. They should have burned the greenbelt to the ground years ago. Harboring mages, refusing to give the land to the Consulate.

A giant lion-man-thing lept off an arborback and onto the Torrential, climbing up the side with disturbing ease and disappeared into one head while Renegades grappled onto it.
Ships hovered in the sky, white light flashing as they shot down thopters as quickly as they could. A large ship pulsed with Aether, sending streams of energy into the sky.

The few thopters that did land were quickly set upon by Renegades, including the big mage and a blond woman. The man’s urumi flashed as it slashed through brass with ease, while blue flames followed the woman.

Baral turned at the sound of footsteps and clanking metal, throwing up a barrier just in time to stop the blast of fire from the Monster, “Is that… is that all you know how to do?”

“It’s all I need!” she yelled, charging at him. Baral, despite his injuries, dodged the flaming fist and drilled his knee into her gut. Baral felt a spike of satisfaction as he watched her crumple to the ground, retching bile.

“Idiot,” Baral kicked her again, dissolving the retaliatory blast of fire as she rolled onto her back. Reaching down, Baral grabbed the monster by her hair, dissolving the flames around it and dragging her to the roof edge, “Look at that. Your friends are fighting for your life, while you were out chasing me. How many could have survived if you had been here? Or would you just have gotten more killed? Let’s be honest, I’m doing them a favor.”

“Shut,” the Monster choked out, “up.”

Baral drew back the blade, a grin rising as he forced her to the ground, “You can’t understand how long I’ve waited for this.”

Seconds before his blade hit her neck, a brass bird struck him, diverting the blow. Looking up, Baral met the eyes of the lifecrafter standing on the ship in front of them, the animal-man next to her, “Let her go you son of a bitch!”

“Gunner! Fire on the lifecrafter!” Baral called to a passing thopter, before grinning down at the struggling pyromancer. “Look, you’re going to get someone else killed, just like you got your daddy killed when he tried to protect you! Yo-”

Baral stagger forward as a burning entered his body, a roar of thunder coming immediately after. Turning his head, he met the elf’s eyes, staring at the weapon in her hand. That was when he looked down, staring at the blue energy radiating from the hole in his side as the elf spoke, “Chandra didn’t do anything. Not here, not then. You killed her father, you burned the village, you
just ordered for a thopter,” the elf nodded to the thopter currently struggling to stay aloft as one of the mages, the youngest, aimed something at it from her place on the ship, “to shoot Mrs. Pashiri to spite Chandra. Those are all things you did, not her.”

“Sh-” Baral wheezed around the burning in his side, “Shut u-”

That was when the blue energy reached the hand holding the Nalaar Monster’s hair… and his magic gave out. Flames sprang to life, burning Baral’s hand and forcing him to let go with a pained roar.

Nalaar span, grabbing him by the face with burning hands. Old scars reopened, leaking clear fluid as blisters formed, “You don’t know how long I waited for this, you piece of shit.”

Baral fell back, struggling and thrashing, trying to get the monster off him. He could feel the blisters pop as he fought, then the pain started to fade and Baral sank into darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts on the chapter? Good? Bad? Meh?
Ruby sank into the couch in one of the Heart of Kiran’s lounge, breathing in, preparing herself. One more battle, one more move on their part. If only she wasn't so tired.

All around her, the centerpiece of the Renegade fleet pulsed with energy. The lifeblood of everyone who had poured their work into the ship, from Kiran himself to Rashmi infused into it. Flying towards the final barrier between them and Tezzeret. The Skysovereign.

If they had just held the Aether Hub for a bit longer, they wouldn't have to. The floating base ate Aether at a pace that made the Gearhulks look energy efficient.

Ruby let loose another exhausted yawn, standing up and looking around the room. Coffee. There had to be coffee somewhere nearby, Jace was addicted to the stuff.

Eyes locking onto the coffee maker, Ruby rushed towards it. Turning it on, Ruby grabbed several sweeteners and sat down.

“That much sugar can't be healthy,” the rumbling voice of Ajani said from behind her, “Though I’ll admit I’m not the best judge for that. Things like that taste bland to me.”

“It probably isn't,” Ruby said, pouring the coffee and adding the sweetener anyways, “but I need it to stay awake. Even I’m reaching the end of my rope.”

“Do you often go without sleep?” Ajani asked.

“Depends on how things are,” Ruby said, “We’re almost done. I can sleep then.”

“This is personal to you?” he asked.

“Me and Tezzeret have a history,” Ruby said, “and not a good one. He was on Mirrodin.”
“Elspeth did mention that,” Ajani said, “He was working with-”

“Yeah,” Ruby cut him off, adding cream to the coffee, “Sometimes. He helped us a couple of times. Never did find out why. So, what are you going to do when we finish up here?”

“I… do not know. I was listless for a while after Elspeth died, only focusing on hunting Tezzeret helped. I don’t know what I’ll do after.”

“Maybe you could come with us?” Ruby offered, “We could always use more help.”

“You want me to come with you? We barely know each other.”

“I know you cared about Elspeth, don’t like Tezzeret or Bolas and have been willing to help the people here. That’s enough for me.”

“You were close to Elspeth? She barely mentioned you.”

“No,” Ruby said, reaching over to run one hand over the heart shaped scar, “We talked, but she was kinda scary. I… do you know the saying ‘hindsight is twenty twenty’?”

“No,” Ajani said, “but I think I understand the point.”

“I promise her I would find her, bring her to Remnant so she could have a home,” Ruby pressed her head against one of the windows of the Heart, closing her eyes as her voice cracked, “I should’ve. If I had just went to find her, she'd still be alive.”

“I don’t believe Elspeth ever held it against you,” Ajani said, “and I’m certain she wouldn't want you to be holding it against yourself now. You weren't there, you didn't know.”

“It’s me not being there that’s the problem,” Ruby said, hot tears prickling at the corner of her eyes, “I should have done something, *anything*.”
“Do you like stories?” Ajani said, voice barely above a whisper.

“Yeah.”

“Stories played a big part in my tribe, for good and ill. In those stories, the hero’s mentor dies, they live, grieve and save the world. I- I failed her,” Ajani said, “I should have fought to the end to keep her safe. Held off Erebos’s men until she was well enough to Planeswalk.”

“That’s,” Ruby choked out, “I-”

“I’m not telling you this to marginalize your feelings,” Ajani continued, “I’m telling you so you know, I know how you feel.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?” Ruby asked, turning to Ajani and watching as an Aetherborn finished herding the other inhabitants of the room, including Sun, out and shut the large doors.

“No,” Ajani said, tears rolling down his own face, dampening the fur there, “but if you ever want to talk about it with someone other than your two friends, I’ll be there.”

Ruby reached out, clutching Ajani’s, Elspeth’s, cloak, “Do you mind if I hug you?”

“No.”

Ruby did so, throwing herself against the white fur.

--- X Yahenni X---

Yahenni, had they been physically capable of it, would have smiled at the release of emotions on the other side of the door. Pent up agony, guilt and a hint of self loathing replaced with pure catharsis.

Many of the others, apparently realizing that it would be best to vacate the area, moved to one of
the other lounges. It was clear that whatever the Heart of Kiran had become, it hadn't been
designed to be a weapon. Too much open space, none of the cut and dry efficiently of a warship.

Oh, they had managed to get it working as one. Aether cannons bolted to the top, one area turned
into a workshop for the quicksmiths, armored plating, but Yahenni could tell that, in a different life,
this would have been something along the lines of a yacht or surveyor (which, given the casual
opulence of the Consulate, were one in the same).

“So,” one of the only ones who hadn't left, a blond boy with a tail started, leaning his shoulder
against the wall, “Any reason you kicked me out when my friend was about to start crying? Cause
I’m gonna need a reeeaaal good one.”

“You’re her friend?” Yahenni asked, studying him. Worry cycles to anger, his empathic scent
turning to a ocean storm waiting to break like the one behind her. Definitely her friend, “I’m sorry.
I didn't realize, but I’m not going to step aside. They need this.”

The boy glared for a moment longer, but Yahenni could already feel his anger leave, a storm blown
off course, “Yeah, I know. But you could’ve been a bit less rough.”

“My apologies,” Yahenni said, sinking to the ground and resting one arm on their knee, ignoring
the puff of grey dermis and smoke that rose as they did so. The boy, however, didn't.

“Woah! Are you alright?”

“I’m just dying, Darling. It happens to the best of us.”

“You’re sick?”

“No,” Yahenni shook their head, sending several more flecks dermis, “just reaching the end of my
time. That's why I’m here.”

“Retirement’s not your thing?”

“Oh, it was. But the Consulate pushed me too far with the curfew, so here I am.”
“The curfew is what did it?”

“Well, technically it was my Penultimate Party being caught in the crossfire, but yes.”

“You're fighting the Consulate because the curfew made you cancel a party?” Yahenni didn't need the overwhelming scent of fruit to tell the boy was incredulous. He didn't know?

“Not just a party. My Penultimate Party, an aetherborn’s ‘going away party’ as it were.”

“Oh,” he said, “Yeah… that’s…”

“Don't act like that, Darling. The Penultimate Party is a happy affair. We don't leave behind a body, but we can leave memories. When your life is measured in a matter of years, it's best to face the curtain with a performance that everyone will remember.”

“Years?”

“Yes. I’m four, to give you an idea.”

The scent changed, not quite pity, “Do you need any help with it? I’m sure I can get the Gatewatch to help.”

“You don't need to.”

“But I want to. If this is a big thing for you and you’re helping us here, it’s the least I can do.”

“Then I’m sure I can think of something for you to do…?”

“Oh! I’m Sun.”
“It’s nice to meet you, Sun. I’m Yahenni.”

The ship quaked, smacking them both into the wall and Yahenni felt another bit of their dermis crumble. Sun jumped to his feet, pulling out something and hitting a button as the door opened behind them.

“Sun!” a female voice came from the device in his hand, “grab Ruby and Ajani and get to the command center. We’re in range of the Skysovereign and it’s sending out thopters to meet us!”

“We’ll be right there, Blake!” the girl behind them called, rushing past Yahenni in a blur of motion followed by the lion man and Sun. Yahenni sighed, jogging after them.

--- X Pia X---

“Thopters incoming! Needles!” One technician yelled to Pia, who calmly grabbed the device to speak to the rest of the fleet and spoke into it.

“Kari?”

“On it,” the young pirate’s voice was unusually serious, full of determination. Several other ships crackled with Aether, beams of white light leaping from them and shattering the first wave of thopters.

Above them, the Skysovereign’s heavy cannon lowered, firing at a collection of three other ships. Metal crumbled, shattering and falling to the ground. Wisps of Aether floated up into the sky, joining the Great Conduit.

All around her, voices died. They had known the Skysovereign was dangerous, even with their fleet, but that had been beyond her worst nightmare.

Kari’s voice came over, “NOW!”

“What?”
“The Skysovereign needs time to recharge, and they're still low on Aether. We need to take it out now!”

“How?” one of the crew members said, “How do we take that out?”

“Boarding party,” Gideon said, face grim, “A small team, but a strong one. Me, Thalia, Ajani, Sun and some Renegades.”

“What about me?” Chandra asked, face smudged by soot.

“No!” Pia snapped, “You’re still exhausted.”

“I’m-”

“I agree with Pia, Chandra. You and Ruby are at the bottom of the list for this team. You’re both running on fumes.”

Pia thought Chandra was going to argue as she stood, then her legs nearly gave out and she fell back into her chair, “Fine.”

“Focus on getting some rest,” Gideon said, “I’m going to need you both ready for the Aether Spire. Ruby, can I borrow Drache?”

“Yeah,” Ruby said, letting the drake jump to Gideon's shoulder, “Why?”

“A contingency plan. Jace, stay in contact.”

“Right.”

“We need a way up to it.”
“Use one of the escape thopters,” Pia said, pointing to them. “They can be used as boarding devices in a pinch.”

“What about you all? If it fires…”

“We’ll land, turn off any non essential systems and have Jace cloak us until you’re done. There will no doubt be Anti-Air defences on the ground we’ll have to deal with after.”

“Thank you,” Gideon nodded, backing towards the exit.

“You’re the ones helping us,” Pia said.

“But,” Gideon's eyes jumped to where a slightly tense Nissa had Chandra leaning against her before looking back at Pia, “Still, thank you.”

Then they were gone.

That was… weird.

He likes Chandra, Pia jumped as Jace’s voice echoed in her head. While the hooded man didn't break from staring at the map of Ghirapur, he did give something resembling an apologetic shrug, but can't find it in him to say anything. I don't know about Chandra.

How did this work?

I can hear you loud and clear. Just think it.

How don't you know, if you can do this?

Chandra would probably hit me if she found out I was going around her head without her permission.
Chandra and Nissa are close.

They aren't in a relationship... well, I don't think they are. I don't live with the rest.

So it's complicated?

Jace's glowing eyes met Pia's, Yes. I'm not getting more involved than that. My own relationship is complicated enough without trying to figure out how the rest of the Gatewatch are.

--- X Sun X---

Sun drummed his fingers on the side of the slow moving thopter, watching the illusionary fleet sail in one direction. Above them, the Skysovereign slowly turned to follow it, “So, how are we doing this?”

“Ruby?”

“Since when did I become a map?” Ruby’s voice came from Drache, a stifled laugh in it, “Because I seem to be playing that role a lot. Ok, this might surprise you, but there’s two ways to do this.”

“Easy way and the hard way?”

“No, two hard ways. First, you dock on the ship and fight through the guards, second is you land on the top and make your way to the command center from there. It’s much more direct, but you’ll be fighting whatever guards they send at you and heavy winds.”

“We’ll take the slow route,” Gideon said, nodding to the Renegade piloting the small thopter. Their thopter docked into one of the long slits in the side of the Skysovereign.

Jumping down, Sun whistled, “This place must have cost an arm and a leg to build. Whatcha think, Rubes?”
“I’ve seen one more impressive. Look out!”

Sun swung one shotgun up, casually blasting the guard in the chest and cocking it as two men in armor similar to Gideon’s appeared, short swords in one hand and shields in the other. They stepped towards several more guards, catching their snapblades and stabbing for the gut.

Halfway through, beams of energy struck them, sending them flying back as they dissolved into Aether. Turning, Sun saw several turrets swivel to one of the Renegades. They lowered their shock gauntlet, eyes growing wide as the next two beams fired at them.

Seconds before impact, Gideon stepped into the path of the beams, skin covered in molten gold. The gunners stared as the beams were absorbed by Gideon’s barrier. Slowly, the hieromancer stepped forward, keeping the beams on him.

One turret swung towards Sun as he rushed towards it. The gunner hesitated for a second before firing, a beam of red and black flying at him. Sun skidded to a halt, planting his feet into the ground and holding out one arm. Mana rippled under his skin, hungry and ready for the Aether fueled attack. He could do this, he would do this.

The beam hit his hand, skin blistering through his aura as he tried to control it, “Come on…”

“Sun…” Drache said in Ruby's voice.

“I’m fine,” Sun gave a satisfied grunt as he got the energy under control and absorbed it. Sun charged forward, dodging another beam and punched the gunner, releasing the attack back at him.

The gunner flew back, armor and body disintegrating from the point of impact. Sun landed, looking back at the turret, “Ruby…”

“I’m not making you one.”

“C’mon,” Sun whined, “It’ll be cool!”

“Sun, you just reduced that man to ash. I’m not doing it.”
“Even if I promise to only use it on Grimm?”

“Yes. Look at your hand.”

Sun did, seeing the cracked skin rapidly heal itself, “You’re no fun, that's just an occupational hazard.”

“I’ll make it up to you somehow,” Ruby said.

“I’m holding you to that. Blake wants t-”

“Sun!” Sun was part way through a turn as Ajani tackled him away from another beam, the lion rolling up onto the balls of his feet and charging at the guard. For a second, Ajani’s double headed axe was aimed right for the neck, then he tilted it down, clipping the guard’s breastplate and sending him crashing into the wall.

“Sun!” Drache flew down to where Sun was sitting up, wings beating as the drake flitted around him, “Are you alright?”

“Fine,” Sun said, standing up, “Where too now?”

Drache flew towards one tunnel, hovering there as he waited for the group to join him.

--- X Gideon X---

Gideon turned at a whispered work from Drache, crashing into the barricade of three automatons with a sweep of his sural. The speaker system crackled on, a calm voice coming from it, “Mr. Gideon Jura.”

Gideon looked around, whip probing the air, “What-?”
“Just speak aloud, I can hear you perfectly.”

“And you are…?”

“I am Bahari Achar, it is my job to enforce the laws of the Consulate. For good and for ill, something I’m sure you understand.”

Gideon heard Sun give a snort, muttering something about the pointlessness of laws at times, “I can.”

“Then I would like to personally extend an apology for the mishandling of the Nalaar case. Had I known just how far Dhiren had gone, how many miscarriages of justice he had performed in his hunt for the Nalaar family, I would have had him behind bars long ago.”

“I’m sure Kiran will love to hear that,” Sun said, voice echoing through the halls, “We’ll go tell hi-oh wait .”

“Fair enough,” Bahari said, “but it is not like any of you are innocent in this matter. You had neutralized the Combustible, Mr. Jura. There was no reason to fire on it. Ms. Thalia, you killed your way through our men at Freejam. Mr. Wukong, you-”

“Oh, please ,” Sun scoffed, “Stop acting like you’ve got some sort of moral high ground here. It’s a war. You would have just turned the Gearhulk back on, Thalia didn't kill those people because she wanted a cheap kick and I gave them a chance to back off. We didn't come here to moan about every Renegade you guys killed.”

“No, just the one,” Bahari said as the team moved onwards, “How many Chandra Nalaars have you created? How many children will grow up fath-”

“How many did you create? We let people surrender until you pushed us,” Gideon cut in, “The men from the Aether Hub were allowed to go free after we had taken it.”

Bahari went silent for a long moment, “I suppose we have reached an impasse. I will give you one warning, surrender now.”
Gideon dodged as an automaton burst through the door in front of them, stepping in front of Thalia and intercepting the heavy spike fired from its arm. Gideon grunted as he skidded backwards, letting the brass drop to the ground as Sun grabbed a shotgun, shooting the automaton down.

“Gideon!” Ajani roared, knocking two more bolts away as more automatons made themselves known.

“You’re almost to the bridge!” Ruby’s voice was barely able to be registered from Drache, “You can turn them off there!”

“Come on!” Gideon said, waving the rest of the team on and taking up the rear. They passed through several halls, dodging more automatons as the ran until they finally reached the bridge…

The empty bridge. The Skysovereign was completely empty, nothing but Bahari’s voice and the sight of a fleet of thopters flying away to greet them, “I wish it hadn't come to this. I don't take joy in killing children and wasting so much of the taxpayers money, but you leave me no choice.”

A series of explosions echoed throughout it the sinking ship, breaking to pieces like… like it was being scuttled.

“Run!” Gideon yelled, smashing through a window as the Skysovereign broke to pieces around them, “Ruby!”

“On it!” Drache was already the size of a horse and growing wide enough to accommodate the team. The ground under the feet of Sun and a Renegade gave as they tried to climb on, sending the Renegade falling as Gideon grabbed Sun by the hand and pulled him onto Drache. The drake took off, pulling on a steep dive on an attempt to catch the falling Renegade until a brass bird came screaming past them, the elf on it catching the Renegade easily as they shifted to slow the force of his fall.

--- X Bahari X---

“You scuttled. The ship.”
“I had hoped to take them down in it.”

“You scuttled a ship that cost one trillion rupees and seven years of work as a glorified deathtrap.”

“We’ve already gone over this, Samar,” Bahari said, “It is also standard procedure for this scenario. The renegade forces would be all the stronger with the Skysovereign on their side.”

“They wouldn’t have held it for long,” the engineer said, “We have the Aether Hub.”

“And few ships,” Bahari said, “They would not need it long, just enough to take the Spire.”

“Which they might do anyways,” Ranaj said, staring at the clockwork map in front of him, “We’re low on ships, people are flocking the the Renegade cause. We’ve lost most of Ghirapur at this point. I’ve called in all teams from out of the city, but if the Renegades push before they get here…”

“The barricade?”

“Holding for now,” Ranaj said, “the Peacewalkers are scaring off any attack, but they're also the last thing between the Renegades and us now that the Sovereign is gone. Take out our turret and they can fly right to us.”

“Where’s the Grand Consul?”

“Working on that oversized Aether transporter,” Samar said, “not sure why. I-”

“Forces sighted from the east!” one orderly called, “Elves, Lifecrafted and beasts. They even have a train built like a damn rhino!”

“Peema?” Samar asked.
“Probably,” Ranaj said, “Kambal’s men clashed with them last time they moved an Aether Harvester over the forest. Flew up on lifecrafted birds the size of manned thopters and punched right through the hull. They never liked us, if they got wind a revolt was happening, they wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“A thopter just flew over them,” the orderly said, “Rishkar is at their head.”

“Joy,” Samar said, scowling at the mention of the Peema Renegade known for his large constructs, “Just what we need right now.”

“They-” there was a hitched breath, “they just took down the thoper! A giant hydra!”

“shit,” Ranaj said.

“Order all available troops within ten kilometers to fall back to the barricade,” Bahari said, “The Renegades will pick off anyone still out there. Abandon the Bastion and move the Dreadnoughts out to sea. I want as few casualties as possible.”

“What about the ones further out?”

“Tell them to go to ground using the tunnels, but stay away from the ones holding the Night Markets and Dhund. We’ll contact them when this is over… for better or worse.”

--- x Sun X---

Sun grunted as Ruby crashed into his midriff, doing her damndest to crush him, “Rubes…”

“Don’t scare us like that,” the silver eyed girl mumbled, “I thought you were gonna…”

“Hey,” Sun said, “C’mon, you know it takes more than that to take me down.”

Sun winced as Ruby just hugged him tighter. Shuffling awkwardly so he was facing Blake, he sent her a pleading look. The cat faunus shot him a look before gently prying Ruby off him, “We need
to focus, Ruby. You can be mad at Sun after we’re done.”

“’M not mad,” Ruby said, swaying slightly, “Just worried.”

Sun met Blake's eye over Ruby's head, seeing the same thought he had in them. That Menagerie vacation couldn't come soon enough.

All three of them jumped as a sharp whistle split the air, spinning (and in Ruby’s case, pinwheeling her arms to keep from falling until Sun reached over and steadied her) to look at Chandra. The Pyromancer had the fingers of one hand in her mouth and was putting her scroll away with the other, “Hey! Get over here, we’re gonna finish up planning!”

“There shouldn't be much of one,” Liliana said, “it’s only Tezzeret and the portal left.”

“The portal's the more important of the two,” Gideon said, voice firm, “Chandra, Liliana… Ruby, if we have to choose between destroying the portal or going after Tezzeret, let him go.”

“First things first,” Jace said, “We need to take out at least one of the turret. The Skysovereign might be down, but if we don't get rid of those, it’ll be all for nothing.”

“Are the turret manned?” Liliana asked, “if so, I can take them out easily.”

“Let's not kill anyone if we don't have to,” Gideon said, “I-”

Liliana’s laugh verged on an inhuman bark, “If we don't have to?” Beefslab, we’re well past the point where we should be entertaining any notion of there being a peaceful answer to this. We need to take out that turret quickly, and I can do that.”

“They have one Planewalker,” Gideon said, “Two if Baan survived that crash.”

“He probably did,” Chandra said, “I didn't see his body after I was done frying Baral.”

“And he could be anywhere,” Ruby said, “We have one shot at this, Giddy. We need to take out
“And we will,” Pia said, sweeping into the room with Rashmi and Saheeli, “We have a modified thopter in the hold.”

“The Hope of Ghirapur,” the elven Artificer said with forced calm, “it’s carrying an Aetheric disruptor.”

“A device meant to deliver a one use shock,” Saheeli continued, the Lifecrafting Planeswalker was adjusting one of the bracers she had on, the light bouncing off the brass as rainbows, “it will eliminate the bridge, but we can't get close enough to launch it without taking out the turret.”

“So I’m bringing a small team down to use a rather… ingenious plan on how to eliminate the turret while the Consulate is busy dealing with the elves from Peema,” Pia said.

“But even if we do that,” Gideon cut in, “Tezzeret has to have something to stop the Hope before it can go off.”

“Leave that to me,” Liliana said with a smug smile, “I’ll deal with him.”

“We just need a distracti-”

“Having half your face rot off is a very distracting thing to happen.”

Gideon's jaw jumped, “We’re not-”

“I agree with Liliana,” Ruby said, “if Tezzeret gets away, he’ll find some other way to make a bridge for Bolas. We need to stop him here… permanently.”

“So that’s how we’ll do it,” Liliana said, “Little Rose and I will attack from below, you launch the thopter. The portal is destroyed, Tezzeret’s dead, everyone is happy.”

“I-” out of the corner of his eye, Sun saw Nissa bristle for a second, before her shoulders sagged, “I
agree. We can't let Tezzeret escape. We don't know if he has blueprints hidden away somewhere.”

“Yeah,” Chandra nodded, “and how about all the people who have had it rough because of him? This is the exact type of thing we should be fighting, Gids.”

Gideon sighed, “Fine.”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby followed Liliana, tapping into a tiny fraction of her Semblance to stay even with the Necromancer and pouring in all the mana she could to keep awake. It had been about an hour since the team of Renegades, including Ajani and Nissa, had departed for the turret and the sounds of fighting had picked back up. Occasionally groups of airborne Renegades and Enforcers would pass overhead, dogfighting, “So… what do we do?”

Liliana stopped at the end of one alley, pointing a finger at a pair of bodies, a Renegade with a crushed chest and an enforcer with a knife through her throat. Curling the finger, purple smoke rose from the ground and wrapped around the bodies. That gave Ruby an idea, “We stop Tezzeret.” Staggering up, the zombies moved to flank them, shuffling along with them as they walked onto the road leading to the Aether Spire and froze. A heavy storm was forming above the skyscraper that ruled the skyline of Ghirapur. One like Ruby had never seen before, even when Vale or Patch got hit with hurricanes. The lightning was not natural, flashing hundreds of colors in a way painfully familiar, the clouds were a glowing blue, and the winding streams of Aether above Ghirapur being pulled into the Spire. The sky seemed to bleed, more Aether appearing every second to be yanked towards the Spire.

Ruby met Liliana’s eyes, and they both sped up. There was only one thing this could mean, one omen. Tezzeret had reached his endgame, the portal was complete. They needed to get to the Spire now.

Luckily, the few people brave enough to be out in the middle of a full blown revolution quickly staggered out of their path as Ruby and Liliana came, gaping at the walking bodies. In front of the Spire was a small group of Consulate guards, a dwarven captain at their head, “Halt! This is a restricted-"

A long wave of purple ripped from Liliana careless wave, turning the leaves on the trees brown
and floating to the ground. The wave hit the guards, who began coughing and wheezing until the collapsed unconscious. The necromancer stepped on the dwarf with a scoff, before continuing on her way, “They presume to order us around? Come along, Little Rose.”

As they made their way up the Spire, Liliana took out each of the guards with the same move. Finally, they stopped in front of the door radiating the smell of energized Aether, looking at each other. Ruby summoned a gun, Liliana drew the Chain Veil from her pocket and, as one, they opened the door and stepped into the room.

The first thing Ruby noticed was how hot the wind pushing through the cavernous room was. It wasn't the muggy heat of Ghirapur, it was bone dry, like it hadn't so much as touched water in a long time. Like Vacuo.

Tubes of Aether lined the walls, passing piles of scrap parts to reach the giant gate holding a series of gyroscopic rings. Tezzeret was in front of it, staring through it and out the shattered wall of windows behind it, adjusting his etherium arm.

Liliana made the first move, eyes and demonic marks blazing so bright that they sent purple light across the ground and pushed. A storm of purple smoke rushed out of her, transforming into a giant claw and it cleared the distance between them and Tezzeret.

Before it hit, the nearest pile of scrap came to life, rolling between Tezzeret and Liliana’s attack. The spell washed against it, sending green patina crawling along as it repurposed itself into a humanoid automaton. Only then did Tezzeret turn to them, his adjustments complete, “Vess, Rose. You should have said you were coming to see my gate. I would have had refreshments ready,” Tezzeret's lips jumped, “but then again. You do call yourself the Gatewatch, so I suppose I should have known.”

“Your gate?” Liliana said, sauntering to the left, “I thought it was that elf, Rashmi’s?”

Tezzeret's face twisted into a snarl, “Her? She had no idea what she was making.”

“I wouldn't be so sure,” Liliana's eyes jumped to meet Ruby’s with the slightest gesture to the golem Tezzeret had made. Ruby silently summoned her staff.

“You think she knew she had created something to bridge worlds? That her tiny mind could comprehend that the Blind Eternities leak into this world? No, if I hadn't shown her, she’d have
spent the rest of her days bouncing vases around Ghirapur.”

“You have a very, very bad habit at underestimating woman like us, Tezzeret,” Liliana said, firing a fist sized blast of Black mana at him that Tezzeret casually scattered with his metal arm. At the same time Ruby gathered as much mana as possible in a moment and launched it at the golem.

The twisting beams of Red and White crashed into it, sending it skidding across the room and into one of the walls of the Bridge. The wall slid out of alignment, popping off several tubes and spraying Aether into the air. Ruby couldn’t help the smirk as Tezzeret watched in horror as the golem went over the edge, spinning with a howl and sending two heavy balls of scrap at her.

Ruby activate her Semblance, ready to dodge… only to find it not working. How…?

Ruby took one ball to the side, falling onto her back and smacking her head hard. Tezzeret gave a yell as Ruby pushed herself up, crawling towards where Liliana’s zombies had Tezzeret pinned while the world pitched and swayed.

“Where’s Bolas, Tezzeret?” Liliana was asking, one heel digging into his throat, “What’s he want the bridge for? A new Infinite Consortium?”

“Maybe…” Tezzeret gasped, “you should… ask him… yourse-AK!”

The last bit was cut off by Liliana’s heel, “I will as soon as we see him. Where. Is. He?”

“You’ve… been,” Tezzeret choked out, “both of you.”

“Where?”

“Twin… Suns…”

Ruby stopped, staring at the dreadlocked man. Even with the haziness of her head, a spike of ice went through her heart and her hand felt like it had been dunked into something hot.
“Amonkhet,” Liliana breathed out, confirming Ruby’s fears, “he’s on Amonkhet.”

Tezzeret nodded, eye jumping to the windows. Out of it, Ruby could barely see the Hope of Ghirapur flying towards them while the Heart of Kiran sunk in the back. Liliana apparently saw something that surprised her because she gave a quiet, “What the hell?”

Tezzeret jumped up as she was distracted, Ruby snapped her gun up, firing twice. The first went wide, the second tore through one eye. Tezzeret staggered back, blood rolling down one side of his face like tears, “That was for Ral!”

“You little-!” Tezzeret started, before apparently thinking better of it and Planeswalking off as Chandra lept from the Hope, flames burning down her arms as she crashed into the portal.

“Chandra?” Ruby asked weakly, “What are you doing here?”

Chandra stopped from where she was turning the portal to slag, “Oh, hey! Uh, Baan showed up of the Heart. Wreaked the Aether Thingy on the Hope so… here I a- Kiddo, are you alright?”

“Huh?”

“You’re… you’ve got blood all down the back of your head.”

“Oh…” Ruby said, “then I’m probably gonna pass out soon.”

“Why…?”

“Adrenaline’s wearing off, haven't slept in a while, blood lose. Not a good combination.”

“Uh… Yeah. Gids! Get over here! We need you to carry Ruby.”

--- X Blake X---
Blake sat next to Ruby, running a hand through her hair, “You’re sure she’ll be alright?”

“Yes,” Nissa said, “She’s just tired.”

“But it’s been two days,” Blake pointed out.

“Two days isn't that worrying,” Nissa said, “She’s breathing and moving on her own, that's a good sign.”

“We shoulda realized she was running low on Aura,” Sun said from where he was sitting with the rest, “She only had what I gave her and…”

“It’s not your fault,” Ajani said from where he was speaking to Gideon.

“I know,” Sun defended himself, then changed topics, “So... What now? I mean, Tezz is out there, so is Bolas.”

“We need to stop him,” Gideon said.

“I…” Jace sighed, “I don't know. We’ll have to face Bolas eventually, but I’m not sure if we should do it now or later.”

“Why not now?” Chandra asked, “He’ll be able to plan for us if we give him the opportunity.”

“We’re not strong enough,” Jace said, “‘We were gods once’, remember? Bolas doesn’t need a plan to defeat us. But he also knows most of us. He has to know about me, Lili, Ajani and Ruby at least, and he probably knows about you Chandra. He can find out about the rest of us quickly, Tezzeret's probably already told him about you.”

“I agree,” Ajani said, “We’re not strong enough. We should take time, train and gather what allies we can. If we don't, well, it will be a very quick fight.”

“That’s what you did for Emrakul right?” Liliana asked.
Gideon sighed, “Let’s put it to a vote. Who thinks we should go after Bolas right now?”

Gideon, Nissa, Chandra and Thalia all raised their hands.

“And those who are against it?”

Liliana, Jace, Ajani, Sun all raised their hands. Blake looked down at Ruby, then up at Sun. Then she raised her hand.

“All right,” Gideon sighed, slumping, “We’ll… I just hope we don’t regret putting this off.”

“Uh,” Chandra spoke up, “Quick question. Why’s Ajani voting?”

“Because Ruby asked him to join,” Sun said, “and I’m guessing you said yes?”

“Until all have found their place,” Ajani recited, “I will keep watch.”

Sun gave a laugh, “Man, it’s gonna be weird explaining this one around Patch.”

“Will that be a problem?” Ajani asked.

“Nah,” Sun grinned, “We’re already the biggest pile of head scratchers they’ve ever seen. You’ll be fine.”

“Well,” Chandra said, standing, “if we’re not running right to Bolas, I’m gonna stay with Mom for a bit.”

“See you when you get back,” Blake said with a small smile.
“I’m going to go to Innistrad,” Thalia said, already beginning her walk, “get training.”

Slowly, everyone filtered out, Sun to help someone with something, Jace to begin catching up on paperwork and Gideon and Nissa just to hang around Ghirapur.

Blake climbed into another bed and closed her eyes, letting sleep drag her down.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts on the chapter now that we're officially done with the Kaladesh arc? Good? Bad? Meh?
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Oh, hai Readers. Got a new chapter before I wander off to work on something new.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

-- X Ruby X--

Ruby leaned on the side of the ship, giving a giant yawn. Behind her, she could hear people whispering, as they had for the last three weeks they had been on the cruise going to Menagerie. She supposed that’s what happened when you were with a giant bipedal lion.

Ruby looked behind her, at where Yang was taking advantage of the lack of clouds to sunbath and Ajani was talking with Gideon. Several of the people watching them, jaws hanging open, were Faunus returning home having finally found the point they found weird.

Ruby turned back away from them, playing with the end of the black bandage wrapped around her right arm. That was one thing she couldn't wait to get off, something she’d hopefully be able to do once they got to Menagerie.

“Everything alright?” Blake asked, slinking next to her and offered a glass of strawberry lemonade. Ruby took it with her left hand, smiling at Blake.

“Just a bit itchy,” Ruby said, sipping from the glass, “I kinda wish it was bit colder, so I could get away with long sleeves.”

It just wasn't comfortable with bandages winding up one arm and over the shoulder, with a second around her wrist, but ultimately, it probably drew less attention than Ruby’s ever increasing collection of runes. Kaladesh, if anything, had taught her that her paranoia was fairly well founded. She’d take it off when they reached the Belladonna house, no point in hiding magic from the parents of a Planeswalker, right?

“You should have told me you were doing that,” Blake said, “I would have lent you one of my longer ribbons. They’re not as rough.”
“Yeah,” Ruby sighed, closing her eyes, “I know.”

“Is something wrong?” Blake immediately asked, and Ruby didn't need to open her eye to know amber eyes scanning her face.

“Just… trying to get used to things.”

“We’ve been on a boat for three weeks and you're not used to it?”

“Not that,” Ruby said, staring at the image in front of her, “It’s… Ghirapur was different than anywhere on Remnant, Blake.”

“How?” Blake drew out.

“it’s hard to explain,” Ruby said, “I… do you mind if I show you?”

“Show m-? Oh! No, go ahead.”

Ruby reached out, sending images of Ghirapur from the Aether Spire at Blake. Not normal ones, but the way Ruby could see it.

Aether thrummed through the ground, reaching every building and pushing into them. The closer you got to the Aether Spire… that was where things changed.

Massive cogs turned in the walls of the buildings and under the elevated streets, shifting and reshaping them. Bridges extended during rush hour, allowing pedestrians to easily pass from one part of the shopping complex at Ghirapur’s heart to another. Fountains in the center park changed poses as the day passed, telling the stories of inventors. Buildings pushed away from the roads to give more space, and hundreds of cruisers rushed by. Somewhere far away, Ruby heard Blake’s breath hitch as Ruby let her see Ghirapur as she had for a moment.

“Everything was part of one big artifact there,” Ruby said, “this isn't like that, and I’m still getting
“Then it’s a good thing we’re almost to Menagerie,” Blake said from that far away place, “It’s away from big cities and artifacts like that.”

---X Blake X---

Blake stepped off the boat, looking around Kuo Kuana port with a growing smile. Home again.

“So!” Blake just barely avoided jumping as Sun vaulted over the side of the ship, landing next to her with a spring in his step, “This is where you grew up? It’s pretty cool, definitely better than Vacuo.”

“It’s beautiful,” Ruby said, scratching at the bandages around her arm as she looked around in awe.

“You’ve been here before.”

“I was blind.”

“Oh,” Blake blinked, that was right. Ruby hadn't been able to see, she had completely forgotten, “I… I forgot, sorry.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry about,” Ruby’s smile was the calmest Blake had seen on her in awhile, "I’m fine now. C’mon. Dad and Giddy are gonna go get our stuff, we should get to your house.”

The small group began to walk through Kuo Kuana’s market, heading towards Blake's house. As they did, people stopped, nudging their friends and gaping at them. Blake couldn't help the scowl that started to slide onto her face.

“What’s wrong?” Sun asked, arms thrown behind his head.

“It’s a bit hypocritical, don't you think?”
“What is?” Ruby asked.

“We live here because we wanted a place to live where we weren’t treated differently, where we wouldn’t get stares like we’re circus animals or something. Someone different shows up and everyone starts staring?”

“How often do you see giant, one eyed white lions walking around on two legs, though?” Yang asked, “That’s pretty weird by Remnant standards. No offense, Big Guy.”

“None taken,” Ajani said with a laugh, “You aren’t wrong. Planeswalkers often forget that what is normal to us is very odd to the Planebound.”

“That’s,” Blake’s frown changed, anger leaving for worry, “That’s true. I’ve never thought of it that way.”

But wasn’t it? Planeswalkers seemed to view themselves as such first. Other things like race and such took a backseat compared to being a Planeswalker. Some did just abandon going by what they were before their ascension.

“Have something happen enough times and anything becomes normal,” Ajani said, “And our kind often consorts with the strange.”

Blake nodded, stopping in front of her house and fishing around for the key. Where had she put it? She had been sure to pack i-

The arm of Blake’s Shadow peeled off the ground, a flash of light reflecting off the key. Blake took it with a relieved sigh, catching a kid pointing at her out of the corner of her eye.

Living shadows, another thing that wasn't common on Remnant. Right alongside Leonin, Necromancers, Pyromancers, Elementals, Devils, Drakes and Magic in general. All things Blake was getting more and more casual about every day.

Blake pushed open the door, quietly gesturing for the others to follow her inside as the kid met her eyes. Her Shadow, realizing they had been seen, coiled under her feet and prepared to attack at her
Blake casually heeled it, shutting the door and turning towards the stairs that her dad was already halfway down. Ghira stopped at the bottom, silently spreading his arms.

Blake didn't hesitate to rush over and hug him, ignoring the quiet ‘oof’ as she did, “Hi, Dad.”

“Welcome home,” Ghira said, “It’s good to see you again.”

“It’s good to be home,” Blake said, “I missed you.”

---

Ghiran tightened his grip on Blake, just for a second, before turning to greet the others. He gave Ruby a smile, “You’re looking a lot better than last time I saw you, Ruby.”

Ruby nodded with a bright smile, “Yeah! All healed up!”

“What about your arms?” Ghira asked, pointing towards the black bandage going up both arms and disappearing into her sleeves.

“Oh! There’s nothing wrong with it, I’ll just…” Ruby trailed off, unbuttoning the top button of her shirt so she could slide one hand inside, walking away as she popped whatever was keeping the bandages in place.

Ghiran’s smile slid off his face for a second as he turned to Sun, memories of the picture Chandra had sent rising up. The boy froze, eyes wide at Ghira’s look, “Sun.”

“Uh… Hi?” it was a question, “It’s nice to meet you- again- hi?”

Ghiran turned to Yang, giving a smile and a greeting, before standing to meet the last person who had arrived. Ghira felt his jaw drop before he quickly composed himself. Looks like Blake hadn't been exaggerating, “You must be Ajani?”
“I am,” the white furred… man(?) said, “and you must be Blake’s father, Ghira.”

“Yes,” Ghira said, reaching out to shake his hand. Ajani’s hand all but wrapped around his, “It’s nice to meet you.”

“The pleasure is mine,” Ajani bowed his head. An act that, Ghira noticed with some amusement, put them at about even height. Ajani’s ears twitched in one direction as he stood, turning, “And this is…?”

Ghira turned to Kali, who was drying her dirt flecked hands with a towel, “This is my wife, Kali. Kali, this is Ajani.”

“It’s nice to- Ruby, what did you do to your arm?”

Ghira turned on his heel to see what Kali meant. Ruby was standing there wide eyed, the bandage trailing from one hand and the other locked in place at her side. Rows of symbols cycled up it, disappearing into her sleeve, “Uh…”

“And what is that?” Kali rushed past Ghira and Ajani, grabbing Ruby’s arm and lifting it to examine the welt of scar tissue on one wrist, “Hypertrophic? Was this infected?”

“I don’t think so?” Ruby asked, stopping her attempted to tug the arm out of Kali’s grip at the look she was given, “What?”

“You think so?”

“I don’t remember getting it?” Ruby shrunk.

“Psychogenic amnesia?” Kali mumbled to herself, examining the injury, “How much can you remember? Do you remember when you got this?”

“It was… I remember going to do something before the fight with Emrakul, the next thing I
remember that was there?”

“How long is the gap?”

“A few days?” Ruby said.

“Dear,” Ghira stepped towards them, gently prying Kali away from Ruby, “Can this wait? Blake’s here.”

“Oh!” Kali blushed, “Yes, of course. Welcome home!”

“It’s good to be home,” Blake said, hugging them.

The door swung open, letting Tai and Gideon in with several suitcases. Dropping them, the two men leaned over, panting. Tai looked up at them, “You could’ve waited!”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby sat at the table that had been moved in to fit them, squirming slightly and wondering if it had been a good idea to take the bandage off. She hadn’t meant to worry anyone.

Ruby traced the heart shaped scar under the table before letting her scared arm drift slightly lower to rub at the new marks encircling her wrist. She would need them soon.

Koth was hours away from finishing the unenchanted blade, and even with the location of the ritual Ruby was going to use, she was gonna need all the mana she could give. And that meant building up as much as she could.

“Ruby?” Blake asked, snapping the younger girl back to the present.

“Yeah?”
“Me and Sun were going to head down to the market, we don’t have enough food, and wanted to know if you wanted to come?”

“Oh! Yeah,” Ruby jumped up, sliding her arm behind her back as her eyes focused on where Kali was talking with Tai outside the windows, sitting on a pair of lawn chairs in front of a garden.

“Mom’s not really angry at you,” Blake said as she led Ruby out of the house, “but you gotta think about this all the way. You’re eleven, and have a lot of tattoos.”

“They’re-”

“I know,” Blake said, reaching out to pull Ruby's hand out from behind her back, “but she still worries about all of us. We’re off doing dangerous stuff. Dad too.”

“I’m not all that sure about that one with me,” Sun said, pushing open the door, “I think your dad hates me, Blake.”

“Dad doesn't hate you.”

“He hasn't said five words to me in the past four hours and keeps shooting daggers any time he thinks I’m not looking!”

“Dad doesn't hate you,” Blake repeated, voice firm.

“If you say so,” Sun said with a shrug, pulling out the list of stuff they needed to get. Halfway down, he did a double take, “Uhhhhhh…”

“What?”

“Why do we need to order like, all the meat on Menagerie?”

“For Ajani.”
“That's... is that why he goes out hunting alone? He eats meat twice as fast as Ruby eats sugary stuff?”

“I don’t eat sugar that fast!”

“Yes you do,” Blake and Sun deadpanned.

“Meanies,” Ruby pouted while relief spread through her. At least they weren't fighting in a war anymore, she could afford to be a bit more childish, “Where is Ajani?”

“He said he was going to visit someone,” Sun said, finishing reading the list and shoving it into his pocket, “Lead the way, Blake.”

“I’ll need the list.”

Sun made a noise of irritation, pulling it back out, “Here.”

They spent the better part of an hour shopping the market, including stopping by the butcher, before the leonin suddenly reappeared. Quite literally, Planeswalking into an alley on their left, growing more solid as the air rippled as the way to the Blind Eternities seamlessly opened and shut, and walking towards them, “I need you to come with me.”

“Why?” Ruby asked.

“I have a friend I want you to meet,” Ajani said, “She’s an Artificer and I think you’ll get along.”

--- X Jhoira X---

Jhoira looked up from her map at the knock, raising one eyebrow. Who could that be? “Come in!”

The door swung open, revealing the one eyed face of Ajani Goldmane. He took one step inside,
shutting the door behind him and bowing his head, “Jhoira, I apologize for arriving unannounced.”

“It’s fine,” Jhoira said, standing and walking towards the leonin, “Can I get you anything? Something to drink?”

“No, thank you,” Ajani said, “I am intruding on your hospitality enough as is.”

“What do you need?” Jhoira asked.

“I wish to ask a favor of you… and have news.”

“What?”

“I am working with a team of Planeswalkers to combat Nicol Bolas,” Ajani started, “I’m not sure if you know hi-”

“I’m acquainted,” Jhoira said. Bolas and Teferi had fought, once. It had ended in a resounding victory for the draconic Planeswalker, only Teferi imparting the knowledge of the time rifts kept Bolas from finishing the dismembered time mage.

“We are attempting to gather allies for the battle. I was wondering of you knew anyone who might be of assistance, and if so, if you could point me to them?”

“I’m sorry,” Jhoira said, “I don’t. Not at the moment.”

“I see,” Ajani said, “Thank you anyways.”

“And the information?”

“Were you aware that the golem Karn was nearly corrupted by the Phyrexians, but has since reascended as a Planeswalker?”
Two emotions surged through Jhoira at those words. Relief that one of her oldest friends was alright was nearly drowned out by dread. While she had missed the conclusion of the Invasion, she had hoped and assumed that any true Phyrexian threat had died with their creator in the end.

So many years, so many lives and so many projects of questionable morality from Urza had been poured into stopping them.

“No! I wasn't,” Jhoira said, noticing the look in Ajani’s eye, “He hasn't contacted me. Why? Is something wrong? Is Karn hurt?”

“No, not hurt… can I assume you knew the Planeswalker Venser as well?”

Ajani probably hadn't been expecting those words to carry as much weight as they had. It was the past tense that caused them to hit like a punch to the gut, causing the taste of bile to rise into Jhoira’s mouth, “I did. Don't… don't try to coat it, what happened to him?”

“Venser gave Karn his spark to save him. Venser didn't survive.”

Jhoira turned away, running a hand through her hair as a heavy weight settled around her chest. Jhoira choked out, “And Phyrexia?”

“A plane has fallen to them,” Ajani said, “though I believe they are limited there for the time being. I will admit to not knowing the most on this matter, but I know someone who is. I can go retrieve her, if you wish.”

“I…” Jhoira nodded, “Yes, please.”

Ajani placed a hand on her shoulder, “I’m sorry.”

“You didn't do anything wrong,” Jhoira said, “I wouldn't have even known he was dead if you hadn't told me.”

“But I understand your grief,” Ajani said as he shimmered and faded in a familiar way, before disappearing.
Jhoira sank into her chair, burying her face into her hands as a million thoughts rushed through her mind. Karn was alive, Phyrexia was alive and Venser was dead. The laugh that rose from her throat was hollow as, perhaps a bit inappropriately and in a tone that reminded her all too much of Urza, some part of her mind noted that that was what qualified as a net loss.

About an hour later, Jhoira heard a muffled voice on the other side of the door, “-so long?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Ajani’s voice responded seconds before he knocked on the door.

“Come in!”

The door swung open, letting Ajani and three children into the room, “Jhoira, these are Ruby, Blake and Sun.”

Jhoira’s eyes immediately jumped to the tail hanging from the boy as a series of puzzle pieces jumped into place, removing any need for her to look for the children in Venser’s workshop, “Hello.”

The youngest stepped forward eyes wide as she stared at Jhoira. The Shivan woman noticed the runes on both arms. Storage in both cases, but for different things. The ones holding a collection of mana was also incorrectly done, risking an explosion if the girl ever tried to remove the mana. Jhoira would have work on that, “Jhoira? Like, the Jhoira?”

“Yes.”

“Wow,” she whispered, looking starstruck, “Urza mentioned you…”

“Urza? He died centuries ago.”

“His journal,” she said, a heavy tome appearing in her hand. Jhoira took it as Ruby offered it, flicking through the pages with a rush of nostalgia as she stared at the familiar handwriting, “Do you… uh… do you want that? You were his student…”
“No, thank you…?”

“Ruby,” she supplied.

“Ruby,” Jhoira said, handing the book back to the young Planeswalker, “Though I would like to know where you got that.”

“From the Weatherlight?”

--- X Ruby X---

It was taking ever bit of self control Ruby had to not squeal in excitement. Jhoira was in front of her, Jhoira was in front of her!

Ruby had been able to figure out through Urza’s journal that he was probably a bit of a jerk... and a bit insane... and had a hatred of Phyrexia that dwarfed Koth, Elspeth and her’s combined by a country mile... but he had nothing but good things to say about Jhoira. Or, at least, what counted as good things by the standards of the journal.

Jhoira’s eyes had grown wide as she stared at Ruby, her jaw falling open slightly before she composed herself, “The Weatherlight? You know where it is?”

“Uhhh... yeah?”

“Where?” Ruby wasn't sure if Jhoira was aware that she had latched her hands onto Ruby’s shoulders, shaking the silver eyed girl slightly, “Where is it?”

“Uhhhhhh...” Ruby was aware she probably sounded silly, “Urborg? A swamp?”

“A swamp?” Jhoira whispered, letting go of Ruby and turning away, “Sisay said it sank, all reports say the same... but Urborg’s not easy to navigate-”

“Tell me about it,” Ruby groused quietly behind Jhoira. Liliana hadn't been wrong about Urborg
“being a hellhole.”

“That would explain why I haven’t been able to find it,” Jhoira continued to herself, “Looking completely in the wrong place!”

“Miss Jhoira?” Ruby asked, “Why are you looking for the Weatherlight?”

“I’d…” Jhoira hesitated, scanning them before moving to the open window and shutting it. Turning to them, she began, “What do you know about Dominaria?”

“Not much,” Sun said, grabbing one of the chairs and sitting so he was straddling it, “Rubes probably knows more.”

“Oh! Yes!” Ruby snapped to attention, suddenly feeling like a kid in front of class. What were you supposed to do when standing someone that was one of the closest things to being someone your hero respected? “Dominaria is… um… uh…”

Ruby, quite suddenly, realized she had little in the way of up to date information on Dominaria. Even what Venser had told her was over a year old now.

Ask her about the Invasion and she could tell you (not that she would do that to Jhoira. She had been a vital part in preparing for it, after all), but her knowledge ended shortly after it.

“I…” Ruby searched her mind for anything Venser might have mentioned. When something came to her, it was something that had, ironically, come from Koth and Elspeth, “…isn’t there a cult going around causing problems?”

“Yes,” Jhoira said with a nod, awarding Ruby a small smile, “The Cabal. I was hoping to repair the Weatherlight and use it to combat them.”

Ruby’s heart stopped at those words, the 3D designs of the powerful skyship rushing to the front of her mind unbidden, juxtapositioning with the sad, broken wreck she had come across, “Yes!”

“I’m sorry?” Jhoira had taken an involuntary step back as Ruby rushed around the table in a
Semblance fueled rush.

“I can help with that!” Ruby babbled.

“Oh boy,” Ruby heard a thunk of something as Sun sighed, “Now you’ve done it. Rubes-”

“I can show you where it is!”

“Ruby-” Blake said with a sigh.

“I’m good with things like that, I can help rebuild it!” after she was done on Theros.

“I-” Jhoira still looked surprised, before gently tugging her hand from Ruby’s, “That’s very kind but… you’re a bit young-”

“But I know how to recreate it-” Ruby insisted.

“Ruby is very good at understanding Artifacts, Jhoira,” Ajani cut in, “and you are one of the best Artificers alive today. You have much you could teach her.”

“I-” Jhoira frowned, “well, it’s rare to find someone so young and so passionate about Artifacts, and while you make mistakes- the mana seal on your right arm isn't safe to extract from by the way, I’ll help with that- we all do. Ok.”

At that, Ruby wasn't capable of suppressing the squeal, sending Blake jumping.

--- X Blake X---

Blake leaned her head towards Sun as Ruby skipped along the streets of Kuo Kuana, “Should we be insulted that getting to work on a ship makes Ruby happier than she’s been in a while?”
“Nah,” Sun said with a small grin, “Why would we? She’s been in a funk for a while now, I’m just glad to have her back.”

“I know,” Blake said under her breath. That didn't stop her from feeling a little jealous that it wasn't Sun or her that helped Ruby out of said funk.

And, somehow, Ruby had managed to find more work to be done during what was supposed to be a vacation to get away from work… Was it weird that they weren't older than fourteen, but still had what probably counted as one of the most stressful jobs in the multiverse?

“We’re back~!” Ruby called with a massive grin as she pushed open the door to the Belladonnas’ house. A second later, Gideon's head popped over the banister.

“Uh… Hi?” Gideon sounded almost confused at Ruby’s behavior. Considering Ruby had been fairly morose, even when she tried to hide it, since their return to Kaladesh, Blake didn't blame him, “Is everything alright?”

“Perfect!” Ruby said, “What're you up to?”

“Tai, Ghira and me were watching some a tournament?” Gideon said, looking back, “It reminds me of the Iroan Games, back home.”

“Oh!” Sun’s head popped up and he rushing past Ruby and Blake to join Gideon, “I forgot the Mistral Cup starts today! What did I miss?”

“Not much, they just finished the opening ceremony.”

“Seems a bit late in the day to start,” Blake said.

“Dodge the worst of the heat,” Sun said, “Just ‘cause it’s nice and warm here doesn't mean it isn't kill me hot up there.”

“It’s much easier at Vale,” Ruby said, climbing up the stairs, “We only have two seasons, wet and dry.”
“It could be worse,” Blake said as she joined her, “Innistrad only has one, cold.”

“I’d take wet and cold over a desert any day,” Sun called from the office, leaning over the couch.

Ladies and Gentlemen! a voice blared from the speakers hidden around the room, it’s time for the moment you’ve all been waiting for! The first match of the Mistral cup!

Blake met Ruby's eyes before they both rushed into the room, followed shortly by Gideon.

Our first match is sure to be an interesting one! Here, we have Tanner Colby, three time champion and last year's runner up! The man who stepped out onto the arena was surprisingly short and skinny, his red hair streaked with grey. A pair of sharp blades stretched from the bracers on each arm.

And in the other, a newcomer to the tournament, Ms. Pyrrha Nikos!

“She’s a bit young,” Tai said as the red head stepped into the area. Red hair pulled back into a ponytail and a simple sword and shield in her hands, “Doesn't even have custom weapons yet…”

“So a quick one?” Sun asked, reaching over to grab a chip and eating it.

“Not necessarily” Tai said, “Last year's winner managed to brute force a win. Don't mistake ‘lacking training’ for ‘weak’. There’s also the factor of…” the arena rose, revealing a burning field of lava on one side and water on the other. Steam rose from the line they met, “the arena itself.”

“Yeah, welllllll,” Sun said, “We’ll see.”

Blake?” Blake turned in place to see her mom standing in the doorway, “Can I talk to you alone?”

“Yeah,” Blake said, standing up and looking down at Ruby, “Tell me who wins, ok?”
Ruby nodded, leaning forward so she could see better. Turns, Blake followed her mom out of the room and down the hall, “What do you need?”

“I just wanted to check in on a couple of things,” Kali said, “is there anything you know about Ruby's scar or those tattoos?”

“Not the scar, but the tattoos hold artifacts or mana.”

“How many artifacts does she have?”

“A lot. She likes to tinker when she can't sleep.”

“Which is often?”

“Yeah. She gets nightmares a lot.”

Kali nodded, jotting down a note on her scroll before looking up, “Anything new since you finished up on Kaladesh?”

“Not really,” Blake shrugged.

“What about you, or Sun?”

“What do you mean?”

“It was a war, right?”

“Yeah.”

“People die in wars, Blake. I’m sure you…”
Blake followed Kali into her office, shutting the door after a look around, “Killed?”

“Yes,” Kali said, “Is there anything you want to talk about it?”

Blake hesitated. Should she ask? “...is it bad I don't feel guilty about it?”

“What do you mean?”

“All the books I read, they act like it's something that’s supposed to haunt you. You're supposed to wake up sweating because of it. I just feel,” Blake shrugged, “I dunno. It sucks they had to die, but it’s not affecting me. It was like that on Innistrad, too. I felt guilty at first, but I got past it pretty quickly.”

“Blake,” Kali said, “everyone deals with that differently. For some it never does get easier, but that doesn't mean there’s something wrong with you if it does. It’s just who you are. Do you want my opinion on the matter?”

“Sure.”

“A lot of the time, people who feel guilty aren't sure they did the right thing, no matter how much they tell themselves otherwise. You're certain you did the right thing there, so it doesn't weigh heavily on your mind.”

“They didn't care who they were working for, that Tezzeret-”

“I know,” Kali said holding out her hands, “I’m not blaming you… I just want to make sure you understand why.”

“Thanks,” Blake said with a smile.

“You’re welcome,” Kali said, hitting a button on her scroll and projecting an image onto the wall mounted screen, “Now, about this adorable picture Chandra sent us…”
Blake was pretty sure her embarrassing wail could be heard on the other side of Kuo Kuana as she caught sight of the picture.

--- X Gideon X---

“Giddy? Can I ask you something?”

“Sure,” Gideon said, turning to Ruby, “What do you need?”

“What’s Theros like?”

Gideon raised an eyebrow, “Why do you ask?”

“I’m just curious,” Ruby said.

“Well,” Gideon started, “There’s three main poleis, cities, for humans, Meletis, Akros and Setessa. Each has a patron god, though you’ll find people who worship others at each one. Meletis has Ephara, goddess of magic and scholarship, Akros has Iroas, god of honorable combat and victory and Setessa has Karametra, goddess of agriculture and farming.”

“For humans?”

“A lot of other races don't have poleis, but the Returned have their two necropoleis.”

“Returned?”

“A group of undead on Theros, they escaped the Underworld at the cost of everything. Their name, their memories, their ability to make memories, even their face.”

“Oh… What about the gods? Who else is there?”
“The major ones are Thassa, goddess of the sea, Purphoros, god of the forge, Nylea, Goddess of the Hunt,” Gideon's face pulled into a sharp frown, “and Erebos, god of the dead.”

“You said major? There are minor ones too?”

“Yeah. Atheros, god of passages and pacts, Keranos, god of the storm, Kruphix, god of horizons, Mogis, the god of slaughter and father of minotaurs, Pharika, goddess of affliction and medicine and Phenax, god of lies.”

“What other races are there?”

“Leonin, harpies, merfolk, gorgan, satyrs, archons. Normal things, as a rule.”

Ruby nodded… the crashed into Gideon's gut, “Good night, Gideon.”

“Yeah, you too,” Gideon said, watching Ruby head down the hall to her room and walking into his. Settling down onto the bed, Gideon let sleep take him.

…

The next thing Gideon knew, there was a loud hammering on his door as morning light poured into his room, “Gideon! Gideon, get your ass up!”

“What is it, Sun?” Gideon asked, stretching.

“Ruby's gone,” Sun said, causing Gideon to rocket up, “We’re meeting in Blake’s dad’s room. Hurry up!”

Gideon rushed around, pulling on a new set of clothes and moving to meet with the other members of the Gatewatch, “Ruby's missing?”
“She wasn't in bed this morning,” Blake said, “and her spark isn't on Remnant.”

“Then where is she? Are we sure she didn't just go visit a friend?”

“She took a few changes of clothes,” Blake responded.

“Gideon,” Ajani rumbled, “Check her spark.”

Gideon closed his eyes, filtering out the three novas of mana around him and focusing on Ruby’s. It was on another plane, but whi- No.

“What’s Theros like?”

“She looked like she wanted to kill the guy who did it when she left.”

“Ajani said Heliod killed Elspeth.”

“She’s…”

“On Theros?” Ajani finished.

“What?” Blake looking between them, “Why would she be there?”

“Trying to kill Heliod,” Gideon breathed. But how?

“Here’s a better question,” Sun asked, eyes still squeezed tight as a knocked echoed through the house, “What’s Nahiri doing here?”

“Wha-"
“Blake!” Ghira called, “There’s someone here for you!”

“Send her up!” Gideon called, sharing a confused look with Blake. Nahiri?

The door swung open, letting the kor Planeswalker into the room, the part of her skin that had been petrified during the fight with Emrakul flesh again, “Right, got a couple of questions for you all.”

“What?”

"First, why’d Ruby just show up on Innistrad and create a sword meant to cut magic?” Nahiri asked in a voice like gravel, “Second, who’s going after her with me? Because I recognized the look in her eye.”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby finished the circle with a satisfied grunt, holding out her hand for the sword. Koth handed it over, “This place… it isn't natural.”

“It doesn't need to be natural,” Ruby said preparing herself. On her right arm, the mana storage matrix began to swirl, “Just powerful.”

“It wasn't a complaint,” Koth said, stepping back, “Merely an observation.”

Ruby looked up at the symbol carved into the moon, certain that Emrakul was watching her right now. Closing her eyes, Ruby fell to her knees and thrust the blade straight down.

It sank through the stone of Thraben’s square like it was water, tapping into the forced convergence of every lay line on Innistrad. The array under Ruby's knees glowed red, the ritual beginning.

For half a second, Ruby allowed worst case scenarios to rush through her mind, that Sorin found them, that Thalia found them, that the ritual failed and blew all of Thraben to pieces, then pushed them aside. This would succeed, it had to.
Ruby felt the mana matrix rise off her arm, spinning quicker as the sword absorbed the mana below her. In her head, Ruby saw a bronze hammer strike iron, Nyxborn rising from the sparks.

It was real / it was a dream .

It was iron /it was an enchantment.

It was of the earth /it was of Nyx.

It was Justice / It was Vengeance.

*It* *was the tool of a savior /It* *was the tool of an avenger/ It was the tool of a killer.*

It was his greatest creation / and on its edge, gods and dreams died.

Ruby drew the blade from the stone as the storm of mana subsided, turning to Koth, “Let's go.”

Ruby focused on the hazy area Elspeth’s spark rested, stepping into the Blind Eternities.

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Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Good? Bad? Meh?
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Gideon burst from the Blind Eternities with a familiar hissing breath of air, waiting for the others to arrive. Stupid. He should have realized Ruby was looking for information for something like this.

The moment the last member of their group appeared in the alley, Gideon stepped out of it and into Akros’s Foreigner Ward for the first time in over ten years. Eyes roaming, Gideon felt a rush of nostalgia.

That was where him and Drasus fought off two guards trying to enforce a fake tax, down the road, he could see the gate leading to the causeway they had fought giants on. Gideon’s eyes trailed to a familiar storefront, his feet carrying him towards it on instinct. Ducking under the curtain, Gideon found himself in a familiar square, watching people eat.

“I’ll be right there!” a grey haired woman called, finishing serving she was at and turning to them, “How might I- I’m sorry, do I know you?”

“You do,” Gideon said, giving a small smile as the rest of the group entered behind him, “G-Kytheon Iora.”

Hagne, and all conversation, stopped dead at that. Every head swiveled to him like a reverse wave, first those close enough to hear, then those farther away. Hagne scanned his face, “By the gods, it really is you. They said you died fighting that titan, were sure you had, when they found the bodies.”

Gideon looked away, “They found them?”

“Gave them a hero’s burial,” Hagne said, “I can bring you, if you’d like.”

“I.”

“-Would love to,” Sun cut in, “We’ll look around, right guys?”
“Right,” Nahiri said, squeezing Blake’s shoulder when it looked like the Faunus would object and guiding her out of the room, “We’ll meet you back here in a couple of hours, Jura.”

“Jura?” Hagne asked.

“Long story,” Gideon responded.

“Give me a moment, Kytheon. I need to let Alexandros know.”

Gideon nodded, watching the woman leave. Hagne and Alexandros had always given the Irregulars any scraps left over at the end of the day and, on occasion, turned a blind eye to a stolen loaf of bread. It wasn't much, but more than what most did.

Shortly afterward, there was a clanging from the kitchen before Alexandros’s head popped out of the door, his once black hair grey and almost gone, “Kytheon Iora? Is that you, boy?”

“Yes.”

“ Gods in Nyx,” Alexandros breathed, before shaking his head and disappearing back into the kitchen. Hagne walked out of the building, Gideon behind her.

They passed through the streets of the Foreigner Ward, people turning to stare at Gideon with open jaws. Gideon towered over most people here, being six and a half feet while most men were lucky to hit five and a half.

Finally, they came to the cemetery. Mothers and wives chanted in the main building, audible even at the front of the cemetery.

It didn't take Gideon long to find his friend's final resting place. It was, far and away, the biggest tomb in the graveyard.

“The king had wanted them buried in the Noble’s District,” Hagne said, “but we protested. They
had plenty of heroes, we said, while we have none.”

“And he let it happen?” that didn't sound like the king he knew.

“His son, the new king, Anax, argued for us. Insisted that the Foreigner Ward was their home, and that their bodies deserved to rest here as their souls departed for Erebus’s domain,” Hagne said as they arrived at the tomb.

“Yes,” Gideon said as he reached out and ran a hand over one of the carvings, not really paying attention to Hagne’s words.

It was his Irregulars, immortalized in marble. Drasus, Zenon, Olexo… and him. Kytheon Iora of Akros.

“Gods,” Gideon choked out, throat constricting. Tears spilled forth as Gideon stared at the carvings telling the story of his friends.

Behind him, Gideon heard Hagne turn and walk away as he pressed his head against the cold marble of his own tomb and, for the first time since he opened his eyes on Bant, allowed himself to sob for the death of his Irregulars.

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby sat in the back of a cart, the sword wrapped in an enchanted cloth in front of her as night fell. Looking up, Ruby’s grip on the hilt grew harder.

Around the night sky were giant men and women. Most human, but one merfolk, minotaur, centaur-thing and one four armed thing that could only be identified by the clouds that made up its body and the stars that followed it as it moved.

A peel of thunder roared across the sky as one, a deeply tanned man with a bronze beard, strode across it to speak to a green skinned woman. For a moment, a cloud cast his face into shadows, causing stars to appear across it and one particularly bright one appeared where his eyes should have been.
“Koth?” Ruby asked.

“Yes?”

“Is it just me… or does that one look like he’s watching us?”

Koth turned around so he could see ‘that one’, “He does.”

‘That one’ turned, staring right down at them… and nodded, a crash of thunder accompanying it. Ruby's grip on the blade became so tight her hand grew pale.

“Wonder what that was about,” the cart owner said, “I don't remember any story like that about Keranos and Nylea.”

“The god of lightning and goddess of the hunt,” Ruby said quietly at Koth’s questioning look. The Vulshok nodded, but didn't say anything.

“I’ve got to say,” the leader of the caravan said, “You two are a steal. Most mages aren't willing to work for anything less than an arm and a leg, what with you wielding the divine gift of the gods. You're working for half of what we’d normally pay for a brute holding a sword.”

“We needed to get to Meletis,” Ruby said, “You’re going there.”

“Still, it’s probably the best damn deal I’ve ever gotten! Starting to get too dark to see, we should probably stop for the night.”

The caravan turned off the road, coiling up around the soon to be made camp. Hoping off the wagon, Ruby nodded to Koth, “Me and Koth will take the first watch.”

Koth nodded, running a hand over the spikes of metal, or, as everyone but Ruby saw it, the slicked back mess of black hair. Ruby turned, walking away and knowing she didn't look anything like herself.
Illusions rocked.

“Ruby,” Koth said quietly, “I have a question for you.”

“What’s up?” Ruby asked, picking at her Innistrad coat, and silently mourning her red hoodie, as she watched the night sky. Keranos was on the move again, walking towards the centaur with thunderous strides.

“How powerful a bomb can you make?”

A certain image flashed through Ruby's mind before she brutally crushed it, “Really strong. Why?”

“I have a plan,” Koth said, “We’ve been looking at this all wrong.”

“This?”

“The fight against the Phyrexians,” Koth clarified.

“What's your idea?”

“We have to do something insane,” Koth said, “We cannot win this fight if we don't. Karn hasn't returned since he left, Ezuri has been compleated, Urabrask is missing... we can't hold out much longer, the way things are.”

“We can stop them,” Ruby said, staring at the Mirrian symbol on her hand, “We have to stop them.”

“I know,” Koth said with a nod, “That's where the insanity comes in. I want to attack the Progress Engine.”

Ruby stared at Koth for a long moment, brain frozen, “What ?!”
“I know,” Koth said, “but it’s our only hope. It’s the biggest center for completion, has the most Phyrexians after the destruction of the Furnace and where almost all research goes on. If we can take out the Engine, take out Gitaxias—"

“...It’d cripple them,” Ruby said softly, a hundred of twisted designs ripping through her head as her grip on the blade grew so tight that it groaned, “at least for a bit.”

“Then we assault,” Koth continued, “Presumably, the domain of the remaining Seven. With those two gone, we’ll have the surface free. Then we take the fight to the next layer. Fight Vorinclex and Glissa. With them taken out, all we’d have left is Norn.”

“Assuming this works,” Ruby said, “and there’s a really good chance it won’t.”

“The same could be said for deicide, but look where we are. Can you do it, build bombs like that?”

“Yeah,” Ruby said hand flexing, “but I’d prefer to take out Gitaxias face to face. I want to make sure he’s dead and stays that way.”

It was the only way to be sure.

“If the mission allows,” Koth said, “I don’t want to ris—"

Whatever he said at the end of the sentence was cut off with the loudest burst of thunder yet, as Keranos manifested a bolt of lightning and launched into the distance, obviously arguing with the centaur.

--- X Keranos X---

“I did not take you for a fool, Iroas,” Keranos rumbled, crossing his arm.

“...I am the fool? What you are suggesting—"

“Is self preservation,” Keranos cut Iroas off, “Something Heliod lacks, as do you if you truly
believe backing him is the wise thing to do.”

“She is one girl!”

“One girl who will not stop until Heliod is dead,” Keranos said, “allow me to walk you through how we even got into the position.”

“Very well,” Iroas said, eyes hardening slightly.

“Heliod discovers that there are other worlds,” Keranos started, “and that his champion, alongside the usurper, can and has traveled to these worlds. That, in all likelihood, the spell the usurper used came from another world. The girl is loyal, has not turned against us even after he condemned her. But Heliod throws a tantrum and kills her. Not considering that she might have friends on other worlds who, upon discovering this, would attempt to find a way to kill gods from one of these other worlds and use it to avenge her. And now, to the lack of surprise of anyone with half a brain, that is exactly what happened!”

Keranos closed his eyes, breathing through his nose as thunder rumbled. Opening his eyes, he met Iroas’s through the centaur’s helm as Iroas started to speak, “But that doesn't mean-!”

“What? That we should turn against him? Humanity is losing faith in us, something that is, once again, Heliod’s fault for not just letting the leonin rant and interceding, soon we will grow weak. If we stand against Heliod, with them we can use it as leverage to regain worshippers.”

“But if they fail-”

“Then we die,” Keranos finished, “I am aware. But the same could happen if we stand with Heliod. I don't like saying it, but Nylea and Thassa, at least, agrees with me on this. We must risk everything if we wish to have any chance to survive.”

“I…” Iroas, “I will have to think on this.”

“Very well,” Keranos said, turning and walking towards Athreos.
Blake held onto the horse reins as tightly as possible… even if they were just for show. Gideon had created them, reasoning that it would be a lot easier to have horses that didn't actually tire out.

Which raised its own army of questions about Gideon, Kytheon, whatever.

Blake urged her horse closer to Sun, leaning over, “What do you think about this?”

“About Ruby?” at Blake's nod, he continued, “I wish she had just told us. She keeps trying to deal with these things herself when she has us.”

“Sun!”

“What? I’d help Ruby.”

“But, but- this is the exact thing the Gatewatch was founded for!”

“So?”

“So- Sun!”

“What?” Sun shot back, “Blake, you know I never actually took an oath, right?”

Blake’s jaw fell open, “What?”

“I never took an oath,” Sun said, “Look, I love you guys now, but I only wanted to stay with Ruby. That’s still what I want. If I have to choose between you guys and the multiverse, I’m gonna choose you. If Ruby wants to go on a warpath against Heliod, I’m gonna be right there with her.”

“But- but-"
“Here’s a better argument,” both jumped as Nahiri’s voice, “how far is she willing to take it?”

“What do you mean?”

“How many people do you think died because I wanted revenge? How many are still dying?”

“I-"

“A lot,” Nahiri said, “That’s why I’m here, Ruby stopped me from making my mistake worse, now I’m going to stop her from making the same mistake at all.”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby’s grip on the sword grew steadily tighter as they approached Meletis, her eyes trained constantly towards the skies. The red and black gems embedded in the guard glowed, energy coiling around her hand.

By the time Meletis was visible on the horizon, Ruby was prepared for damn near anything.

Well, damn near anything but a new spark roaring into existence in the distance. Which, considering how nothing Ruby had done since her ignition could be remotely classified as ‘easy’, made all the sense in the world.

Ruby idly wondered if people who ignited latched onto the nearest spark as a beacon through the Eternities as she tried to figure out what to do. The obvious answer was immediately rush off to find the new Planeswalker.

But she was sure the rest of the Gatewatch would have the exact same plan. Ignitions were disorienting at the absolute best of times, but those were rare cases. In all likelihood, there was a scared Planeswalker, currently adjusting to the influx of senses that Igniting triggered. Perhaps even more if they hadn't been a mage beforehand, and had awakened an ability.
Ruby’s grip on the pistol holding her anti-magic bullets grew tight, drawing her attention to the fact that she had summoned it. There was also always the chance that they had Walked right into a pack of lions or something. They’d get mauled before Sun got there.

And if the booming roar of thunder in the distance was any sign, Sun would be there.

Ruby sighed, adjusting the sword so she could hold it more comfortably, and launched herself forward, petals the only sign of where she had been. With each step, the roaring beacon of mana was condensing, infusing the Planeswalker’s body, elevating it to a level near that of an Archmage…

Without any control over it. A Planeswalker with unknown abilities and mana to spare was a ticking time bomb. Ruby's vision shifted as she tore through the plane, watching the mana prowling around the new Planeswalker. Enchantments- no, creatures- no, both.

Nyxborn.

Well, no time like the present to test out the sword, Ruby decided as she grabbed the hilt. The cloth around the blade unraveled as she swung for the first wolf, the black blade drinking in light as it hit the Nyxborn.

The result was less like a knife through butter, and more like one through fog. The creature had just enough time to let out a confused whimper before it faded into a mist of green mana that was eaten by the sword. Ruby span on her heel, slashing through another three just as easily.

The last three turned, rushing away as quickly as the could. Ruby resealed the sword, crouching down next to the boy and turning him over.

He was around Sun’s age, with brown hair except for a streak of teal in it, and had a pair of goggles pushed up onto his head. He was wearing a heavy coat with fur around the hood, a red scarf, and pants with one leg rolled up. Next to him was a staff with a pair of shattered bottles hanging from it.

His blue eyes flickered open as he looked up to her, “Wha- who are you? Why's it so warm?”

--- X Varian X ---
Varian jumped across the ice flows, hissing as the one he landed on tilted and sent his leg sliding into the cold water. Digging his staff into the ground, the young alchemist clawed his way back onto the ice and flopped down, panting.

Dang it. He couldn't stop, not now. He had to get back to his home, if the castle wouldn't help, he had to save his dad himself.

Somehow.

Varian stood, using his staff to stand as he leg locked up from the cold. Carefully, he navigates his way back to the mainland, squinting against the storm.

Slowly, Varian made it to his home, opening the front door and sliding inside as he leaned against the wall. Leaning down, he rolled up a pant leg and breathed in. Walking into his lab, Varian started to speak, “It's going to be alright dad, I shou-”

Varian’s voice died as he stared at the amber stone encasing his father, incapable of finishing the sentence. Walking over, Varian reached up, placing his hand on the stone over his father's head.

Then he closed it, punching the stone and causing his hand to let out a nasty crack. This was their fault. They were living in a castle, Cass and Eugene and… they were living in the castle while he worked to figure out these stupid spikes and now his father was trapped because of it.

“I’ll get them for this,” Varian said, feeling like he was speaking through something thicker than air, “I’ll make them pay, I’ll save you dad-”

Varian staggered back as the air around him span and glowed several colors, Black and Red and Blue. The air around him crackled and popped, before he was suddenly knocked back, his head crashing into the ground and everything went black.

When he woke up, there was a brown haired girl wearing a red cloak over a black coat with one of the biggest swords Varian had ever seen standing over him. Varian opened and closed his mouth a couple of times, “Wha- who are you? Why's it so warm?”
Sun’s head snapped up as a familiar burst of Mana washed over the group of planeswalkers, causing them all to pause. Finally, Gideon spoke, “Sun, can you…?”

Sun wanted to refuse, to insist that they had to catch up to Ruby… before it dawned on him that this would let him catch up to Ruby. Snapping his mouth shut, Sun nodded, slid off his horse and raised his hand towards the sky.

A familiar nova of heat roared down, smashing into Sun’s hand. Absorbing the red mana, Sun tensed, before launching off at a breakneck sprint.

Ruby watched the boy stagger to his feet, summoning the revolver loaded with anti-magic bullets and quietly checking to make sure it was loaded. Just to be safe.

For every Ruby, there was a Tezzeret, for every Sun, a Tibalt, for every Blake a… a…

Well, Ruby hadn't met anyone she could easily compare Blake to. She just hoped it wasn't the boy in front of her.

“I’m, where am I?” he asked again.

Ruby yawned, rubbing at her eyes and forcibly cycling White mana through her body to stave off the exhaustion, “You already asked that.”

The boy apparently remembered he wasn't alone then, spinning in place to look at Ruby, “Uh… hi?”

“Hello,” Ruby nodded, trying to give a calming smile. In the back of her mind, the memory of Gideon leaping between her and an Eldrazi on Zendikar, his sural twisting and twirling in golden light. Best to replicate that, she supposed, “I’m Ruby. What's your name?”
“Don't say it like that!” the boy said, raising his voice.

“Like what?”

“Like I’m some sort of… of… child! You're younger than I am!”

And had probably done more in that time. Compared to Ruby, he was a child, “Well, you don't have to rude!”

“Rude!? You're the one who- what the-?”

Ruby stumbled slightly at the displaced air, while the new Planeswalker fell down on his backside, “Hey, Sun.”

“Yo!” the faunus waved cheerfully, lightning arcing from his fingertips, “Man, Rubes, you need to stop running off without telling me!”

“I didn't want to be followed,” Ruby said bitterly.

“Sure you didn't.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I’m just sayin’ that running off in the middle of the night is the best way to have people follow you I’ve ever heard of,” Sun shrugged, before turning towards the planeswalker, “So, who’s the new kid?”

“I’m the same age as you!” the new kid protested.

“Welcome to the multiverse man,” Sun shot back, “You just stepped through the door, so you're the new kid.”
“It’s more of a tunnel,” Ruby mused, “or a set of paths.”

“Philosophize later,” Sun waved his hand, “Anyways, I’m Sun, how much did Ruby fill you in… uh…?”

“Varian,” he said, “Nothing at all. Multiverse?”

“Yeah,” Sun said, waving his hand, “Listen, the crash course is this. You’re a Planeswalker, one of the lucky sons of guns who can cross through the Blind Eternities and jump from one world to another. It comes with a couple of nice perks, like, you know, say you get into trouble with the law on one Plan-”


“That's because we're are ,” Ruby said, “Like, a super rare.”

“Yeah, right,” Varian scoffed, “You're-”

Sun let out a tired sigh, planting his hand on Varian’s shoulder and causing them both to vanish in a shimmer. Ruby turned, booking it away from the spot. Sun had Varian, time for her to get back to Koth!

--- X Varian X---

Varian staggered back, sinking into the surprisingly comfortable couch he had suddenly appeared in front of. Looking around, the alchemist felt his jaw drop. This room was bigger than his house! “What?”

“Still think we’re insane?” Sun asked, walking over to a door and yanking it open, “Lils!”

There was a yell back, too distant for Varian to hear, but apparently not for Sun, “Long story, get over here!”
Another yell, after which Sun turned to Varian, “Sorry, she’ll be right here.”

“Right,” Varian said, carefully sitting up and looking around. A variety of toys and books were strewn across the room, “Where are we?”

“Gatewatch HQ,” Sun said, falling into the couch opposite Varian, “Remnant.”

“I have no id-” Varian stopped with a jump as the door slammed open, freezing and staring at the woman who stepped inside.

She was wearing a royal purple dress with long gloves around her arms and a choker around her neck. Somehow, in spite of all that, she was still revealing more skin than Varian had ever seen on a girl, “what?”

“We’re dealing with something,” Sun said, “gotta get back to it, deal with the new guy!”

“Wai-!” before she could finish, Sun disappeared, leaving the disgruntled woman to turn to Varian, “and you are?

--- X Liliana X---

Liliana examined the boy, stalking around him and resisting the urge to smirk as his eyes flickered lower. She still had it!

“Yes,” Liliana closed her eyes and sucked a breath through her nose as the familiar voice of the Raven Man came from behind her, “Your ability to be attractive to young men never ceases to amaze.”

Liliana dutifully ignored the man behind her, instead focusing on the boy, “Well?”

“I’m worried for you, Liliana,” the Raven Man continued, “You claim to have joined this group for their assistance, yet you voted against traveled to Amonkhet.”
“Well?” Liliana urged the boy, resisting the urge to gnash her teeth in response to the Raven Man’s questions. Why *had* she done that? What did it matter to her if the Gatewatch died?

“I’m- I’m Varian,” he said, holding out his hand. When Liliana gave it a nonplussed look for a moment, he lowered it uncomfortably, “He, uh, he called you Lils?”

“Liliana,” the necromancer said as firmly as possible, studying the boy. What the hell did Sun even want her to do? Take care of him? She wasn’t some sort of nan-

Liliana blinked as it dawned on her that they had literally *handed* her a child. It was just her and Garad in the house…

She could use this.

“So,” Liliana sat down across from Varian, crossing her legs and doing her best to give a disarming smile, “Varian. Sun called you ‘the new guy’. I take it that you’ve only recently Ignited?”

“Ignited?” Varian asked in turn.

“Ascended? Awakened? Sparked?” Liliana recited, and as Varian continued to look confused, reached out and planted one hand on his knee in a show of pity, “You poor thing! They didn't explain anything to you, did they?”

“They said I was a Planeswalker?” Varian offered, “Are you…”?

“Yes,” Liliana said as kindly as possible, “Except for Garad, our manservant, everyone who lives here is a Planeswalker. You're among your own kind now. Do you want me to explain this to you?’

To Liliana’s slight annoyance, Varian nodded, “Yes please. They didn’t tell me anything.”

“Well then,” Liliana said, taking comfort in that this would at least make Varian trust her more… and the Raven Man’s noise of disgust as he disappeared, “Let's start at the heart of the matter. The
Chandra sat up with a yawn, looking at the door to her room with bleary eyes, “Wuzzit?”

“One of your friends is here, ma’am,” the still unfamiliar voice of one of the house’s staff said.

“Oh,” Chandra said, “Tell them I’ll be out in a few?”

“Of course,” he said, followed by the sound of footsteps getting more distant.

Chandra climbed out of bed, looking around the room in the Consul of Allocation (Read: Pia Nalaar)’s manor she was staying in and grabbed a pair of pants hanging from one bed post. Halfway through yanking them on, another knock came from the door, “What?”

“Would you happen to know where Miss Revane i-?”

“Garden!” Chandra grunted, grabbing a shirt and pulling it on.

“Ah,” the voice said, “I had thought she might... ah…”

Chandra rolled her eyes as the man left again, focusing on the spark downstairs. What was Sun doing here?

Pulling on her goggles as she opened the door, Chandra thundered downstairs, swinging off the banister and into the room Sun was sitting in, “What's up, Kiddo?”

“I kinda need you and Nissa’s help,” Sun said, “I’ll explain when she's here, it’s kinda complicated.”
“Alright?” Chandra said, sitting down across from Sun, “Where's Blake and Ruby?”

“Part of the complicatedness,” Sun sighed.

“Ok?” Chandra said, “How’s Remnant?”

“Nice,” Sun said with a shrug, “We went down to Menagerie for a bit.”

“Sun?” Nissa asked, entering the room, “What's wrong?”

“What makes you think something’s wrong?”

“You wouldn't be here alone if something wasn't,” Nissa observed, “You and the girls are almost never this far apart.”

“Ruby’s,” Sun breathed in, “Ruby's in trouble, I need your help.”

“What do you mean?” Chandra asked, sitting up straighter, “What's wrong? Why can't Gids or someone…?”

“Ruby's gone after Heliod,” Sun explained, “You know, the guy who killed her friend Elspeth? Gideon and the others want to stop her, but… well, I don't think we should.”

“You don't?” Nissa questioned.

“No,” Sun shrugged again, “Listen, I know we’re supposed to deal with threats to the Multiverse, but what about threats to Planeswalkers? Ajani said that was all it took for that guy to kill her. Who's to say he wouldn't do the same to other people?”

“He’s got a point,” Chandra said, “Think about Baral. He would have killed any of you for being mages.”
Nissa nodded, “So you want us to help convince Gideon?”

“Nah,” Sun said, “Gids is a bit too pig headed. I want you to help me help Ruby do it.”

Chandra nodded, “Ok.”

“Chandra!” Nissa said.

“What?” Chandra turned to Nissa, “Sun’s right. Why do we have to just sit by and let someone kill Planeswalkers? Listen, you don't have to come, but I’m going.”

“I-” Nissa sighed, “Fine. I’ll help for now.”

Chapter End Notes

Yep, I FUCKING went there! We got our first non-RWBY or MTG, and it’s from the last goddamn thing anyone expected!

OK, more seriously, this fic was always supposed to slip into multi-cross territory. It’s already been alluded to that Sun visited Mahora Academy in between Zendikar and Innistrad, and I have plans for a few others. Here enters Varian, Ruby’s foil.

Thoughts? Good? Bad? Meh?
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Sun confronts an old fear, Varian begins down his path.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sun stepped from the Blind Eternities, feeling Chandra and Nissa appear right behind him. Before they could do anything, a man with slicked black hair turned towards them from the fire, “Come out here.”

Sun carefully stepped out of the shadows, stepping towards him, “Hey. I’m looking for a friend of mine…”

“Then you’re probably in the wrong place,” the man rumbled, “People like us don't tend to stay in the wilds. Not when there is countless other places to stay.”

“Yeah, well,” Sun said, “She can be kinda stubborn…”

“That is a trait many of us also have,” the man said, “I suppose if we weren't too stubborn to lie down and die, we wouldn't survive past the first Walk.”

Sun sighed in irritation, running a hand over his face, “Damn it, ok, look, do you know where Ruby Rose is or not? Because if you don’t, it was nice talking to ya, but we need to go look for her and figure out why our mana radar isn't working rig-”

“I get the point,” the man cut Sun off, “To answer your question, I do know. Why do you want to know?”

“You know, she decided to do something dumb, didn't tell anyone, so now I’m here to do that dumb thing with her,” Sun said with a shrug.

“…Very well. I’ll go wake her,” the man said, standing up and walking over to a black bundle and
shaking it, “Ruby!”

Nothing. No knife, no gun and no movement.

Crap on a cracker.

“Rubes?” Sun asked, making his way to Ruby and reaching out to touch her arm, shaking her and feeling hysteria quickly mount as Ruby remained dead to the world, “Hey, c’mon. This isn't funny, Ruby. Wake up! Nissa!”

I’ll do my best,” Nissa said, placing her hands on either side of Ruby's head as she folded her legs under herself.

“Hey, guys,” Chandra said, back turned, “is it just me, or has it gotten real foggy all of a sudden?”

The fire that the man had been sitting next to flared at Chandra's words, casting light about twenty feet before it hit a wall of incredibly thick black fog and was immediately swallowed up. Sun immediately reached for one of his guns, breathing in as something began skittering out of the fog.

Its legs were covered by a ragged half robe, stopping slightly above a long metal spine laced with cables. The spine extended until the thing towered over them before disappearing into the spike ridged chest.

Its arms stretched out until they were almost scraping the floor, the fingers so long they looked like hooked blades instead. The triangular, eyeless head swiveled towards them, the jaws that ended in a sharp point splitting open, green goo stretching between the flat teeth within and it spoke in a voice that sounded like nails on a chalkboard, “Interesting…”

“What the fuck?” Chandra yelped, hair ignited at the thing took another skittering step forward, “What is that thing?”

“What isn't real,” the man said, walking towards it, “it can't be-”

Two more creatures stepped from the fog, giant masses of blue goop wearing brown cloaks and
brandishing all too many needles for Sun’s liking. Before they could do anything, the ground underneath the three creatures melted into lava, sending the metal sinking into it. After a second, the magma cooled with a strange plop, and the man grunted, “Definitely not real. That wouldn't have worked if they were.”

“Then what was it?” Chandra asked, swinging an arm and creating a barrier of fire against the fog. Behind them, Ruby let out a whimper in Nissa’s hands.

“Some form of mind magic,” the Animist said, “looking for… fears? I’m sorry, this is more Jace's alley.”

“It's fine,” Sun said, “we know there was something rooting around in Ruby's head. We'll figure it out the rest of the way later.”

“But-”

“That fog isn't gonna let us pass,” Sun said, sitting down and lacing his fingers with Ruby, “We’ll wait for morning, if it’s still there then, we’ll know more about it and can deal with it.”

“How?”

“Planeswalk.”

“…That's so simple I hadn't thought of it,” Chandra admitted, “fine, until morning. But I don't like being stuck here.”

“I don't think any of us like it,” Sun said.

--- X Varian X---

“So, what type of…” Varian hesitated, barely hiding his scoff as he continued, “magic do you use?”
“Why do you say it like that?” Liliana asked from where she was lounging on a couch.

“Magic isn't something that's supposed to be real,” Varian said dismissively, “It's just something people use to explain things they don't understand.”

“That's a very simple view of magic,” Liliana said, “and one almost completely wrong.”

“Oh, yeah? Then what's your definition?”

Liliana heaved a sigh, raising a finger, “Magic is the manipulation of mana to achieve a desired effect. The specifics ultimately fall upon the magic user, and the type of mana being used. While a peasant might decide that a random outbreak of illness is ‘magic’, an actual mage will have known exactly what they were trying to do.”

“So,” Varian said, carefully, “What you're saying is that it's a form of science? I could run tests and get results?”

“If you wanted to,” Liliana said, “Are you hungry?”

“Uh…” Varian trailed off at the sudden change of subject, “Yeah?”

“ Anything in particular?” Liliana asked.

“Like pottage? Varian asked.

“Why would you want to eat that gruel?” Liliana scoffed, sitting up, “Come on, I’m hungry and there's a Mistralan restaurant in town.”

“There's a town? How far?”

“Four or five miles,” Liliana said as if that wasn't something to be worried about, opening the door, “We’ll take my car.”
“Isn’t that a bit far for a—what is that?” Varian cut himself off, jumping back as a pallid man shuffled by, carrying a box.

“One of my undead,” Liliana said, “they make things get done much quicker.”

“Undead?”

“Yes,” Liliana said, “I’m what’s known as a necromancer. And before you ask, no that is not synonymous with necrophiliac,” the dry way she said that gave Varian the feeling she had that conversation before, “A necromancer is a practitioner of death magic.”

“Oh,” Varian said, leaning away from Liliana, “What, uh, what made you to decide and use that?”

“It’s a very useful school,” Liliana said, “Beyond the reanimation of corpses, it makes ending threats almost pitifully easy. I’ll show you, at some point. You do need to learn magic.”

“And I can learn that through studying things?” Varian asked, sliding into the metal contraption Liliana had guided them to.

“Of course,” Liliana said, grabbed a belt and clipping it into something before helping Varian do the same, “Anatomy is all but vital.”

“That makes se—” whatever Varian had been in the midst of saying fled his mind as they suddenly began moving forward at high speeds.

--- X Sun X---

It was, ultimately, Sun who was the last to succumb to the lure of sleep, watching the additions of Baral, Eldrazi spawn and more Phyrexians prowl around the fog. After a while, there was the crunch of feet on the ground from behind him. Whirling, Sun drew one gun, leveling it at the newest creation and then sighing, “Yeah, figures it would be you.”
“Oh?” the young looking girl standing in front of Sun said with a grin, “You don't seem scared, kid.”

“You're not actually her,” Sun said as calmly as he could, “So I don't need to worry.”

“You sure about that?” the vampire’s blue eyes flashed red, “If I’m not her, what am-?”

“Some mage’s half assed attempt to fuck with my head,” Sun said, cutting her off.

“Exactly,” the vampire continued, “I’m not her, what I am is a manifestation of what you think Evangeline McDowell would be like. You have no idea what I can do.”

“Good point,” Sun said, and promptly pulled the trigger on Ruyi Bang. The vampire's head exploded in a burst of black fog before the body collapsed in on itself, fading away.

“Impressive,” Sun whipped around, cocking his gun as he went before a fist clocked him right between the eyes with unexpected force. Sun rolled away from the cause of the strike, “You didn't even hesitate to kill me.”

Sun pushed himself up, trying to draw two more of his guns only for them to be blasted away by two spikes of ice, “Damnit…”

“Come now,” the fake Evangeline said, striding forward and running a hand through her blond hair, “There's no reason to be like that. We were having such a nice chat.”

“Am I supposed to be laughing?” Sun asked, hesitating from pulling out his last shotgun as Evangeline manifested a icy spear.

“No,” Evangeline said, strolling towards the cinders of their fire and delivering a kick that ended it, plunging the area into complete darkness. Sun tensed, watching for the vampire.

“It takes more than turning out the light to scare me.”
“Then let's talk. How does it feel? To have feelings for two separate women and neither of them are interested in you… because they're interested in each other?”

“Great,” Sun said, “You're gonna be rummaging around in my head this whole fight, aren't you? I don't care, so long as Ruby and Blake are ha-”

“You're not being honest,” Evangeline’s voice came from next to his ear, sending Sun spinning to look for the ten year old immortal, “It hurts, doesn't it? You stood by Ruby, did everything you could to help her in Vacuo and the Blake comes along and sweeps it all away.”

“Stop acting like I’m entitled to her or something,” Sun growled, “She's her own person. If she loves Blake, she loves Bla-”

“What if I told you she did have feelings for you?” Evangeline said with a mocking laugh, “It's buried deep, under all the trauma and nightmares. She does love yo-”

“Is this really how petty your creator is?” Sun said, ignoring the slight swelling of hope, “He’s trying to create some sort of love triangle to divide us? Because you're gonna need better ammo than that.”

“Very well then,” Evangeline’s voice said with a chilling calm, “We’ll see how long you last. Let's start with…”

Sun’s heart plummeted as Ruby’s voice let out a high pitched scream as there was the noise of something wet tearing. Seconds later, a disembodied sliver eye landed close enough for Sun to see.

The blood rushed to Sun’s head, a roaring in his ears. That fucking *bitch*.

Sun raised his hand, mentally reciting the step in his head as six bolts of lightning struck his hand and condensed into a ball. Fixate and stagnate.

Sun felt the lightning roar through his body and Aura, strengthening it and ripping it apart at the same time. Load magic and arm.
Sun moved as quickly as he could, already feeling his Aura dropping. Evangeline had enough time to look up from where she was removing something from Ruby's torso before Sun ran her through with a knife hand to the chest, feeling several bones in his hand break with an audible crack.

“So you copied that, did ya?” Evangeline whispered, chest collapsing to smoke, “It's not anywhere as good as the real version.”

“I know,” Sun said, before swinging the arm in Evangeline to the side, tearing through the fake ribcage like paper as he felt a slight build up of blood in his mouth, dispersing his magic and reaching down to grab Ruby with his good hand.

Or rather, he would have, if she didn't dissolve into smoke immediately after. Sun stared at it, before turning to see Ruby lying there unhurt, still slightly cradled by Nissa.

“When I get my hands on that son of a bitch,” Sun muttered to himself before vomiting up some blood, “I'm gonna beat the everloving shit outta them.”

Then Sun spat out another mouthful of blood, watching the ground sway, “Ah, damn…”

Sun had just enough sense remaining to collapse onto his side, just in case more came up, before he blacked out from a combination of the pain and internal injuries.

--- X Varian X---

Varian staggered out of the vehicle with a groan, covering his mouth in an attempt to keep from vomiting, “That's… ugh.”

“It's something you get used to,” Liliana said, “Convenient, isn't it?”

“I guess,” Varian said, “How much farther?”

“We’re here,” Liliana said.
Varian stopped, silently doing the math to compare how long they had been in the vehicle (not long) with the distance Liliana said, “How fast can that thing go?”

“I’ve never tested it.”

“Gonna need to do that,” Varian muttered, following Liliana into brick building. A woman around Cass-

Varian hid the pained growl at that thought. Talking to Liliana about… well, everything had put his thoughts away from what had happened before he got here.

The woman looked up, giving a polite smile, “Oh! Miss Vess! It’s good to see you. Rumor had it you were on a business trip!”

“I was,” Liliana said, “I got back a week ago, but was busy dealing with things at the manor. There were rotten mangos, among other things.”

“Oh,” the woman said, “That’s… hmm. don't you have a live-in butler? Wouldn't he have dealt with it?”

“Gared was on vacation,” Liliana said, waving her hand, “It's fine now.”

“Yes, of course,” the woman nodded, a small piece of- what was that? It didn't look like anything natural- labeled with the word Agni visible as she stood up, a white shirt of another material he didn't recognize tucked into black pants that (guess what?) he still didn't know what they were made of.

Wherever this ‘Plane’ was, there was one thing for sure. They were a thousand times more advanced than the day to day life of someone in Corona.

“Just the two of us today,” Liliana said, waving a hand towards Varian, “Jace is busy catching up on his work, unfortunately.”

“Oh? Who’s this?”
“My nephew,” Liliana continued without missing a beat, “He’s going to be staying with us this summer.”

“I didn't know you had any siblings.”

“Just the one,” Liliana said, following Agni to a table, sitting down on one side and gesturing for Varian to do the same. Taking a pair of sheets from Agni, Liliana nodded to her, a clear dismissal and handed one to Varian.

Varian looked down, studying the list, “What-?”

“Menus,” Liliana said, “You pick something, they cook it and bring it to you. Convenient, isn't it?”

“Yeah,” Varian said, “What would you recommend?”

“Do you want me to just order for you? Just this once?”

“Sure.”

“Go- Oh, hello.”

“Hello, Liliana,” A voice with forced calm said, “I didn't know you were back?”

“Yes… what's your name? Ceryl?”

“Ciara,” she said, “Where's the rest of your little group?”

“Vacation,” Liliana said, not really paying attention, “What are you doing here?”
“Pickup,” Ciara said, “Who’s this?”

“Varian,” the boy said, turning to the woman with a black braid, “I’m staying with… Aunt Liliana for the summer.”

“His father felt it would be good for him to see Vale,” Liliana said.

“So he decided to trust you around his child?”

“Are you implying something?”

“I’m just surprised anyone is willing to trust you with their children,” Ciara said, voice cold.

“What have I done to offend you?” Liliana deflected.

“I-“ Ciara growled, turning and walking back towards the front of the building.

Liliana snorted, lacing her fingers, “Now, why don't you tell me about yourself? It's easiest to figure out where to go magically from there.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the shortness of this chapter, I’m busy working on some other stuff.

Thoughts? Good? Bad? Meh? I’m especially curious about people’s opinion on "Evangline" (who I’m aware is out of character, which is deliberate)
Blake took an irritated breath in, stomping her foot, “That idiot!”

“In hindsight,” Gideon said, “We probably should have seen that one coming.”

“Why are they doing this?” Blake demanded, clutching her hair and pacing, “We’re- how does killing a god help anyone?”

“I suppose it depends on the god,” Nahiri said.

“But they're- they're-!”

“Looking at this from a personal perspective,” Gideon said, “Heliod killed someone Ruby cared about. She's not thinking in the right mind.”

“Then what about Sun? Or Nissa? Or Chandra?”

“Chandra went after Baral on Kaladesh,” Gideon pointed out, “and Nissa went to help her. As did you.”

“That was different,” Blake argued, “Baral was taunting her and wanted us ALL dead. Heliod’s just-”

“.Minding his own business?” a familiar, accented voice said, causing Blake to jump and turn with a hiss.

“What are you doing here?” Blake asked.

“I did not take you for a fool, Blake,” Sorin Markov said, “and would sorely hope that you don’t
think the same of I. I keep a close eye on my domain these days. Not that I needed to, a blind and
deaf man would be capable of noticing what Ruby did in Thraben. I've been stalking you since you
left Remnant.”

“Would that really matter?” Nahiri asked, “it was a magical ritual. So long as they could still sense Ma-”

“-the point being I was curious what she was doing to require so much mana,” Sorin said, “I was,
at first, surprising to find her forging a weapon that could so easily be used for evil, but, in
hindsight, it isn't *too* surprising. That girl is capable of terrifying things when pressed.”

“Like?” Blake asked.

“When I created Avacyn,” Sorin said, “I bound her to Innistrad’s leylines. An enchantment so
powerful it left me weak for years after-”

“That’s a jab at me, isn't it?” Nahiri snarked from her place against a tree.

“-the greater the danger,” Sorin continued without acknowledging Nahiri’s question at all, “the
stronger she would become,” Sorin's lips quirked, “Nahiri exploited that to her benefit. Avacyn was
becoming stronger because of the danger to Innistrad, but *she* herself was the danger. Incredibly
intelligent, if I may say so.”

“Thanks,” Nahiri said, “but what's that got to do with-?”

“So how was it?” Sorin asked, “that a little girl was capable of defeating her that day? Avacyn was
at the height of her power, so Ruby should not have been able to even scratch her.”

“This is a rhetorical question, isn't it?” Ajani rumbled.

“Indeed,” Sorin said, “the only injuries Ruby suffered over the course of that fight was self
inflicted, and Avacyn, well…”

“Sun turned it into a verb,” Blake said dryly, “Apparently ‘to Avacyn’ someone means to beat
someone until they lose an eye.”

Silence fell across the air as Nahiri, Gideon and Ajani started at her. They hadn't known?

Sorin chuckled, “That's actually quite funny. But yes, Ruby should not have been capable of rendering Avacyn in such a state. Which leads to my point. Somehow, through means I am still uncertain of, Ruby usurped the enchantment. During their fight, Ruby was the one empowered by the prayers of every man, woman and child that Avacyn had terrorized. When Ruby is sufficiently enraged, she is capable of doing things that worry even me.”

“So what you're saying is,” Ajani said, “that Ruby’s actually likely to slay Heliod if we don't stop her?”

“Unless we can find something to appease her, is more likely,” Sorin said, another smirk rising, “Luckily, I have a plan. One that will require your help.”

“Why?”

“Because we need to acquire the one thing on this Plane that could possibly halt Ruby,” Sorin said, “Come, I have a… reluctant ally… waiting for us…”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby sat up with a yawn, looking around.

Koth, Nissa, Chandra, Sun collapsed on his side, a puddle of blood next to his mouth and a pulped arm-

Wait. Chandra and Nissa?

SUN?
Ruby scrambled over to Sun, foot digging into the dew soaked ground and rolling him over, “No, no, no, NO! What did you do? Nissa! NISSA!”

Ruby let loose a sigh of relief as she found a pulse, letting Chandra pull her away as Nissa moved to Sun's side. Green Mana rose and wrapped around his chest as the glow in Nissa's eyes grew so pronounced as to make them beacons. The mana sank into his chest, traveling through his veins like the roots of the tree as Nissa tutted, “This is… dear me…”

“Is he alright?”

“He'll be fine,” Nissa said, “I'm just… what would cause him to use that technique of his to such an extent? I've never seen him injure himself so much…”

Ruby watched as Sun's arm spasmed, cracks echoing from it until finally, the Faunus’s eyes opened, “Oww… What's-? RUBY!”

“What's wrong?” Ruby asked, dodging from under Chandra's arm.

“You're… fine?” Sun wheezed.

“I'm fine?” Ruby asked, a hysterical laugh rising up, “I'm fine? Sun, you're the one lying next to a puddle of your own blood!”

“But you're alright, right?” Sun asked, “Your eyes?”

What the-? “I'm fine, Sun.”

“Worth it,” Sun wheezed, “So, so worth it.”

“That's- Sun you're hurt,” Ruby reached out gripping his hand, “That's not-”
“I’d happily take a lot worse than some burn out if it means you’re safe,” Sun shot back.

“I-”

“How about you two have that argument on the cart,” Koth said.

“Yeah,” Ruby said, stepping to the side and letting Koth carry Sun onto the cart, moving Sun so he was resting on her as Nissa joined them to continue the healing. Muttering a few words, Ruby rewrote the memories of the other caravan members so they remembered new additions.

Ruby focused on the city in the distance, trying to ignore the fear still sitting as a question rose up that she couldn't bring herself to voice.

Why would she possibly be worth Sun being hurt?

--- X Qrow X---

Qrow leaned back on the couch, flipping through the channels as he relaxed alone for the first time in-

The doorbell rang.

Gods damn it.

Standing up, Qrow walked to the door, throwing it open to see Ciria Delaney standing there with a stormy look on her face. Qrow stifled a sigh, “What’s up, Cir?”

“Who in their right mind let that Vess woman around their child?”

Uh… what?

“Wanna run that by me again?”
“I was just in town,” Ciria said, “And Vess was there with her nephew, is is apparently staying with her.”

Liliana was alone with a child…

Yeah, there was no way *that* was gonna end well.

“Give me a minute,” Qrow said, shutting the door in Ciria's face and calling the brats.

“What?” Winter asked, sounded harried.

“Love you too,” Qrow snarked, “Listen, I need you and Gai to do something.”

“Which is?”

“Ya know how the Gatewatch has a manor?”

“The one they acquired through illegal means?”

“Whatever. I need you to stay there for a bit.”

“Why?”

“It's-” Qrow sighed as he heard Ciria knocking, “It's a long story. I'll explain when we pick you up in an hour.”

“I didn't-” Winter started, “Whatever. I expect an explanation.”

“I told you I'd give you one,” Qrow muttered as he hung up, opening the door, “Ok, we got
someone.”

--- X Varian X---

Varian caught a pair of books with a ‘oof’, nearly tipping over the chair he was in, “What…?”

“The thinner of the tomes is on the basics of magic, the thicker, necromancy,” Liliana said.

“Oh…” Varian said, grabbing the bigger book and opening it.

The five forms of mana create a circle, phasing into one another and each being required to make the world whole. From White, we are gifted order and civilization, from Blue, knowledge and perfection, from Black, decay and self-reliance, from Red, chaos and emotions and through Green, we gain instincts and insight. Through use of magic, we pluck the mana to control the tapestry of creation.

Each of the forms of Mana allows control of different forces. Unstable forms of energy, such as Fire and Lightning, are called into existence by Red, Decay and Shadows to Black-

Varian skipped forward.

-Mana gathers where meaning does. An academy, a wellspring of Blue, a graveyard, Black. Reach below you now, and search…

Varian, feeling a bit silly, did that. He closed his eyes, straining to hear or feel or whatever-

And nearly jumped back as he felt the hundred things that could only be called ‘Black’ shift, turning towards him. All through the house, a moan rising up-

-and then was stopped as Liliana sighed, the woman waved a hand to silence the noise, “Well, you were able to access the mana, at least. Now-”

“Liliana!” a voice called as a door opened.
“Who’s that?” Varian asked.

“What?” Liliana called, stalking out of the room without answering Varian.

“She’s gonna help you with the new kid!”

What the-?

“I don’t need help, Branwen!”

“Too bad!”

Varian stuck his head out, looking at the teen standing next to a man around his da-

Varian crushed that thought.

--- X Winter X---

“So, Qrow wants you to move into the Gatewatch manor?”

“Yes,” Winter nodded, “Sir, it's-”

“Perfect,” Ironwood said with a nod.

“Sir?”

“It will help foster relations with the Gatewatch, maybe even smooth over any bad blood created from my deal with them. And it gives you two a place to stay, perhaps we could leverage it into the entirety of the Taskforce staying eventually.”
“But-”

“Please, Winter,” Ironwood said, “We need them to trust up… to work with us. They barely interact with anyone but Qrow, this might be our only chance.”

“Is this an order?” Winter asked. She really didn't want to stay in a glorified mausole-

“I don't want it to be.”

“Very well,” Winter said with a nod to the unspoken continuation, “But I'm not bringing Gawain.”

“Why not?”

“Sir, you said it yourself, we don’t know much about the Gatewatch, but Liliana seems… antisocial. Whoever put a child in her care should probably be certified… I can move in and try to stay out of her way while also doing some reconnaissance, Gawain is more likely to provoke her.”

“And you want to infiltrate-?”

“I’m not saying he would push her to murder,” Winter said, realizing how ‘antisocial’ and ‘probably be certified’ could be misconstrued, “the bodies don't appear to have been recently made, otherwise we'd have reports of a killer even worse that Tibalt, but it is her home, she could call the police on us, which, seeing as we're a pair of Atlesian Specialists in Vale…”

“I see your point,” Ironwood said, “I'll trust you on this one.”

“Thank you, sir,” Winter said, saluting.

“You're dismissed, Specialist Schnee.”

Winter watched it flick off, giving an explosive sigh. Here came the hard part…
“I said, *I don't need her!*

...Convincing Liliana to even give her a chance in the first place.

--- X Qrow X---

Qrow watched Liliana storm back and forth, drops of red blood rolling down her scars, “I-

“Get out,” Liliana hissed, purple sparks crackling along her hands, “get out right now, you-!”

“Excuse me, Miss Vess?”

“*What?*” Liliana hissed, turning to Winter, who stared back without flinching.

“You have every right to be angry at Qrow,” Winter said, “but I can assure you, I can supply reason to keep me around-”

“Like?” Liliana asked.

“If... um...”

“Varian?” the boy offered from his seat, leaning away from Liliana.

“Yes,” Winter nodded, “if Varian needs something, you don't want him to bother y-”

“That's what undead are for,” Liliana sighed, “or Gared, if it's something they're too braindead to understand.”

“And if he needs do go into town?” Winter asked, “I swear, you won't know I'm here...”
“...Fine,” Liliana snapped, “you can use the elf’s room, she never uses it anyways, but you aren't to irritate me, if I'm teaching Varian, you aren't to interrupt that either, understand?”

“Yes, ma'am.”

“Good,” Liliana said, turning, “ask one of the zombies for directions, or don't, I really don't care, Varian, come along.”

Once the door had shut, Qrow turned to Winter, “She has ever reason to be angry at me? really?”

“I'm sure you had done something,” Winter said.

“Listen, I owe you for this,” Qrow said, “The other option was trying to move the kid, and…”

“That could only go well,” Winter nodded, “You did the right thing, for once. Goodbye, Qrow.”

“See you around, brat,” Qrow said, toasting her with his flask.

Winter made a rude gesture as she exited the room…

Before the door sprang back open as she gave a startled shriek, a zombie striding in after her and holding out a keyring towards her.

--- X Blake X---

Blake looked around as they finally stopped before a river looking around, “So where’s this-?”

“You are late,” Blake turned, staring at the trees she had just passed between as a dark haired elf stepped out from between them. A silver circlet sat on his brow, a single gem in the center, “I did not break from my hunt to wait here for you, Markov.”
“I warned you it could be a couple of days,” Sorin said in turn.

“Nevertheless, my patience was wearing thin,” he said, “Are you prepared?”

“Ye-”

“Wait,” Blake said, “What's going on? Where are we?”

“The Rivers that Ring the World,” Gideon breathed, “That's… you plan for us to enter the Underworld?”

“Heliod brought this reckoning by killing this Elspeth,” Sorin said, drawing a knife, “and only by undoing that death can we hope to halt it. I don't expect any of you to join us, but I will request you keep your silence. For those who will remain, I shall need to draw some of your blood.”

“This might be my chance to fix my failure,” Ajani said, holding out his arm. Sorin drew the blood quickly, splattering it upon a coin.

“I still owe her,” Nahiri said, stepping forward and letting a second line join the first.

Blake shared a look with Gideon, who still looked reluctant, before stepping forward, “You'll need to be extra hard for me…”

“And what about you, Gideon?” Sorin asked after finally adding Blake's blood.

“...Fine,” Gideon said, letting his own blood be added.

Sorin added his own blood, before handing it to the elf, “Once we're across, Blake will go on ahead with Alith, there is another Planeswalker within the depths, one most ideal for stealing something as ephemeral as a soul, if I recognize his Spark correctly.”
“Very well,” the elf said, adding his blood and passing it back to Sorin.

“Good,” Sorin stepped forward, dropping the coin into the water. Slowly, a derelict boat rose from underneath the water, “Come, we must cross before the tollkeeper arrives…

Chapter End Notes

And so we meet the second Planeswalker from beyond RWBY or canon! Huzzah!

Thoughts? Good? Bad? Meh? Recomendation on TV Tropes worthy? (In my dreams, right?)
Blake slunk down the tunnel, eyes jumping back towards the elf following her through the dim lighting as a shiver rose up her spine. Was this how people felt when she snuck around?

The archer was holding an arrow against the dimly glowing string of his bow, occasionally drawing it back and angling it down a side path. The arrow would strike stone, lighting up the dark. In the distance, there was a snapping noise, followed by one of the lights flickering out.

Finally, Blake couldn't keep the silence any longer, too much time around Ruby and Sun having made that prospect strange, “So, who are you exactly?”

“Should we really be speaking?” he responded, voice low and dispassionate.

“Something tells me that they're going to know we're here the minute they see your arrows.”

“Very well, I am Alith Anar,” Alith said, launching another arrow and sighing, “Well, it appears you were correct.”

“What’s-?” Blake’s eyes locked onto the three headed dog, stepping back and ears flattening on instinct as it growled at them, “Duh… duh…”

“What?”

“Dog!” Blake yelped, scrambled past Alith and away from the three headed dog, “ Gideon !”

“Blake?” Gideon called, running forward, “What is-? Cerberus!”

Gideon planted his feet, gold light shining along his body as the dog slammed into him, two heads latching onto his arms and the third around his torso. An arrow scrapped along the dog, gouging a
line in the hide, before breaking against Gideon's skin in an explosion of light. Blake shifted Gambol Shroud to gun form, watching the Doom enchanted bullets bounce off it as Alith landed on the dog's back, flipping a sword around and driving it into one of the right head's six eyes.

That head reared back, howling.... And letting Gideon’s sural force its way down into that head's throat and whirl around inside, when it retracted the whip blades were covered in blood and the head stopped moving. Seconds later, Ajani bounded down the hall, his heavy axe sailing through the air and sinking through the leftmost head's neck with ease.

Blake trained her gun, breathing in and firing through the middle head's eye as a bronze worked dagger flew through the air and into the same spot from the other side.

“That was close,” an unfamiliar, accented voice said from the shadows, “Almost- Wait a minute... Gideon Jura?”

“Dack?” Gideon said, standing up.

“Meno male!” ‘Dack’ said, stepping from the shadows to reveal a handsome man with long brown hair, a goatee and green eyes, “You're the last person I expected to find down here!”

“I could say the same for you,” Gideon said, “Nobody has seen you in at least a year. Not that I heard of, anyways…”

“Yes, well, it's been a very busy year on my side.”

“The same is true for us,” Gideon said, stepping away from the dead dog, eyes jumping back towards Sorin and Nahiri, who were finishing off another dog, “I take it this is the other Planeswalker you were talking about?”

“Yes,” Sorin said, “We… require your assistance in a matter. I’m even willing to return the dagger.

“I'd help,” Dack shrugged, “but I'm a bit busy, there's a curse happening around Theros, and I've been unfortunate enough to catch it.”
“Then help us with our problem, and I shall help you with yours,” Sorin said.

“Deal,” Dack said with a nod.

--- X Adam X---

Adam couldn't help the laugh that rose up as he read the report, standing up and walking into the main room of the warehouse the White Fang was using, gesturing for five members playing poker to follow him, “Bring your weapons.”

They quietly stood, climbing into the truck. Once they were in motion and away from the base, the woman driving spoke up, “Where to, Boss?”

“Patch,” Adam said, “We're sending a message.”

“To who?”

“Blake Belladonna and the SDC.”

“Blake Belladonna?” one inquired, “Isn't that the chieftain's daughter? Why her, what message does she need?”

“Blake has… she's become complacent to our suffering, she lives with humans now… we're going to remind her that Faunus are superior. The elder daughter of Jacques Schnee moved into the same house two weeks ago.”

“The daughter of the SDC's head and the daughter of the chieftain?” Orin said, shaking his head, baring his fangs as he carefully shifted his axe, “Disgraceful. Chieftain Belladonna must be so ashamed…”

Adam rolled his eyes. Ghira wasn't remotely-
“You've never met Belladonna have you?” Bane asked as the truck got onto the ferry with a bump, “He loves humans.”

“Loves is a strong word.” Claire, the only other Menagerie born Faunus, said, “They're-”

“He's letting his daughter live with them,” Dhaval said, “That's too close in my opinion…”

“It doesn't matter,” Adam said, “Blake isn't there right now, just four humans. Kill the three not-Schnees, leave her to me.”

--- X Varian X---

Varian watched the rat twitch and writhe, its' back arching unnaturally as he poured Black mana into it. Finally, the cadaver exploded in its metal tray, sending him tilting backwards and off his chair with a crash. Varian growled as he pushed up, stalking away from the tray and throwing open the door to his room.

Stupid. This was so stupid! Liliana wasn't helping, nobody was helping-

“Can I help you?” Varian jumped in place, twirling to stare at the hunchbacked man standing behind him, “Oh! I'm sorry, Master! Did I scare you?”

“What- who are you?”

“Ah, have we not met?” the hunchback said, stepping forward, eyes mismatched, “My apologies, I am Gared, the butler. I heard a bang from your room and came to check.”

“Uhm…” Varian said, squirming, “I'm fine, Gared.”

“That's good to hear!” Gared said, smiling broadly, “I should go, I was heading towards the kitchen to prepare something for Mistress Liliana and Master Jace. Would you like me to bring something by your room while I'm at it?”
“No tha-” Varian stopped at the banging noise, “What was that?”

“I… do not know…” Garad said, drawing a heavy knife, “Shall we go check?”

Varian started to nod before a loud noise came from down the same way, “What the-?”

“The alarm system!” Garad called, “Someone has broke into the house-”

A loud bang came from that same direction, followed by the alarm going silent. Varian gulped, grabbing his staff as he heard a series of voices.

“You damn idiot!” one snapped, “You three, down that hall. Bane, you take her and go upstairs. I'm going to try and find Schnee.”

Varian shared a look with Garad, before they rushed into Varian's room as three sets of footsteps came down the hall. Varian reached over, clutching his staff and holding it. Leaning against the door, he tried his best to still his breath.

“You're a damn idiot,” one said.

“What? We're here to kill them anyways!”

“And now they know we're here!” the first said as they passed Varian's room, “It's not going to be easier, now.”

“Please,” the second said as Varian quietly pushed open his door, meeting the slitted eyes of a woman holding a sword. She quietly raised her other hand up, pressing it against her masked lips. Before Varian could shut the door, however, one of the men, who had a pair of curved swords looked back and saw him, “Hey!”

Varian kicked open the door, smashing his staff into the other man's head before he could turn
around, and freezing as it shattered against the head, “On, crud…”

“You little…” Varian dove back as the axe smashed into the… woman's sword, “What the-!?"

“Adam didn't say anything about us killing kids!” she said.

“So?” the Two Swords said, swords flashing as he slashed at the woman, “He's a human!”

“If I was a human killing Faunus kids because ‘they're Faunus’ would you be fine with it? Run!”

Varian pushed up, running toward the exit… and stopping as he saw Winter stepping back into the room, waving her sword and dagger and occasionally deflecting something out of the air as more bangs came from the way she had.

Varian looked back towards the axe wielder and the dual sword holder. Pushing off the banister, Varian curved his hand, pushing out mana.

Axe staggered back, gasping and letting Gared ram his knife into Axe's side. Drawing the knife, Gared threw Axe into Two Swords, nodding towards One Sword before limping away. Two Swords pushed his friend off him, lunging at One, cleaving her into her as Varian heard a curse from behind her, the door slamming. Two Swords ran for Varian, who ducked, running back for One Sword’s… sword.

Grabbing it, Varian span, barely able to deflect the swing and tripping over Axe's body. Before Varian could think, Axe stood up, giving a moan and swinging his weapon at Two Swords, who deflected them with a stuttered, “O- Orin?”

Orin gave another wild swing, slashing through the other man and turning towards Varian. Varian raised his sword, stopped at the glowing blue eyes as Orin crumpled.

Had he done that?

Had he… had he killed the man before Gared got him? Had-
“This way! This way! This-” Varian was barely aware of Gared running back, gesturing for a group of zombies as he sank onto his side. He had killed someone.

“What's- Varian!” Varian felt Winter rush over, picking him up, “Hold on, I'll get help.”

--- X Winter X---

Winter quickly woke as the sound of an alarm going off came, grabbing Mohnblume and throwing open her door. Stepping out, she immediately trained her eyes on the masked, horned teen marching towards her, “Joyous…”

The teen moved to fire his rifle, which Winter dodged as it dug into the wood. The Schnee jumped onto a glyph, using a series of them to run along the wall and ceiling in a spiral. Landing behind him, Winter brought both blades down, watching his Aura spark in the wake of the strike.

So he was trained. Good to know.

Winter brought up her maine gauche to deflect the first sword strike, followed by another. He was trained, but she had graduated top of her class at Atlas.

Still, Winter realized as the next slash came and barely missed her hair. It wouldn't do well to underestimate him.

Forming a glyph behind him, Winter sicked a snarling Beowolf on him, white claws tearing at the back of his-

The teen quickly sheathed his sword, curling as another strike hit him. Winter felt her hair stand on end, throwing herself backward as a glyph blossomed into existence between her and the teen.

That probably saved her life.
The glyph and Beowolf were cut to pieces by the flurry of slashes, red energy created a cage around him that exploded outside, ripping up the wallpaper and carpet. Winter flew back further as the slash hit her, skidding to a halt and beginning to step backwards as she deflected several bullets from the Faunus.

Eyes flicking around, Winter quickly assessed the room she was in, silently creating Glyphs along the wall as the teen walked towards her, continuing to fire as he growled out, “I'm going to kill you…”

“Scary,” Winter taunted, waiting for him to enter the room. Once he had, Winter sprang her trap, a Nevermore flying from each Glyph, knife-like wings and beaks ripping at the teen until his Aura shattered.

“Shit!” The White Fang member spat, tearing out of the house. Winter prepared to follow him, before a whaling scream came from the other way.

Was that Varian?

“What’s- Varian!” Spinning, Winter had rushed up the stairs, eyes locking on Varian curled up next to three dead bodies, a sword his hands as he screamed his lungs out, “Hold on, I'll get help.”

---X Jace X---

Jace's head swiveled around as a sharp noise came from behind the door, “What is that?”

“I don't know,” Liliana sounded very displeased with admitting that, standing up and striding to the parlor door. Throwing it open, she glared down the hall as the whine ended, “What in the Nine hells was tha-?”

Jace stared at the pair walking towards them, one a giant tattooed and masked man, clutching an object with sharp metal teeth and a woman holding a rifle with a bayonet. Tensing, Jace cast a spell to camouflage himself, muttering to himself, “Who-?”

“I don't know who you are,” Liliana said, “but I'm in a decent mood, so I'll give you a warning. Leave. Now.”
“Please,” the man scoffed, lifting his weapon, “You're just some ritch human bi-”

“Very well then,” Liliana said, voice lofty as she ran one and along the wall, “I suppose you made your choice then.”

“Wh-?”

“Goodbye,” Liliana snapped her fingers, a claw of purple mist rushing at the two, who dodged around it. The one with a gun snapped it up, firing at a nonplussed Liliana. Jace watched her raise a hand up, touching the bloody hole in her side with something resembling confusion as he did something resembling throwing caution to the wind.

“Where the hell is this fog coming from?” the man snapped as Jace threw up an illusionary fog bank, the Living Guildpact rushing to the necromancer’s side.

“Lili,” Jace started, only for her to whip around, still clutching her side, and hissed at him.

“Drop the illusion,” Liliana's eyes were glowing purple, murderous intent clear within, “Drop it right now, Jace.”

“You're hurt,” Jace said.

“This is a flesh wound compared to what I’m going to do to them,” Liliana said, hand tightening over the ‘flesh wound’, “Drop it.”

Jace hesitated, “…Fine, but you're going to a healer afterwards.”

“I don't need a healer!” Liliana snarled.

“Please, Lili,” Jace pled, “You've seen what guns can do.”
“Fine!” Liliana snapped, “Hurry up and drop it so we can kill them already!”

Jace did so, meeting the gun holding woman's eyes as Liliana created a giant purple claw. The attack clipped the woman's leg, the skin sloughing off as rot began to crawl up her body.

“You-!” the man charged forward, revving his weapon as Jace created an illusion of him and Liliana slightly in front of them and cover the Planeswalker couple. Illusionary blood splattering out of Liliana's skull as Jace silenced the rotting woman’s screams and replaced her with an illusionary copy as the man rammed his weapon into the illusion of Jace’s chest, “Die! Die! Di-”

“I believe,” Liliana said, stepping forward and planting a hand on his right arm, “That’s my line.”

“What-? But I-” the man stopped with a yell as his hand began to rot, stagger back, “I killed you! I killed-”

“You, kill me?” Liliana gave a weak laugh, “I- I don't-”

Then she collapsed, crumpling to the ground as Jace gasped, “Lili!”

“I-” the man growled, only to stop as Jace created an illusionary dragon appeared over Liliana and the rotted woman disappeared, “Fuck this. Fuck this!”

The man turned, running away as Jace pawed around for Liliana’s scroll and the knowledge to use it.

“Hello?” a male voice came from the other side, “Vale emergency services. How can I help yo-”

“We need help!” Jace gasped, “We were just attacked. Liliana, my lov- friend is hurt!”

“Please stay calm,” he said, “Where are you?”
“Patch! The ma-”

“I- Oh. Don't worry, sir, I believe we're already sending someone your way. The… ah… ‘Vess manor’?”

“Yes.”

“I'll send a ambulance,” he said, “can you stay on the line? Your friend, Liliana, is she still breathing?”

“Yes, but she's bleeding- badly.”

“It's alright, sir,” he said, “Everything will be fine.

--- X Adam X---

Adam huffed against a tree, slamming his fist into it with a wince. Fuck. Fuck.

“Hey!” Adam turned, before an arm slammed him against the tree, Bane looking down at him, “What the fuck was that, Taurus?”

“What-?”

“The human you sent me and Mauve after was some kind of… of… of witch or something!” Bane hissed.

“What do you mean?” Adam asked, “Where's Mauve, we need her to drive the getaway-”

“She's dead ,” Bane said with a growl.
“What? How?” Adam demanded, “That’s impossible! They’re a bunch of humans! They can’t-

“Tell that to my arm!” Bane thrust his other arm forward, revealing a stump with his belt wrapped around it, “She fucking rotted my arm!”

“But-” Adam started, “Whatever, we need to leave!”

Bane growled, “Fine, but this isn’t the end, Taurus.”

--- X Tai X---

“Tai! Tai!” Tai winced in his bed at Kali’s call, “Wake up!”

“What?” Tai croaked, eyes landing on the bottle of alcohol next to his bed.

“There’s something on the news,” Kali said, breathless, “Come on!”

Tai staggered up, throwing open the door, “What?”

“Tai?” Kali asked, voice soft as she looked up at him.

“What?” Tai repeated.

“You… you look like hell,” Kali said.

Tai reached up, running a hand through his beard, ignoring the puff of dandruff that rose, “I’m fine.”
“Tai,” Kali said, “You're not fine. Anyone can see that.”

“I'm-”

“Me and Ghira have had to take care of Yang for the last two weeks,” Kali said, “You've hardly left that room. You're not fine.”

“What do you care?” Tai asked, voice brusk.

“What do I-? I'm your friend, Tai,” Kali said, “I don't want to see you like this. What's wrong?”

“What's wrong,” Tai growled, slowly striding forward, “What's wrong? My daughter disappeared for half a year, comes home starved half to death, and then keeps running off without telling me where she's going. This was supposed to be a fucking vacation so she could get some help from you and instead, she ran off ag-”

“And my daughter went off after her,” Kali cut Tai off, stepping forward in turn, “Every time Ruby has gone somewhere dangerous since they met Blake has gone right after her. When I saw my daughter for the first time in a year, she went after your daughter, when my daughter came home, it was because she was worried about your daughter, when my daughter came home again, from a damn revolution, she left after a day to go after the girl she loves enough to repeatedly abandon us for, so don't you dare act like you're the only person who has suffered because of this. Do you understand me, Tai-Yang Xiao Long?”

Tai nodded, eyes wide, as he pressed against the wall, Kali's finger digging into his chest. Somehow the unassuming housewife seemed to tower over his six two frame, “Yes, ma'am.”

“Good,” Kali said, stepping back, “we're in this together, Tai, we're family…”

“Yeah,” Tai said, nodding “yeah, What’s wrong?”

“There was… just come and see,” Kali said, gesturing for him to follow.
They stepped into the study, where Ghira was pacing back and forth. Grabbing the remote, Kali hit play. Lisa Lavender began moving, reading a report, “There was a White Fang attack on Patch yesterday.”

“What?” Tai said.

“A group of six terrorists broke into the house of one Liliana Vess, who was playing host to Winter Schnee,” Lisa continued, “While there was no deaths amongst the inhabitants, Ms. Vess was injured and transported to Mountain Glenn Memorial Hospital.”

Tai sank into his chair, “What?”

“They've gone too far this time,” Ghira growled, “That has to be Adam. I'm calling Sienna.”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby leaned her back against the mast of the ship they were on, a weak smile rising as she watched Sun rush around the ship with a joyful laugh. The Faunus was all but dancing around the ship, even three days after they got on it, “Sun, don't get in their way.”

“C'mon, Ruby, don't be a wet blanket!” Sun whined, dancing over to her and flopping down next to her.

“I just want to get this over with as quick as possible,” Ruby said.

“Well,” the captain said as the passed, stopping briefly, “You're in luck, Ma'am. We've never had better conditions. It's as if Thassa herself has decided to help us. The wind has been at our back for every moment of the trip, the currents haven't slowed us, it's been nearly perfect.”

“So how long?” Ruby asked.

“Two days,” the Captain said, “Maybe three?”
Ruby nodded, standing up, “Come on, Sun.”

Sun stood, following Ruby towards the back, “Ruby?”

“Yeah?”

“Got a question for you.”

“Ok?”

“Why are we doing this?”

“What?” Ruby asked, turning.

“I just want to know why we're going after this guy,” Sun shrugged.

“I… I messed up, Sun,” Ruby said, “I promised Elspeth I would bring her to Remnant… she died became I didn't keep that promise… but I also promised her I would kill whoever killed her. I'm gonna keep that promise, no matter.”

Ruby tensed for a second as Sun closed his arms around her, resting his chin on her head, “I wish you had told me about all this stuff before now, Rubes, I woulda helped ya. Grabbed El or something while you were healing up after Ulamog or some shit.”

“I'm sorry,” Ruby said, voice cracking, “I'm sorry…”

“You didn't do anything wrong,” Sun said, a calming tut in his voice.
Thoughts and opinions? Good? Bad? Meh?
“I’m going to slaughter them,” Liliana hissed, “Every single last member of that damn group is going to die.”

“Lili,” Jace sighed, sitting beside her as she sat in the hospital bed, her normal dress replaced, quite unhappily, with a hospital gown.

“Don’t ‘Lili’ me, Jace Beleren,” Liliana snapped, “I refuse to let them get away with this, they broke into my home and tried to kill me.”

“I’m not saying you can't get back at them,” Jace said, voice obviously placating, “but I think going after the entire White Fang is a bit extensive.”

“What you consider extensive,” Liliana scoffed, “I consider a warning.”

“Lili,” Jace sighed her name again, “Trust me.”

“What do you expect us to do?”

“Talk to Blake?” Jace said, “Her parents are the former leaders of the White Fang.”

“They are?” Liliana said, a spike of surprise rising up.

“You didn't know?”

“No,” Liliana said with a smirk, already starting to form plans, “I didn't…”

--- X Kali X---

Kali carefully typed out the message, hitting the send button even though she knew the recipients wouldn't receive it anytime soon.

“We're heading to Patch.

Four words, four simple words for her daughter and her two friends. That was all she could do at the moment, with her being worlds away from them.

“Ready to go?” Ghira asked.

“Yes,” Kali said, grabbing the suitcase she had packed as Ghira did the same with Blake's.

“By the way,” Ghira started as he flicked off the lights, “Did something happen with you and Tai? He's been surprisingly active. Helped me pack and prepare the house.”

“I may have exploded at him,” Kali admitted.

“You what?”

“In my defense,” Kali said, “He started it. I felt it prudent to remind him that he isn't the only person whose daughter tends to run off at the drop of a hat.”
“Yeah,” Ghira sighed as they made their way through the streets of Menagerie, occasionally stopping to greet various people, “I’m… I'm worried about that, if I'm honest. Ruby keeps encouraging dangerous behavior from Blake.”

“She's a traumatized little girl,” Kali rebuked.

“I know,” Ghira said, voice low, “but I can't help but worry about Blake.”

“But what do we do?” Kali asked, “Blake won't leave Ruby, even if we tell her to…”

Ghira breathed in, “I know. I just… I don't know what to do about it.”

“Hopefully once they get Ruby, they'll be able to convince her to get the help she needs,” Kali said, “if not... well, Sun might be able to help us.”

“Sun?” Ghira inquired with a scoff.

“Oh, don't be like that,” Kali sighed.

“People aren't normally like that, Kali.”

“They're not normal,” Kali responded.

“It's hard to remember that sometimes,” Ghira said, voice cracking.

“I know,” Kali admitted, voice soft. How did you even begin to deal with those three?

--- X Blake X---

Blake’s eyes trailed from her Scroll to where Sorin and Dack were kneeling in front of a golden urn, “Are you two almost done?”

“Very nearly,” Sorin said, finishing a line of blood, “Fayden, I need your blood to break the curse.”

“Very well,” Dack held out his hand, letting Sorin spill blood. After a couple of muttered words, Sorin stood.

“There, it should be gone.”

“Doesn't feel any different,” Dack said as he stood up.

“And how did you expect to feel?”

“Like I wasn't tired,” Dack said with a loud yawn.

“When was the last time you slept?” Blake asked.

“Six day ago or so?” Dack yawned again.

“And you're surprised you don't feel different?” Blake snarked, reminded of Ruby. Sun better be making sure she was fine…

“Fair point,” Dack said, striding past Blake with a lockpick set, kneeling before the door they had stopped in front of, “Let's get this over with so I can get some rest, eh?”

“Good idea,” Blake said, reaching down and shaking Gideon, who jerked awake with a bewildered noise.
“Time to go?” Gideon asked.

“Yeah,” Blake said, making her way around the small camp and waking each member of their group up until she reached Alith. Halfway to his shoulder, the elf rasped out a warning.

“If that hand touches me, it will be the last thing it does,” Alith said, standing up.

“Well,” Dack said, “aren't you genial? Leave… ah, I'm sorry, I never got your name.”

“Blake, Blake Belladonna. I-” Blake stopped at Dack's laugh, “what's so funny?”

“Sorry,” Dack chuckled again, “That was rude of me, but is that really your last name?”

“Yeah, so?”

“On my home plane, Bella Donna would mean ‘beautiful woman’,” Dack said, “perhaps when you're older, the name will be more apt, though the two in that picture you're holding might argue it already does, eh?”

Blakeflushed as she hit the button to collapse her slate sized Scroll, storing it away the minute it was small enough, “Shut up.”

“Oh? Perhaps you prefer the other use of it? Belladonna, it’s a poisonous killer,” Dack said.

“Not now,” Sorin rasped, pushing the urn into Blake's hand.

“What's this for?” Blake asked.

“She doesn't have a body,” Sorin said, “So we'll bind her to that.”

“A lich?” Ajani growled, “You want to turn Elspeth into a-”

“Just long enough to find another solution,” Sorin said.

“The only other way to get her out probably involves turning her into a Returned,” Gideon said, “That's a fate worse than death, Ajani.”

“...I know,” Ajani said with a sad noise somewhere between a whisper and a whine, “Fine.”

“Is that door done yet?” Nahiri asked.

“Should be done in a moment,” Dack said, pushing the door open, “There we go. Shall I go first?”

“No, I'm fine with going first,” Nahiri said, pushing past everyone with a superheated sword, “Which of you is Elspeth!”?

“And they say subtlety is a lost art,” Sorin snarked, following her in, “Oh…”

‘Oh’ was right. The cathedral like building they had just entered was crammed full of people, almost too many to count. How were they supposed to-?

“Ajani?” Blake watched a pretty woman with her black hair in a braid push her way through the crowd as the leonin pushed past the other Planeswalkers. A spark burning in front of them, centered on the woman.

--- X Ajani X---
Ajani staggered towards Elspeth, arms all but shaking. Tears began to well up in spite of himself, matting down his white fur as he swept the woman into a hug. Beneath his frame, Elspeth tensed, before returning the hug, “Ajani? What are you doing here? Who are these people?”

“We're the Gatewatch,” Blake said, “er... most of us, anyways.”

“Actually, more of us aren't,” Nahiri said.

“Whatever,” Blake said, “We're friends of Ruby's, and we need your help.”

“Ruby?” Elspeth said, confusion in her eyes, “Wh-? Oh! Is she alright?”

“She's fine,” Blake sighed, “Ok, that's not true.”

“She's trying to kill Heliod,” Gideon said.

What?” Elspeth’s head jerked over, the gold earrings she was wearing jingling, “Why?”

“Because he killed-”

“As nice as this reunion is,” Sorin said, “We need to go. I’m fairly certain we don't have much longer.”

“Go?” Elspeth asked, leaning away from the white hand, “What do you mean, go?”

“We’re here to rescue you,” Blake offered, “it's the only way to stop Ruby-”

“What? No?” Elspeth stepped backwards, “No, I can't go!”

“Why?”

“Why? Erebos might-!”

Before Elspeth could finish, an arrow flew into the sky, exploding in a burst of silver light that blinded Ajani for a moment. Alith's voice called out as the noise of his bow drawing back hit his ears, “Come out, now!”

“Perspective of you,” as the spots in Ajani's vision faded, he watched a bald old man step out of the crowd, body as gnarled as the staff he held, a red veil over his lower face and wearing a red robe with several gold masks on it, “but lower the arrow, child, for it will do nothing to me.”

“Child?” Alith hissed, “I am no child-!”

“I am no child-!”

“Leaving without Elspeth?” Athreos asked with a rasping laugh, “I would hope not, it's all the more work delivering her separately from you.”

“What?” Ajani said.
“Girl,” Elspeth jumped as Athreos pointed a finger so gnarled it appeared to have four joints at her, “What did Erebos promise you in return for your passing?”

“He promised me that Daxos would be returned.”

“Death for life,” Athreos laughed his rasping laugh again, grabbing a mask and casting it at her feet, “Tale as old as time. He cheated you, girl. Brought your love back as an echo like the elf. And so the debt must be repaid.”

“Daxos?” Elspeth said staring down at the mask with a stricken look on her face.

“In a better place, now,” Athreos turned toward Sorin, “Bind the girl, we need to move.”

Sorin nodded, planted one hand on Elspeth's shoulders and the other on the urn Blake was holding. Black energy coursed between the two and he nodded again, “It is done.”

“Then it is time to depart,” Athreos said a black smoke pouring from the mouth of his staff and causing everyone in their group to sink into it. The next thing Ajani knew, there were standing beneath the night sky in a familiar temple, “You had best-”

Before he finished the night sky blossomed to day for a single moment, blinding Ajani again and causing Athreos to utter an oath.

“-The battle has been met! Swiftly, to your friends!”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby stepped into the temple, eyes locked on the flames in the center. Behind her she heard Sun give a stage whisper, “So this is the place?”

“Looks that way,” Chandra said, “but how do we get up to Nyx from here?”

“One of us needs to do a trail,” Ruby said as her eyes landed on the gate, the answer immediately coming to her and holding out the Blade of Chaos for Koth to take, “I'll do it.”

“You sure?” Sun said, “I can-”

“We're here because of me,” Ruby said, slowly walking around and examining each statue. Finally, stopping in front of a massive man clutching a lightning bolt, she reached down, gathering a small handful of water and drinking it. Closing her eyes, she fell forward.

Slowly, the world around Ruby changed, warped and shifted. No longer was she under the night sky, instead she was in city, falling backwards as a blond haired girl with red eyes flew towards her, a scythe with a yellow blade angled backwards before Sun appeared between them in a burst of lightning, the Blade of Chaos pointed up so the girl impaled herself on it as her clothes unraveled into stands of mana.

Do you fear Fate?

Ruby watched her father spit up a splatter of purple and red, coiling around a stab wound as a Faunus stood above him laughing, before changing to a snake headed man being stabbed by a scorpion.

Are you brave enough to face the consequences of your actions?

“Don't you always have to face them?” Ruby asked the air.
You could run from it, the booming voice said.

“But that's still facing it,” Ruby said, “Because if you run from it, then you know it happened. Do you mean, am I brave enough to live with the consequences?”

That wasn't nearly as philosophical as you probably hoped it was. Yes, are you brave enough to live with them?

“Yes.”

We shall see. Enter, Ruby Rose, and face your enemy.

Ruby's eyes jumped open as she jolted up, gasping for air… and smashing right into Sun's forehead with her own. The Faunus jolted back, yelping, “Ow! Jeez, Rubes, give me some warning next time.”

“What were you doing so close to me anyways?”

“I was making sure you didn't drown! You face planted in the water!” Sun said.

“I did?” Ruby said, touching her face and staring at the wetness on her hand.

“Yeah,” Sun said, “What, was that part of what you needed to do? Because I don't-”

“Oh, kiddos,” Sun and Ruby looked over to where Chandra was standing on a staircase that hadn't been there a minute ago, “is this what we’re looking for?”

“Yeah,” Ruby nodded, standing up and tugging Sun along, “let's go!”

--- X Sun X---

Sun walked up the staircase alongside Ruby, a grin rising up, “Almost there.”

“Yeah,” Ruby said, a grim smile rising up.

“So, after this is done,” Sun said, “Ya wanna grab Blake and get something to eat? We are supposed to be on vacation.”

“Yeah,” Ruby nodded, “I could use a break.”

“I think we all could, kiddo,” Chandra said, tugging at her goggles.

“...Thanks, guys,” Ruby said, “You don't need to be here…”

“Yeah, well, if this Elspeth girl this important to ya, there's no other place to be,” Chandra said.

“Gideon might disagree,” Ruby said.

“Gids is a stick in the mud sometimes,” Chandra said, “but I'm pretty sure that if he wanted to catch up to us, he would ha-”

“Look out!” Nissa and Koth said at the same time, the geomancer grabbing Ruby and Sun and dropping to the ‘ground’, as it were, with them as Nissa did the same to Chandra. Sun felt heat rush over them, something exploding down the steps from them.

Sun looked up at the giant standing before them, a golden laurel on his head as a spear with a
glowing tip appeared in his hand, “I'm guessing that's-?”

Before he finished Ruby launched forward, a pistol in one hand and the unraveled sword in the other. The second spear flew down, only to explode on contact with the sword and be absorbed into the blade, “Die!”

The next spear was met with a blast of red from the sword as Ruby fired the gun at the god, who deflected all six shots and met her swing with his spear. Time seemed to freeze as the bladed tip on his spear met Ruby's sword, before a shockwave blasted them back from the top of the stairs.

“Come on!” Sun pushed himself up, rushing up the stairs with Ryu Bang in his hand, splitting the two composite shotguns apart and firing it at the man. The god didn't even bother deflecting them this time, letting them strike his skin and stop cold as Ruby launched towards him again.

“Boy!” Sun looked over to the man holding a lightning bolt, two groups of gods fighting behind him, “Catch!”

Sun swung his hand up to cup the lightning, eyes widening as he felt it. This was, it was like five of his bolts!

“You would think to betray me, Keranos?”

“Yes,” Keranos said as Sun threw the lightning at Heliod. The god swung his spear at it, dispersing it easily.

“Then you can-!” before he could finish, Ruby launched across the gap, the sword swinging for him as several vines lashed from the air and wrapped around his arm and a blast of fire and molten metal crashed into him. Ruby's sword slashed across through his leg as he was distracted.

“This is for Elspeth,” Ruby growled, swinging down the sword and stabbing him.

“Ruby!” Sun’s head turned as he watched the group rushing up the stairs Blake and a woman in golden armor at the lead, “Ruby sto-”

“No!” Ruby snarled, stabbing Heliod again and twisting the sword, leaving him to yell in pain, “I promised Elspeth I would kill the person who-!”

“I never expected you to keep that promise,” the unfamiliar woman said, causing Ruby to freeze. She turned, one hand still on the sword.

“Elspeth?” Ruby asked, voice cracking.

“If I had,” Elspeth continued, “I would have never let you make it. You're a child, you shouldn't have-”

“No,” Ruby shook her head, “No, this isn't- you aren't her! This is just some sort of trick!”

Ruby punctuated that statement by twisting the sword again, causing Heliod to cry in pain and coil around the sword.

“Ruby,” Blake said softly, “It is her. We got her from the Underworld. Please, stop this. I know you're angry, but this isn't you.”

“I-” Ruby's hand shook, tears welling up, “I need to! This is my fault-”

“It isn't,” Elspeth insisted.
“Ruby,” Koth said, striding forward, “Give me the sword.”

“But-” Ruby croaked, “You too?”

“You aren't killing him,” Koth said, “Give me the sword.”

Ruby staggered back from the impaled god as Blake stepped forward, arms spreading to catch the younger girl as she broke down completely, sinking down with the girl and cradling her. Blake looked up at Sun, curving an eyebrow meaningfully.

Sun walked over, lowering himself and joining in the hug. Chandra finally gave an annoyed sigh, “Would you three just hurry up and hookup al-Nissa!”

“Don't be annoying,” Nissa said from where she had pinched Chandra.

“What? Anyone with eyes can see it!” Chandra complained.

“Like you and Nissa?” Sun shot back to a wet giggle from Ruby as Chandra's face, and hair, lit up.

“Shut up,” Chandra muttered, “You're the one who asked Ruby on a date earlier.”

“You did?” Blake asked.

“I asked her if she wanted to grab you and get something to eat,” Sun defended, feeling his face light up with a blush.

“Well,” Blake said, “I guess it's a date. Something normal for once.”

“Three way dates are normal now?” Sun said.

“Compared to most things we do?” Ruby started, “I-”

“And where do you think you're going?” Koth said suddenly, drawing attention to Heliod trying to crawl away from the Planeswalker with metal in his body, the Blade in his hand.

“Koth?” Elspeth asked, stepping forward, but Koth seemed to be ignoring her.

“You see, I was very specific,” Koth said, striding forward, “Ruby won't be taking your life. I, on the other hand, will be.”

“Please-!” Heliod started, only for Koth to swing down the sword, cutting the god's throat. Koth turned, a grim smile on his face.

“Let’s leave,” Koth said, “It's good to see you again, Elspeth.”

“I-” Elspeth sighed, “It's good to see you too. I feared the worst-”

“Maybe we can carry on this conversation at Remnant?” Gideon said, looking nonplussed.

The gathering Planeswalkers nodded, and one by one, they vanished, Sun finally splitting from Ruby and Blake.

Chapter End Notes
Awww, the trio are reunited and actually moving forward in their relationship!

What, did you expect Ashiok to make an actual appearance? He ain't that crazy.

Bit of fun trivia, other songs that I toyed with instead of All Things Must Die (which I ultimately decided was best because of the mass of reference to snuffing out fire and ending legends) include God in Fire and The Messenger from Dissidia (The later of which is essentially the unofficial theme of One Fleeting Moment (Shameless self promotion, ho!)), Dead Man's Gun from Red Dead Redemption, Contact Redux from Red Vs Blue and Divine Hate from Devil May Cry.

Thoughts? Good? Bad? Meh?
Chapter Notes

So, this is functionally the first time in a long, long time that I wrote a character dedicated to letting the characters relax, and so I really want your honest opinions on this one. Even if you normally don’t say anything, it'd be appreciated, as I'm getting ready to do another story that’s lighter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

--- X Chandra X---

“Should we get the kids?” Chandra asked.

“No,” Gideon said, reaching down to grab the half inch shard of metal and examine it. Red.

“Like, what the crap happened while we were gone?

“I don't know,” Gideon repeated, annoyance leaking into his voice. He had been gone for a while too.

“Sorry, sorry,” Chandra said, raising her hands.

“It's fine,” Gideon said, “I'm just… I'm worried. Where's Liliana? Where's Jace? ...Who's here?”

Gideon stood up, tensing as he stepped towards the door with his sural curving back. Looking back to see Chandra’s hair ignite, Nissa draw her sword and Ajani ready his axe as Dack carefully balanced the pithos holding Elspeth’s soul on a window and draw his dagger, Gideon threw open the door.

And blinked as a button up shirt flew into his face, an indignant yell coming from the room, “Varian!”
“Who?” Gideon asked, reaching up to grab the shirt, only for Chandra (he could tell from the heat) to wheel him around.

“Trust me, Gids,” Chandra said, “It’s only gonna get more awkward if you look behind there.”

“Mr. Jura!” Gideon held the shirt backward, feeling it get snagged off his hand and waited for Chandra to give him a pat and a nod to turn around towards Winter Schnee, whose clothes were distinctly messed up, as if she had pulled them on in a hurry, “I'm sorry, I had just finished bathing-”

“What are you doing here?” Gideon said, confused.

“I've been watching the place while you were gone,” Winter said.

“Whose… uh… Varian?”

“Varian?” Winter asked, “Your newest… ah… ward?”

“Wh- oh!” Gideon nodded, “Right. Thanks.”

“What's going on?” Gideon turned, staring at the boy with bags under his eyes and clutching a sword, “Who are you?”

“Varian,” Winter said, “It's fine.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

“Ok,” Varian nodded, “Ok.”
“I'm telling you,” Sun said as the new three way relationship sat around the table of a restaurant eating Mistralan food as a tv played behind him, “We should take a vacation to another plane soon. We have literal superpowers, and instead we're always using it to do boring stuff!”

“Being responsible,” Blake said dryly, “Oh, the humanity.”

“Hey,” Sun said, pointing his chopsticks at Blake with as much menace as possible, ruined by the grin on his face, “We're kids, we shouldn't have to be responsible all the time.”

Ruby laughed softly around a small roll of dough covered in sugar, “He has a point. I've never been to a Plane for a vacation before.”

“I'm not saying it's a bad idea,” Blake started, “I'm just saying his way of saying it is a bit- wait, what?”

Blake had stopped, jaw falling open as Sun turned towards the tv, eyebrows jumping up as he read the captions underneath it, Ghira Belladonna, former leader of the White Fang, is traveling to Vale in the wake of last week's attack on Patch.

“There was an attack on Patch?” Sun asked, sharing a bewildered look with Ruby and Blake as a waitress nearby snorted a laugh.

“Don't pay attention to the news much?” she asked, “It's all anyone's been talking about.”

“We've been away from anywhere to see the news,” Sun said, “What happened?”

“Group of those terrorists attacked some rich woman's house because Winter Schnee was there,” she said as Sun's stomach dropped.

“Did they say her name?”
“Yeah, it was a weird one,” she said, “Morado! What was the name of the woman that owned the house in Patch?”

“Uh,” the man standing at the desk said, blinking, “Lil something? I don't-”

“Liliana?” Sun said, aware of Blake pulling out her Scroll and Ruby fumbling with her wallet, “Liliana Vess?”

“Yeah!” Morado said with a nod, “That's the one! How did you-?”

“We live with her,” Sun breathed as Ruby hurriedly pushed a hand full of Lien into the waitress’s hand and Blake walked out of the restaurant with her scroll next to her ear.

“Shit,” Morado said, “Really?”

“Morado!”

“It's fine,” he said, “and your friend is fine too, she had to go to the hospital, but she's recovering now.”

So in other words, if Blake couldn't talk Lili down, the White Fang wasn't long for this world.

“Come on,” Ruby said, snagging Sun's arm and dragging him after their girlfriend.

“Hey, wait! This is way too much!”

“Keep the change!” Sun called, stepping out of the restaurant to find Blake waiting for them with a serious look on her face.

“Ilia's gonna meet us at Mountain Glenn Memorial,” Blake said.
“The park or the Hospital?” Sun asked.

“Does it matter?” Ruby asked, “One is outside the other.”

“Good point,” Sun nodded.

--- X Ilia X---

Ilia sat on the picnic table, staring at the scroll with blank eyes. Finally, Blake, Sun and Ruby sat down across from her and she dropped it, focusing on them, “Hi.”

“Hey,” Sun said with a nod and a smile, “How’s things going?”

“Not good,” Ilia said, “Adam's on a warpath.”


“Adam,” Ilia said, “He did it without telling anyone but the team he brought.”

“But why?”

“Don't take this the wrong way,” Ilia said, carefully, “but because of you, Blake.”

“What?” Ruby said.

“Adam's obsessed with you,” Ilia explained, “He's been in love with you since before you left Menagerie.”

“In love?” Blake said, “In love? How does ‘in love’ translate to him attacking my house?”
“You left us,” Ilia said, “You began living with humans and training to be a Huntress-”

“So?” Blake asked.

“So Adam feels like you don't care about us anymore,” Ilia said, a spike of annoyance at being interrupted rising up.

“So he's an entitled jackass,” Sun summarized, “He thinks that because he has a thing for Blake and she doesn't return it, he's allowed to attack her friends.”

“Pretty much,” Ilia said.

“Yeah,” Sun said, drawing a shotgun, “C'mon, Rubes, we got an asshole to shoot.”

“Sun!” Blake rebuked.

“What? He broke into our house, tried to kill our friend and- oh, son of a bitch!”

“What?” Ruby asked.

“I brought Varian to the house,” Sun said.

“Crap,” Ruby said.

“Who?” Blake asked as she stood up.

“New guy,” Sun said, “Ilia, you mind coming to Patch with us? I need to see what happened.”

“You want me along?” Ilia asked.
“You didn't go with Adam, did you?”

“No.”

“Then I don't see why not,” Sun shrugged.

--- X Blake X---

Blake sat between her... her boyfriend and girlfriend (and those words made her kinda want to give a giddy laugh), holding their hands. In spite of the the joy at being home and with Ruby and Sun again, however, Blake couldn't help the feeling of dread coiling in her stomach.

Adam was ‘obsessed’ with her. So obsessed, he had attacked Liliana Vess. How was that ‘in love’?

Blake blinked back tears at the shiver of revulsion that rose up her body. How would Adam have acted if she had joined the White Fang, but decided she didn't want to follow the dark way they had been going?

Blake blinked as Sun pushed her towards Ruby, who wrapped her in a hug that Sun joined in on. Blake’s shoulders shook as hot tears spilled out of her eyes, sinking into the hug, “I'm scared.”

It was a soft, weak admission, one that probably wasn't needed, but one she felt the need to say nonetheless. If someone had told her a year ago that Adam liked her, she would have been so happy.

But in the past year, she had gone through things that divorced her from that world. The Blake from a year ago hadn't fought men twisted into monsters, hadn't helped a revolution find victory. She hadn't met Chandra Nalaar or Nissa Revane. She hadn't met Ruby Rose and Sun Wukong.

Hell, if you had told her she would be in a relationship with two people a year ago, she would have laughed. But Ruby was right, compared to most things they had gone through, it really wasn't strange.
“Don't worry,” Sun said, “He isn't gonna hurt you if we have anything to say about it.”

“I'm not scared of that,” Blake said, “I'm scared about what he might do to you two, if he finds out…”

“Don't worry about it,” Ruby said, “I didn't survive New Phyrexia to let some jerk beat me.”

“Yeah,” Sun said, “We're not like Lili, you know her, she probably stood there and took a bullet or something because she didn't even think a gun would hurt her. We have our Aura and are good fighters.”

“But Adam's a good fighter too,” Blake argued.

“It'll be fine,” Sun said.

“So, uh,” Ilia coughed, drawing their attention for the first time since they had gotten on the ferry leading to Patch, “I guess you got into some really, uh… different stuff, since you began living with the humans? I mean, uh, it kinda looks like you three…”

“Are in a relationship?” Sun finished, “We are.”

“Sun!” Blake hissed, feeling her face light up.

“What?” Sun said.

“Oh,” Ilia had also flushed, skin turning red, “Um, uh… when did that happen?”

“Earlier today,”” Ruby said, yawning, “it's been a long day…”

“We can pass out after we check on Varian,” Sun said, “Shouldn't be much longer before we dock.”
Varian looked up from his newest project as the door slammed open, causing him to reach under his desk and wrap a hand around leather grip of the sword resting there. Pulling it loose, he snuck towards the door to his room.

It had been so, so tempting to just leave, to flee from this house and never look back. But he couldn't. If he was going to save his dad and get revenge on Rapunzel, he needed to learn magic.

Jumping out of the door, Varian readied his sword, gripping it like a club, ready to hit the nearest person. Before he could make a remotely threatening gesture, however, a metal tube pressed against the back of his head and a second to the side as the black haired girl pulled out a weapon, “Do us a favor, put the weapon down and step away from our girlfriend.”

Varian froze, eyes wide as he realized he was pinned, and did what seemed smart. In his workshop, Orin stood, grabbing his axe. The one behind him gave an annoyed sigh as the one next to him pushed the gun further into his head, “Dude, seriously, we've had a really tiring couple of weeks, we came here to make sure you were alright, just put down the sword.”

Slowly, mechanically, Varian lowered the sword and the two weapons were in turn removed from their place next to his head. Then the one behind him span him around, pulling him into a hug, “Bro, you don't know how worried I was when I realized you had to be here when that fight went down.”

“Uh, what?” Varian blinked at Sun, who was grinning at him.

“Like, holy shit, was that scary,” Sun said, “You don't know how to fight, do ya?”

“How-?”

“You were holdin’ that sword like a baseball bat,” Sun said, “and sorry for the gun to the head thing, it's been a rough couple of weeks on our end, we're a bit jumpy, you know?”

“Sure?” Varian said, feeling taken off guard.
“Sun,” the girl Varian had been about to attack sighed, “You're confusing him.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Sun waved, swinging an arm around Varian's shoulders like they were best friends, “C'mon, let's go to the hangout room, do introductions there.”

Varian glanced at Orin, before sighing and going along with the group of four. They reached a room at the end of the hall as Ruby pulled out a key, slotting it into the door and swinging it open.

Sun let go of Varian, grabbing Ruby and the black haired girl by the hand and dragged them over to one couch, all three flopping onto it with a laugh. Varian looked around the room, noticing the wall mounted monitor on one… wall, a bookcase with books and cardboard boxes against the other, several balls of various sizes around the room and a couple of tables.

“Excuse me,” Varian turned to the pretty, brown haired girl standing behind him, “can I get through?”

“Uh, yeah,” Varian blushed, stepping aside so she could go towards the table and take a seat. Varian walked into the room, looking around, “So, uh, introductions?”

“Yeah,” Sun said, grinning as he pulled out a thin bit of white material with a golden circle in the center, “Hey, did Lili get you a Scroll before things went to hell in a handbasket?”

“A… Scroll…?”

“You don't know what a Scroll is?” the brown haired girl said.

“Varian's from way, way out from the Kingdoms,” Sun said, “He'd never met a Faunus before, either.”

“Really?” She said, “I guess we didn't exactly create a good impression, huh?”

“Eh,” Sun said, fiddling with his ‘Scroll’, “I've seen worse first impressions. Oh, hey, Blake, you're parents sent a message saying they're heading to Patch a few days ago.”
“I didn't have my Scroll on when we got back,” the black haired girl said, “I didn't think we needed it.”

“I'm just sayin’” Sun said as the wall mounted monitor turned on and he leaned back, doing something on his scroll as the image of a roaring dragon on a curved wall appeared, “Anyways, introduction time! Varian, this is Blake-”

“Hi,” the black haired girl said, pulling off her bow to reveal a pair of fluffy ears and rest her head against Ruby's shoulder as they both watched Sun's game, hands laced together as she yawned, “Do you mind grabbing a book for me? I'd grab it myself, but I'm ready to pass out.”

“Uh, sure,” Varian said, grabbing a book and handing it to Blake, who promptly took it and flipped to the start.

“-and that's Ilia,” Sun said, nodding to the girl sitting at the table.

“Hi-”

“Ruby?”

“Elspeth!” Ruby's face lit up as yet another person Varian didn't know stepped into the room, leaping off the couch (To Blake's hiss of irritation) and rushing towards the black haired woman, colliding with her gut and pushing her back.

“It's good to see you again,” Elspeth said.

“I'm just glad I finally-” Ruby's voice cracked, “-finally got to bring you to Patch.”

“It's interesting,” Elspeth said, “I walked through the forest with, ah, Nissa, is it?”

“Yeah,” Ruby nodded, “What do you think?”
“It's beautiful,” Elspeth said, running a hand through Ruby's hair.

“That's beautiful enough to be a home?” Ruby asked, voice soft.

“I think after all the work it took to get me here, it has to be,” Elspeth said.

“I'm not making you stay,” Ruby insisted, waving her arms back in forth.

“It's a metaphor,” Elspeth said with a laugh, messing up Ruby's hair in a move somewhere between maternal and sisterly, “Though we do need to figure out a way around my… hindrance, of course.”

“Where's everyone else?” Ruby asked.

“Relaxing, mostly,” Elspeth said, smiling, “I was finding my way around the house. I'll let you get back to those two before… Blake’s glare gets worse.”

Varian looked back at Blake, who was giving a tired glare, eyes drifting open and shut several times.

“Guess it's probably about time for bed,” Sun sighed, scooping Blake up, “C'mon, Rubes. Ilia, feel free to crash on the couch! See ya tomorrow?”

“Yep,” Ilia waved as the four disappeared, Elspeth continuing on after Ruby opened a door for Sun and those three disappeared in side, “Listen, Varian?”

“Yeah?”

“I want to apologize,” Ilia said.

“For what?”
“For the attack,” Ilia said, “Adam, he was rogue when he did it.”

“How do you-? You're with them?” Varian fumbled with his sword, only to notice Ilia's weapon on the table.

“Relax,” Ilia said, “I'm not here to finish the job or anything, I just-”

“I don't care,” Varian hissed, turning and storming out of the room.

Chapter End Notes

So, I was tempted to make a joke about how romantic Elspeth and Ruby's dialogue can be read at, but decided that not even Sun would make that joke during their reunion (as they didn't really have much time last chapter). This is also the first time since Forged in the Light (Nope, not what you thought I was gonna say, as Forged is a bit of an Old Shame for me, which is why I might reboot it soon) that I wrote characters in an open relationship.

Thoughts? Good? Bad? Meh?
I'm sorry this is short, but I needed to get something out to attempt to force myself back into writing. Feel free to consider it an interlude

See the end of the chapter for more notes

--- X Sun X ---

Sun let loose an explosive sigh, ignoring the dirty looks from the others in the crowd as an old woman wearing a mask of a wolf on her face and a lamb on the back of her head pranced on stage, clutching a bow. Blake tugged him back, letting him rest his head in her lap, “It'll be over soon.”

“I can't believe you dragged us to a play,” Sun complained under his breath.

“It’s something different,” Blake defended, “We’ll do your vacation next week.”

“Good,” Sun muttered, “Mine'll be something we’ll all enjoy.”

“Why’s the lamb named Wolf and the Wolf named Lamb?” Ruby asked as a long roll of red fabric was thrown by the actress as the black lamb mask lunged forward, pantomiming a tearing move at the throat.

“Duality,” Blake said, as if that explained anything.

“No!” an actor said, rushing to the woman Wolf had just finished killing, clutching her hand, “My love, what has befallen you? What poison has taken your life?”

Sun rolled his eyes even as Blake and Ruby leaned forward. The man picked up the apple, lifting it to his nose in a pantomimed breath, “Carronshade! If only I had been here to hold you through your final moments! I shall join you, to be your bulwark against the Void, to keep you from being dragged away by the Black Mist of the Shadow Isles.”
“Then allow me to ease your flight to her side,” Lamb said as the lead, who Sun was no closer to remembering the name of then he had been three hours ago, drew his sword and looked up, eyes wide, as if he hadn't known she was there.

“No!” Wolf snarled, the actress’s entire demeanor changing, becoming twisted, almost playful as her dance like steps became loping strides, “fight, struggle, run Lorenzo-thing!”

“Do not be greedy, dear Wolf,” Lamb said, their actress shifting to a dancing movement again, “There are many things for you to hunt, but he isn't one of them.”

“All things are mine to hunt, little Lamb,” Wolf snarled, “is that not what you say?”

“Then let us ask him,” Lamb said, turning to Lorenzo, “Which is it you wish? Will you accept my arrow? Or will you attempt to outtrace Wolf's fangs?”

“Where was she during the rest of this?” Sun asked, sitting up, “They got the best actress to play a bit character?”

Up on the stage, Lorenzo lifted his sword, drawing a deep, jittering laugh from Wolf, who took a long, loping step towards the lead, before he brought the sword to his own throat. Wolf gave a confused growl as Lamb nocked an arrow, drawing the bowstring back.

It flew as Lorenzo pulled the sword across his neck, several ribbons flying in a recreation of arterial spray. Lorenzo fell backwards, giving a half decent death rattle as Wolf gave a whimper.

“Are you sad, dear Wolf?” Lamb asked.

“I am,” Wolf said.

“What does it feel like?” Lamb asked, voice still devoid of emotion.

“A long hunt with no kill,” Wolf said, “like this one.”
“Do not fret dear Wolf,” Lamb said, “These two are of families who despise each other, there will be many to hunt come dawn.”

“Good.” Wolf laughed, lopping off stage for a minute before every actor began to come on stage and a thunderous applause started. When the actress who played Wolf and Lamb, Magga, came on stage, Sun joined in, jumping from his seat as she gave a curtsey.

Sun blinked as a glimmer of blue flew through the air, striking Magga in the chest as she looked up.

Sun looked behind them, catching sight of the black mask of a wolf in the rafters, attached to a white body, before it vanished into the moonlight, “Come on!”

---

Ruby rushed along with Sun and Blake, following the white blur even as the question of ‘why?’ burned in her head. Why had an assassin killed an actress?

Ruby watched the blur disappear into the forest, drawing Crescent Rose and throwing Ryu Jingu Bang to Sun as Blake grabbed Gambol Shroud from her shadow. The three Planeswalkers rushed into the the woods, weapons prepared as they looked around.

“Hello, World Striders,” Ruby’s eyes jumped up as she wheeled around, squeezing one eye shut and putting Crescent Rose’s scope to the other as Blake and Sun prepared their own weapons. Seated on the tree was a white furred creature, a bow in hand and a black wolf mask on her face, “It has been long since we last saw your kind on Runeterra.”

“And it was good without you here,” Ruby froze at the guttural voice growled from the shade, only to give a relieved sigh as Sun and Blake shifted so they were in a triangle, Sun splitting Ryu into two shotgun so he could keep them leveled on each target while Blake summoned a Doom Blade into her left hand while she shifted Gambol Shroud to gun form. Prowling through the trees was a mass of smoke vaguely in the shape of a wolf, a white lamb mask on his face.

“So,” Sun muttered, “this is either the most elaborate, and shitty, gaslighting experience since Baral tried to fuck with Chandra’s head… or that play was telling the truth.”
“Odds?” Blake asked.

“I'll give it a sixty-forty split,” Sun said, “with the sixty being that this is real.”

“Great,” Ruby said, “Do we need the sword?”

“You don't,” Lamb said, “We aren't here to take any of you, merely to talk.”

“About what?” Ruby asked.

“First, we would appreciate it if you reminded Liliana Vess that if she returns here, we will kill her.”

“They're rooting around in our head?” Sun growled, preparing his gun.

“Not so,” Lamb said, “we can merely see the weft and weave of fate.”

“I will commend you,” Wolf growled, “To kill two things that anyone else would view as unkillable, that is a hunt even I can appreciate, Sun-Hunter, Ruby-Hunter.”

“Thanks,” Ruby smiled, “Anything else?”

“Yes,” Lamb said, “advice for each of you, in return for you never returning here?”

“You don't want us coming back?” Ruby asked.

“It's nothing personal,” Lamb said, “but the fate you would bring with you is not one we wish inflicted upon our world.”
“Alright,” Sun shrugged.

“For you, Sun, do not fear the dark, when the time comes… also, have some of your seed frozen.”

All three Planeswalkers gave a blink and took a disgusted step back as one, bumping into each other, “Uh…”

“It will make sense, one day,” Lamb said, “though it will hopefully not be needed. Next Blake… know that walking in the dark to serve the light is not an evil thing, and to trust the king who owns no throne.”

“O...k?” Blake said.

“These will all make sense, one day. Ruby, fear not the one eyed one, and drink as deeply as possible, no matter how disgusting the drought may seem.”

Ruby shared a confused look with the others, “Ok…?”

“Good,” Wolf growled, “Now leave and don't come back, before I decide to hunt you!”

“Right…” Ruby drawled, before giving Blake and Sun a kiss on the cheek, “I'll see you on Remnant?”

“Yep,” Sun nodded.

“You sure you don't want us with you?” Blake asked

“No reason for you to bore yourselves,” Ruby said, before whirling and stepping into the Blind Eternities.

The minute she stepped out, she smiled at the partially repaired ship sitting on a beach, women and men working on it.
Ruby walked towards the tent where she could see Jhoira working, ready to begin another lesson.

--- X Winter X---

Winter blurred backward, deflecting two bullets before her opponent appeared in a blur in front of her, their sword angled for her throat before a glyph appeared in front of it, bouncing the sword back as Winter leapt onto the side of the house, summoning a small flock of Nevermores to harass the other combatant.

Thalia dispersed them in a single slash, ethereal flames lashing out in a ring around her as Winter launched herself from the wall, aiming for Thalia’s head. The Planeswalker dodged out of the way of the attack, her saber clashing with Mohnblume.

Winter jettisoned her main gauche as a ghostly arm came swinging from Thalia, a black sword grinding against the metal. Driving a foot into Thalia's gut, Winter hissed as Traft's other hand burst from it, wrapping around her ankle and stopping her retreat as Thalia leveled her revolver at Winter's head, cocking the hammer back.

Victory.

Winter glanced over at the forest at the heavy crunch of feet, seeing Varian walking into the trees with a new mech following him. Winter stifled a sigh as the boy who was slowly becoming gaunt disappeared, before checking the time, “I need to go.”

“I'll see you around,” Thalia said with a nod as Sun and Blake popped out of the forest.

“Hey!” Sun grinned, jogging along, “We late?”

“No,” Winter said, grabbing her coat, “I was just getting ready to get her now. Do you want to come?”

“Nah,” Sun said, “Your family doesn't got the best history with Faunus, we'll be popping in and out, there's a Plane I want to check out with Rubes and Blake.”
“Ok, then,” Winter said, hiding the wince at her father's corrupting influence on the Schnee name.

“Catch ya around, Win,” Sun said with a wave, “C'mon Blake, I wanna go get ready-”

“I'm going to go with Winter,” Blake said, “Meet me, Ruby and Elspeth at my Mom and Dad's apartment?”

“Yeah,” Sun nodded with a sigh, kissing her briefly.

---X Varian X---

Varian stepped into the abandoned house he had found and repurposed. Behind him, Orin sat down in the corner, dropping the bag of supplies.

“Alright,” Varian muttered, picking up the bag and walking towards the work table. Dumping the pieces of metal across the table, Varian grabbed Orin's axe, grunting at the weight, “You couldn't have picked a lighter weapon?”

Orin, predictably, didn't respond. The skeletal wight merely kept the ghastly leer that had taken to his face since his death.

Varian grabbed the ball peen hammer, using it to remove the head of the axe and setting it aside for another project down the line. Picking up the haft, Varian began to slowly bolt the new head onto it.

“Alright,” Varian muttered, “Let's see if this-”

The motorized head gave a loud roar as Varian turned it on, causing him to jump back with a yelp, the axe sinking into the rotten wood and sending up a spew of wooden shards.

Behind him, Orin gave a chittering laugh, rising and drawing the axe from the wood with one hand, turning off the head. Varian felt a shiver go through his body as the other hand brushed through his
hair, ironically not because of the dead body touching him, he had come to terms with that.

It was because, not for the first time, he was left wondering how much of Orin was left in the wight. Was he trapped in his body, capable of feeling everything, as Varian replaced parts with metal?

Was that was what it was like for Quirin, trapped in stone because Rapunzel didn't help?

Varian let out a growl, moving on to the next project. He grabbed the gnarled tree branch he had picked out, taking out the chain attached to a ball and nailing it into the branch.

Taking out several vials of white Dust, Varian closed his eyes, pushing Black mana into the powder. After a minute, he opened his eyes, giving a grim smile at the purple-black Dust in his hand, flicking open the ball in front of him and pouring the Dust into it.

Varian span the Dust empowered flail around as a Grimm without arms came prowling into the house. Purple flames rose off the flail as he stepped forward, Orin following behind him with a whirling of his axe.

Now, it was time to practice fighting…

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts and opinions? Good? Bad? Meh? I need opinions, I’m freaking out...
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Uh... hi?

Sorry this took so long to get out. First I was focused on Welding Nanoha into Magic, then I struggled to decide how the actual story was gonna go, then I suffered a panic attack about the specifics of it, then I lost someone dear to me to a trip to the Undiscovered Country, then I worried about the specifics again.

On that note, as childish as it might seem, I'm dedicating all my fics to my beloved Memere, who was so proud to have a writer in the family she would loudly proclaim it at every family gathering, no matter how embarrassed it made me.

Anyways, here's the start of the arc.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

-- X Blake X---

Blake felt her shadow coil as Weiss Schnee stepped off the airship, sinking into it slightly as it curled around her. An instinctual defensive maneuver towards the short girl.

It wasn't fair, Blake knew. Winter was walking evidence that Schnee didn't immediately mean evil or even racist. But it didn't change the fact that Jacques Schnee had made life hell for Faunus for years.

Blake pushed down her shadow as it wrapped around her arm, trying to form a claw to defend herself from a threat that didn't exist. It was fine, everything was safe…

“Winter!” Weiss called, jogging towards them as a balding man followed. Stopping in front of them, Weiss appeared to be struggling to keep an affectionate smile blossoming across her face, “How have you been?”
“Well enough,” Winter said, “I finished moving into a new location recently. It's where we're going.”

“Oh,” Weiss smiled, “that's good to hear. Whose this?”

“Blake,” the cat Faunus greeted, holding out her hand, “Blake Belladonna.”

“It's a pleasure to meet you,” Weiss said curtsying, but not taking Blake's hand.

“Nice to meet you too,” Blake said, trying to keep the curtness from her voice as she turned to the man, holding out her hand, which he took.

“Klein Sieben,” Klein greeted with a smile, “butler to the Schnee family. It's nice to finally put a face to a name.”

“Nice to meet you too,” Blake said.

“Anyways,” Winter coughed, “The car we uses is out front. “

“I'm not heading to the house right now,” Blake said.

“Right,” Winter nodded, “We'll meet up later?”

“Sure,” Blake agreed half heartedly, watching the trio disappear and pulled out her Scroll. Maybe it was time to head out on that vacation with Sun and Ruby after all.

--- X Adam X---

“The search for Adam Taurus, former leader of the Vale White Fang responsible for the unprovoked attack upon the reclusive home of the Huntsman Guild ‘Gatewatch’, continues,” The news report said, as Adam grit his teeth. Unprovoked? unprovoked? They had forfeited their right to live when they took Blake from him, when they had let a Schnee into their home, “Ghira Belladonna, former leader of the White Fang and father of one of the Gatewatch members, Blake
Belladonna, has condemned Taurus's actions, implying an obsession with his daughter may have been the cause. While current leader Sienna Khan was unavailable for comment, spokesman for the White Fang of Mistral have also condemned Taurus, declaring his actions to be beyond what they would allow, and stating that Khan had revoked Taurus’s membership, effective immediately.

Adam snapped Blush up, firing it at the screen and watching the crystalline substance shatter. Standing up, he began to pace, running a hand through his hair.

“Would you stop that?” Bane growled as he pushed open the door to the safehouse, tossing a bag onto the table and fumbling with the locks.

“What's that?” Adam asked.

“Essentials,” Bane said, grabbing a bottle of pills out of the bag, putting a few in his mouth and chasing it with a bottle of water.

“Ribbon is essential?” Adam asked as he took the long ribbon out of the bag.

“Yes,” Bane grabbed Adam’s mask, alongside his own, and threw them to the ground, driving his steel toed boot down on them, shattering them completely.

“What was that-?” before Adam could finish, Bane whirled around, grabbing him by the collar with his one hand.

“In case you were too stupid to realize what you were just watching means, it means we have nobody except each other because of your little ‘message’, shit lick,” Bane growled, “Sienna is going to name a new leader of the Fang branch, and you can be damn sure they're gonna go hunting for us first thing.”

“Why-?”

“Why-? Why!? Because you attacked Ghira Belladonna’s daughter's house,” Bane snarled, throwing Adam against the couch, “You got several high ranking members of the Fang killed, and most importantly, that Vess woman has wiped out two safe houses looking for us. She wants you dead, she wants me dead, and she doesn't care how many fucking bodies she needs to turn to
fertilizer to do it. If they can find us and hand us over, well, maybe we'll get lucky and she'll make it quick, but they hope she'll let the hatchet be buried.”

“Then we kill he-”

“Are you braindead, boy?” Bane snapped, “We tried to kill her. She crippled me, killed Mauve.”

“And she was injured-!”

“Because she didn't dodge or block it,” Bane’s snarl hadn't faded, pulling out a bottle of black dye, “since then, she's killed forty men without an injury beyond the one she was recovering from. It won't end well. So here's what we're gonna do. You're gonna dye your bloody hair, cover your eye and we’re leaving Vale for Vacuo tonight.”

“Why Vacuo?”

“Because they don't care who you are in that shit hole,” Bane snapped, “Once we're there, we're done. If you want to be a retard and try to form some sort of movement to march into Vale and kill 'em, risking someone finding you, go ahead, but I won't be involved. Understand me?”

“Yes,” Adam spat.

“Good,” Bane shoved the dye into Adam's hand, “Get dyeing, boy, we have to be at the station in two hours.”

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby exited the Blind Eternities with her eyes closed, holding Sun's hand in a much less traumatic version of what had started their journey together.

In hindsight, the pain of watching Sun fall out of the Blind Eternities, skin raw and blood pouring from his nose, was probably a sign of how this all would end. That Sun was so worried about her leaving…
Man, she was oblivious…

Sun nudged her, “Whatcha thinking about, Rubes?”

“What makes you think I'm thinking about something?”

“You scrunch up your nose when you're thinking.”

“I do not!”

“Yes you do,” Blake and Sun chorused.

Ruby pouted, crossing her arms, “Can I open my eyes yet?”

“Yes!” Sun said, popping the P.

Ruby's eyes flitted open, her jaw dropping as she took in the view.

They were standing in a cliffside park, overlooking a city that stretched as far as the eye could see. Hovering in the sky above it were three planets, “Where are we?”

“Midchilda,” Sun said, “It's a funky place, part of this huge, like, sub-thing of Planes-”

“Like Rabiah,” Ruby muttered.

“Uh, yeah, sure,” Sun nodded, “Anyways it's- what the fuck?”

Ruby watched the distorted vacuum sail into the air, before she shared a look with Blake and Sun, and took off for the location it had come from.
Cinque’s respiration rose slightly as she reached up to touch the malfunctioning ocular replacement and got a shock. That would be expensive to replace.

A pair of Stingers formed in her hand, crackling with energy from Rumble Detonator. The brown haired giant of a mage who had taken her eye glared up at her, a snarl on his face as he tried to defend the remaining members of his team.

Cinque could understand that. She'd do the same if somehow, impossibly, her and her sisters were forced into the same position.

Cinque’s remaining eye shifted, struggling to accurately gauge the distance between her and Zest Grangeitz. Not that it mattered, at this distance. It wasn't a battle anymore, just an execution.

“Hurry up!” Quattro demanded, “I want to-”

The Stingers flew forward, aiming for Zest's throat. It was at that moment that Cinque’s day started to truly go wrong.

Both knives exploded in air, shrapnel hitting both Zest and Cinque. Not enough to take either out, but enough to make it clear someone was there.

Cinque, Quattro and Tre turned alongside the Gadget Drones, meeting the eyes of the trio of children standing in the doorway, the youngest pointing a gun at them.

“See, I told you to hurry up,” Quattro said, taking a step forward and giving a smile, “Now you thr-”

Before she could finish, Tre moved, grabbing Quattro and flinging her away from a shot from the youngest. Quattro's eyes widened, before narrowing, “You…”

“Run!” Zest ordered, “They're too-”
“Shut up!” The boy ordered with a laugh, pointing his weapons at Tre and Cinque, “We're saving you!”

Cinque wanted to grimace at the misplaced optimism, as opposed to the wide grin on Quattro's face. Cinque prepared four Stingers, waiting for Tre to begin the battle.

And begin it she did, launching towards the three children so fast Cinque's enhanced senses couldn't keep up with it, moving to take off the youngest’s head…

And sailing through air as the girl ducked, firing four more shots at Tre at point black range. When each one stopped against Tre's enhanced frame, Cinque felt her eyebrows raise in slight shock.

Mass based rounds? Why were children carrying around something so illegal?

And yes, Cinque was aware of the hypocrisy of that question, but for them, it was different. Everything about them was illegal, so adding mass drivers to the mix wouldn't make things much worse if they were somehow caught.

Tre's face betrayed a slight look of shock as the black haired girl’s shadow rose up in some form of beast, roaring and swiping at Tre to force her to back off. Cinque threw her Stingers into the beast, watching them vanish and hearing the muffled noise of an explosion within.

Some form of summoning magic? Or a barrier? Not enough data to draw a conclusion at this point. Not from Cinque, anyways, Uno would be able to.

Cinque immediately designated the trio, the youngest was Rot, the one with the shadow was Schwarz, and the last was Gelb. Two more Stingers appeared in her hand as Rot swung open the revolver mechanism of her weapon, only for them to be swallowed by the shadow.

“How many knives does she have?” Gelb complained.

“Sun,” Rot said, pointing her mass driver at Cinque, “Deal with the purple haired one.”
“Right,” Gelb nodded, holding out the hand not holding his mass driver, which was pointed at Tre, as lightning crackled down from the heavens, marks appearing under his skin as the ball lightning absorbed into his form.

“I'll deal with glasses,” Schwartz said, the shadows rising up and swirling around her.

“Oh boy!” Quattro said, her shark like grin growing wider, glasses flashing as the anti magic field on the Gadget Drones turned on.

“And that leaves you and me,” Rot said, leveling the mass driver at Cinque.

Cinque summoned a set of Stingers in the air, preparing for the battle.

Then Tre and Gleb vanished, a shockwave coming from outside, Quattro vanished as Schwartz sank into her shadows, and Rot moved in another blur, shooting down six of the Stingers and dodging several more.

--- X Sun X---

Sun caught the punch from the purple haired woman, grinning at her as he pressed Ruyi to her chest, “Sor-”

The woman vanished, the shot flying up into the air. Son of a…

Sun whirled in place, a bladed wing sailing by his throat as he pulled out Jingu, firing both shotguns at the woman. Watching her be pushed back, Sun snapped his weapons together, charging, launching across the rooftops in a blur.

Ruyi Jingu Bang smashed into the purple haired woman's gut, going off with another bang as her wings slashed at his throat, struggling with his Aura. Sun dodged backwards, a lightning bolt crashing down between him and the woman.

When the flash faded, unfortunately, she was gone.
Fuck a duck, that backfir-

Sun split Ryui Bang and Jingu Bang, using the pair of Escrima sticks to deflect the next strike. Sun fired one shot from each, then twirled them by the levers, firing the other at her. Purple dodged around each shot, aiming for Sun.

Sun activated Via Sun, the glowing copy colliding with her, the explosion blasted her back. Two more launched forward, colliding with her gut and exploding in a blast.

Sun grit his teeth as she stood, feeling his Aura protest, fucking shit. Lightning crackled in the sky.

He needed to end this, now. Now.

Lightning smashed into Sun, burning into his body. Go, go, go.

Sun exploded forward, fist drawn back as Purple’s yellow eyes grew wide. She swung her fist at him, colliding with his.

Sun felt his arm shatter, watching her arm do the same, shards of metal ripping through her muscle and flesh. Her mouth fell open, eyes widening as she grabbed Sun with her other arm.

Damnit, why hadn't Ruby warned him she was a cyborg?

Sun grit his teeth, swinging his forehead straight down and knocking her back, blood pouring down his head and into his eyes. Behind the woman, a blue path formed, another purple haired woman riding up it on a pair of roller skates, a pair of metal gauntlets on her fists.

Sun met her eyes as the cyborg’s eyes widened, lunging forward as the woman punched her from behind. Sun's fist smashed in between her breasts, causing her to vomit up a large glob of blood.

The cyborg spasmed as several glowing bands wrapped around her, the woman nodded to Sun, smiling “Thanks for the save. A bit of advice, get rid of those weapons, they're not worth the risk.”
Sun watched her skate off, arms dangling limply, “What the heck is that supposed to mean?”

--- X Blake X---

Blake dodged the shots of the droids, her Shadow grabbing a part of broken wall and throwing it at the droid with a deep, animalistic roar. The drone gave a whine as it powered down, energy crackling around it.

Two more shadows rose up, roaring as they lunged at the drones…

And vanished in wisps of mana the minute they got within a certain distance of the droids, a mocking laugh coming from above her. Blake's eyes trailed up to where the woman with glasses and pigtails was seated, watching her with a wide grin.

“Were you hoping that summon magic-” The woman's head jerked back as Blake fired on her in between weaving around two lasers, her grin not fading as she toppled off the building, hitting the ground and vanishing.

“Oooh!” Blake whirled, the woman sitting on the roof opposite the one she had just been sitting on, leering down at Blake as two more drones aimed at her, “Were you hoping to take me out? Too ba-”

Blake charged forward, running straight up the wall and decapitating the woman as the drones whirled on her, preparing to fire. Before they could, Blake's Shadow rose up, slightly sluggish, and shattered them with a sweep of the claw.

“You're really determined to kill me, aren't you?” Blake resisted the urge to snarl as she looked up, the woman flying in air with a finger on her chin.

“Shut up,” Blake said, firing another shot at her and watching another body drop. Was this what it was like to fight Jace?

“Keep it up,” the woman taunted, “You're just giving me more data~!”
Blake closed her eyes, pouring all the mana she could into creating a horde of shadows and clones, and leveled a glare at the drones that appeared shortly after, like a veil had been swept aside.

--- X Ruby X---

Ruby dodged to the right in a flurry of petals, switching out her anti-magic rounds for barrier ones as the knives impacted the ground, exploding.

*Stingers, designed by Jail Scaglietti for use by Number V of the Combat Cyborg Series, further modified to its specifications.*

Ruby continued her spin, firing at the creation in front of her.

*Number V ‘Cinque’, product of Jail Scaglietti, 75% cybernetics. Unique features include ‘Rumble Detonator’, ability to infuse metal with explosive power.*

Seventy five percent cybernetics. *Seventy five*, only Tezzeret and Phyrexians were more metal than this thing.

Ruby fired at it, watching it deflect the shots with Stingers. Barriers sprang around the explosions before Ruby summoned Crescent Rose, unfolding the scythe and charging forward.

The Cinque’s eye widened, a barrier forming and protecting it from Ruby's strike as Ruby threw it away from the injured man and pregnant woman. Cinque summoned several more Stingers in the air, launching them at Ruby.

Ruby formed a series of barriers around herself and the survivors of the fight, dropping them the minute the explosion went off before she fired a helix shaped beam at it.

“Megane,” the man said, “How much longer until Quint is up?”

“Minutes.”
“Good,” the man grunted, pushing himself up and clutching his spear.

*Gungnir, crafted as a casting catalyst for Zest Grangaitz. Capable of releasing high speed wind blasts—*

“Stay down!” Ruby ordered.

“And let a child risk their life for me and my men?” Zest asked, continuing forward in spite of his injuries, “Never.”

Ruby met his steeled eyes, before pointing her gun at Cinque, him doing the same with his spear.

“...Che,” Cinque snarled, throwing a storm of Stingers at them. Ruby quickly formed more barriers, only to find it gone when they dropped.

--- X AN X---

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts and Opinions? Good? Bad? Meh?
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

So, for this arc, chapters are gonna probably be (even) shorter. This is in part due to it being significantly easier on me with the two very parallel storylines, and in part due to me being aware I don't know the StrikerS characters. It's just easier for me to go back and fix things if the chapter is shorter (I fully admit that's exactly why I haven't gone back and fixed the monster that is the Innistrad chapter yet).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

--- X Weiss X---

Weiss looked up at the storm of expletives through the halls of the manor. Following it, the young heiress watched Blake and a brown haired girl supporting a blonde boy with his arms were twisted at uncomfortable angles.

“Nissa!” Blake called, “We need you!”

“What is it-?” a woman with long, pointed ears, her brown hair in a palit and wearing a green leather coat entered the room, stifling a sigh at the sight on the boy, “What did Sun do this time?”

“Punched a fucking cyborg,” the boy spat, letting himself be placed on a table as people began to gather. A woman with cracked red hair, another with her black hair in a bun, a handsome giant man with brown hair, a giant lion thing, Winter and a boy with blue eyes.

“We gotta fight?” the red haired woman asked.

“Nah,” Sun said, “It wasn't anything Gatewatch-y. We started a vacation, got in a fight with a cyborg.”

“Ruby, are you alright?” The redhead asked, apparently losing interest in the conversation.
Weiss's eyes followed everyone's, seeing the dull eyes of the girl that had come in with Sun and Blake. Her hand was wrapped around a revolver, angled at the ground with a complete lack of trigger discipline. Her eyes snapped up, an exaggerated smile coming onto her face, "I'm fine! I should head to my workshop, I need to go prepare some ammo!"

The woman with her hair in a bun walked up to Ruby, whispering something in her ear. Once Ruby gave a hesitant nod, the woman pulled her into a hug, the lion man planting a hand on her shoulder. Once the woman let go, the lion guided her out of the room, passing by Weiss and looking at her with one glowing eye, the other clenched shut, "You're Winter’s sister?"

He could talk!?

"Yes!" Weiss squeaked.

"A pleasure to meet you," he rumbled, "I'm Ajani, this is Ruby."

"Hi," Ruby said.

"Hello," Weiss curtsied, feeling her knees shake. What was he? She had never heard of something like this…

"Weiss," Winter called, "Come over here."

Weiss did her best to do so without running, hair standing on end. Winter planted a hand on her shoulder, "It's alright, Ajani is a good man."

"But…"

"It's alright," Winter said, "I wouldn't have brought you here if I thought you would be hurt. Here, let me introduce you."

Winter gestured to the tall man standing off to the side, "This is Gideon Jura. Gideon, this is my sister, Weiss."
“Hello!” the man said, giving a wide smile and planting a hand on Weiss's shoulder, “It's nice to meet you, Winter has been a great help to us the past few weeks.”

“Nice to meet you too,” Weiss said, leaning away from the hand on her. She wasn't used to people who weren't Klein or Winter touching her.

“This is Chandra Nalaar,” Winter gestured to the woman who was watching Sun jerk about with a look of amusement.


“I don't wanna,” Sun complained, “I- mhf!”

Before Sun could finish, the long eared woman shoved a block of wood in between his teeth, cracking her fingers as green energy circled around them, her eyes glowing.

Weiss glanced around, taking in everyone. Except for Winter, everyone's eyes glowed slightly. Cybernetics? She knew some Huntsmen groups required Cybernetic enhancements on top of Aura, but then shouldn't Ajani have two eyes?

“Nissa Revane,” Winter waved at the woman running her hands up Sun's arms, before waving at the woman with her hair in her bun, “and Elspeth Tirel.”

“Hello,” Elspeth said.

“And this,” Winter finished, turning to the boy, “is Varian.”

“Hi,” Varian said.

“Not here at the moment are Liliana Vess, Jace Beleren, Thalia or Ral Zarek,” Winter finished, “but I’m sure you'll see them all at some point.”
Ruby grabbed a set of bullets already marked with sigils to stabilize their ballistic (something all but required given the complete destruction of aerodynamics from the sigils) and began to carve more into one, lips tight.

“You plan to go back,” Ajani rumbled.

“Yeah.”

“I thought you would have abandoned revenge-”

“It isn't about revenge,” Ruby said, pouring lightning dust into the casing and loading it into the press, “Sun’s gonna be fine, and he took out the one who did it.”

“Then what is it?”

“Cutting this off at the head,” Ruby said, “They weren't just cyborgs, Ajani, they were created from clones.”

Ajani didn't say anything for a long moment, letting Ruby move around her workshop in a blur, preparing more bullets, grabbing spar weapons.

“I see,” Ajani finally said, a guttural growl in his voice, “that does make things more worrying.”

The words that didn't need to be said between them was that there was another group that used clones to create cyborgs. Ruby could see it in her mind's eye, androgynous clones, crafted without gender because they needed none.

What did ovaries and wombs do, when flesh would be stripped away? What did sperm do when metal would replace it?

What did testosterone and estrogen do, when all that would remain was soulless metal? When all
was Phyrexia?

Jail Scaglietti needed to die, before he could become a new Father of Machines. Before he discovered a way off Midchilda and blighted the Multiverse like The Ineffable before him.

They had failed Mirrodin, they wouldn't fail Midchilda. It didn't matter what it took, they would crush the Numbers, they would destroy the drones, and they would kill Jail Scaglietti.

“Do you want my help?” Ajani asked.

Ruby hesitated, eyes trailing toward a bullet she had planned for Tezzeret. Tightening her lips again, Ruby walked over to the safe, typing in the code on it and pulling out a briefcase and the heavily enchanted, black coat she had gotten on Innistrad, immediately sealing it away in case something happened to her cloak. Cracking open the case, Ruby checked the gun within, opening it, running a cleaning wire down the barrel, before loading the bullet and sealing it within a sigil on the palm of her left hand.

“Do you want my help?” Ajani repeated, louder.

“I don't know,” Ruby said, “the more people who go, the more suspicious Giddy will get. Maybe I'll do an investigation with Blake and Sun, then come get you and Elspeth when we find something?”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Ajani agreed, placing a hand on her shoulder, “You're doing the right thing.”

“...Thank you,” Ruby said, voice wavering.

“You're welcome,” Ajani said, “Now, I need to go hunting.”

“We could just buy more meat,” Ruby said.

“It isn't as good as meat from a wild animal,” Ajani said, good eye closing in a smile, “but I appreciate the gesture.”
“Well,” Fate watched her brother gaze around the crime scene, one hand in the pocket of his jacket, where she knew he was gripping Durandal, “This is a mess.”

“We knew that,” Fate pointed out.

The crime scene was, unfortunately, in less than perfect condition. The three survivors of Team Zest had insisted that the deceased be removed before Chrono be allowed to examine it, pointing out that they had already died before the new group appeared. The morgue would assuredly call if evidence otherwise arose, and pictures had been taken.

It didn't really change much, there were still blood splatters, broken drones and damaged walls.

“Fate,” Chrono said, teeth gritted, “Cast a search spell.”

“What?”

“Cast a search spell.”

“Oh...k?” Fate said, moving Bardiche off the floor. This wasn't really her area of expertise, “Bardiche?”

Yes, Sir, the yellow gem embedded in the axehead flashed, sca- error.

“What?”

Error, Bardiche repeated.

“That's what I thought,” Chrono said, his Barrier Jacket vanishing to reveal the Enforcer uniform under it, “You probably didn't even notice it, did you?”
“Notice what?”

“Exactly,” Chrono said, walking over to something as he pulled on a pair of white gloves. Picking it up, Chrono rotated his hand, examining it, before carefully bagging it, “There are several AMF’s around the area.”

“Team Zes-”

“Not from the drones,” Chrono said, pocketing the bag and walking to another piece of metal, “It’s coming from the mass rounds.”

“Mass rounds?” Fate said, frowning, “That can’t be right. The technology is too big-”

“That’s what I was thinking,” Chrono said, grabbing yet another slug and holding it out towards Fate, who carefully took it, feeling the gloves of her Barrier Jacket flicker against it, “I’m going to step out to call Ferret Boy. You finish bagging the mass rounds.”

“Yuuno?” Fate asked, eyes trailing towards Chrono as he stepped out of the warehouse. Why was he calling Yuuno?

Fate looked down at the slug of metal, eyes narrowing as she examined it. On it, she could just barely make out some form of runes.

Fate pointed a finger at the mass round, flipping it into the air as she ran through algorithms, energy crackling, “Photon Lancer!”

The ball of mana launched at the slug, hitting it, and dispersing. When it landed, the slug lay against her gloves without any fight.

So they could only do a limited amount of anti-magic? Strange…

Fate bagged the slug, before beginning to move around the room, bagging each.
Hopefully Yuuno would be able to find something in the Infinity Library about the runes. Fate didn't recognize them, but she had never been the best at languages (her Japanese scores had never risen above passable).

--- X CinqueX---

Cinque stepped into the lab, watching Jail working on another enhanced arm, “We're here.”

“Welcome back,” Jail said, not looking up from the limb, holding out a hand and taking the tool Uno handed him, “Don't get too comfortable, I'm going to need you to go back out in a short while.”

“I'm sorry about-”

“-Tre? The operation going wrong? Don't be,” Jail said.

“But-”

“Cinque,” Jail sighed, “it wasn't your fault. It wasn't anyone's fault. There was no way we could have predicted those three rogue elements appearing.”

“But-” Cinque tried to interject, to argue she should have, only for Jail to continue.

“We don't know who they are,” Jail said, “Where they're from, why they got involved, how they were capable of keeping up with Tre, why they use mass based weaponry… without any of that information, it would have been impossible to predict them. I can't even say for certain we will ever see them again. I'm preparing, obviously, but they may have only got involved because they happened to be nearby.”

“By the way,” Quattro said, speaking up with a grin, “I got something for you.”

Quattro held up a mass round with black runes on it in her gloved hand. Jail looked up, holding out
his hand with a smirk, “That will greatly help our attempts to find out where they came from—”

“-Put on a glove before you hold it,” Quattro said, pulling off her glove to reveal the synthetic flesh under it had become black and necrotic, “It's not something you want to touch.”

“Clearly.” Jail said, his Device appearing on his right hand so he could take it, “I'm going to examine this. Cinque, be ready, I have another mission for you.”

“What?”

“I need you and Sein to rescue Tre,” Jail said, “We can't risk her being examined too closely.”

“Right,” Cinque nodded, lips tight. She was going to save Tre, no matter what.

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Chapter End Notes

Thoughts and Opinions? Good? Bad? Meh?

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