The Grimm War

by McDougal

Summary

A trick of the Void traps the Operator and Ordis on Remnant just after the events of the Mountain Glenn incident. Warframe story spoilers through Chains of Harrow, although not Apostasy or Sacrifice.

Character tags will be added as more characters show up. Rating subject to change; I think it'll stay at T but it might go up to M.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
“Operator, the Lotus is calling.”

Not looking up from her gun maintenance, the Operator responds. “How urgent is it? We are kind of traveling to another mission and I’m neck deep in this guts of this gun, Ordis.”

“She seems very agitated. Perhaps it would be best if you TOOK THE DAMN CA responded to her.”

“Alright, put her through. Audio only, I’m covered in grease. This had better be important, though,” says the Operator, hands and eyes never leaving the rifle on the table in front of her.

“Connecting to the Lotus. Connection live in 3… 2… 1…”

The voice that comes over the speakers in the next moment is calm, collected, soothing, and yet still expecting obedience. “Tenno, my sensors have detected a Void portal near your location. However, I cannot locate the exit point within the Void. I need you to enter this portal and identify where it leads, and find a way to shut down the portal.”

Carefully removing and inspecting a guide rod and spring for wear, correct shape, and elasticity, the Operator asks “Who opened it, Lotus? Grineer or Corpus?”

“Unknown. It appears to have opened without any outside activation, or indeed any Void gate. Even more concerning is that it’s fairly large and in hard vacuum – you could fly a capital ship into it, although it would be a tight fit. Your secondary objective is to find out what activated this Void portal.”

Careful fingers find early signs of metal fatigue in the spring, removing it from the guide rod and placing it in the foundry for reconstruction. “Any other Tenno in the area? Do I have time to call them for backup?”

“The next closest Tenno is 3 days out. There is a medium sized Grineer fleet roughly a day out. This needs to be dealt with before they reach the portal.”

“Is that all?” the Operator asks, opening a bottle of cleaning solution and enjoying the sharp smell for a moment before wetting a cloth with it and wiping down the receiver.

“Yes. Good luck, Tenno.”

“Thank you, Lotus.” The operator finishes wiping the receiver, using a clean cloth to remove the remainder of the cleaning solution.

“Ordis, bring the orbiter to the Void portal, and put the Ivara back into storage and warm up the Excalibur. We don’t know what we’re going to find in there, so let’s hedge our bets with a fast generalist ‘frame.”

“Warming up the Excalibur now, operator. We are about a half hour out from the Void portal.”

“Wonderful. Give me a five minute warning so that I can get to my transference seat, please.”
“Will do, operator!”

The Operator sighs, and as she reaches for the small cloths and cleaning rod number 3 to clean out the barrel, begins to vent. “Another day in the life of a Tenno. ‘Go here, explore this dangerous thing! Wipe out the crew of this ship! Sneak through to these locations and hack these consoles for enemy intelligence, and if you get spotted, things will rapidly go the way of the Orokin if you don’t quickly kill the poor sap who spotted you.”

Stabbing the cleaning rod down the Tiberon Prime’s barrel with much more force than is necessary, the Operator continues. “Oh Tenno, I have a special mission for you. I need you to go and find the shards of the Sentient Hunhow, who was the leader of the Sentients in the Old War because he’s starting to reactivate OH GOD THINGS HAVE GONE HORRIBLY WRONG QUICKLY YOU NEED TO GO FIGHT THE SHADOW STALKER WHO HAS BEEN SUPERPOWERED BY HUNHOW WHO IS ALSO MY FATHER! Take the ENTIRETY of Lua out of the Void! Now go recover yourself! Get to your orbiter! There’s a transference seat in the back that you need to place yourself in OH GOD HOW IS THE STALKER HERE?”

Slamming a dry cloth through the barrel to pick up the cleaning solution and remaining fouling, she continues, now yelling. “Then, a few months later, someone gets close to the Transference pods that still have fully sleeping Tenno. Go find out what it is! Oh hey, Teshin. What are you doing here? Being creepy and condescending? Sure, that’s the best way to not appear suspicious at all! Of course I came here, this is the first intel we’ve had on the Grineer Queens and the first location of this gigantic mobile fortress! And at the center of that fortress, the Grineer Queens, who it turns out are Orokin who have managed to stay ‘alive’ through Continuity, and one of them wants my body for her new host now! In order to fight her, you’ll need to unrepress your memories of the Zariman 10-0 incident!”

Slamming the cleaning rod onto the table hard enough to break it, she continues. “And then. AND THEN. A Steel Meridian ship goes silent, so we go there to find that the Red Veil has gone crazy, because their spiritual liege, who is an autistic Tenno, decided to permanently bind himself to his Warframe to protect the rest of the Origin System from the Man in the Wall. Which ended up driving him absolutely nutty. So now you have to mercy kill him. And we still don’t know what the Man in the Wall actually is.”

Much more quietly, she says “But Lotus calls, and I answer.”

Leaning back with a sardonic smile, she continues. “For an intelligence officer, the intel that she provides is extremely lacking. What do you think we’ll find on the other side of the portal, Ordis? Human intelligence Infestation?”

“That is extremely unlikely, Operator. Infestation transforms most brain matter, leaving only basic functions remaining. If I could get you back on track, the replacement parts for the Tiberon Prime will take about 12 hours to finish fabbing, as you have tasked priority cycles on other things. Do you wish to change your weapons loadout?”

The Operator sighs and leans forward, thinking. “Let’s see… Prisma Skana for the melee option, take the Pyrana Prime for short ranged room clearing, and what to take as the primary… Astilla or Soma Prime… Well, if I’m taking the Pyrana, the Astilla would be overspecializing in area of effect room clearing. I do need a midrange option. Let’s grab the Soma Prime. That means that I definitely need to take the Carrier Prime, as this thing chews through ammo like no other.”

“Understood, Operator. Moving weapons to Excalibur hardpoints now.”

The Operator stands up, looking at the mess she’s left on the table from her rage. “How’s the
Archwing?”

“The Archwing launcher segment is operational, Grattler and Itzal are ready to launch.”

“Thanks Ordis. In that case, I’ll clean up and go meditate. I need to do that more often, that outburst proves it.”

The Operator walks over to the living quarters, and kneels down on the meditation spot, meditating for a while and trying to calm herself from her earlier rage.

“Operator, we are five minutes out from the Void Portal. I am letting you know, as requested.”

“Thanks, Ordis.”

The Operator walks to the back of the orbiter to the somatic link, swings in, dogs the hatch, and closes her eyes.

And opens them a moment later, in control of her chosen Warframe.

Looking around and moving arms, legs, and fingers, the Operator says “Gross motor control… good. Fine motor control… good. Transference successful, signal is strong.”

As she pulls the weapons off the hardpoints to make sure they’re in top shape and the hardpoints are functioning properly, the Operator walks up to the navigation console of the Orbiter, with a minute to spare before the arrival at the Void portal.

Watching the rapidly approaching portal, the Operator orders “Ordis, set scans to maximum strength. The less time we spend in an unknown part of the Void, the better.”

“That will drop our cloak, Operator. Are you sure?”

“Yes,” the Operator says with a slight nod. “Do it before we enter, or the Void might screw with it.”

“Dropping cloak and boosting active sensors. Entering Void portal in 3… 2… 1…”

The Void is vast. It is completely black, or would be were it not for the streaks of silver looking like frozen river rapids. And there’s nothing nearby, although that doesn’t necessarily mean much. Distances in the Void tend to not mean a lot. Something can appear to be only a few minutes away and take days to reach, or vice versa. More importantly, there doesn’t appear to be anything opening this Void portal, at least that’s immediately visible.

Looking around, hoping to see a ship, or at least an obvious structure to board and disable, the Operator asks “Ordis, what do your scans say?”

Sounding almost confused, Ordis says “Operator, the scans ARE USELESS have found nothing yet. This Void Portal appears to be completely natural.”

Shaking her head, the Operator responds “We both know that that’s not possible. No naturally occurring Void Portal gets this big or lasts this long. If it was natural, it would’ve been barely a blip on whatever tacmap the Lotus has before it disappeared.”

“All the same, Operator, I am not detecting any power source or any indication of a Void key.”

“Ordis, get me a line to the Lotus. Something is seriously screwy, and I want to give a report before something goes way off the rails. Send her all the data you’ve collected so far, too.”

Shrugging, the Operator says “Damn. Load up a beacon with the information, and send it back through the portal. Set it to self destruct once the message has gotten through.”

“Data loaded and beacon launched.”

“Run a search pattern. Let’s see if it’s just beyond the range of our sensors.” The Operator shakes her head and walks to the living quarters to meditate.

12 hours later

“Operator, I am still finding nothing—wait. Operator! The Void Portal is closing!”

Bolting up and starting to run to navigation, the Operator exclaims “Damn! Full speed back to the portal, we still haven’t figured out where we are in the Void! If we don’t get to that portal, we may be stuck here for good!”

**“THIS HUNK OF JUNK ISN’T FAST ENOUGH”** - The orbiter won’t make it before the portal closes!

Hitting the ramp into navigation at full speed, the Operator says “Try anyways! This portal broke every other rule of Void portals, maybe it’ll slow down as it closes!”

The Operator looks out of the window, willing the Void Portal to stop shrinking.

But despite the Orbiter’s speed and the Operator’s hopes, they lose the race.

Slamming her fist on the nav console, the Operator exclaims “Damn it! Ordis, what’s our supply levels? How long do we have before the orbiter can no longer function?”

“We recently restocked on life support and fuel, so a few months? Fuel is the limiter on how much we can do. If need be, we can use some of the materials you’ve collected to make more life support, but if we run out of fuel, the orbiter shuts down and **THE OPERATOR DIES** there’s no way to cycle the life support.”

Nodding and making the decisions, the Operator says “Right. Shut down everything non-essential, except for the transmitter. Keep us drifting, and transmit an emergency plea on all Tenno channels. Do we still not know where we are in the Void?”

“We are **COMPLETELY LOST** adrift in a trackless sea, Operator.”

“Great. Let me know if anything changes. I’m going to get out of the Excalibur. And then meditate some more.”

Two weeks later

Reaching her meditation spot and looking out into the Void, the Operator says “Ordis, is it just me or is the Void… darker today?”

“One moment, booting up active sensors. Oh no. Oh no. This is very bad. Operator, you must get back to your pod and transference into a Warframe!”

The Operator immediately starts moving to the back of the Orbiter. “What’s happening, Ordis?”

“A Void storm is approaching! We must prepare, and the Operator must be protected!”
“Unrack the Excalibur. It’s ready for anything right now.”

“I never stowed it. GET MOVING!”

Practically throwing herself into the pod, the Operator begins to initialize Transference even before the pod is fully sealed. As soon as she’s in control of her Excalibur, she starts moving to navigation and asks “What exactly is a Void storm?”

“The easiest way to describe the damage it does is rapidly shifting gravitic anomalies. But it’s the Void, where physics breaks down. We don’t know what they are. We can only batten down the hatches and hope to ride it out.”

“Can we outrun it?”

“Not unless there’s a Void gate in the area.”

Just then, the ground drops out from under the Warframe, the Excalibur ending up sprawled over the navigation console. “Operator, it’s starting!”

“I figured that out!” the Operator says, scrambling to regain her feet.

The next five minutes felt like hours, as the Void storm bounces the orbiter around accompanied by the sounds of metal groaning under the strain of rapidly shifting gravitic anomalies.

“Operator! There’s a natural Void portal opening!”

Braced against the codex console, the Operator yells “GET US OUT OF HERE, ORDIS! I DON’T CARE WHERE IT IS, ANYWHERE IS SAFER THAN HERE!”

The orbiter turns and boosts towards the Void portal.

They’re nearly there when there’s a tremendous tearing of metal and alarms start blaring.

As they exit the gate into open real-space, the Operator yells “Ordis! What happened?”

“There was a particularly strong surge in the storm, with two pulses pulling in roughly opposite directions. Your personal quarters has a new exit to hard vacuum. Also, the port side primary thrusters and port side rear maneuvering thrusters ARE FU are out of commission until they can be repaired. This is problematic, as we no longer have the thrust capabilities to escape the gravity of the planet that is pulling us towards it.”

Immediately jumping towards navigation, the Operator exclaims “Planet? Which one? We could get picked up by other Tenno quickly!”

“Either my sensors ARE A PIECE OF JUNK are malfunctioning or we are no longer in the origin system, Operator.”

Confused, the Operator stops and says “What? Try to send a message to the Lotus.”

“I have been trying, Operator. We are getting no connection. Also, there is a more immediate problem. Brace for atmospheric reentry.”

“WHAT?”

“The Void portal opened in the middle of the exosphere of the planet, Operator, and we were on A
COLLISION COURSE a perpendicular angle to the planet surface. With the port thrusters offline, the orbiter was unable to obtain standard orbit.”

“How much control do we have?”

“We have nearly full pitch and yaw, but no way to fly in atmosphere until we can get the port main thruster online. If we try to fly by counteracting the unbalanced thrust with the maneuvering thrusters, we’ll just burn them out. I was able to get us to a proper atmospheric entry angle, but only barely. I maintain enough control to steer us away from any population centers, but this is going to be a crash and not a proper landing. SO BUCKLE UP.”

Reentry is hellish. With no way to slow down until close to impact, it’s not so much a controlled descent as a screaming fireball falling at mach 15. The Operator can do nothing but hold on and pray that Ordis can get the Orbiter slowed down to a survivable speed before impact. Then the Operator remembers something she can do to increase their chances of survival.

In a slightly panicked voice, she orders “Ordis! Emergency override. You are authorized to use the maneuvering thrusters to destruction to slow us down. We can’t repair anything if we’re dead!”

“Understood, Operator. Beginning emergency braking sequence. Please brace yourself for acceleration. THIS IS GOING TO GET UGLY.”

The Operator watches as the maneuvering thrusters on the starboard nose quickly light off, flinging the ship around so the remaining rear thruster can bring its substantial amount of power to bear. The counterpulse of the port nose and starboard rear maneuvering thrusters and the remaining main engine begin slowing the ship from “we just wiped out everything in sight and dashed ourselves in so many pieces that they cannot be counted” to a much more reasonable “There will probably be one big piece that is repairable, and we’ll show up on any seismographs for a 1000 kilometer radius.”

The Operator watches as the maneuvering thrusters on the nose of the ship go past their safety cutoffs; they weren’t designed to be fired constantly, they were only supposed to be fired for a second at a time at most. One of the thrusters explodes, then a second. Then, trees, and an instant later, impact.

Flopping back on her bed and throwing her arms wide, Ruby complains “Ugh, this waiting is so boring! I want to go on another mission!”

“Ruby, even though we were cleared of wrongdoing in the Breach, they still want to give us a break from missions because of how off the rails that mission went” says Yang, not looking up from her beeping scroll as she plays a game.

Blake reaches over and smacks the top of her partner’s head.

With an indignant start, Yang exclaims “Hey! What was that for?”

Looking over the top of her book, Blake responds “You know what you did.”

Yang looks confused for a second, then surprise sprouts on her face. “I swear that that was unintentional.”

“I don’t believe you.”

Rolling onto her side, Ruby says “Blake, I think she’s actually telling the truth. She’s normally a lot
more proud of her wordplay.”

“She still deserved it.”

Weiss interjects “Will you all stop bickering? I’m trying to study.”

Ruby is quick to respond, saying “Weiss, you haven’t turned a page in your notes or your textbook for the last fifteen minutes.”

“What - Yes I have!”

“No, you haven’t. I was recording,” says Ruby, holding up her scroll.

“WHY ARE YOU RECORDING ME STUDYING?”

“BECAUSE I’M BORED!”

“Woah, Ruby, look at that shooting star!” says Yang, desperately trying to avoid the indignant explosion of Weiss that seems imminent.

In a flash of rose petals, Ruby appears next to the window with excitement on her face. “Wow, that’s a really big one!”

Joining the sisters at the window, Blake says “Brighter and longer lasting, too. Normally a shooting star would’ve burned up by now.”

Weiss, having completely given up on the idea of studying, joins the team. “It’s probably a large chunk of the moon. There might be enough mass there to be a full on meteorite.”

The team watches in silence as the shooting star continues its descent.

“Is it just me, or did it just get brighter?”

Nodding, Yang says “Yeah, Blakey, I was just thinking the same thing.”

The light disappears, and Weiss starts counting off the seconds in her head. A little bit over seven seconds later, a small boom is heard, the room shakes a bit, and the ropes suspending Ruby’s bed creak as it sways. “It landed about 25 kilometers off. It’s a good thing that it was a small one.”

“How do you know that, Weiss?” asks Blake, turning her head to look at Weiss.

Dropping into lecture mode, Weiss explains “A shock wave will propagate through the ground near the surface at roughly 3.5 kilometers per second. I counted down after the light disappeared, and the shockwave hit Beacon a bit over seven seconds after impact.”

Looking a little confused, Blake asks “But the horizon is only 5 kilometers away. Wouldn’t that screw with your calculations since you couldn’t actually see the point of impact?”

“We are very high up, Blake. Thanks to the height of Beacon, the horizon is closer to 40 kilometers away.”

Just then, all the scrolls of team RWBY go off with the chime of a new message.

Quickly recovering them, they read the message.

“I wonder why Ozpin wants to see us,” wonders Weiss.
Ruby turns and fixes Yang with a glare. “What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything, Ruby!” Says Yang, raising her hands in mock surrender.

Quickly leaning forward at the hips and jabbing at Yang with her finger, Ruby asks “Then why does Ozpin want to see us?”

Blake interrupts, shaking her head a little. “Let’s just go and see him. He did say ‘at your earliest convenience,’ after all.”

The team quickly grabs what of their combat gear they weren’t already wearing and pile into the elevator to go meet Ozpin.

It’s a long ride up. Weiss breaks the silence. “Why do you think Ozpin summoned us?”

“If Yang didn’t do a particularly bad prank, then he’s probably going to give us a mission,” says Blake.

Ruby looks excited, but before she can start speculating on what the mission will be, the elevator dings and the doors open, forcing her to compose herself as much as she can.

Team RWBY enters Ozpin’s office, looking up at the clockwork spinning away before looking at Ozpin’s desk and the back of his chair.

Turning around, Ozpin says “I’m assuming you’re wondering why I called you here?”

Ruby immediately begins rambling. “Well, yeah, our first guess was that Yang had done a prank that went too far but she’s assured us that that isn’t the case so our second guess is that you called us here to give us a mission and we were about to start taking guesses as to what the mission was when the elevator door opened and-”

Weiss lays a hand on Ruby’s shoulder. “Ruby. Breathe.”

The corners of Ozpin’s mouth lift a tiny bit. “Yes, I called you here to give you a mission. As you have not had any since the Breach, you have technically fallen behind your classmates in field missions completed - although this is through no fault of your own. However, this mission should be much simpler, and should not result in another major incident. Did you see the piece of moon fall?”

Ruby exclaims “Yeah! We were all watching it as it hit. Weiss says it landed about 25 kilometers away.”

Ozpin nods. “A very educated guess, miss Schnee. Our triangulation says it landed 26 kilometers away. I want you to go out and investigate the landing site of the moon fragment, collect the largest piece, and bring it back to Beacon. In eighty minutes, a bullhead will be at the landing pad ready to take you to the entrance of the Emerald Forest.”

Ruby is barely able to contain her excitement at being given another mission, and isn’t thinking too deeply on it. Weiss is already mentally adjusting the study schedule and working out what they need to bring along. Blake is running through her mental map of the Emerald Forest, planning the quickest routes to the mission site.

Yang is the only one who realizes the obvious problems with the mission. “Professor Ozpin? Why are we not just taking the bullhead directly to the crash site? What do we do if the largest piece is too large for us to take back? And what teacher is going to escort us?”
Ozpin actually smiles. “Very astute, miss Xiao Long. I will answer your questions in reverse order. As this is a simple mission, with a projected threat of low and no side objectives, there is no need for a teacher escort. Our math on the impact and experience with previous impacts says that this moon shard was no larger than 500 kilograms on impact, and probably shattered even smaller. It is expected that the largest piece remaining will be roughly the size of Ruby’s fist, if that.”

“And as for your first question, this mission is more of a test of your ability to conduct missions outside of the city, and navigate using maps, compasses, and the stars. The target goal is actually inconsequential.”

“Miss Belladonna has this experience already, but miss Xiao Long and miss Rose have only limited experience with this, and miss Schnee has no practical experience with forest navigation without scroll assistance. If you are to be Huntresses, you must learn to do without these aids, so that if they fail, you will not be lost in the forest, unable to find your way out. For this reason, upon your return, we will be checking your scrolls. If you use their map or communication functions after departing the bullhead and before your return, you will receive a failing grade on this assignment. If the largest part is too large or the mission parameters change and you need to call to inform us of this, that will of course be excused.”

Ruby, wanting to get going as soon as possible, responds “Take bullhead to entrance of Emerald Forest, go through Emerald Forest to the meteorite, collect biggest piece of meteorite, come back, use maps and compasses, don’t use scrolls. Did I miss anything?”

“No. But I will impress upon you this: If the mission becomes something you are not able to handle or the mission parameters change, do not hesitate to call for backup or advice. Above all else, this is a training mission. We will not fail you if you simply cannot surmount an obstacle, or something beyond your skill level appears. Knowing what you cannot handle is more important than knowing what you can handle. Here are the maps. We have marked them with the approximate location of the impact. Good luck, team RWBY.”

Operator! Operator!”

The operator gets up, still in control of the Excalibur. “I’m okay, Ordis. What’s the damage?”

“Extensive, but repairable. It will take many months before the Orbiter is able to fly under its own power once more if NOBODY COMES FOR US we do not receive assistance from other Tenno.”

Checking that the Transference is still properly running and link is strong, the Operator asks “What about the Liset?”

“The Liset is currently trapped underneath the Orbiter, the launcher itself is damaged. The Liset itself is also damaged and incapable of flight, although less severely.”

Moving to the Transference room, the Operator asks “Is the foundry running properly?”

“Yes, and I should be able to fabricate all the replacement parts we will need.”

“Good. I’m assuming you’ll need me to do installation?”

“OF COURSE I Yes, Operator.”

“Sorry, stupid question. What about this planet? Signs of life?” The door opens, and the Operator sees that the Somatic Link appears undamaged.
“Yes, and somewhat advanced from the sound of it. I have been tapping into their unencrypted transmissions, and have created a translation program. The longer I am able to continue running the program, the more accurate the translation will be.”

“What are they saying about our little crash landing?”

“They appear to think it little more than a meteorite made from a shard of their shattered moon. It is probable that they will not even investigate, as they believe it to be very small.”

“How far away are we from the nearest settlement?”

“We are roughly 25 kilometers from a fairly large city, Operator. However, there is a complication.”

Suddenly wary, the Operator asks “And what would that be, Ordis?”

“The locals call them ‘Grimm.’”

“All right team RWBY, scrolls off!” a cheerful Ruby announces as team RWBY dismounts from the Bullhead.

There’s some clicking and buzzing as the four scrolls of team RWBY power down. While not strictly necessary, it takes a few seconds to start up a scroll again - something that should hopefully remind the members of team RWBY that they aren’t supposed to be using them on this mission.

Team RWBY then watches as the bullhead transport flies off, turning to look at the currently opened gate to the Emerald Forest.

Ruby, dropping into her team leader mode, reminds everyone of the plan. “All right, we need to go southeast until we reach the river ford, where we ford across. Once we’re across, we go south until we reach the crash site.”

Blake adds in, having been assigned as second in command for this mission, “Remember, stay with the group. If you are leaving the group for any reason, take a partner. Weiss, this is very important for you as your fieldcraft is very much lacking. If you do get separated from the group, stay calm. Call out a few times. If that doesn’t work, throw up your signal so we can see it.”

Ruby nods. “Yup! This should only take 3 days, 4 if we get lost or have to fight a lot of Grimm. We should reach the impact site around noon tomorrow if we’re able to follow the schedule and go at the speed Blake thinks we can.”

Blake adds in once again “Keep an eye on your compass. In forest like this, it is very easy to get turned around.”

Standing up from the short briefing that she’d just been given, the Operator says “Ordis, these Grimm sound a lot like a strain of Infestation.”

“That was my original thinking as well, but I did some testing of air samples. There are no nano spores in existence on this planet except for the ones we carry.”

Surprised, the Operator says “Wait - there’s no infestation here already? Please tell me the Helminth infirmary is locked down and not leaking, let’s not infect another planet.”
“The Helminth infirmary is located deep inside the ship for a reason, Operator. The containment has not been breached, and the door is sealed. As you **FINALLY PURGED** already burned that patch that was outside the room and the infestation inside of most warframes is not infective, as long as the room is not opened we should have no problem.”

Nodding in approval, the Operator says “Good. I’m going to go outside to do an inspection of the exterior, maybe try to salvage some of the debris so we can reuse it. If I’m reading your estimates on repairs right, we have the ability to repair this with our saved resources, but we’ll be cutting it extremely close. If we can salvage broken bits, that’ll stretch our supplies.”

“It will take longer, Operator.”

Shaking her head as she walks to the exit, the Operator says “We’re already guaranteed to be here for 6 months, Ordis. We’re going to have to police the debris anyways. And since we’re in atmosphere, we can synthesize fuel.”

The Excalibur leaves the Orbiter via an airlock, stepping out onto this new world for the first time. Walking around and checking the damage, the first thing she does is check the fuel lines to the main engines. They are mostly intact, with only a few of the lines having any failures. Due to the redundancies in the system, there’s no pressing need to repair the lines yet - in case of emergency, enough fuel would still make it to the engines.

The engines themselves, however… The portside engine is so much junk. It’s beyond repair - the damages wrought by the Void storm and later being the first point of impact for the Orbiter on the ground have resulted in it being so much scrap metal.

The starboard engine is in better shape. While it took damage, the Orbiter was starting to spin to port as the maneuvering thrusters burned out, so it didn’t take as much damage as the port engine from impact with the ground, on top of not being damaged previously. It’ll be easy enough to replace the damaged housing.

The hardest part is going to be repairing the hull - it’s easy enough to see the new entrance to the personal quarters right now, but the bottom of the Orbiter must be torn to hell and back and what was that noise?

The Operator’s head is on a swivel. “Ordis, are you running scans?”

“No, Operator. It is possible that the inhabitants of this planet may be able to detect an active scan if it pings them.”

Fingering the grip of the Pyrana, the Operator asks “Can you run a low-powered scan focused magnetic south? Look for motion if you can. I think I heard something.”

“Scanning. Please wait a moment. Oh. Oh dear. **THAT’S A LOT OF** there is much movement incoming from the south, Operator. Coming fast. They will be here in under a minute.”

Nodding, the Operator says “Right. Any fliers?”

“Not yet, but I kept the scanner power down to a 1 kilometer range. The fliers could very easily be out of range.”

“Keep the Grattler in the launcher then, and be ready to deploy it if I call for it. Time to do what I do best,” the Operator says as she cracks the Excalibur’s neck, pulls the Soma off of her back, and checks that the Skana is still there.
‘Thankfully, the impact knocked down a lot of the trees in the area. Makes it easier to have that long, clear line,’ the Operator thinks as she crouches down and stabilizes the Soma in preparation to receive the incoming horde. In the last moment before the horde of bone plated wolf-like creatures that the locals call ‘Beowolves’ emerges, she has one more thought. ‘I really should’ve taken the Astilla.’

The first of the horde appears, charging towards the craft in a massive wave. The Operator turns the Soma to the left to cover the leftmost side of the horde, and opens up.

Panning left to right and back again, the first wave of beowolves are simply shredded apart by sheer weight of bullets. But even as the first wave was cut down, the second wave appears - and the Operator isn’t able to open fire immediately, needing to reload the Soma and the Pyrana being an option at short range only. Finishing the reloading process and opening fire once more, she notices that these seem to be more heavily armored than the ones in the first wave.

They still die easily. With how wide open the terrain is, the grimm simply cannot close the distance before the Soma opens back up and they’re pushed back once more.

‘It’s like fighting infested,’ the Operator thinks as she reloads again. ‘Keep them at range, and they pose no threat to you. The difficulty comes from the ones that can force you to leave your defensive position and engage them at their range, or are simply too tough to take down with bullets. So where are the Boarbatusks, the Ursas? According to Ordis’s briefing, they do seem to have some sort of intelligence, they aren’t just mindless creatures. They must realize that as long as I have ammunition - Ah. That’s the trick. The little ones are trying to run me out of ammunition. And it’ll work, too. I only have two magazines before I run out of ammunition for the Soma, and because I’m holding position and not letting them get close, the Carrier isn’t able to synthesize ammo for me. I’ll empty this mag, reload, then sword time.’

The empty magazine ejects out the top, and is grabbed by the Carrier for eventual refill. As soon as the new magazine slides home and a round is cycled into the chamber, the Operator puts the Soma on her back, reaching for the Skana.

And then leaps forward, covering 20 meters in a single jump, doing this once more before meeting the lead beowulf with a Skana blade.

‘They attack faster than the infested, but their attacks are comparatively weaker. These things must only be threatening by sheer numbers, as even most colonies would be able to deal with just this with a few Gorgons. And lord knows there’s plenty of those around the origin system.’

The Operator is in their element, slashing, dashing, jumping. Mostly broad, sweeping horizontal attacks, and liberal use of the Slash Dash. When these attacks are powered by the arms of a warframe, they’re enough to slice the long way through the beowolves.

It couldn’t last. A roar announces the arrival of a contingent of bear-like Ursa to the field, lead by an Ursa Major, its heavier bone armor attempting to menace the Operator with its spikes, even as the last of the beowolves cut and run, utterly shattered.

Inside the transference pod, the Operator smiles. “Only a dozen?”

The Excalibur charges forward, and the Ursa charge to meet, with the Ursa Major leading the way. Just before meeting, the Operator backflips to dodge the swipe of the Ursa Major and comes up with Skara pointed directly at its chest, only a few inches away from the center.

And stabs. Two and a half feet of prismatic steel buries itself to the hilt in the sternum of the Ursa
Major. Letting go of the haft of the Skana and ducking under the still oncoming mass, the Operator pulls the Pyrana off of Excalibur’s hip, aims it at the face of the next Ursa, and dumps three rounds from the one handed shotgun into its face.

The first two shatter the mask, and the third rips the head apart. Leaping high, the Operator takes a moment to look around at the situation and sees some trees to the south shaking as something large brushes up against them, but before there’s time to think about it, gravity forces her back to ground and fighting once more.

Killing two more Ursa with Pyrana blasts before being forced to reload apparates a second, ethereal Pyrana. The bullets this ethereal Pyrana fires are just as real as the Operator spins with arms outstretched and triggers depressed, shredding the remaining Ursa before they have a chance to regroup or run away.

Walking over to the Ursa Major, the Operator puts the last shell of the magazine into the back of its head and reloads before bracing her leg on the dissolving Ursa’s chest and pulling out the Skana.

The silence is interrupted by crashing as a gigantic scorpion crashes out of the woodline. It stops and screams, snapping its pedipalps in a way that is probably very intimidating to someone with little to no combat experience.

The Operator is a veteran of thousands of missions. Simple combat no longer evokes fear.

Pulling the Soma off of her back, she opens up, starting to dump the magazine at center mass. Most of the rounds deflect, although a few find purchase in the weak points of the armor. Realizing this, the Operator shifts targets to the comparatively weaker looking tail, stitching it up and down even as the death stalker charges.

Not bothering to reload, the Operator stows the Soma and pulls the Skana. ‘I need to target the stinger. If I can sever or otherwise neutralize it, it loses most of its ability to hurt me if I don’t screw up. Thankfully, the shots I put into it should’ve weakened it.’

Rolling under the grasping claws and jumping up, the Skana swings, bites into the tail, and gets stuck not even a third of the way through.

‘Well, that’s a problem,’ the Operator thinks, letting go of the Skana to keep up momentum, activating the Exalted Blade ability of her Warframe as she falls.

Spinning to face the Death Stalker, she opens off, slashing the air and sending projections of her Exalted Blade slicing towards the death stalker that’s screeching in pain and anger.

Those screeches somehow get even louder as the first waves of energy sever its legs and start chewing through the armor on its main body. Where the Soma deflected and the Skana got stuck, the ethereal projections penetrate quite a distance into the Death Stalker before they dissipate.

With one final overhead slash, the Operator sheathes and dispels the Exalted Blade and watches as the death stalker collapses and begins to dissolve.

Walking over to collect the Skana and surveying the battlefield, the Operator says “Ordis, queue up a bunch of sensors that I can mount on some of the trees around here. I want to get a network set up so that we can’t be caught off guard by this again. If that death stalker had come in with the beowolves, it’s very possible that I would’ve just been overrun. Let’s not count on luck to save us again.”

“Yes, Operator.”
“Oh, and prep the Ivara. Loadout B. During installation, I want to be able to avoid battle if I choose.”

“Silenced Vectis Prime, Hikou Prime, and Sheev being moved to Ivara’s hardpoints now, Operator.”

“Thank you, Ordis. I really don’t say that often enough.”

“You’re welcome, Operator.”

“We’re making good time, we got across the ford faster than I thought we would,” says Blake.

“We are, but I’m still worried about Weiss. She’s having problems on her turns navigating, and her endurance isn’t as good as ours. She was lagging behind for the last few hours today,” responds Ruby. “We may have to slow down or take more breaks, so that Weiss isn’t completely exhausted if we run into grimm.”

“We’ll try to call halt to check the map for directions more often, and once we reach the impact site we can take a few hours of break or light work. Tomorrow and the next day are going to be worse for her, she’s not going to have slept well and won’t have physically recovered nearly as much,” says Blake.

“I can hear you, you know!” a peeved Weiss says from the other side of the camp they’ve set up.

“Are we wrong?” asks Ruby.

Weiss hmmphs. “... No.”

“We’re not trying to shame you,” Blake says. “We’re trying to help you. Everyone, including Ozpin, identified you as the weakest link in this group for this task.”

“We all have different strengths and weaknesses,” says Yang. “Without you keeping us on our study schedules, and especially helping Ruby, we wouldn’t be nearly as strong academically as we are. As a matter of fact, as the PT master of the team, I’ve already started coming up with exercises to increase your endurance so that this doesn’t happen again.”

Weiss looks faintly horrified. “This is revenge for the history test prep I put you through, isn’t it?”

Yang smiles. “It actually wasn’t, but now that you mention it…”

“I will bury you in flashcards.”

“Alright, no extra PT time for Weiss.” Weiss sighs in relief. “I’ll just run it faster.”

Weiss glares at Yang, hand inching towards Myrtentaster. “I will stab you.”

“Not with how quickly you tire out!” Yang says, leaning back against a tree with a huge grin.

“Yang, please stop winding Weiss up. Let’s try not to attract any Grimm,” says Ruby, raising her hands palm up towards the two verbal combatants.


“I’ll take first watch. Yang, you take second. Blake, third. Weiss, you’ll take fourth, unless anyone wants to trade?”
The sun begins to creep up over the horizon. The Operator has been busy all night, planting the hidden sensors first to the south, and then to the north, as Ordis calculated the greatest possibility of Grimm coming from the south and of the people of the planet coming from the north. Next, she’ll set up the network to the west, and will probably return to the Orbiter around midday to restock on the last sensors and cover the east, meaning Ordis could stop pulsing possibly detectable active scans at somewhat random intervals.

The advanced warning of anything incoming would help, but having gone over the recordings of the battle while waiting for the first batch of the sensors, the Operator had realized two things.

Firstly, as in control as the Operator had felt during the fighting, she had still nearly been overrun by the creatures of Grimm. A few dozen more Beowulves or the Ursa or Deathstalker entering the fight a minute before they did would have been a much closer fight, if not an outright defeat. If fliers had shown up at any point, it could’ve been even worse, forcing her to split her attention.

Secondly, if there was a full fireteam of four Tenno here, there would have been next to no threat from the Grimm, at least in that attack. Since Ordis’s work attempting to connect to either the Lotus or other Tenno had failed, that wasn’t an option. However, the inhabitants of the planet may be willing to help.

Or they might refuse, or shoot at the Operator. The resulting spike in fear when the Operator would defend herself would immediately summon Grimm, overrunning both the settlement and the orbiter. Or, the Operator’s warframe could be defeated and they could just destroy the orbiter and the Operator on board while she attempts to recover from a violent separation from her Warframe.

The other option to beef up the defenses involves creating automated defenses, such as gun turrets. This might be even worse, as Ordis’s conservative estimates are a month of time to build the minimum necessary for the turrets to be effective, and would use enough resources that they could not complete the Orbiter repairs without later cannibalizing the turrets, so for at least 3 months of the now extended timeline that they would be there, the defenses would be insufficient to hold off a Grimm assault.

The debate with Ordis over which one was the better option had been agreed to be continued later, as both options presented their own scary problems and advantages, and both had switched sides multiple times to argue it from both angles.

“Oh well,” the Operator thinks. “At least we’ll know if anything is coming now.”

“Okay, Weiss, your turn as navigator is over. How’d she do, Blake?”

“We spent most of the last two hours traveling southeast. Weiss, can you pass me your compass?” Weiss hands it over. “Ah. Your compass got stuck. In that case, you did an excellent job of keeping us on a straight path, much better than yesterday,” Blake says, smacking the compass a few times before handing it back to Weiss. “Overall, still not good, as she was too proud to ask for help, and I doubt she didn’t realize her compass was broken.” Weiss fumes for a moment, but doesn’t issue a denial.
“If I’m reading the map right and we did go mostly southeast, based on the speed we traveled yesterday we’d be a bit south and east of the target. Given that we slowed our pace a little, I think we’re pretty much due west of the target,” says Ruby.

Blake nods in agreement. “Maybe a little bit north of it still. Let’s try to go at about 265.”

“Yang, are you okay with trading navigation turns with Blake?”

“Yeah, I don’t want to navigate this close to the area. Too likely we’d miss it.”

“Alight Blake, lead us onward to our goal and one step closer to returning back to Beacon!”

Operator, you must return to the orbiter at once!”

Putting one of the last western sensors in place, the Operator asks “What’s happening, Ordis?”

“I just pulsed a scan to the east. There are four human INTRUDERS interlopers coming, and they will arrive soon!”

The Operator, in her Ivara, begins moving as quickly as possible towards the orbiter. “Void damn it. I guess our debate is about to be settled. Start jamming all transmissions except for ours in the immediate area. If they’re unfriendly, we need to make sure that they can’t call for help. If they’re friendly, easier to explain it to them as a precautionary measure than deal with enemy air strikes if not.”

“Operator, at your current speed, they will get here before you.”

“How much sooner? I can’t go any faster,” says the Operator, parkouring towards the Orbiter.

“A few minutes. They won’t be here for any significant length of time before you arrive.”

“That’s still not good, Ordis. If they try to call out immediately, they’ll notice something’s up.”

“Do you want to drop the jamming, Operator?”

“No. They probably won’t be carrying anything that can damage the orbiter before I reach it.”

“Nearly to the impact site,” says Blake.

“Really? How do you know?” asks Yang.

“Look up.” Team RWBY, with the exception of Blake, look up and see the tops of the trees shorn off.

"So this is the angle it came in at,” Weiss says.

“Yeah! This is so cool! It’s like we’re tracking it!” Ruby exclaims.

“As a matter of fact, I can see the impact site up ahead through the trees. About two more minutes, and we’re at the location.”

Walking faster than they were before now that their goal is nearly in sight, the arrive at the edge of
the impact zone.

And stop for a few moments, as they get their first clear look at the thing in the center.

Weiss breaks the silence. “Please tell me that that’s just a crashed bullhead.”

“Nope, I can’t. That is not a bullhead. Ruby, do you know of any Atlesian prototypes that this could be?” asks Yang.

Ruby looks awestruck. “Uh, no. Nope. Not a one. Atlas just upgraded their picket fliers, and that or a new transport would be the only thing this could be if it were Atlesian. And Atlas hasn’t had any problems with up-armoring bullheads, so it’s not a transport.”

Ruby, Weiss, and Yang start moving towards the crashed ship, but Blake calls then to stop, saying “Wait! Look to the southern side.”

Turning, Yang is the second one to see the remains of the fight. “Something was fighting over there.”

“That’s impossible. Nothing could’ve survived that impact, it showed up on seismographs and we felt it from 26 kilometers away!” says Weiss from behind the rest of the group.

Ruby pulls out Crescent Rose, deploying it to rifle form and looking through the scope at the woodline. “Something did. There’s bullet holes in the trees. Grimm don’t shoot guns.”

“It could’ve been automated defenses!”

Blake responds with the easy statement of “If there were no survivors, what attracted the Grimm? It must’ve been a fairly decent swarm for all those bullets to be necessary. This wasn’t a pack of beowulves wandering around and coming across it.”

“Don’t even have to go that far in the argument, Blakey. I don’t see any weapons on the thing, and we haven’t been shot at yet.” Says Yang.

“That could mean that it doesn’t think we’re hostile!”

A new voice cuts in from behind and above them. “Actually, I haven’t decided what you are yet. Turn around slowly, no sudden moves.”

Looping through the forest to the north of the crash site, the Operator looks at the group of four girls that may have forced her hand as she casts prowl and turns invisible to sneak up on them.

Carefully picking her footing, the Operator thinks ‘Dammit. They’re armed, and they’re not wearing uniforms, so they’re not soldiers. Given the range of colors, they’re probably huntresses. I need to know how much they know. That means I need to ask them. Let’s keep it at range - if they’re huntresses, they’re probably very good in melee and I’m currently not equipped for standup melee. If it does become a fight, open off with a few shots from the Vectis before dodging into the forest and activating the Artemis bow. Try to turn it into a running fight.’

‘Let’s do a quick assessment of the interlopers, see what I’m working with if it comes down to a fight.’

Carefully dodging fallen branches so as to make a minimum amount of sound, she thinks ‘the one in
black and purple with the bow on her head is the most alert. Sneaking up on her will be the most
difficult. Weapon is a currently sheathed sword. Handle on the sheath itself - probably able to use it
as a bludgeon, I can’t imagine that it’s sharp. Crossguard of the sword appears to be a small pistol.
Also, it appears she’s attached her sword to her forearms with a length of ribbon. Probably able to
use it as a chained sword.’

Jumping up on top of a fallen tree trunk and picking her next jumping target, she thinks ‘red cloak
girl there is interesting. That gigantic thing she just took off of her back changed forms - probably a
transforming weapon of some sort. Definitely has a sniper mode, as she’s using it to check the
woodline more closely. Probably has a melee mode as well, as I can’t imagine that the whole mass in
the rear is just to reduce felt recoil. The cloak has the potential to make shots miss, as it could make
her look bigger than she actually is when snapping off a shot. If it comes down to a fight, I need to
eliminate her first, as she looks to be the only one who can really contest me at range.’

Rolling under a fallen tree, she thinks ‘the blonde in the browns and tans doesn’t look armed at first
glance, but with how I just saw that weapon the red cloak girl is carrying transform I’m willing to bet
that those big bracelets on her wrists are actually punching weapons, just waiting to be deployed. In
that case, definitely keep her at range, as any ranged weapon she has will still be very inaccurate at
range because of design limitations.’

As she tightropes along a treetrunk, she thinks ‘white hair, white dress, and the rapier. No obvious
ranged option, but possibly dust mage. From what Ordis gave me in his briefing, those attacks are
fairly telegraphed, but very powerful if they hit. That being said, if she plays a more supportive role,
she could be very dangerous in enabling her teammates. Take her out second tentatively, first if she
does anything really dangerous.’

Reaching her destination and jumping up onto a sturdy looking branch, the Operator catches the last
bit of their conversation, and smirks when she hears the blonde say that they haven’t been shot at yet
and the white haired girls frustrated reply before dropping out of Prowl and aiming the Vectis at the
middle of the group - not pointed at anyone yet, but easy enough to flick onto target.

“Actually, I haven’t decided what you are yet. Turn around slowly, no sudden moves.”

The group turns, and gets their first sight of the alien on Remnant. It’s forest green with some cream
colored splotches on the legs and torso, and is wearing a cloak that almost looks like a cocoon that
goes from forest green to a lighter green. It also seems to have a hood, and green lights in a rough
circle for a face.

It’s also aiming a very fancy looking dark green rifle right at the middle of the group. The blonde
speaks somewhat sarcastically, crossing her arms, “Are you going to demand that we put our hands
up too?”

The girl in the bow and blacks and purples looks absolutely shocked at the fact that this thing had
managed to sneak up on her - she’d checked behind her not five seconds ago, and had seen and
heard absolutely nothing.

The rifle shifts to point directly at the red cloaked girl, whose eyes are flicking around, seemingly
trying to plot out how to get to the Operator’s perch or into cover. “No. Two of you have your
weapons attached to your wrists already, another one has her weapon in her hand, and either way I’ll
only be able to plug one of you before I’m forced out of my position. Just don’t make any sudden
movements and don’t point your weapons at me and I won’t shoot.” The red cloaked girl is
completely frozen, staring down the barrel of the rifle pointed at her - looking down a barrel with a
caliber larger than their thumb tends to do that to people. The Operator shifts her aim off of the red
cloaked girl, prompting an exhale of relief, before asking “What are your names?”
Red cloak carefully steps forward. “My name is Ruby Rose. The one with white hair is Weiss Schnee. They,” she says, pointing to the black and purple girl with the bow in her hair and the blonde in tans and browns respectively, “are Blake Belladonna and Yang Xiao Long. What’s your name?”

“I’ll answer that later. What are you doing here?”

Ruby answers, carefully choosing her words, “We were sent to get the largest part of the moon that crashed here, and we were supposed to do it with maps and compasses as part of a test.” She starts adjusting her stance before a small movement of the rifle towards her stills her once more.

“Why did you come from the east instead of the north?”

A few seconds of silence pass, Ruby not daring to speak lest she move and have the rifle pointed at her again, before Blake sighs, shrugs, and speaks up. “Weiss’s compass was stuck when it was her turn to navigate, and she sent us southeast instead of south. When it became my turn to navigate, we went west to get here.”

The alien is completely still. “Did you know the craft was here before you arrived?”

Yang barks out a laugh, crossing her arms and putting her weight on her back leg. “Nah. We thought it was a meteor. If they’d thought there was gonna be aliens, we wouldn’t have been sent.”

The rifle recenters and lowers a bit. “Who sent you?”

Now that the rifle is no longer pointed closer to her, Ruby finds her voice again.“Professor Ozpin.”

The lights on the alien’s face brighten for a second, and the rifle tip bobs up and down almost imperceptibly, seemingly surprised. “Professor? You’re students? How old are you?”

Ruby rallies a bit. “We’re students. I’m 15, Weiss, Blake, and Yang are 17.”

The rifle lowers a bit more. “What were you going to do before I interrupted you?”

Ruby slowly shrugs and shakes her head as she answers“I don’t know, probably call Professor Ozpin. Things kinda went beyond what we were prepared for, especially with the whole aliens on Remnant thing. And Ozpin told us to call him if we found something that we couldn’t handle.”

“What would your Professor Ozpin have done upon being informed?”

“Probably come out here himself to make a decision based on what he found. This really isn’t making a good first impression, by the way.”

“Ruby, please don’t antagonize the alien. I’d rather go into the history books as the first people to make peaceful contact with alien life, not the first people to be killed by hostile aliens,” interjects a miffed looking Weiss.

‘This is a decent outcome so far,’ thinks the Operator. ‘If I can smooth over the whole “Aiming a rifle at you” thing, they don’t seem to be immediately hostile to me.’

“One last question. If I put away my rifle and asked to have a friendly discussion rather than an interrogation, what would you do?”

Ruby’s face instantly brightens and she starts looking hopeful. “I’d talk with you! I’m super interested in your ship and also I really don’t want that gun pointed at me anymore because the size
of that barrel really scares me.”

The other three remain silent for a few seconds before the alien looks at them in turn. “That question was for all four of you.”

“Not gonna lie, I’m more curious than angry right now, although that might change depending on your answer to my first question,” says Yang, uncrossing her arms and shrugging at the alien, seemingly unconcerned. “I won’t attack you straight off the bat, anyways.”

“As I said earlier, I’d rather go down in history as one of the first people to make peaceful contact with alien life, not the first to be killed by an alien,” says Weiss, absolutely hungry for new knowledge and fame that her father has no claim on.

Blake speaks up again. “I won’t attack you.”

“Good. I’ll hold you to your word,” says the Operator, pulling the rifle up and placing it on her back, before hopping off the branch she was sitting on and landing lightly on the ground.

There’s an uneasy silence for a few moments, team RWBY fidgeting and shifting for a bit, nobody wanting to be the first to talk and the alien content to wait, before Yang shrugs and opens off the questioning with “So, why the whole holding us at gunpoint thing if you weren’t going to shoot us?”

“Short version? I needed information, and didn’t know what your reaction would be if I revealed myself peacefully. You dodged the partial sensor net that I had managed to put up that would’ve given me early warning of your coming. One of the first things I found out about this planet is that humanity is under siege, and people under siege tend to be very paranoid. I needed to have some control of the situation, some reason you wouldn’t immediately attack me upon revealing myself.”

The alien steps forward a bit, jabbing a finger towards the scars of battle to the southwest. “Because under an hour after I woke up from the crash landing, I found myself in pitched battle against 242 beowulves, 19 alpha beowulves, 11 ursa, an ursa major, and a death stalker, and I was damned near overrun and killed. Because my ship is unarmed, and is so heavily damaged anyways that it cannot fly. Because I am hideously outnumbered by both the Grimm and the humans of this planet and in an extremely vulnerable position that I cannot retreat from or reposition in any way, and I’m going to be here for the next six months at least before I can effect enough repairs to get out of this deathtrap. I am quite sorry for that our initial interaction was hostile, but I view it as necessary.”

Blake interjects, nodding in understanding and looking to the rest of the group. “You were scared. It was a little paranoid, but I can definitely understand why you did what you did.”

The alien nods sharply for emphasis. “Scared is definitely a term that can be used. Professionally paranoid is probably more accurate, however.”

“To continue,” the Operator says, “A group of four people somehow come from the one direction I don’t have sensors set up to cover yet, and the only reason I had any advance warning was because Ordis luckily pulsed an active scan to spot you about 2 minutes before you came in sight of the orbiter! So I’m sorry for being suspicious and panicked and attempting to gain control of a situation that I felt was rapidly spiraling out of control!”

Yang slowly nods. “I scare you, then?”

“You four in particular don’t scare me. I have fought in literal thousands of combat missions, and I am extremely confident in my ability to defeat you. It might take some time and effort, but I would win. It’s what comes after that concerns me.”
Blake says “What do you mean, ‘what comes after?’”

“I identified you four as huntresses, and fairly young ones. Because you’re out alone, your Professor Ozpin must’ve decided that this mission was fairly low threat or you are particularly good fighters - possibly both - and don’t need an escort. If a team of huntresses on a low risk mission disappeared this close to a city, what would happen?”

Blake nods, understanding. “He would be worried about a Grimm threat that could overwhelm four fairly competent huntress students before they could call for assistance this close to the city, and would launch a search for our remains and whatever killed us.”

“And one of the first places they’d check would be your destination, as it is the only place that they knew you would be going. It’s easier to track going two ways than one. Even if I were to successfully hide your remains, they’d still be intensely suspicious of me.”

Ruby says “So, you never actually had any intention of harming us?”

“Only if you attacked me outright. I really needed a way to control the situation and get my questions in so I could figure out what you were doing here and how you dodged the sensors.”

Weiss asks, curiosity in her tone, “You said you’re a veteran of thousands of fights. How old are you?”

The Operator sighs. “That’s… hard to answer, actually. Biologically speaking, I’m about 16. Years since I was born in the regular universe, somewhere more than 5,000. Years that I’ve been awake for in the regular universe, about 300 or so. Actual age is actually pretty much unknown.”

Ruby asks, tilting her head in confusion, “What?”

“I spent birth to age 14 as a normal, baseline human. At 14, my parents took me on a colony ship, the Zariman Ten-Zero, to go colonize a newly terraformed planet. The ship had a malfunction in its Void drive, and disappeared for approximately 4000 years. It was not 4000 years for us, though, although it was long enough that people stopped tracking things like how long we had been stuck in the ship. During this time, anyone older than 16 went absolutely batshit insane and started people who were 16 or younger, however, those who were 16 or younger started manifesting Void powers. As a side effect of this, we stopped biologically aging at about the age of 14 to 16. We are effectively immortal if not killed.”

“After a long time, the ship emerged from the Void, surprising the Orokin who had risen to dominance as it was thought long lost and would never be found again. The kids onboard had created our own society by that point, born out of having to defend ourselves from the adults. Eventually, due to the fact that we were unable to completely control the Void effects from outside of the Void, we were forced to be put into a dream for several hundred years, until we were woken up because the Orokin faced a major threat that only we were able to properly deal with.”

Yang says “You say you were born as a human. You don’t look like a human. What are you now? Also, what’s your name?”

“My name, like so many other things, was forgotten while I was in the dream. Just call me ‘Operator,’ ‘Tenno,’ or the pattern of Warframe that I’m using, that’s what everyone does. As to what I am, I am still human. As a matter of fact, I’m actually inside the orbiter right now. What you are seeing here is a Warframe; specifically, an Ivara-pattern. It is a conduit for the Void energies and prevents it from leaking into the environment, which is very bad to have happen.”
Weiss says “You mentioned someone named Ordis, but you said you were the only one capable of fighting onboard. Were they injured? Do they need medical attention?”

“Ordis is a ship’s Cephalon. Short version is that he is an AI, created by taking a person and turning them into an AI. The way of doing this has been lost. It was the only way that the Orokin found to make stable AI, as all of their actual artificial intelligences eventually turned against them. Whether this was a fault of the way the Orokin treated them or a fault of all AI, no group attempts to make true AI anymore due to the risks.”

Team RWBY exchange a look, before Weiss asks “Ivara-pattern? Does that mean there’s different types of Warframes?”

“Yes. I actually have four with me right now; an Atlas, an Excalibur, an Ivara, and a Mesa. Each of them has very different abilities and strengths. I wouldn’t necessarily choose to engage in direct combat with the Ivara, although it is still very capable of it. It is much more suited to sneaking around. However, the Atlas is very much a Warframe that loves to get in the face of the enemy and bash them around.”

Blake asks “Do you feel pain if your Warframe gets hit?”

“I feel anything the Warframe I am currently controlling feels. So yes, I feel pain, although with the amount of times I’ve been shot, stabbed, and slashed over the years it doesn’t register as much.”

Yang asks “What’s the Void?”

The Operator slumps the Ivara’s shoulders a bit. “That’s… literally impossible to actually answer. The Void is a place where all physics and logic break down. While sections of the Void are relatively stable, they still shift in random, patternless ways. Something can look to be a five minute trip away and take 5 days, or vice versa. The greatest scientists of the day ended up completely stupefied by the whole thing, saying it seemed to resist any attempt at ordered investigation.”

Weiss interjects “But it’s traversable?”

“Technically speaking, yes. A Void drive that is properly functioning can open a portal to the Void. While inside the Void, it protects a vessel and any occupants by essentially wrapping it in a bubble of realspace. Going through the Void to your target can even be faster than light, and as long as the Void drive is working properly you should know roughly where you are in realspace. This doesn’t protect the vessel from any environmental dangers in the Void, however.”

Weiss asks “Does your vessel have a Void drive?”

The Operator throws back her head, before shaking it. “Ha! No. A Void drive is massive. The smallest ones are roughly four times the size of the clearing that my little crash landing created.”

“But then how did you arrive here?”

“I was alerted to the presence of a large Void gate that had opened in my immediate area, and was sent to investigate it and close it, as a natural Void portal shouldn’t have lasted that long. Upon arrival and transversal of the gate, we found it to be a naturally occurring Void portal - one that was larger and longer lived than any other recorded natural portal. Disbelieving this result, I had Ordis run a search pattern for the ship I believed to be opening the Void gate. During one of the search pattern sweeps, we strayed too far from the portal when it began to close. We were unable to make it back to the portal before it closed, and ended up trapped in the Void.”

Blake interrupts. “I thought you said you couldn’t traverse the Void without a Void drive.”
“You can, you just won’t have any idea where you’ll exit in realspace if and when you come out, and you can only enter or leave through already existing Void portals or gates. Anyone with an active Void gate keeps it as secret as possible. And I don’t know of any active, fully functional Void drives, either.”

“Isn’t that dangerous to go into the Void without shielding?” asks Weiss.

“Yes and no. It’s not particularly dangerous for Ordis or I, as I am already Void-touched and Ordis is a Cephalon. Cephalon degradation due to Void exposure is a very long term process, measured in thousands of years.”

“How’d you get here then?” asks Ruby.

“I was getting to that before we got sidetracked. Short version, a Void storm happened, we tried to ride it out, a Void portal opened during the storm, we went through the portal which exited in the upper reaches of this planet’s atmosphere. The storm damaged us quite badly, and we were forced into this very hard landing.”

“That’s great and all, but can we call Ozpin? The mission has changed, and we were supposed to call him if it did,” says Yang to the group as a whole.

“Oh, right. One moment. Ordis, stop jamming transmissions, contact went about as well as we could’ve hoped, given the initial conditions.”

Only the Operator can hear Ordis’s response, saying that the jamming has been dropped.

“Okay, you should be able to call out now, Ordis is no longer jamming your communications.”

“Let me guess, jamming was one more thing that you could control?” asks Blake.

“Yes.”

In the meantime, Ruby’s started up her scroll and is dialing Ozpin. Putting it on speakerphone, she says “Hello Professor Ozpin.”

“Hello Ruby. What’s happened on your mission that required this call?”

“We’ve reached the impact spot with a only a little bit of trouble and no Grimm fights, but there’s a problem.”

“Is the largest piece too large for you to transport yourselves? I can have a bullhead out to your location in a few hours.”

“Yes and no,” says Ruby, slightly elongating the last word.

“What do you mean, miss Rose?”

“The thing that hit the ground is not a piece of the moon, it’s actually a crashed spaceship and there’s an alien.”

“Miss Rose, can you repeat the second part of that last statement? I didn’t catch it.”

“It’s actually a crashed spaceship and there’s an alien,” the Operator helpfully supplies.

There’s dead air for a good 15 seconds before Ozpin responds. “I’ll be there in half an hour.”
“Professor Ozpin, as the alien being contacted, I would like to request that you only bring those that you trust implicitly to not spread the news around.”

“I’ll do that, although my leaving Beacon on short notice will not go unnoticed.”

“That’s fine. I look forward to talking with you, Professor.”

“Likewise,” says Ozpin before the line goes dead.

Team RWBY look at the Ivara. “So, we’ve got a half hour until Ozpin gets here. Do you have any more questions?” the Operator asks.

“Yeah! Can I see your gun?” asks a very excited Ruby.

Chapter End Notes

Phew. This is the first fanfic I've published in roughly two and a half years, and this chapter is the result of almost 5 months of writing and mostly solo editing.

This chapter honestly exploded in overall length. I thought it would be a 5000 word chapter maximum, but stuff just kept happening that I needed to include.

Dialogue is hard. Especially for team RWBY. I spent a long time trying to get their characters right, and I'm still not 100% comfortable with it. But I decided it wasn't going to get much better with more editing passes, so I decided to post it and get to work on chapter 2.

Don't expect chapter 2 to come out in anything resembling a timely manner. I do have things planned for the story, but I have not started writing chapter 2 yet.

EDIT: Changed number of Beowulves.
Ozpin hangs up the call from Ruby and unleashes a deep sigh before dialing a code that he knows by heart.

It rings three times before it’s picked up, and before the recipient can say anything he says “Qrow, It’s Ozpin. Are you still in Vale?”

Ozpin can almost hear the eyeroll and lean as Qrow languidly responds “Yeah, the air convoy to Vacuo doesn’t leave for another two days. What’s up?”

“Not on the scroll,” Ozpin says, pulling out his keyboard. “Get to the Emerald Forest landing pad, I need a bullhead pilot that knows the meaning of discretion and can fight if need be. I’ll be there in ten to fifteen minutes.”

A much more worried voice comes out of the speaker. “Oz, what’s going on?”

“Not on the scroll. I’ll let you know what’s happening in the bullhead.” Ozpin hangs up.

Flipping through the scroll’s address book, he reaches the Vale air traffic control, who he dials.

“This is Ozpin. I’m taking Beacon’s bullhead to the Emerald Forest landing pad and then out into the Emerald Forest.” As he’s talking, Ozpin types out a message to the Beacon faculty, informing them that he is leaving Beacon for a short while and to continue their daily duties until his return. “Do not record where the bullhead goes once we leave the Emerald Forest landing pad, and delete all records of the flight. This is of the utmost importance. Failure to comply will be prosecuted under section 7 of the Kingdom of Vale Constitution; until further notice, this flight is classified state secret.”

The shift officer of the Vale ATC sputters for a second before composing himself. “Right, no records state secret flight. When are you leaving?” Ozpin hears him mutter under his breath “First one of those in a while…”

“As soon as the bullhead is ready to fly.”

“Right. We’re clearing the skies for you.” The ATC hangs up.

Ozpin dials a third number. “Ash. I need you to fly me to the Emerald Forest landing pad. From there, you can have the rest of the day off with full flight pay, although I will still need the bullhead.”

“Got it. I could just fly you all the way to your destination, you know.”

“Ash, as good a pilot as you are, I need a pilot who is also good in a fight. I’m not expecting to end up fighting, but the destination is not safe,” says Ozpin, shaking his head slightly.

“Ah. Say no more. I’m just about to start preflight, so she should be good to go when you get here.”

“Good.” Ozpin hangs up, sends the message to the faculty, and stands up, looking up at the twisting cogs above him.

‘An alien on Remnant,’ he thinks, moving to the elevator and pressing the call button. ‘This could change things massively. Team RWBY has managed to take another expected milk run and turn it
into something massive. If they didn’t need more missions in order to graduate, I wouldn’t let them out on another mission again.’ The elevator arrives and he shakes his head as he steps in and selects the hangar level. ‘No. It was a good thing that they found the Mountain Glenn plot, and it is so far a good thing that they found this alien. Nobody’s been hurt. And if I can help it, nobody will be hurt.’

The elevator doors open and Ozpin walks towards the high-pitched whine of a bullhead’s engines spooling up.

“Not on the scroll. I’ll tell you what’s happening on the bullhead.” There’s a click.

‘The hell?’ Qrow thinks, already reaching for his weapon, Harbinger. ‘Ozpin’s never that short with people.’

Pulling out his wallet as he stands up, he pulls out a couple hundred lien, dropping it on the hotel bar. “Hey, barkeep. This should cover my tab and my room for about a week. Keep it rented to me.” He barely hears the barkeep’s grunt of acknowledgement as he leaves the bar.

‘Too far to walk and make it in time. I could run, but that would attract attention, and if Ozpin’s refusing to talk about any details of this on the scroll it’s probably so secret that attracting any attention would be bad,’ he thinks as he ducks into an alleyway.

A few seconds later, a crow flies out, flapping in the general direction of the Emerald Forest landing pad.

Weiss watches as the alien shows an extremely animated Ruby some of the features of something the alien had pulled off of her back - she’d called it a “Sheev.” The alien hasn’t let Ruby handle it or her rifle, but Ruby seems unconcerned, absorbing the details of the design and making excited noises as the tip lights up, heat shimmer coming off of the plasma.

A hushed “Weiss” from behind her catches her attention.

Weiss turns to look at Blake, responding in a similarly hushed tone. “Yes?”

“What are your thoughts on this? I’m kind of in shock. Normally I’d ask Yang, but she seems to be trying to keep Ruby from making any mistakes.”

“I really don’t know,” Weiss murmurs back, shaking her head a little. “I’m excited, but also coming down off of the adrenaline high from having that rifle pointed at us. Ask me again later, maybe after I’ve had a chance to sleep.”

The Operator is in the middle of showing Ruby the concealed explosives inside of each of her Hikou Prime throwing stars when Ordis butts in, announcing “Operator, the sensors to the east have detected a lone flying object. It appears to be coming directly towards us.”

The Operator pulls back the Hikou, holding up her left hand in the universal ‘one moment’ gesture to quell Ruby’s questions. “Probably Professor Ozpin, trying to make it harder to figure out where he went. Ping it with an active scan.”

“Scanning. Appears to be a bullhead, flying extremely low.”
“Thanks, Ordis.”

A crow flaps down and disappears into an alleyway, and a few moments later Qrow walks out, walking with a purpose towards the landing pad with a bullhead on imminent approach.

Going through the security turnstile with barely a look at the guard, he waits at the edge of the pad for the bullhead to land, the constant growling thunder getting higher pitched as the engines spool down to land and the side bay door opens, a man in a Beacon uniform and flight helmet exiting. Walking over to him, he yells to be heard “Is there anything I should know about this bird?”

The pilot yells back “Only thing is that she seems to be quite touchy if you try to make a hard turn left at speed, but the mechanics say that they can’t find anything wrong with her, so it might just be a figment of my imagination.”

“Thanks,” yells Qrow with a nod as he steps past the pilot. ‘Better take it easy on left turns then, don’t want Lady Luck to have her say,’ he thinks. Stepping through the open hatch, he doesn’t spot Ozpin. ‘Probably in the cockpit,’ he thinks as he hits the switch to seal the bay door.

The sound immediately dampens inside the craft as soon as the door shuts, and Qrow takes a moment to appreciate the end of the assault on his ears before he enters the cockpit.

Ozpin immediately hands him the flight plan he’s thrown together. “Fly as low as possible as soon as we get out of the sight of the Vale proper. Beacon classes should be running for another few hours, so we should be safe from visual detection from anyone.”

Qrow looks at the flight plan. “Thirty three and a half kilometers southwest, then turn and go thirty four and a third kilometers due east? Oz, what’s going on?”

Ozpin shakes his head. “Get us in the air and moving at cruising speed. Something happened that needs to be kept in as small a circle as possible for the moment, and there’s too many eyes here. Never know who can read lips.”

“All right, Oz, but this had better be good,” says Qrow, shaking his own head as he grabs the controls and begins takeoff.

The inside of the bullhead is silent for a few minutes until Qrow gets onto course and the city of Vale can barely be seen behind them, at which point he asks “Okay, we’re in the air and underway. What’s going on?”

“Do you remember the moon shard impact two mornings ago?”

“Yeah, it spilled a snifter of some top shelf brandy. What of it?”

“Team RWBY had fallen behind on mission completions due to the investigation surrounding the Mountain Glenn incident, and three of their four members do not have much practice with map and compass navigation. I judged that sending them on a mission to recover a shard of the moon was a low risk mission that would not require a Huntsman escort, so I sent them out.”

Quickly glaring at Ozpin before returning his eyes to the job of piloting, Qrow asks “Oz, what happened to my nieces?”

“They’re fine, or at least they were twenty minutes ago when Ruby called in, reporting that it wasn’t a moon shard.”
“What, did a dust smuggling bullhead go down?”

“No. It was not from Remnant.”

“What was it then? Because the only thing left that comes to mind for what it could be is a spaceship, and I would’ve heard about the launch of one of those, even as isolated as I was on my last mission. Also, any recovery mission wouldn’t be this secretive, and would be an all hands on deck thing.”

The corners of Ozpin’s mouth lift a tiny bit. “You’re close.”

A very exasperated Qrow sarcastically says “Oh, so they found an alien spaceship.”

“Exactly.”

There’s silence in the cockpit for a few seconds before a loud smack and slight grunt of pain comes from the pilot’s chair. “Okay, I’m not dreaming. My nieces found an alien spaceship.”

“There’s at least one alien there as well.”

“And you called me why? Glynda can fly a bullhead just as well as I can and also wouldn’t leak.”

“I needed someone who wouldn’t cause large amounts of alarm if they weren’t where they were supposed to be when I left Beacon on short notice. This just looks like I received a moderately high-priority call that requires my personal attention somewhere to the southwest. Yes, it’s something to discuss, but it happens a few times a year.”

“And why are there only two of us going?”

“The alien requested that this be kept in as small a circle as possible-”

“You’ve talked to the alien?” Qrow interrupts as he begins a wide left turn to start heading towards the final destination.

Still looking straight ahead, Ozpin shrugs. “Technically, yes. We’ve exchanged less than forty words total. Its exact wording was ‘Only bring those you trust implicitly not to spread the word around.’”

“So you chose the drunk,” Qrow says, rolling his eyes. “What do we know?”

“It seems to be able to speak perfect Remembrance. Ruby did not use any of the distress words or phrases during the call, so it probably wasn’t made under duress and it’s likely they’re unharmed.”

Pulling up over a hill that was approaching, Qrow says “She’s just a student, Oz. She might not remember the words or phrases.”

“Possibly, but I doubt it. Miss Rose takes her position very seriously. That being said, after dismount and power down, I will attempt to separate the alien from team RWBY, at which point I want you to talk to them and figure out how the contact happened and if any of them are injured in non-obvious ways. This is another reason why I chose you over anyone else; two of the members of team RWBY are your family, and likely will be extremely excited to see you.”

Nodding in approval, Qrow asks “If they are physically hurt, what’s the plan?”

“It depends. If they’re dead, send a burst to Beacon that all available Hunters are to converge on the location and destroy it, then we try to kill the alien. If they’re badly wounded, we try to take it down nonlethally. If they’re only lightly wounded, we talk it out.”
“This is a lot to take in, Oz.”

They fly in silence for a few minutes, before the system screeches a warning.

“Woah! Big active sensor ping from the east. I think our alien knows we’re coming.”

“Ordis, where’s a good spot that I can point them to for a landing zone?”

“Analyzing. To the northeast, there used to be a clearing. There’s a large tree that fell; if you DESTROY IT move it, there should be enough room for a touchdown.”

“Got it. I think I see the one you’re talking about.” Turning to team RWBY, the Operator yells “HEY, YOU FOUR! I’m about to blow a tree into splinters. Duck behind that tree trunk and cover your eyes, there will be shrapnel and I’d prefer not to have to explain why you’re filled with puncture wounds or missing an eye.”

“Operator, you could just move it.”

“If I were in the Atlas I would, but I don’t think that the Ivara has enough strength to get it clear before Ozpin arrives.”

Carefully planning her targets on the tree trunk, the Operator grabs a few handfuls of the throwing stars and, after checking that team RWBY is in cover as ordered, throws them one at a time, blowing apart large chunks of the tree trunk with each star.

“Okay, you can come out now, it’s safe. Ozpin’s nearly here, and I needed to clear a landing area.”

“Destination’s about half a kilometer away. Bleeding speed and switching to VTOL for lift,” Qrow says, suiting action to words. “Oz, do we have a landing area or am I going to have to trust in the suspension?”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t think to ask that. We’ll probably have to trust the suspension.”

“Wonderful,” says Qrow, rolling his eyes.

The bullhead pulls up over the impact zone, Qrow looking to find the place that looks the most likely to support it when a bright and cheery voice lights up the comms system. “Hello! My name is Ordis, a Ship Cephalon. If you will look directly to your left, you will see the Operator waving their arms next to a landing zone that has been cleared for you.”

Ozpin and Qrow exchange a look before Qrow starts looking to locate the alien. Ozpin leans forward, toggling the comms system on. “Thank you, Ordis. Are we cleared to land?”

“OF COURSE YO-” Ozpin and Qrow jump at the angry outburst. “Apologies. You are cleared to land whenever you wish.”

Qrow finishes landing in the clearing, shutting off the engine, the whine getting progressively higher in pitch until final shutdown. The older man leaves the cockpit as Qrow completes the shutdown, and Ozpin toggles the switch to open one of the bay doors. Air from the clearing swirls in, smelling of freshly cut hardwood.
Ozpin steps out, nodding in greeting to the unharmed team RWBY before turning to the alien. “Welcome to Remnant. I am Professor Ozpin, and my pilot is Qrow Branwen.” There’s some excited looks exchanged between Ruby and Yang. “I hope that our encounter will be peaceful. Do you or anyone with you need medical attention?”

The alien shakes her seemingly hooded head. “Thank you for the welcome, I hope it remains peaceful as well. I am the Operator. I am unharmed, and Ordis does not have a physical body, so we will not need medical assistance.”

Qrow steps out of the bullhead, right hand slightly cheating towards the handle of Harbinger. “If he doesn’t have a physical body, what is he?”

“Ordis is a Cephalon. Probably the easiest comparison for you is an artificial intelligence.”

Qrow gives a flat look at the Operator. “He didn’t sound stable when he called us.”

The alien’s shoulders slump. “Ordis is… damaged. It wasn’t caused by the crash. He’s stable, and still able to do his job without issue.”

“But-”

Ozpin interjects. “Enough, Qrow. If they say that it’s not a problem, then it isn’t a problem. Do you require any assistance with repairs to your vessel?”

The Operator shrugs. “From what Ordis has figured out, I’m pretty sure you don’t have the material manufacturing capability to help make replacement parts, while the foundry in my ship is able to. Help guarding the vessel would be good. I had a fairly sizable swarm of Grimm - one moment. Yes, Ordis?”

The natives of Remnant stand awkwardly for a moment while the Operator nods along to whatever Ordis is relaying to her. The Operator stops nodding, her tone dropping into a very serious mode. “Right. Sensor network just picked up motion to the south, either a lot of little things moving in a pack or one very big thing. It’s moving fairly slowly, and according to Ordis its current path would take it wide of us, but I have a policy since the attack on my vessel a day ago of annihilating any Grimm that come close. If you’ll excuse me, I’ll be back in half an hour. Don’t go into the ship.”

As the Operator turns to leave and wipe out whatever idiotic Grimm has decided to encroach upon her domain, Ozpin steps forward and holds up his hand. “Wait. Surely you would rather talk with me. Let Team RWBY and Qrow Branwen deal with the Grimm while we talk.”

The Operator stops, seeming to think about it for a few seconds, before shrugging. “Fine. Your scrolls have radio capability, switch them to channel 24 scramble 17 and Ordis can walk you there.”

Ruby suddenly looks very excited, fumbling out her scroll, as Qrow shrugs and asks, “Which way should we go?”

The Operator pauses, slightly cocked head indicating that Ordis is talking to her privately. After a moment, she relays “They’re at about one-nine-oh, moving north-northwest. Try going two-ten, maybe two-fifteen. If they keep their course and speed, it should be about two thirds of a kilometer before you meet them.”

Qrow nods, pulling out his own scroll and activating radio mode as he starts to walk towards the forest in the suggested direction, team RWBY following him as a very excited Ruby finally runs up and hugs her uncle.
“Ordis will call with any updates to what the intruders are doing. He should be able to track you as well.”

After team RWBY and Qrow got underway and were well into the forest, Qrow turns to them, motioning to keep moving while asking “So, what happened?”

Surprisingly, Yang answers. “Lots of things, Uncle. We went off track, and ended up going too far to the east when we were going to the spot. When we realized that, we went in from the west. We got to the spot, and we saw the spaceship. Had a few moments of discussion between ourselves, ending with me saying ‘We haven’t been shot at yet,’ and Weiss responding ‘That could just mean it doesn’t think we’re hostile!’” Yang’s impression of Weiss is very accurate, if a little too high pitched. Weiss’s annoyed “Hmph.” and accompanying glare says everything that needs to be said about what she thinks of that.

Blake picks up the story from there. “After Weiss said what she said, we suddenly heard a voice from behind us saying ‘I don’t know what you are yet, turn around slowly, no sudden moves.’ As a note, I still don’t know how it snuck up on us; I had my head on a swivel and I didn’t see or hear anything. The only explanation I can come up with is that it was either invisible and didn’t make any sound as it approached, or it teleported.”

Qrow looks worried as the group continues onward. “What happened then?”

Ruby gets in on the conversation. “We turned around and it was pointing a gun at the middle of us. Yang said something stupid, and I was looking around trying to figure out how it got there and it pointed the gun at me and I’ve never stared down the wrong end of the barrel of the barrel of Crescent Rose but now I think I know how a Beowulf feels when Crescey is pointed right at it.”

Blake intervenes, before Qrow can get too angry over what happened. “She probably thought that Ruby was trying to figure out how to reach her. She was treating us as a potential threat.”

Ruby nods quickly as she steps over a rotten tree trunk. “Yeah. Anyways, it started asking us questions like who we were and what we were doing and we were trying not to freak out or provoke it because oh my god it’s an alien.”

Yang steps in. “After it asked us all that stuff, it kinda went silent for a moment, then asked us what we would do if it put its gun away and answered our questions. We all said we wouldn’t attack it, so it put the gun on its back, jumped down, and sat on a tree and started answering our questions.”

Blake interjects. “At first, she was very ready to fight us if we showed even the slightest bit of hostility to it. Even though she was sitting down, she kept both of her feet on the ground, her hands free, and her center of gravity above her feet - she was ready to jump up and fight us at a moments notice. As our conversation went on, she started to relax more, and—”

The radio squawks, and Ordis’s voice comes out of their scrolls. “According to the mapping the Operator has done of the area, there is a fairly large clearing just west of you. If you can bait the Grimm there, you will have much more room to KILL THEM ALL work with.”

Qrow turns to the west, motioning for team RWBY to follow him as he pulls his scroll out of his pocket, saying “Thanks for the advice. Any information on what we’re fighting?”

“It’s no more than 30 beowulves, 20 boarbatusks, 6 ursa, or a single Death Stalker. It could also be a combination of any of the smaller types. Unfortunately, in order to maintain stealth with the sensors,
they had to be **ABSOLUTELY USELESS** only motion sensing.”

Qrow grimaces, still not trusting the damaged AI fully as they enter the clearing. “Right. You girls plan your ambush, I’ll go figure out what’s coming and bring them to you. I won’t fight unless things go pear shaped; show me what you can do.”

----------------------------------------------------------

The Operator watches as Qrow and team RWBY leave the impact zone. Turning back to Ozpin, she shrugs. “We’ll see how this goes.”

Ozpin nods. “They’ll be fine. Qrow is an experienced Hunter. Now, you were saying something about protection?”

The Operator nods. “I can hold out against a lot of Grimm, but I’m vulnerable to being overrun, especially here. If you have any people that you trust to keep a secret, I can be off the ground in four months, and spaceworthy in six. In return, I can fight at your direction until I find a way to return to my home system - I assure you, I am far superior in combat to any Hunter you have.”

Ozpin shakes his head. “Unfortunately, the number of people who I would trust to never spread this news is very small, and I cannot have them abandon their current duties for four to six months. However, I may be able to move your ship to a safer location. Would that suffice?”

“You’re going to have to define ‘Safer,’ Ozpin.”

“There is a barely used, massive room below Beacon that is only known of by a few people. The only current occupant is a VIP, but she is in a coma and shows no signs of waking up. We could use a cargo bullhead to move your vessel into it. All that I would ask is that you do not disturb the machine keeping the VIP alive, and guard her from any who visit without my express consent. I may ask that you lend your… combative talents to away missions on occasion, as well.”

“Give me a minute. I want to discuss this with Ordis.”

----------------------------------------------------------

Team RWBY had discussed their strategy before hiding in the trees. If it was a pack of Grimm, they would wait until they chased Qrow into the clearing, where Weiss would wait until the entire pack was in the clearing before using an ice glyph to summon an ice wall to halt and confuse the pack. At that point, Yang would jump down into the middle of the group, scattering and confusing them even more. Ruby and Blake would then descend and work on the flanks, while Weiss supported Yang’s chaos with glyphs.

If it was a Death Stalker, they would open off with a Freezerburn maneuver to throw up a smokescreen. Yang would again be the distraction, and Weiss would prevent its retreat, while Blake and Ruby attempted to sever the stinger. They figured once that was severed, they could attack with much less fear, with Yang being able to use her heavy blows to crack the armor.

Ruby’s scroll crackles, and Qrow’s voice comes through. “Bringing the Grimm to you. There’s 2 Ursas and about 20 Beowulves.”

Ruby responds “Just get them into the clearing then keep going, we’ve got a plan.” There’s a grunt from the other end of the line. Gripping Crescent Rose tighter, still in rifle form so as to make her profile smaller and harder to spot behind the tree she’s hidden behind, she calls out to the team “Get ready, Qrow is incoming with the Grimm on his tail! There’s a couple of Ursas and a bunch of Beowulves!”
Blake is up in the tree branches on the other side of the clearing from Ruby, her chained sword and sheath, Gambol Shroud, at the ready. Hearing that, she unsheathes the sword and prepares to leap down once Yang has engaged.

Yang double checks that the correct sequence of shells is loaded into her yellow shotgun gauntlets, Ember Celica, once more - gravity dust for the initial jump into the group, and a combination of gravity and burn to create the explosion and chaos. Finding that they’re still ready, she checks her footing on the sturdy branch once again.

Weiss crouches behind a bush, her rapier Myrtenaster ready to help focus her glyphs. Her part is the most tricky in the battle, as she has to correctly time the glyph cast to not catch Qrow on accident while also blocking the entire mass of Grimm. She knows she can do it, though. She’s practiced extensively, and knows exactly how long it will take for her glyph to take effect.

Qrow bursts out of the treeline, running just fast enough that the Grimm won’t lose sight of him. A half-second later, the first of the Beowulves burst out of the trees, baying in excitement - the open ground will let them use their superior speed to catch the highly maneuverable human.

Just as the Ursa come crashing out is when Weiss chooses to strike. Stabbing her rapier into the ground, a line of white snowflake glyphs appears underneath Qrow’s feet, perpendicular to his path. The instant Qrow is clear, a 7 foot tall wall of ice appears, blocking off the last half of the clearing.

The first Beowulves have no chance to react, slamming face first into the ice. The ones immediately behind them attempt to pull up, and are only partially successful. The Ursa, with significantly more momentum than the Beowulves due to their larger size, actually trample a few of the smaller Grimm underfoot as they attempt to brake.

Ruby smiles, hearing the telltale sound of Ember Celica firing off, and seeing the flash of yellow and tan come flying down into the middle of the pack of Grimm before an explosion sends dirt flying everywhere.

Yang aims her landing carefully, and Ember Celica discharge their explosive payload into the skulls of two of the Beowulves, killing them before they had a chance to realize what was going on. Before the dirt has even landed, she leaps towards where she remembers the largest concentration of Grimm are.

As the dust begins to settle, Blake targets the closer Ursa, leaping from her perch and aiming to sever the spinal cord with one well-placed stab. Unfortunately, Yang either doesn’t or can’t see this, and a beowulf is sent flying into the Ursa an instant before Blake lands. What should’ve been an immediately mortal blow from which Blake could immediately recover her blade and move to her next target from instead results in Blake having Gambol stuck in the neck of the Ursa as her planned footing is knocked off kilter.

Ruby, not having the height advantage that Blake does, can’t immediately reach the second Ursa. Leaping forward with a burst of rose petals in a burst of semblance-enhanced speed, Crescent Rose scythes off the heads of the first beowulf she meets before she spins the scythe with an underarm motion, burying the blade tip-first into the chest of another, before firing the rifle of Crescent Rose and using the recoil to both free the blade and get some height.

Blake is currently regretting her decision to tie Gambol to her forearm. Sure, it’s makes it significantly easier to use the chain part of the chained sword, but now she can’t get out of the rodeo ride on her terms. She also can’t pull it out, as it seems to have twisted inside the Ursa in such a way that it has become stuck - she just doesn’t have the leverage in her current position. Suddenly, the ursa throws itself forward, landing back on all four paws. This throws Blake over its head and she
loses her grip on the Ursa. Blake reflexively tucks into a few rolls to attempt to minimize impact and gain distance before getting onto her feet again; unfortunately, as she reaches the last of her rolls before she’s going to get onto her feet, she hits the end of the line. The ribbon, now unfortunately wrapped twice around her midsection, cinches tight around her waist, winding her and sticking her right arm to her side. Eyes unfocused and desperately trying to get air back into her lungs, she hears the Ursa roar once more before everything goes red.

Weiss, away from the immediate fight, is able to see Blake’s predicament as the Ursa rears back in an attempt to unseat the unwanted passenger. Her glyphs aren’t precise enough to kill the Ursa without also potentially hitting Blake, and she’s too far away to close the distance and get into melee range. As well, now that the initial confusion is ended, several of the beowulves and the other Ursa are actually pushing Yang back – and the ice wall prevents her from having full freedom of movement. She makes the instant decision to yell “Ruby, Blake needs help!” as she casts a fire glyph underneath a beowulf that is trying to get around Yang.

Yang is in her element - the focal point of the battle. As she ducks under the wildly swinging paw of the other Ursa, she hears Weiss yell “Ruby,” but whatever else she said was missed underneath the sound of the ribcage of a beowulf breaking and subsequent shotgun blast. She does flick her eyes to see where Ruby is and if she’s in trouble, but locating her isn’t difficult - she’s in a Crescent Rose assisted jump. Her eyes flick back as she takes a quick backstep and the beowulf that was about to jump on her misses before she snaps a kick off into its side.

At the peak of her jump, Ruby hears Weiss’s call. Looking over to Blake, she’s just in time to see her awkwardly thrown and her ribbon cinch around her stomach as the Ursa stands up again. It roars in pain and anger before starting to lurch forwards.

Towards Blake.

Ruby immediately activates her Semblance as she lands, moving faster than she ever has before. At the last moment, she turns around, scything Crescent Rose around. As soon as she feels pressure, she pulls the trigger once more.

The red fades from Blake’s vision as it she’s able to focus again, and she sees a bunch of rose petals, an Ursa dissolving from the beheading it just received, and Ruby standing in post-strike stance.

As Blake stands up, disentangling herself from Gambol Shroud, Ruby disappears into another cloud of rose petals, repeatedly appearing, striking, and disappearing across the battlefield.

Blake collects herself and moves towards a beowulf that appears to be focused on trying to get to Weiss, making short work of the distracted Grimm as she hears Yang yell out in triumph as a sickening crunch is heard and a disintegrating Ursa is sent cartwheeling through the air, and she realizes the fight is over.

Ruby rushes over to Blake, while Yang and Weiss move over at a walk. “Ohmygosh are you okay? I was so worried when I saw the Ursa throw you and saw the ribbon get pulled on and-”

Blake interrupts. “Ruby. I’m fine. I’m a little bit short of breath, and I’ll probably be a bit sore in the morning, but with how fast you got over there, I was never really in any danger. And now I know that I need to practice recovery rolls where Gambol is stuck in something, so that this doesn’t happen again.”

Qrow emerges from wherever he was hiding, and says “Good work. For the most part. Your actual plan went off without a hitch, you were able to communicate well in the fight when things went wrong. That being said, there is some room for improvement.”
Yang crosses her arms and leans back, smirking. “Like what, Uncle Qrow? I kicked butt out here!”

Qrow fixes her with a look. “One thing for each of you. Weiss, your ice wall, while impressive, was a substantial waste of ice dust. If you’re similar to other dust mages, that ice wall probably ate up most, if not all, of the ice dust you keep in your focus, and only a third of it was actually needed for your plan. While it didn’t come up in this fight, it’s important to remember that you aren’t always going to be in a fight where you can find time to reload, and supply isn’t always going to be a few hours away.”

Weiss nods. “That makes sense.”

Turning to Ruby, Qrow says “Your plan placed you too far away from Blake for her to support you if you ended up in trouble. As you saw in this fight, even an easy fight can go wrong in an instant.”

As Ruby nods, taking the advice to heart, Qrow turns to Blake. “You relied far too much on one perfect strike, not taking into account that the battlefield can change in a millisecond. All it takes is a little bit of bad luck.” Qrow winces a tiny bit, almost unnoticeably, as he says the last bit.

Finally, he turns to Yang. “You failed to keep track of what the rest of your team was doing and could’ve gotten your partner injured or killed.”

Yang blanches, shock on her face. “What?”

“After you landed, you immediately launched towards a group of beowulves. That right was very impressive, but it also launched the beowulf straight into the Ursa that Blake was about to sever the spine of, jarring it just enough that her stab missed the spine and her planned footing was off. Her landing was awkward, her sword got stuck, she got thrown and tangled up in her ribbons, and if Weiss and Ruby hadn’t spotted this you would’ve possibly been calling for medevac, because I was far enough away that I don’t know if I would’ve made it in time.”

Yang sheepishly looks over to Blake and says “Sorry Blake.”

Qrow adds “That being said, these are minor things that most first year students have issues with, and you all acquitted yourselves well in the fight - Weiss kept the Grimm off of Yang’s back and spotted Blake in trouble, Yang made for an excellent front line and her mechanics and movement were superb, Ruby got to Blake very quickly, and Blake’s quick recovery after Ruby rescued her were all excellent. The plan was textbook and well executed, Ruby just forgot that just because she can cover Blake that doesn’t mean Blake can cover her. You did good, and everyone’s going home without a stop at the hospital. That’s always a good thing.”

Stepping inside the Orbiter and letting the airlock close, the Operator asks “Ordis, what are your thoughts on this?”

Ordis pipes up. “I’ve been doing some hacking, Operator. The space he mentions is well hidden, and not on any public records.”

Slightly surprised, the Operator says “Wait, you can hack them that well?”

“OF COURSE I CAN. Their information security isn’t very good compared to the Corpus, or even the Grineer, and most information is on networked drives. They seem to barely use air gaps. I’d guess that they don’t have much experience with being hacking or being hacked - their protections are amateurish at best, but I’ve found very little actual malware.”
Nodding, the Operator says “Alright, fine. Keep it up as long as you can stay undetected. Let’s keep this ace up our sleeves. But what did you think about Ozpin’s offer?”

“We would essentially have 24/7 armed guards and would be immune to airstrikes. The only way to attack us would be to either open the hangar doors - which I could override - or come down the elevator. We would be safe, even if Ozpin were to turn on us.”

“That can’t be a very big elevator, then.”

“The plans say it fits six **PACKED LIKE SARDINES.**”

“So it’s overall safer, aside from the transport period, and very few people would know. And you can monitor for anybody that notices it happening. That works. Are you OK with me giving the green light to Ozpin to proceed?”

“My hacking will only improve with closer access to a network tower. And with you there to provide physical safety, what could-”

Raising her left hand, the Operator interrupts. “Don’t finish that statement.”

“I’m sorry, Operator?”

“It’s fine, Ordis. I just remember saying something to the effect of ‘What could go wrong’ shortly before we investigated that Steel Meridian ship.”

**“IT’S JUST A SUPERSTITION** That makes sense, Operator. Anyways, I like the idea.”

Nodding as she turns to the airlock to exit once more, the Operator says “Good. We’ll do it. Warm up the Atlas, we’ll need the strength to load it up. Start fabbing some straps?”

“Starting the fabrication now, Operator.”

“Thanks, Ordis.”

Stepping back outside, the Operator turns to locate Ozpin, who is looking with a critical eye at the shredded engine on the port side. “We’ll take the offer. I’ve got Ordis fabbing some heavy-duty straps to help load and secure the Orbiter.”

Nodding in satisfaction, Ozpin turns. “Excellent,” he says. “I will call for the transport now. I do have some more questions for you after I make this call, however.”

The Operator shrugs. “That’s fine. I’ll answer what I can.”

Chapter End Notes

I just want to bring this up before I get raked over the coals here for "Blake's not that incompetent!" - Blake's trouble was due to a combination of Qrow's Semblance and reflexes not helping if they're the wrong reflexes. Qrow's semblance is to blame for the specific timing of the Beowulf impact, and her reflexive roll was the correct action to take if she still had Gambol Shroud in her hand.

I'm also going to bring something up here quickly - I have a lot planned for this story.
Nowhere in the planning is there a romance planned. That doesn't mean that there won't be romance - I know the broad strokes of the story, but don't know all of the actual specifics. All I can say for sure is that the Operator definitely will not end up in a romantic relationship.
As Glynda Goodwitch supervises a practice duel, her scroll rings. She sighs and pauses the bout; the only people who can call her during class require an answer. Excusing herself for a moment, she steps out of the classroom and answers the call.

“Yes, Ozpin?”

Ozpin’s voice comes out of the speaker. “Glynda, good. I hope I’m not interrupting anything too important?”

Glaring a little bit, Glynda says “I had to pause a bout. What do you need?”

“Tonight, I need you to take a cargo bullhead out of Vale and follow the flight path Qrow will give you.”

“Does this have anything to do with why you left in such a hurry earlier?”

“Yes.”

“Fine.” Glynda hangs up and returns to the classroom.

“The away team has dealt with the Grimm incursion, and is returning. There don’t appear to be casualties,” Ordis reports to the Operator.

“Ozpin, the others have dealt with the Grimm, and are returning,” the Operator relays.

“That’s good to hear. Any casualties?”

“None that Ordis can determine.”

“That’s good. Anyways, you were saying about the Void?”

As Qrow and team RWBY walk back towards the crashed spaceship, Yang walks with shoulders slumped and staring at her feet, dropping to the back of the group. Realizing how out of character this is for her sister and seeing that Blake doesn’t seem to notice this, Ruby drops back.

“So, Uncle Qrow was a bit hard on you, huh?”

Shaking her head and kicking at the dirt, Yang responds “He was right, Ruby. I put Blake in a really bad situation. We’re partners, we’re supposed to be able to trust each other, how is she going to be able to trust me when I nearly got her badly hurt or killed?”

Giving Yang a quick shoulder hug, Ruby responds “By being better. You’ve always been kind of a ‘Punch first, ask questions while punching’ person. I’ll look up some exercises to increase your battlefield awareness, and maybe doing some training with Ren on maintaining your calm would do you some good.”
Returning the hug, Yang says “But what if it doesn’t work? We have to work together for the next four years, and if she doesn’t trust me then-”

Ruby clamps her hand over Yang’s mouth, silencing her. “Then we’ll work on that, too. But you shouldn’t worry too much about it, Blake will forgive you.”

Shaking her head to both to remove Ruby’s hand and express her disagreement, Yang says “How do you know that? I screwed up bad, Rubes.”

Smiling, Ruby says “I forgave you, didn’t I?”

Yang stumbles, inadvertently releasing herself from the hug. “What?”

Grabbing Yang into the hug again, Ruby says “Remember when we were kids, and you decided to go hunting Raven? Yeah. You made a bad decision. It was your fault. But nothing bad came of it, and you’ve never repeated the mistake. You worked to be better. Why wouldn’t I forgive you then, and why wouldn’t Blake forgive you now?”

Turning her face forward and lowering her voice just a bit, Ruby continues, “And besides, I’m sure Blake has heard our whole discussion with those cute kitty ears.” Blake’s instant hesitation before she continues walking puts paid to this claim.

Yang perks up a bit. “You really think she’ll forgive me?”

Ruby squeezes her sister tighter. “She already has.”

-----------------------------------------------------------------------

Ozpin watches as the Operator stands up, excusing herself by saying “Hold on a moment. I need to change Warframes. I’ll be back momentarily.”

Barely noticing Ozpin’s nod and sound of acknowledgment, the Operator walks over to the airlock and cycles through. Walking over to the armory and stepping onto the platform, she releases the transference to the Ivara.

Snapping back to your own body is always disorienting. There’s a few moments where you aren’t clear which body you’re in control of, and then another few where motor control is iffy at best. The first time she’d transferred Warframes after her awakening, it had taken an hour to regain control of her body and mind in full. With the practice she’s had, the recovery period is more like standing still after quickly spinning around a few times.

That doesn’t make it comfortable, and violent separations are still bad. Getting back to her center, she asks Ordis “What’s the weapons loadout on the Atlas? Still the heavy and hard?”

“The current weapons on the hardpoints are the Corinth, 2 Lex Primes, and the Bo Prime, Operator.”

Contemplatively, the Operator says “A little bit light on crowd killing, but that’s what the ‘frame is for, and the Remnant natives should be able to help. Leave it as is.”

“Understood, Operator. Atlas is ready for transference at your leisure.”

“I’m not going to transfer yet. I’ll give it fifteen minutes. I’ve been nothing but polite and forthcoming so far, so he’ll probably assume I came out as soon as I could.”

“Understood, Operator.”
Qrow sees the forest brighten, meaning they’re near the impact zone, and prepares for his talk with Ozpin; his worries about the alien have not been assuaged.

Walking into the clearing with team RWBY behind him, he notes the distinct lack of said alien, immediately putting him on guard even as he sees Ozpin sitting calmly on a tree trunk, typing calmly on his scroll. Putting his hand on the haft of Harbinger and keeping his head on a swivel, he walks forward and asks suspiciously “So, where’s the alien?”

“She said something about needing to change Warframes and went inside her ship a bit over ten minutes ago. How was Grimm hunting?”

“Mostly uneventful. I’m sure the kids can give you a more detailed breakdown if you want, but they did good.” He stops, then shrugs. “For students, at least.”

Raising an eyebrow, Ozpin says “High praise from Qrow Branwen.”

Rolling his eyes, Qrow says “I should hope so. One of them’s related to me by blood and I taught the other everything she knows about fighting with a scythe.”

Ruby pipes up. “Not everything, I learned some new tricks at Beacon!”

The ghost of a smile barely makes an appearance on Qrow’s face, although it’s gone before he turns around, eyebrow raised. “Oh really? Can you show me some of them?”

Ozpin interrupts before that can get too far, handing over a message with his seal and signature to Qrow. “Unfortunately, Qrow, I need you to go back to Beacon in the bullhead with this message. Get it to the Vale ATC, and collect Glynda once classes have ended. Fly the same path out as you did in, and on the return in the cargo bullhead.”

“Oz, what did you do?” Qrow says, crossing his arms.

“The alien requested protection for her craft while she effected repairs. Her timeline was far too long for me to guarantee the services of enough Hunters that would not talk about the fact that there was an alien on Remnant to those not in the know. I proposed a compromise solution where we would host her in one of Beacon’s disused hangars. In return, she has offered to fight at our direction until she finds a way to return home.” The glint in Ozpin’s eye informs Qrow without words that mentioning that he only knows of one disused hangar and what it currently holds would be quite the mistake.

Unhappily, Qrow asks “What about the kids?”

Turning to address the students directly, Ozpin says “They will help with the loading process tonight, then finish their assignment.” Standing and taking a few steps forward, he looks each member of team RWBY in the eye as he states “I don’t think I need to mention this, but in case I do, you must tell nobody about this. The only people you should discuss the alien or her spaceship with is me, Qrow, Professor Goodwitch, the alien herself, or yourselves. The alien wishes her presence on Remnant to be kept as secret as possible for as long as possible, and I have no doubt that she’s only been as forthcoming as she has been because we simply have no way of making use of the information she’s given us.”

Team RWBY all nod, making noises of acknowledgement, as Ruby says “We understand, Professor. We’ll just say we ran into a lot of Grimm and that’s why we’re back late.”
Qrow, on the other hand, looks downright mutinous and is about to continue questioning Ozpin before he is interrupted by the sound of a door opening. The group of Remnant natives turn and look at what exits the door.

The first thing that crosses Weiss’s mind is “Oh my god, where’s its neck?” The shoulder area of the Warframe is so heavily muscled that the neck has seemingly disappeared. It looks almost… unbalanced, in a way; the granite colored arms and legs are very thin in comparison to the bulk of the shoulders and thighs - although most boxers would still kill to have them. Add that to an obsidian black torso covered in what looks like a gray and black belt draped around its… well, where the neck would be on a normal person and an obsidian black facemask that looks like an old frog-mouth helm, and the thing now slowly walking towards them looks like it just stepped off of a plinth. A slate gray cape that goes down almost to the forest floor, ending in slightly threadbare tatters completes the look.

Ruby’s eyes are, of course, immediately drawn to the weapons. She sees the black and silver stock of something over the shoulder of the new Warframe, and then her eyes are drawn to the massive black and silver pistols on each hip - they look like they would dwarf her hands. To her disappointment, the melee weapon seems to simply be a staff - an expertly made and heavily ornamented staff, inlaid with silver, but a staff nonetheless.

“Did I miss anything important?” The Operator asks, stopping a fair distance away from the group.

With a start, Blake realizes that the timbre of the voice has changed - it’s almost the same, but there’s a slight undertone of… what almost sounds like a rockslide? It’s barely there - even with her faunus senses, it was hard to detect.

Qrow turns and steps forward, subtly placing himself in between team RWBY and the Operator. “What do you actually look like? So far we’ve just seen two of your Warframes, when are we going to see the real you?”

Somehow, despite the mass of muscle that makes up the shoulders of the Atlas, the Operator shrugs. “Hopefully never. If I’m actually visible, that means I’m vulnerable. However…” The Warframe’s limbs stiffen as a swirl of emerald energy apparates out of the chest of the Atlas, rapidly coalescing into a humanoid form.

It’s human. A bare few centimeters taller than Ruby, with a similar hair length, however, the hair is black with shocks of white running through it. Green eyes and fair skin are noted as they look down to see the slate gray shirt, skirt, and sleeves, with emerald piping adding a splash of color to all the gray. There’s also silvery brace of some form on her right forearm.

A bemused half smile crosses the Operator’s mouth, and says something in a language that none of the Remnant natives are able to understand - it sounds almost… musical? Blake quietly notes that the undercurrent of rumbling is gone, and the earlier undercurrent of rustling leaves that the Ivara had is also absent. Weiss’s jaw drops, sputtering incoherently. Yang puts a hand on her shoulder and asks “What?”

A look of confusion crosses the Operator’s face, and more of the musical language is spoken.

“Remembrance, please,” says Ozpin, completely deadpan.

The Operator’s eyes widen in understanding, and she steps back, placing her hand on the Atlas, disapparating in a swarm of emerald energy that rejoins the warframe. “Sorry about that. I forgot that the translation program can’t translate my speech while in that form. I said, ‘This is what I look like.’”
Weiss regains control, asking “Is that - was that- well you know what I mean, real?”

Shrugging again, the Operator says “Kind of? It has a physical presence, can interact with physical objects, even fight - although that form is much more vulnerable than a Warframe. On the other hand, if that form is, for lack of a better word, killed, I am not harmed beyond a rather painful migraine for a minute or so, and am placed back into control of my Warframe.”

“How is that possible?” asks Ozpin, seemingly curious.

“The actual ‘how’ I don’t understand, and I doubt anyone ever will. It’s Void energy; if you think you understand it it’ll do something it shouldn’t be capable of according to your model. As to how I physically do it, imagine taking a step forward without moving your legs and you’ll have a pretty good idea.”

“And that brace on your arm?” Qrow asks, crossing his arms and raising an eyebrow.

The Operator pauses for a second, mystifying the group of Remnantians with how the Atlas’s head is somehow cocked to the side. “It’s… Probably the easiest way to describe it is as a flare stack, like you use in the Dust refining process to burn off dangerous waste safely. Void energy is very bad for the general area if not properly contained, and one of the downsides of using that form is that it can ‘cook off,’ for lack of a better phrase. The brace usually is able to prevent that, by burning off any overpressure. It’s another reason I rarely step out of my Warframe.”

“That’s enough, Qrow. I need you to fly back to Beacon and do what I asked now,” Ozpin intervenes.

Qrow looks at him like he’s insane. “Nothing it’s saying is making me trust it, Ozpin. You must be crazy if you think I’m just going to leave my nieces here.”

Ozpin stands up and looks Qrow directly in the eye over his glasses. “I am not asking you to trust the alien. I am asking you to trust me.”

The two men continue to stare at each other for a good thirty seconds, a test of will on Qrow’s part to display to Ozpin exactly how much he dislikes what Ozpin is doing, and Ozpin attempting to reassure Qrow.

Qrow breaks first. “Fine,” he says, shaking his head, “I’ll go collect Glynda. I’ll be back half an hour after nightfall.”

“Thank you, Qrow.”

“When should I tell Glynda about the situation?”

“Once you’re in the air should be fine.”

------------------------------------------------------------

“An alien.”

“Yep.”

“Team RWBY found an alien and a crashed spaceship, and made first contact.”

“And Ozpin then met it and invited it to repair its ship at Beacon, in exchange for it fighting for us until it finds a way to return home.”
“And you’re okay with this?”

“Ozpin is.”

They continue the flight in silence.

Flying a cargo bullhead is tricky. The sheer mass of the craft means that any mistakes in piloting are punished due to the momentum of the craft causing the entire thing to want to continue to make the mistake.

Flying close to the ground is even trickier, especially in a craft that takes to quick maneuvers about as well as a Goliath grimm.

Doing this while heading to a location without a beacon is even trickier.

Doing all this at night, with only instruments to guide you? That’s just asking for problems. Especially when you’re a magnet for bad luck.

Thankfully, the only problem that Qrow had run into so far was the computerized artificial horizon bugging out. The physical one was still fine, but just to be safe he’d increased his altitude a little bit.

As the Qrow and Glynda enter the final stretch, he says “Radio should be set for minimum strength. Can you radio and call the Orbiter, asking for some assistance in getting right on target?”

Unable to take his eyes off the instruments, Qrow hears Glynda messing with the radio before she says “Glynda to Orbiter, come in, we are on approach and requesting a walk in.”

The radio crackles, and the cheery voice of Ordis pops in. “Thank you! Turn to heading two-six-zero and throttle back to 75%. In roughly two minutes, you should transition to VTOL and begin bleeding speed.”

“So, where do we attach the straps?” a confused Ruby asks as she drops off her armful of orbiter scrap.

Stepping out of the airlock, heavy duty straps in hand, the Operator shakes her head and responds “We don’t. The orbiter has no external attachment points that are designed to be used to hoist it up. We’ll be running the straps underneath.”

Ruby looks down past the small pile of scrap at the bottom of the orbiter. It’s completely flush to the ground. “Um.”

The Operator chuckles for a moment, before saying “I can lift it up on edge. Then it’s up to you four to run the straps over as far as you can. Then we repeat on the opposite side, except you grab the end that was brought partially over before.”

Ruby looks at the Operator, boggle eyed. “You’re that strong?!”

“This ‘frame is. I’ve punched a 250 kilogram Grineer nearly 280 meters as the crow flies. That was with one hand, without assistance. You’ll be fine as long as you’re quick - me being strong means nothing to the fact that a lot of weight is going to be focused on my feet. I shouldn’t sink very fast, especially with a trick I have up my sleeve, but you shouldn’t dawdle either.”

A little bit later, after as many bits of orbiter scrap as can be found have been collected, the Operator
asks “All ready? Remember, get the marked middle as close to the centerline as you can - there’s quite a bit of extra on the ends, but getting it to the center can only help. Try to avoid twisting the straps.”

Team RWBY nods and makes noises of affirmation.

“While you’re under there, grab any more scrap that you find and pull it out. I can give you a thirty second warning if you aren’t all out.” With that, the Operator slams the ground with a grunt of effort, somehow summoning a platform of rock for her to stand on.

It’s now Weiss’s turn to look confused and amazed. “Wha- how-”

“This ‘frame can summon rock, for protection and utility. It’s Void stuff, channeled through the ‘frame in ways that I frankly do not understand, and each ‘frame makes use of the Void energy in a different way.”

Standing on the freshly created platform, the Operator turns and bends at the knee, digging her fingers through the loam and underneath the edge of the orbiter. “Lifting in 3, 2, 1.”

The orbiter groans and Blake swears she can hear the rocks underneath the warframe beginning to fracture as the Operator lifts the orbiter on edge. Despite this, the warframe holds rock steady and maintains perfect form on the lift, even lifting up past the shoulder. Stopping lifting, the Operator says in a voice that betrays no strain whatsoever. “Go.”

There are seven straps in total. Ruby has the longest run, since she will be running the strap that will go along the keel. Hers will be laid down first, before the others run theirs. Running as fast as she can without her semblance, she covers the distance in seconds, snapping it straight and removing the twist.

As soon as Ruby went in front of them, the other members of team RWBY moved forward, dropping their straps past the midpoint and grabbing any scrap they can find, throwing it out from under the orbiter.

Calmly, the Operator says “Thirty seconds.”

Immediately, team RWBY clears from underneath the orbiter, and the Operator begins to slowly lower it. As it’s returned to the ground, Yang takes a look at the platform that the Operator had created - all the weight pushed into it had sunk it a good foot into the ground. “Good job. Now the other side. Then I’ll throw the ends up for Glynda to attach, and we can hoist it up.”

------------------------------------------------------------

In a safe house, a scroll rings. A black coated redhead man with Grimm mask covering his eyes and nose stalks past a window showing the barest hints of sunrise, swipes it up and answers the call with a flat “Yes, Cinder?”

“Taurus. Ozpin was doing something that required a cargo bullhead out in the forest near where the meteorite impacted the other day. He then took it to a secure room at Beacon, and the Black Queen can’t locate where. I need you to find out what it was.”

“I’m going to need more reason than that to risk discovery, Cinder,” says Adam Taurus, leader of the Vale White Fang, as he stalks over to the map on the table and checks the location.

“It involved Qrow Branwen, Glynda Goodwitch, and utmost secrecy. The only reason I know that they were at the meteorite site was because for some reason they flew just high enough that the Vale
radar was able to catch them while they were in the cargo bullhead. There are no records of the flight accessible by the Black Queen.”

Leaning forward and plotting the westerly course his men would have to take, Adam says “Well, that certainly is… unusual.”

“Exactly. My squad is stuck here, so I need you to check it out.”

Adam waves his hand dismissively. “Fine. I’ll head out there tomorrow - and don’t tell me to go out sooner. I’m going to need some prep time. Ever since the Breach incident, Vale and the Atlas troops have been a lot more paranoid. It wouldn’t be good for your plans if we were caught, now would it?”

We met an alien.

Team RWBY still hasn’t left the clearing. The shock of the previous day’s events have finally worn off, and Weiss was the first one to break the silence as they picked at their breakfast.

Putting down her fork, Blake just nods, lost deep in thought. Yang isn’t as silent. “She was weird, wasn’t she? She didn’t act normal.”

“She’s paranoid. From what little we got out of her, I don’t think she’s used to having friendly contact with others,” Blake notes.

“We met an alien,” Weiss repeats.

“Her weapons were so cool! She had explosive throwing stars, and the lines on that sniper rifle were beautiful! And that shotgun, sure it’s just a pump action, but it’s got a secondary fire mode that fires timed fuse airburst grenades! And I didn’t think you could make pistol rounds with a caliber that high!” Ruby enthuses, upsetting her breakfast and only barely catching it before it scatters all over the clearing.

“We made first contact. With an alien.”

“Ya know, if this is the Ice Queen’s reaction now, it’s probably a good thing that the first semester included a lot of classes on how to compartmentalize emotions and remain effective in stressful situations. Where’s her reset button?” Yang jokes.

Reaching over, Ruby grabs Weiss’s plate and then pokes her in the side with her fork. Weiss jumps and lets out a rather undignified yelp, before smacking at Ruby’s hand.

“Yes Weiss, we met an alien. And we did it peacefully. Somehow. I’m not sure how that happened when it looked ready to kill us at any moment and that barrel was huge and terrifying…” Ruby trails off as her eyes lose focus, staring off into the distance.

Weiss snatches her plate back from Ruby, jolting her out of her thoughts. “Obviously,” Weiss says, “She decided that it wasn’t in her interest to kill us. She explained that to us just fine.”

Blake shakes her head. “That explanation worked backwards from information we gave her. I think she may have actually had intentions of killing us if she thought she could get away with it.” The campsite is silent for a few moments as rest of the group digests that information.

Yang is the one who speaks up, saying “I don’t think she was planning on killing us. I think she was
prepared to kill us if she was forced to.”

“And if what she said is true about how many combat missions she’s been on, then I highly doubt that she’d feel any guilt over it,” Weiss murmurs, barely loud enough to hear.

“I can tell you this much, I don’t want to be on her bad side,” Yang jokes. “Being able to lift that entire ship on edge, seemingly without any strain? That’s insane.”

Blake shakes her head. “She probably is a little insane, but honestly that just makes her fit in at Beacon.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was heavily delayed due to a combination of bad circumstances in my personal life, writer's block, being unhappy with the original Ruby/Yang conversation (Which originally had Ruby trying to take on some of the blame for the Blake incident by pointing out that she hadn’t addressed Yang’s shortcomings, which is her responsibility as leader), and a month long research project focused on figuring out what the Remnant equivalent of a flare stack would be. Someone pointed out to me that Dust refineries are a thing, and flare stacks are used at regular refineries as well. So that was a wasted month of theorycrafting. All this is on top of my difficulties writing dialogue, meaning I make slow progress in the first place.

I’m not happy with team RWBY’s breakdown in the last bit. I don’t have personal experience with that level of shock, so I’m pretty poor at writing it. I did try to lampshade/have a reason for their lack of reaction a bit, but I will freely admit that that’s a weakness in the story. It has also been pointed out to me quite often in reviews - if you have a suggestion for how to bring across the shock better in the future, I would love to hear it. That’s not sarcasm; I legitimately have an extremely hard time writing that style of scene and would appreciate any advice given.

I also had to completely rewrite the villain convo, because it was originally going to be Cinder and Roman. Then I remembered that Roman is currently in an Atlesian prison cell.

I also changed something, just to make formatting and proofreading easier - I’m no longer referring to actions the Operator has the Warframe take by saying “The Operator’s (warframe) does thing,” and instead just saying “The Operator does thing.” I’m not expecting the Operator to spend too much time outside of her Warframes - like I said, the Operator is *extremely* vulnerable when not inside of one, and frankly even a fully kitted out Operator pales in comparison to what most Warframes can do.

BTW, fashionframes may be retconned when new skins/primes come out; I’ll let you know if and when that occurs in authors notes.

I’m using Atlas base here for two reasons. The first is because I only like Karst from the front quarter, I hate the helmet, and the D20’s where the shoulders should be piss me off. The second reason is that it looks too much like an earth elemental, and not humanoid enough. It kind of doesn’t feel like a Warframe to me - one of the things with Warframe design that I’ve always liked is that it looks alien, but is still recognizably human. Karst doesn’t manage that to me.
“Professor Ozpin is on his way down the elevator now, presumably in response to your summons, Operator. MAKE READY,” Ordis’s helpful and then angry voice pipes into the Operator’s ear.

The Operator makes a noise of acknowledgement from the top of the orbiter, where she’s using the Ivara’s deft fingers to carefully remove the ruined internals from a destroyed steering thruster, thinking back on the past few days.

Arrival at the hangar was fast, and with Ordis having nearly a hardline connection to the CCT, Ordis could access nearly anything transmitted over the CCT. Encryption seemed to be a dirty word to the average denizen of Remnant; Ordis had explained that he had located several minor smuggling enterprises within minutes of connection. Most of these, the Operator instructed to be left alone - what harm could come from small-time dust smugglers?

Some of them weren’t smuggling objects though. A few well-placed anonymous tips to local law enforcement resulted in the start of investigations, and presumably the eventual arrest of everyone involved.

There was encrypted traffic as well - mostly governments, massive corporations, and “Unknown, probably CRIMINAL SCUM organized crime.” The Operator had instructed Ordis not to break the encryption, even if it was laughably simple compared to what he was used to breaking in the Origin System. As the Operator had patiently explained to Ordis, “I trust that you don’t believe you’ll get caught, but it still does increase our risk. All it takes is one hotshot hacker to notice your activity and wonder what it is.”

The elevator door opens, and the Operator springs into motion, affecting surprise as she pulls the Vectis Prime off her back and aims it at the figure exiting elevator. “Tyl Regor,” she supplies.

“Tubemen,” comes the challenge reply from Ozpin, completely unworried by the massive sniper rifle aimed directly between his eyes. “Why did you ask for me?”

Sliding the sniper rifle back onto her back as she slides off the top of the orbiter, the Operator replies “I have two requests that would make repairs go faster.”
Striding forward and checking on the nook that holds the machine keeping Amber alive - Ordis had said he was lucky to find the name, and had yet to find any information on what befell her, or why she was a VIP - Ozpin responds “I’ll fulfill them if I can.”

“The first one is simple. I need cranes. Four of them, at least, and preferably six. Ordis can fab them, and that was the original plan, but if I can acquire them pre-made that would shave at least two weeks off of the repair estimate. Heavy duty ladders would be appreciated as well.”

Nodding sharply, Ozpin responds “I’ll get them for you. How much weight do you need to support?”

Shrugging, the Operator states “Ordis will send the model of the cranes we’re looking at. And the ladders should be able to support at least two tons.”

Blanching a bit, Ozpin says “Unfortunately, we do not make ladders that can support that weight - at least, not that I can requisition without question.”

“That’s understandable. I’ll have Ordis fab them up,” the Operator says, shrugging. “The second request is more of a question, at least at first.”

Ozpin gestures to continue, turning to look at the fused scrap from the Operator’s earlier activities.

“Does anyone already in the know have welding experience?”

Looking off into the distance as he thinks for a moment, Ozpin responds “I don’t know for sure, but I’m reasonably certain that Ruby Rose has at least basic knowledge of welding.”

Nodding sharply, the Operator says “I would greatly appreciate being able to have her services. I can weld one-handed while holding panels in place with the other, but it’s much messier with the big panels especially.”

“I’ll ask, but the VIP must remain secret to her. And she may request her own payment, as well.”

“I’ll just throw a cloth over the machine. It’s hidden far back as it is,” the Operator says, shrugging.
“And as for payment, Ordis and I will come up with something.”

“I’m assuming you’ll want a challenge and response for her?” Ozpin asks, eyebrow raising.

“Yes. One moment.” The Operator turns and heads inside of the orbiter, and Ozpin patiently waits for the Operator to return.

A minute later, the Operator steps out again, sealed envelope in hand, handing it over to Ozpin. It’s very plain, with the only writing on the front being a neatly handwritten “Ruby Rose.” “Give that to her,” the Operator says. “It has her unique challenge and response. Don’t open it yourself.”

Nodding, Ozpin turns and leaves.

------------------------------------------------------------

Late at night, a scroll beeps in a unique code. Cinder Fall ensures the door to the dorm she, Emerald, Neo, and Mercury are currently occupying at Beacon is locked before answering it.

Before she can even say a word, a flat “Fall. It’s Taurus. We’re back from our little expedition. It wasn’t a meteor. I’m uploading pictures of the spot as we speak. Entire area is tracked up, at least nine different footprints, and there’s signs of combat - there’s bullet holes in trees, and Grimm tracks all over the south side. We also found some scraps of metal that don’t seem to be a familiar one,” comes out of the scroll.

Raising an eyebrow, Cinder says “Did you take the scrap with you?”

“Yes. Don’t know what we’ll do with it, though. Like I said, don’t know what it is. I’m no smith.”

“I’ll alert one of our more… scientifically inclined allies to go by the safe house soon and see if he can’t identify it - a Doctor Watts.” The nearby computer terminal lights up, alerting Cinder that the images that were taken of the site have finished uploading, and she strides over, pulling them up and looking at them. “This is… interesting. That spot looks like the nose of a ship, and certainly not like a bullhead. Did we stumble across some secret weapons testing?” Cinder asks, leaning back.
“That’s what my men were saying,” Adam growls over the scroll, “but it doesn’t feel right to me. Weapons development isn’t as secretive in Vale as it is in Atlas. Hell, weapons development isn’t as funded in Vale as it is in Atlas. What little there is is focused on modifying existing designs to work better in Vale, not making new ones out of whole cloth. And if it was Atlas doing the testing, General Ironwood is in town and would’ve been involved in the recovery.”

“So then what do you think it is?” Cinder asks, annoyed.

An exasperated voice answers “I. Don’t. Know. My gut says testing of some sort, but it doesn’t fit the evidence. Maybe your labcoat will be able to figure it out.”

“Operator, Ruby Rose is on her way down the elevator. May I suggest not pointing your weapon directly at her like you do with Ozpin during the challenge?”

From her Atlas, the Operator chuckles. “That’s probably a good idea, Ordis. I’ll take it under advisement.” Finishing removal of a heavily damaged panel on the bottom of the orbiter, she turns as she hears the elevator ding. Hand on the grip of one of the Lex Primes, she barks the challenge “Alad V!” as soon as Ruby takes a step out of the elevator in full welding gear, mask dangling loosely from her right hand as she gawps at the cavernous room.

“Oh! Uh, Za-nuck-a?” Ruby says questioningly, horrifically mangling the pronunciation.

Inside the orbiter, the Operator’s lips twitch up into a smile. A chuckle escapes as the hand is removed from the pistol. “Close enough,” she says. “For future visits though, it’s pronounced ‘Zah-New-Kah.’ My fault for not including a pronunciation guide.”

“Zanuka, Zanuka, Zanuka,” Ruby repeats under her breath a few times, memorizing the correct pronunciation. At a more normal volume, she says “Ozpin told me you needed someone who could weld?”

“Yes,” the Operator says, nodding. “How much experience do you have?”

“ Mostly small scale stuff - I did all the construction and maintenance on my weapon, and regularly help classmates maintain theirs. It’s mostly arc welding, but I’ve dabbled in gas welding too.” Ruby’s
response is quick, excited to get to work.

Ordis’s voice springs from a speaker that has been moved to the outside of the orbiter. “Arc welding should be good for the job, but you will need to practice on some supplied materials before you DAMAGE ME FURTHER… My apologies. Attempt repairs.”

Ruby pouts. “I wouldn’t damage you, Ordis!” Questioningly, she says “That... is Ordis, right?”

Unseen, the Operator smiles. “Yes, it was. And I have no doubt that you wouldn’t intentionally damage the Orbiter, and by extension Ordis, but I also very much doubt you’ve welded this particular alloy before. It’s very difficult to work with.”

Ruby nods. “So, it’s not steel then? It didn’t feel like it.”

“It’s a very difficult to make alloy of aluminum, titanium, and cryotic. Remnant literally does not have the resources to create it, nor the manufacturing capabilities.”

Smiling at the prospect of a challenge, Ruby asks “So where do I start practice?”

“Ordis will finish fabbing up some small sheets in a few minutes, and I’ll get them out of the foundry when I get the arc welder. Ordis will guide you; I’m not the best teacher,” the Operator says, shrugging at the last bit. “If you’re interested, after these sessions I have more weapo-”

“YES YES YES I WANT TO SEE MORE OF THOSE WEAPONS!”

“So, Ruby told me that you wish my help with learning meditation?” Ren asks, face an unreadable mask as usual.

“Yes?” answers Yang, unusually uncertain as she looks around the small, plain room the size of a walk-in closet that Ren invited her to, spotting only two mats on the floor. The door into the room closes behind her, muting the sound of the bustling hallway.
“All right. Sit down, in some way that you’ll be comfortable for a while,” Ren says, suiting action to words as he folds himself into a half-lotus position on one of the mats.

Self-consciously, Yang kneels down on the other mat.

“Are you comfortable?” Ren asks.

Yang nods.

“Good. Now, before we begin, I must tell you. Meditation is not a science, it is a practice. That being said, I practice several different types for several different reasons. Why are you interested in learning meditation?” Ren’s face remains placid and calm.

Yang’s does not, screwing into a frown as her shoulders slump. “My lack of awareness nearly got Blake killed. I didn’t see that what I was going to do would put her into a bad situation, and didn’t even realize that I’d screwed up until after the fight, when it was pointed out to me. Ruby brought up meditation, thinking that might help.”

“Perhaps,” Ren says placidly, barely nodding. “I think that your goals would be most helped by mindfulness meditation. Some basic instructions, then. Once we begin, start by focusing on your breathing. Pay attention to the physical processes. Mentally tell yourself when to breathe in and when to breathe out.

“Your attention will eventually wander. This is fine. When you realize your attention is wandering, which it will, gently return it to your breathing. If you’re uncomfortable and need to adjust your stance, that’s fine, but pause and think about how you will move, then move. Our goal here is for you to observe, but not instantly react.

“You may find it easier at least to begin with your eyes closed. I know I did when I began meditating.” Ren silences himself, as Yang takes his advice and closes her eyes.

‘Breathe in,’ Yang thinks, ‘and out. In… out… in… out… in… out… out…’ The ceiling above them creaks. ‘I wonder what that noise was? What room is above us, anyways? Wait, I’m supposed to be focusing on my breathing. In… out… in… out… in… out… in… out… out… Ugh, my nose itches. Should I scratch it? Would that be a failure? Screw it, from how he was talking about it as long as I think my actions through before I do it it’ll be fine - wait, my nose doesn’t itch anymore,
A tall thin tanned man with a large bushy mustache, clad in a bespoke suit that looks very out of place in the scrubwood approaches a well hidden hideout, guarded by several Grimm-masked faunus. “I heard you needed a scientist.”

The gate guard looks at him suspiciously. Keying his scroll, he says “Hey boss, we’ve got a human claiming to be a scientist.”

Some voice that the well-dressed man cannot quite make out comes out of the scroll. “All right boss, I’ll let him in. Right this way.” The contempt in his voice for the human isn’t hidden at all.

Leading him into the run down cabin and then down a hidden stairway, the hidden area is much larger and better kept than the cabin above. Adam Taurus steps out of a side room, half-mask staring directly at the well dressed man. “So you’re Cinder’s labcoat?” he sneers.

“Hardly Cinder’s, but we share a common goal. Where are the samples?” Doctor Watts asks, not caring about what the faunus thinks of him.

“Back in here. No clue what they are other than ‘not steel.’ Hopefully you’ll be able to figure it out.”

The shards of metal are arrayed across a plain wooden table. Watts walks over and selects a medium sized one. “Hmm. Very light for its size. Is it aluminum?” He attempts to bend it, finding it very resilient. “Doesn’t bend or twist with normal pressure. With it being this thin, not solely aluminum. Titanium alloy, maybe? No, no, no. It’d have to be very heavy on the titanium to be this stable, which would mean it would be much heavier than this. Steel?” He pulls a magnet out of his pocket, but it doesn’t stick on the metal. “Not alloyed steel.”

He steps over to the table, looking carefully over all sides of the scraps. “What are you doing?” Adam asks.

“I’m looking for any makers marks. If I can find any, then that would narrow down the manufacturer, or possibly even give me what’s in it. Unfortunately, it’s unlikely given the state of the scrap,” Watts answers distractedly. “Do you have a stationary grinder?” he asks, looking up.
“Why?”

“A spark test may help narrow down the possibilities of what metals the alloy contains.” Watts says, coming up empty on his search for markings on the scrap.

“Back in weapon maintenance. Hopefully it’s up to your standards,” Adam sneers.

Raising an eyebrow and choosing a medium sized piece of scrap, Watts says “There aren’t exactly any signs. Would you care to point me there?”

Behind the mask, Adam rolls his eyes. “Follow me.”

They walk in silence to a room near the entrance. Entering, Watts locates a polarized facemask that he borrows, knowing that sparks have the potential to be blinding. “You should grab one, too. It may throw off very bright sparks, permanently damaging any vision you have behind that mask.” Adam growls before doing the same.

Watts starts up the grinder and prepares the longest flat edge for contact. Once the grinder is up to speed, he carefully approaches the flywheel with the scrap. Upon contact, there’s an absolutely blinding spray of greenish-white sparks.

Even behind the polarized facemask, Adam still flinches from the unexpected intensity of the spray. Watts betrays no reaction as he calmly removes the scrap from the grinder and shuts it off. Raising the mask, he says “There’s definitely titanium in there - nothing else produces such blinding sparks, and in such quantity. But nothing I know of makes green sparks on a grinder.”

“Doesn’t copper burn green? I might not remember much from what little schooling I got, but I remember that,” Adam says.

“Copper doesn’t spark on a grinder. As well, the color of the scrap itself is off; If there was copper, it would have a more orangish tint,” Watts explains. “If I had to guess, I’d say it’s probably air dust infused titanium, but that would be extremely expensive to make for something of that size. Before I can say for certain, I’d need to make some myself, and my budget is not infinite. If the White Fang is able to cover the few hundred thousand lien I’d need to make that from scratch, I could have a definite answer for you in… oh, three months.”
Adam’s scowl somehow becomes even more severe. “Even I know that it wouldn’t be that expensive.”

“I’d have to figure out how to infuse the wind dust into the titanium in the first place. Unless I get extremely lucky, I’ll almost certainly end up accidentally destroying the first several attempts. Of course, the other option is that the green sparks are being caused by something completely alien.”

“So you're saying it could be aliens,” Adam says flatly.

“No. The likelihood of alien life crashing on Remnant, let alone intelligent alien life, is extremely low. This is an alloy, it could not have happened naturally. No, it was probably someone doing testing on some new hull composition for fliers. Anything this expensive would be secretive.”

In the library, Blake’s scroll vibrates. Opening it, she spots a message from Pyrrha that says “Sorry, Ozpin just approached us with a mission - something about an outlying CCT relay being down. We’ll have to cancel tonight’s team spar.”

Shrugging, Blake places her bookmark in the book and closes it as she stands up to go find Ruby and Weiss, since they’re studying right now and Weiss would insist upon turning off the ringers of their scrolls to prevent distractions.

The freshman dorms are a mere five minutes from the Beacon library. For better or worse, this gives Blake a chance to think again about what had happened a few weeks previously, when Ruby had called her Heritage “cute.”

’If it were Weiss or even Yang, I would’ve already had a discussion with her about how you need to be careful about saying things like that - even when it’s meant as a compliment, many faunus will take offense to having their differences pointed out, even in a positive way, because of the history of the unspoken ‘but’ in there,’ Blake thinks. ’Even though I know they wouldn’t mean any harm if they said it, I’d still bring it up. So why haven’t I talked to Ruby about it?’

Blake continues mulling over this question, even as she unknowingly slows down and eventually stops in the middle of the hallway. ’Is it because I absolutely know that it’s meant without malice? Ruby doesn’t have a mean bone in her body, at least not that I’ve seen. But that doesn’t make sense,
since I’d talk to Yang about it and she hasn’t shown anything like that. So what is -’ Something thin and yellow waves in front of her face, startling her out of her thoughts. Scowling, she turns to the monkey faunus who interrupted her. “What?” she growls.

“Woah woah woah, take it easy! You were just standing still in the middle of the hallway for the last minute, I was just making sure you were okay!” Sun says, concern bleeding into his normally upbeat voice as he raises his hands in mock surrender.

Blake blinks, realizing that she had been, thinking ‘I spaced out that badly? I don’t -’ Sun’s tail flicks her nose, startling her out of her thoughts again.

“You were doing it again,” Sun says in response to Blake’s unamused look. “So, what’s got you all broody?”

Realizing remaining silent and glaring won’t help in this case, Blake lets out a miniscule sigh. “Fine. Let’s get out of the main hallway, at least.”

“I know just the place!” Sun says, grabbing Blake’s upper arm and half-dragging her to a currently unused classroom just a bit away from the main hall.

Closing the door as Blake leans against a desk, Sun asks “So, what’s got you thinking so hard that you forgot how to walk?”

Bluntly, Blake says “Ruby called my Heritage cute.”

Somewhat confused. Sun asks “So if you don’t like her saying that, why don’t you just tell her?”

“That’s what’s getting me. If it were Yang or Weiss, I would’ve already talked to them about it. Probably within the day. I know that Yang in particular wouldn’t mean harm, and Weiss is working through everything she was taught by her father about the faunus – which does her credit. But for some reason, I can’t bring myself to talk to Ruby about it,” Blake says, frustration bleeding through her voice and stance.

“Huh. That’s certainly a pickle. Have you thought about just asking her why she said it in the first place?”
“That’s not the problem, Sun.”

Shrugging, Sun says “It might be related.”

Blake shakes her head. “The problem is I don’t know why I haven’t talked to Ruby about it. I know that she wouldn’t say it again if I did, and also wouldn’t take any offense to it.”

Shrugging, Sun says “Maybe that’s why you don’t want to talk to her about it.”


Realizing that he may have inadvertently touched on a touchy issue for Blake, Sun raises his hands in surrender. “All I’m saying is that because you know Ruby won’t say it again if you ask her not to, you don’t want to ask her to stop because you like it when she compliments your Heritage please don’t kill me.”

Stalking forward and stabbing a pointed finger at Sun, Blake asks “But then why wouldn’t I have this same issue with Yang? She also wouldn’t bring it up again if I told her about it.”

Edging towards the door, Sun says “I don’t know? I mean, has this ever come up before for you?”

Throwing her hands up, Blake exclaims “No! I spent most of my life up to the enrollment in Beacon with only other faunus as friends! I don’t know why this is an issue because it’s never come up before!”

Nearly at the door, Sun says “Well, maybe it’s because you like Ruby and want to hear more compliments from her.”

Suddenly stupefied, Blake stops and says “What? Of course I like Ruby. She’s one of the few friends I have at Beacon. But I’d talk to Yang about that too, and she’s my partner.”

Hand on the door handle in case this goes badly, Sun says “No, I mean like like Ruby. As in, you’re
nursing the beginnings of a crush on her.”

The audacity of the statement may have saved Sun’s life. Blake is struck dumb for a few moments before faintly saying “What?”

“I mean, there’s not a lot there and I might be completely off base so tell me if I’m wrong but I mean it kind of fits since you like hearing the compliment from her and don’t want her to stop but would get her to stop if you just liked her as a friend and seriously I’m just trying to help here,” Sun rambles. “Did anything happen recently that might’ve caused this?”

Stunned, Blake takes a few steps back and leans on a desk, Blake says “Um. I mean, she kind of saved me from an Ursa the last time we were on a field mission. And then the first thing she did after the fight was make sure I was okay and worry over me.”

Rallying, Sun says “Okay, that’s a good start. So, what’re you gonna do about it?”

Blake doesn’t respond, currently reexamining her thoughts about her admittedly cute team leader. Sun lets this run for a few moments before throwing a wadded up piece of paper at her. Blake spots it coming and swats it away before it would hit her. “What?”

“So, what’re you gonna do about it?” Sun repeats.

“I don’t know. I didn’t plan anything about this. I mean, she is cute, but I don’t know if I have a crush on her or not, and I certainly don’t know if she’d return any feelings I may have.”

“Were you about to go talk to her about something else and that’s why you were thinking about it?”

“Yeah. Pyrrha just messaged us to cancel the team spar we had scheduled for this evening, but since Ruby’s studying right now her scroll will be off. I was going to let her know.”

“Perfect! You’ve got an in!” Sun says, excitedly. “The room will still be reserved, just take it and do a bit of 1 on 1 practice!”

“I really shouldn’t-“
“It doesn’t have to be a date, Blake. Just get to know her better by, you know, trying to kill each other in a friendly way?”

“But what if you’re misreading this and I don’t have a crush on her?” Blake frets.

“Then you’re still getting to know your team leader better, and that can’t be a bad thing.”

Blake looks down, chewing on her lip for a few seconds before looking up and saying “Thanks, Sun.”

“Yeah, anytime! Just… preferably without the unspoken threat of imminent physical harm next time?” he says jokingly as he opens the door to leave the room.

“No promises,” Blake says, a ghost of a smile disappearing as fast as it appeared as she follows.

---------------------------------------------

Sparks are flying from a workstation that the Operator had set up for welding practice. Behind her welding mask, Ruby is laser focused on her work - the Operator had not been joking when she said that this was extremely difficult material to work with, and she was extremely demanding when it came to the weld quality.

“This needs to be able to withstand a constant one atmosphere of pressure at all times with no leaks,” she remembers the Operator saying. “In space, a pinhole leak can very quickly become a rupture, and a rupture can very quickly spell the doom of a ship.”

Shutting off the arc welder and reaching for the bottom of her mask, she jumps in surprise as a large gray arm reaches past her and picks up her latest practice piece. Ruby wonders once more how it sees anything at all without any eyes before the Operator speaks up and says “Excellent weld. Next time you come down here, we’ll start work on attaching replacement panels to the bottom. For now though, I believe I have another weapon to show you.’

Ruby bolts upright, whipping her mask off in haste. “Yes please what space gun are you going to show me today miss Tenno?”
Pulling a weapon with a dark gray barrel shroud off of the small of her back, the Operator proffers it to Ruby - unloaded - and says “This is called the Quatz. It’s a four-barreled submachinegun, with the option to fire all four barrels at once by pressing this button here if there’s something big and tough that needs more precise firepower to take down.” Ruby takes a hold of it, carefully pointing it anywhere but at the Orbiter or the Operator, and observing the royal blue wires running from the magazine to the midpoint of the rifle and the more loose wire running from the bottom of the pistol grip to the front of the weapon. There’s also green lights on it inside of royal blue housings. It’s a lot heavier than it looks - she’s noticed that that’s a common theme of the Operator’s weapons, and she suspects that’s part of the design.

Looking up, she says “What’s the firerate like in full auto mode and what’s the recoil like in burst fire?”

Shrugging, the Operator says “1440 rounds per minute in full auto, recoil is surprisingly light for the burst fire. Don’t try to limp wrist it though, that way lies pain and suffering.” Pulling out a magazine, the Operator hands it over to Ruby. “This one has only four bullets in it. Get a feel for the recoil on full auto.”

Sliding the proffered magazine in, Ruby looks over the Quatz for a few seconds. “Where’s the charging handle?” she asks, finally.

“Oh, right. The Quatz is unique. It doesn’t charge normally. You have to slam the magazine in hard and the inertia will load the cartridges.”

Stupefied, Ruby asks “Why?”

The Operator shrugs. “I don’t know. It’s a grineer design, most of them have weird magazines. This one actually has four miniature helical magazines.”

“Where’s the ejection port?”

“Caseless ammo.”

“Caseless ammo? How’d they solve the heat issues, especially with something that has that high of a rate of fire?” Ruby removes the magazine, looking at the end. “And what’s with the contacts on the end here?”
“Electrical capacitor.”

Ruby gives the Operator a flat look. “What?”

“Each bullet that’s fired gets an electrical charge through that cord running from the grip to the front of the gun. It’s basically a miniature tazer with deadly bullets in its base form. However, it’s fairly easy to modify the weapon to gain access to other elements. I like to run it with acidic bullets to break down armor. That magazine doesn’t have a charge or anything in the reservoir, although the next ones will. As far as overheating issues, the two cords along the top supply power to cooling elements running through the barrel and receiver that are powered by the capacitor in the magazine. The ports near the front of the weapon are where the waste heat is ejected, so don’t put your hand there once you’ve fired it unless you appreciate second degree burns. It’s a very grineer design, honestly.”

Quizzically, Ruby says “But it’s not ugly like the other grineer weapons. Sure, it’s a little unornamented, but what do you mean?”

“I mean it was built to a purpose. The Grineer needed a small in close weapon that was effective at short range suppression and could take down shields quickly. The best way to do this is to overwhelm the projectors with many projectiles coming as fast as possible, using electrically charged bullets to increase the damage done to the shields. To do this, they used already available caseless ammunition that was meant for a semi-automatic pistol. They did initial testing with a more common single barreled design, and found a few problems - take a guess at what they were.”

Tapping her chin, Ruby says “They obviously discovered the overheating issue then, but I can’t think of anything else off the top of my head.”

“The rate of fire did not meet requirements. It was far too low - it was around 450 rounds per minute. However, the bolt could not be lightened any more than it already was or it would fail to keep the chamber sealed while firing, causing jams and even on a few occasions misfires in the magazine. They also couldn’t upcharge the cartridge - then they wouldn’t be able to use already in place ammunition manufacture.”

“So that’s why they added the four barrels then, it’s four separate receivers!” Ruby exclaims.

The Operator nods. “Yep. They did add some weight to the bolt after they did that, because an 1800 round per minute fire rate was deemed wasteful. Their initial cooling solution also had a separate
power source, but nothing could keep up with the cooling needs through an extended firefight, so eventually they just upsized the capacitor that they were using to charge the bullets and powered it from that instead. However, this had an interesting side effect. Take your shots and pass the gun here?"

Ruby is slightly confused, but shrugs and slams the magazine into the rear of the pistol. Holding it in a standard two handed grip and aiming it at the target about 10 meters away, she slowly squeezes the trigger until it fires with a sudden B-r-r-rp. Looking down at the Quatz, Ruby says “That was… fast,” as she removes the magazine and proffers the weapon to the Operator.

“Pretty accurate. Fourth one did climb into the eight-ring, though,” the Operator says, actually sounding impressed.

Ruby shrugs. “I don’t think the first three shots really had a chance for the recoil to affect them, honestly. Is it even possible to fire just one bullet from that thing?”

“Yes, but it’s not easy. It requires a very light trigger finger and an intimate knowledge of the breakpoint,” the Operator says, flipping the weapon around. “Now, as for the side effect,” the Operator raises the magazine and slams it into the Quatz, triggering an electrical discharge in the area around the gun.

Ruby’s eyes bug out, amazed that the shock didn’t affect her. “What? How? Why?”

“Short version, the initial version that used the increased capacitor size failed to increase the strength of the systems, so when the capacitor was connected rapidly to a drained system, it would give a rather nasty and occasionally fatal shock to the user. The grineer didn’t figure out how to solve this, but they did figure out how to direct it into an area around the user that would taze nearby enemies. And since this was a high rate of fire, short range weapon, it was determined that this was a useful feature and should remain.”

Regaining control, Ruby asks “So what about the burst fire? Why was that added?”

“Initial field testing reports came back and were mostly positive. The major complaint that the grineer troops had was that against the more heavily armored Corpus units, it would take down the shields quickly but then lack any substantial power to put down the proxy behind it. So, they added the ability to depress that button there with your thumb and fire all four barrels at once, basically turning it into a miniature shotgun.”
Ruby nods. “And that let it crack the armor plate a lot more efficiently, right.”

The operator nods in return. “Go ahead and try it out. I’ve got one more magazine after you finish that one. Just be careful with the recoil on the burst mode; it is surprisingly light but it’s still substantial.”

Ruby nods, already aiming downrange.

Two magazines later, Ruby has a massive grin on her face, despite shaking her right wrist as she hands the Quatz back to the Operator. “That’s a really fun little piece miss Tenno. You have anything else to try out?”

Shaking her head, the Operator says “Not today. One weapon per session; that’s the deal.”

Ruby pouts. “But I’m not going to be able to be here for the next session. Ozpin’s assigned us to support team JNPR on a mission to Forever Fall.”

“Oh. Thanks for letting me know. Why is Ozpin sending two student teams on a mission?”

“Oh, Ozpin’s being cautious, something about mutated grimm. Anyways, I need to get going, Blake and I are sparring again pretty soon so I need to get changed into my combat gear,” Ruby shrugs as she gathers her welding mask. “Thanks for showing me that weapon!”

“You’re welcome.” The Operator watches as Ruby walks over to the elevator. As soon as the elevator door closes behind her, the Operator says “Any intel about that, Ordis?”

“Collating data. One moment, Operator.”

The Operator walks over to the orbiter, stepping inside as Ordis says “Found it, Operator! In the past few weeks, several outlying CCT relays have gone down. A student team was dispatched to bring the towers back online, and discovered something that looked like sabotage. That student team was dispatched on another mission later, and another CCT tower that was down was brought back online, but the details of that mission and the one that team did after that are encrypted. I CAN BREAK IT shall I break it, Operator?”
Shaking her head, the Operator says “No, don’t break it. Sabotage, huh? That’s… odd. Do what digging you can without breaking any encryption. Anyone willing to sabotage the CCT network is worrying.”

Chapter End Notes

So this was only supposed to take about a month at most. That uh. Didn't work out. I got hardstuck on the Blake section for a good 4 weeks - it was originally going to be a monologue, and that just wasn't working. Sun showing up was a spur of the moment decision, and one I fought over for a few days until I realized that while Sun may want to be with Blake, he really just wants the best for his friends, and if his friend wants to be with someone else he will push them forward as long as he doesn't spot anything wrong with the relationship.

I quite enjoyed writing the "Operator and Ruby discuss the Grineer weapon designs" section. The Quatz is one of my favorite secondaries, don't get me wrong, but I made up most of the details in that section. It was all backtracked from (1) no ejected casings means caseless ammo, (2) stats of the gun, and (3) four barreled design. (I also know that high ROF and electric don't mean more effectiveness against shields, it just fits the fluff fairly well.)

The hints here should be somewhat familiar to anyone who's played RWBY: Grimm Eclipse before. I am going to make it much more… fun. Don't get me wrong, it's a decent spectacle fighter, but that's really all it's good for.

Team villain interactions can basically be summed up as "You were so close and yet so far."

Next chapter will involve combat once more. Expect a decent wait; combat writing is not a strength.

Calling faunus traits a Heritage is lovingly stolen from Hysterical Clerical Hijinks Remnant's Reclaimer, an unfortunate deadfic that you should still read because it's great.

The Ladybug stuff was not planned, but it's one of my favorite ships and I kind of accidentally wrote flirting in last chapter, so I decided to roll with it. It'll be a side plot.
Grimmlands

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Qrow’s scroll vibrates in his pocket. Finding some shade, he answers it and asks “Whaddaya need, Ozpin?”

The voice on the other end of the line is almost pleading. “Please tell me you’re finished with your mission in Vacuo and are back in Vale.”

Shrugging, Qrow says “Nope. Still trying to find that pack of Anubites. You know how hard it is to track down Grimm in a desert.”

“Sorry for bothering you then,” Ozpin says abruptly. “Good luck with your hunt.”

Qrow’s voice turns concerned. “Oz, what happened?”

“Your niece’s team and their sister team disobeyed orders and stowed away on a cargo ship. The sister team was investigating and fixing sabotage on outlying CCT relays, and found Merlot Industries markings and mutated Grimm. Instead of sending out a full Hunter team to continue the investigation, I sent team RWBY alongside team JNPR to find out more. They found a cargo ship being loaded, and decided the appropriate reaction was to stow away against my orders.”

Chuckling, Qrow says “I have to admit, Oz, I’d do the same thing. You’re training Huntsmen, not soldiers. They’ll disobey orders if they think it a better option.”

“I was going to ask you to assemble a relief team, or be the relief team yourself. They’re currently off of the CCT network, and I have no clue where they went.”

Qrow shakes his head. “All the huntsmen in Vale I’d trust with the job are out on their own jobs right now. As much as it pains me to say it, they’re on their own.”

“I’ll find something,” Ozpin promises before he hangs up.

-----------------------------------------

“Operator, Ozpin is coming down the elevator. May I recommend SHOOTING HIM making ready?”

“Need to fake not knowing that he’s coming, Ordis,” the Operator says as she tightens a bolt down. “I’ll maintain security.”

The elevator door dings, and the Operator affects surprise by dropping the wrench as she spins and grabs for the Corinth, snapping out “Tyl Regor!” as soon as the shotgun is lined up with Ozpin’s face - this whole display taking barely a tenth of a second.

Ozpin, as ever, is unfazed. “Tubemen,” he replies calmly. “Can you take a mission for me?”

Sliding the shotgun back over her shoulder, the Operator says “ Probably, since Ruby’s off on her own mission I’m working on stuff that only needs one person to do.”

Ozpin nods. “Good. I need you ready on a moment’s notice to find and reinforce teams RWBY and JNPR.”
The Operator crosses her arms. “You’d be exposing me to more potential leakers.”

“Team JNPR is close friends with team RWBY. I suspect they already believe something odd happened on the mission where team RWBY found you. Regardless, they are trustworthy, and will not spill the secret if I and you impress upon them the severity of the situation.”

Unimpressed, the Operator asks “Why don’t you just ask any of the other huntsmen?”

“The only ones I would trust with this mission are unavailable at this time for one reason or another.”

“Fine. What’s the briefing, and start from the beginning.”

“A few weeks ago, we started noticing some of our CCT relays going down - relays that are used both to connect outlying settlements to the CCT system and also keep track of our early warning systems. We dispatched team JNPR to bring it back online, and discovered signs of sabotage on all of them.”

“Who would sabotage an early warning system?” the Operator asks, glad to finally get an answer to the question that had been brought up previously.

“The sabotage all bore symbols of Merlot Industries, a company that was believed to be destroyed in the fall of Mountain Glenn. I sent team JNPR there, with the intent of having them enter the old Merlot Industries building to see what could be found there. Unfortunately, this didn’t work out as planned. The building collapsed, and team JNPR was trapped underground for a good period, where they also found mutated Grimm.”

“Mutated how, exactly?”

Pulling out sketches, Ozpin throws them over to the Operator. “They were covered in green growths, and exploded when they died. Rather violently. This was the only type encountered in the Glenn warrens, although they encountered mutated Beowulves earlier today that were reportedly as tough as a Beowulf Alpha to take down.”

“What is Merlot industries?”

“The personal company of one Doctor Merlot. He claimed to be a researcher, but was more of a mad scientist than anything else. He was doing research on the Grimm at Mountain Glenn. Some escaped into the city and precipitated the fall, and then he disappeared. He was presumed dead.”

“Let me guess, he wasn’t?”

“It appears not, unless someone else decided to use his logo.”

“So what’s the situation?”

“With the knowledge that there were mutated Grimm in play, I sent team RWBY along with team JNPR as backup. I figured that with eight students, even in an area known to be fairly hot with Grimm they’d be fine. They were. However, they found a ship, and against my orders stowed away on it. They dropped off the CCT network half an hour ago.”

“So, you need me to find them?”

“Yes and no. I need you ready as soon as they come back online to get to them and give them any help they need. They are heading into an unknown situation against an unknown opponent, and while those two teams are the top rated of their year, they are still only students.”
“I can do that. I’ll change warframes and have Ordis warm up the Archwing.”

Ren’s eyes open from his meditation. “I think the boat has stopped.”

“How can you tell? There aren’t exactly any windows in this shipping container that someone thought was a great idea to sneak into against Ozpin’s orders,” snipes Weiss.

“Oh yeah, let’s just let the ship that is our only lead on where the mutated Grimm are coming from disappear. That’s a great idea, Ice Queen,” Yang sarcastically responds.

Pyrrha interrupts, attempting to defuse the situation. “I felt the engine turn off, too. We should get ready.”

“Yeah!” Nora exclaims, her massive silver hammer already in hand, “There could be anything out there!”

Jaune gulps nervously. “Guys, wait. Maybe we should make a plan before we go out there?” he questions.

Blake nods, looking at her scroll. “We don’t have service in here. Unless this shipping container is lead-lined, our first step needs to be getting back into contact with Beacon.”

Ruby steps forwards, looking serious as she attempts to take control of the situation. “Blake’s right. If we get back into contact with Beacon, they can figure out where we are. If we don’t, then every moment we spend here is risky, since we can’t be extracted or get backup. So, to that effect, we should try to be as sneaky as possible until we get into contact with Beacon. That means Blake and Ren are on point, everyone else be as sneaky as possible and follow their instructions.”

Blake smiles and nods, while Ren slightly inclines his head.

“Pyrrha, will you do the honors?” Ruby asks, gesturing to the doors of the shipping container.

“Of course.” Pyrrha walks forwards to the door, placing her hand upon it. A black energy envelops the door as Pyrrha concentrates for a few seconds before the sound of unoiled metal creaking echoes inside the container as Pyrrha uses her semblance to open the door.

Pyrrha steps back, and Blake slips out the barely opened door, followed closely by Ren, who holds up his hand, telling the others to wait for a moment. A few minutes later, the two designated scouts return. “The deck is clear,” Blake says, looking almost surprised. “Any crew must’ve already disembarked.”

Ruby nods. “Any idea where we are?”

Ren shrugs. “In a harbor. The dock is professionally made. It’s cooler than it was back in Forever Fall, and it seems to be open ocean to the north. Maybe we went north?”

Weiss scowls. “The sun hasn’t even started rising yet, of course it’s colder than it was in midafternoon at Forever Fall.”

Ruby pulls out her scroll to look at the saved map she has. She scowls before putting it away. “There’s so many bays in the north side of Vale that that’s unhelpful. We were in here for twelve hours, we could be anywhere from 300 to 550 kilometers from that dock at Forever Fall. There’s six of them just on the north coast of Vale that it could be, not counting anything on this island here,”
Ruby says pointing to an island that’s part of the Grimmlands.

“Why are you even considering that, Ruby? The Grimmlands are overflowing with Grimm! Nothing human could survive for long!” Weiss exclaims.

Blake steps in. “From what we were taught, this island, while technically part of the Grimmlands, doesn’t have the same density of Grimm as the Grimmlands proper. If you’re doing things with Grimm, this is probably one of the best places to be.”

Ruby smiles at Blake. “Thanks, Blake. I don’t like it, but it makes sense. Did you guys spot anything that would get us into contact with Beacon?”

Ren nods. “There’s a radio tower to the southeast, on top of a quite large hill. It’s probably large enough to reach Beacon, or at least reach a relay.”

Ruby half turns to the rest of the group. “All right people, that’s our goal. Let’s get moving, but stay as quiet as possible.”

------------------------------------------------------------

“Operator, Professor Ozpin just contacted me. He says that the students just got into contact, and he’s triangulated their location to an island in the Grimmlands.”

“Dammit. Tell Ozpin to get extra Dust and ammo for the students. I can take a good amount along on the archwing.”

“He was already doing so, and will be down soon.”

“Itzal’s ready for speed burn, I take it?”

“Yes, Operator.”

“Details of the course?”

“You’ll be heading roughly 400 kilometers due north, mostly over open water. It will take you roughly 35 minutes to get there at full burn; the sun will be rising by then.”

Sliding the carefully cared for Veldt onto her back and sliding two Vasto Primes onto her hip mounted maglocks, the Operator reaches for the final piece of weaponry - a massive hunk of gilded steel, a Redeemer Prime, which she slides onto the small of her back. Performing a quick bullet jump to ensure that the hardpoints are working, the Operator nods and heads to the airlock.

Stepping out, she sees the elevator open and yells “Tyl Regor!”

The answer of “Tubemen” is barely acknowledged as the Operator immediately starts addressing Ordis, requesting “Ordis, deploy the Itzal. I need to load up the storage compartments with the ammo and dust.”

“Itzal deploying,” Ordis says, as a pair of wings launches up and swoops down next to the Operator.

Ozpin steps forward, bag of ammunition and dust outstretched. “How fast can you get there?”

The Operator takes the bag, stowing it in the back mounted portion of the Itzal. “I can be over the area they called from in 35 minutes. What are the odds that they’ll still be there?”

Ozpin shakes his head. “Slim. They were reportedly getting hit with a heavy Grimm swarm when
contact was broken. I told them to continue to broadcast radio with their scrolls, so you should be able to find them once you get closer.”

“Jaune! Nora! Yang! Pyrrha! There’s a building back here, we’re going to fall back into it!” Ruby yells to the group holding back the largest mass of Grimm as the students fall back. Dashing in front of Weiss with a flurry of rose petals and decapitating a beowulf, she yells “Freezerburn!”

Weiss, freed from the melee, jumps back and stabs the ground, channeling ice dust through her rapier and causing a massive pool of ice to form, before she leaps back as Yang backflips high, coming down and slamming the center with a fire-dust enhanced shot, creating a massive smokescreen.

Teams RWBY and JNPR break contact into the fog cloud, falling back towards where Blake found a building that they can hopefully bottleneck the Grimm in.

Jaune’s the last one in, Nora slamming the door behind him. Breathing hard, he gets out “Everyone OK?” in between gasps for breath as Ren leaves the foyer, heading deeper into the building.

Nobody speaks up from where they’re sitting or lying on the floor. Everyone’s winded and running low on aura. Even Pyrrha doesn’t look like her usual poised self, taking notably deep breaths and rubbing her upper right arm in an effort to get feeling back into it.

“Ammo check,” Ruby says after a few moments of silence and heavy breathing. “I’ve got two magazines of ammo left for Crescent Rose.”

“I’m out of grenades,” Nora supplies.

“I’m out of ice dust, and am running very low on other types,” Weiss says after spinning the revolver cylinder on Myrtenaster and patting her pouches.

“Out of dust here too. Don’t have much ammo left for Gambol either,” says Blake.

“Two full braces of plain shells, one fire shell,” Yang says.

“One and a half magazines for Milo,” says Pyrrha. “But I don’t run through as many as the rest of you, so I can husband that for a while.”

“I’m nearly dry,” says Ren as he comes from the back room. “More importantly, that’s the only reasonable exit unless we want to blast out a wall,” he says, pointing at the door which suddenly looks quite flimsy.

“There’s no other exit?” Ruby asks to confirm.

“Do we have explosives?” Ren asks.

“No. We’re out. Ruby, have you heard anything on the radio?” Jaune asks.

“Nope, but since we aren’t connected to the tower we’ve only got a 5 kilometer range.”

“We made contact with Ozpin at 6:30,” Weiss says. “It’s only 7:10 now. Even a fast mover transport won’t be here for another 20 minutes, and that’s if it was loaded up and ready to go right when we called Beacon.”

“Are we even sure we’re in the right place?” a worried Pyrrha asks. “We haven’t seen any of the mutated Grimm yet.”
An ursa roars just before the door rattles on its hinges. Everyone groans and begins standing up - the Grimm have figured out where they went.

Ruby asks the group “Do we hold here, or try to push out?”

Jaune inputs “I like holding here, the doorway is small enough that only a few of the Grimm can come in at once.”

Nora disagrees. “There’s not enough room in here! I can barely swing Magnhild without worrying about hitting any of you!”

“There’s no way out through the back. Like Weiss said, we have at least 20 minutes before we can expect any backup. We need to be able to keep moving,” Ren says as the door rattles again, the ursa outside roaring in frustration.

“Jaune, Pyrrha, Yang?” Ruby asks, “Can you hold that doorway for 30 minutes with only minimal support from the rest of us?”

Yang shakes her head as the door shudders again. “If you asked me that half an hour ago, hell yes. Now I’m not sure I could do it for fifteen minutes, especially if I can’t maneuver much.”

Pyrrha nods, saying “I have the endurance to do it, but it would get very touch and go by the end of it. I’d much rather push out.”

Jaune looks horrified. “No. But I don’t know that I can push out, either.”

“Right then, we’re pushing out. Nora, Yang, you go first at the Ursa bashing down the door. Push it away to let us out - you don’t need to kill it. Jaune, Pyrrha, you’re out next. Weiss, save your dust attacks for high-priority targets only. Ren, Blake, we need to harry the Grimm and prevent them from focusing only on the main group. Everyone got it?” Ruby asks.

There’s general sounds of affirmation, but nobody sounds excited - after all, they entered this building to attempt to cut down on the number of Grimm they’d be facing at once, and now all they’ve gotten out of it is a four minute break.

Everyone readies up as they wait for the next impact on the door, waiting several long seconds before it explodes inward and the plan is invalidated.

An Ursa Major barrels headfirst through the door. Yang and Nora try to follow the plan, leaping forward and attempting to push it back out, but fail to stop it, let alone reverse its direction, and Nora is sent flying by the backhanded swing of the Ursa’s paw. Reaching the back of the room, it bashes it’s shoulder into the wall as most of the students turn towards the largest threat. Ren, meanwhile, turns to go make sure that Nora is OK.

The fight against the Ursa Major is brutal and short, over in less than ten seconds. Blake leaps in front of it, dropping a shadow clone to distract it as Pyrrha and Jaune close in from the sides. Yang leaps through after the Ursa swipes through the shadow, punching it straight in the face as Pyrrha and Jaune get to work on the neck of the Ursa. It goes down quickly, but the damage has already been done. In the time it took the teams to defeat the Ursa Major, more than a dozen minor Grimm of various types have already entered the foyer, and more are pouring through with each passing second.

Ruby leaps forward, intercepting a pair of beowulves that were making a beeline for Ren and Nora. Quickly dealing with them and being relieved by Pyrrha and Blake, Ruby turns to assess the situation, asking Ren “How is she?”
Distractedly, Ren says “She’s conscious, but her aura was broken from hitting the wall, and she’s concussed. She’s not in any shape to move herself right now - she’s not even verbally responsive.”

“Get her to a back corner, we’ll hold here for as long as we can,” Ruby says, laying a comforting hand on Ren’s shoulder. Turning and raising her voice - and Crescent Rose - she yells “Nora’s down, we need to protect her until her aura’s back up!”

There’s no sounds of acknowledgement, although Jaune and Pyrrha do slip closer together to better cover the downed Nora. Spotting Weiss having trouble with an Alpha Beowulf, Ruby readies herself to dash over to help before a flash of black comes from seemingly nowhere, taking off a forelimb and allowing Weiss to press an attack. Ruby instead dashes to the other side, shoring up the flank where Yang is being pushed back badly.

The next two minutes are a mess of pitch black, bone white, and baleful orange eyes as the inexorable tide of Grimm slowly pushes the students back. The battle line is mostly holding, and Ren intercepts any Grimm that manage to slip through before they can reach Nora.

But with a bang and a flash of green, that changes. “EXPLODER!” Jaune yells as he stumbles backwards from the explosion, Pyrrha’s thrown shield intercepting the claw of a beowulf aimed at him as he regains his footing.

Ruby bashes a beowulf in the head with the backside of Crescent Rose, stunning it and jumping up onto its head for a better look at the entrance. Her heart sinks as she flips back off - the tide of black and white now has a good amount of green. “THERE’S MORE EXPLODERS COMING IN!” she yells.

“Nora can’t even stand. We won’t be able to move her fast enough.” Ren’s voice is still calm somehow, despite the desperate situation.

Dodging underneath an Ursa paw, Yang yells “We might not have time, Ren!”

Before anyone else can say anything, a new voice comes in from Ruby’s hip, the volume cutting over the combat. “Teams RWBY and JNPR, get clear of the center of the room. Backup inbound in five seconds.”

The teams are surprised, falling back more from that than any actual plan even as they continue fighting.

And then there’s a massive BOOM as part of the roof explodes inwards and something tan and golden falls through, making a three point landing on top of an unlucky beowulf. There’s a moment of stillness as the students and Grimm try to figure out what just happened before the thing stands up, simultaneously drawing a pair of revolvers off of its hips, and fires off twelve shots into twelve different Grimm, before rolling to the side while reloading to dodge the explosion of a mutated creep.

The students rally, pushing forwards for the first time since they made the call to Ozpin, as the thing that dropped in continues making Grimm slurry out of everything that crosses in front of the barrels of its guns.

An Ursa comes charging in during a salvo of fire, and the thing doesn’t even flinch. It throws one revolver high in the air as it grabs a mass of gilded steel off of its lower back, pointing it directly at the face of the bearlike creature before another earthshattering BOOM issues from it, sending the now disintegrating Grimm backflipping out the door. Replacing the weapon on the small of her back, the thing adroitly catches the falling pistol, dropping a nearby beowulf with a headshot before reloading.
The interior mostly clear, the thing leaps forward with a spin, exiting the building. The students inside hear the sound of gunfire from outside - slow at first, but quickly speeding up as the students finish off the last of the Grimm inside. Pushing out, they see the thing performing impossibly fast gun katas, leaving ghosts of itself where it was moments ago as a seemingly endless stream of bullets mows down the Grimm like so much wheat before the scythe.

It’s no surprise when the remaining Grimm break and run - the Grimm may be mindlessly aggressive, but even they understand when a fight is lost. The thing calmly stops doing the gun kata - the guns themselves flipping back onto the tops of her arms - and pulls a gilded rifle off of its back, sniping away at the retreating Grimm, seemingly every shot hitting a target.

This finally gives team RWBY, Jaune, and Pyrrha a chance to look closer at the thing that rescued them. It’s mostly the color of undyed leather, but bits and pieces of metal all over are golden, as are the spurs on it’s ankles. The rifle in its hands is gorgeous - a brassed barrel, with rosewood stock and furniture, inlaid with golden patterns. Glancing down, Pyrrha’s face goes as red as her hair as she realizes that the thing in front of her is most definitely female, given the shape of the butt that is not covered at all by the chaps the thing seems to have growing out of its hips.

Team RWBY realizes that this must be another, as yet unseen, warframe of the Operator as she turns to them, reloading the rifle. “Where are the other two?” the Operator asks from behind the bandanna-like thing covering her face.

“Uh, they’re inside?” Jaune responds, questioningly.

“Are they injured?”

Ruby steps in, explaining “One of them took a nasty blow to the head after her aura was broken. The other one’s her partner.”

“All right,” the Operator says, cowboy hatted head nodding, “I'll see what I can do. First, though, Ordis, please swoop the Itzal down so I can get the resupply going.”

The students look at each other questioningly before hearing engines swooping in from above and a pair of wings flies in, stopping in front of the Operator. “Unlocking storage compartments. Please access for resupply,” a cheerful voice says as some parts on the wings open up, revealing a massive stash of ammunition and Dust.

As the students gratefully restock their consumables, the Operator heads inside.

‘That one exploder that I let hit me as I was spooling up the Peacemakers actually did a fair amount of damage,’ the Operator thinks as she walks through the splintered doorway. ‘I need to kill them at range if at all possible. A single one isn’t that threatening, but a group of them could severely damage the Warframe. It’s probably a good thing I didn’t take Atlas - close combat with those things is asking for problems. At least with volatile runners they don’t explode if you kill them with melee weapons.’

Entering the foyer, she sees the green coated male crouched over a much shorter white-dressed female. Realizing that the green coated one hasn’t seen her enter, she politely stops walking silently to alert him that she’s approaching.

He glances back at her first non-silent step, suspicious - ‘no, not suspicious, the injured girl is his partner, he’s being protective’ - of the thing approaching them. Crouching down next to him, the
Operator asks “What happened to her?”

“Introductions first. Who are you?”

‘Cancel that, definitely suspicious of me,’ the Operator thinks with amusement. “I’m the backup Ozpin sent. I’m an alien from outer space. Call me the Operator.”

The male looks even less amused than previously. “You’re an alien.”

“Yep! She’s an alien!” Yang calls from the doorway. “She also brought us some ammo, so come get it!”

“I’m not leaving Nora alone,” the male says.

“I won’t hurt her. I need to know what injuries she’s got in order to treat them,” the Operator calmly tries to explain.

“You drop in literally through the roof, claim to be an alien who was sent by Ozpin to be our backup, and now you want me to just let you do things to my partner. I don’t trust you.”

Ruby steps inside, walking over. “Ren, she’s a friend. Let her help.”

The Operator nods. “I want to get her back on her feet quickly, if for no other reason than we still have a mission that needs completion and splitting the group is a bad idea.”

Ren is silent, trying to stare where the eyes should be on a human. The Operator holds the stare for a moment, before having an idea. Standing up and breaking the stare, she takes a few steps back before stepping out of the Warframe. Ren’s eyes widen in shock as he’s suddenly staring at someone who looks to be a bit younger than him.

Plucking a box off of her hip and holding it to her mouth, she speaks into it, saying “Please, let me help. We need her back on her feet,” looking Ren in the eye. “There’s still a mission to complete.”

After a few moments of silence, Ren slowly nods. “What are you going to do?” he asks.

“That depends. What’s the situation?”

“She’s conscious, but barely responsive. Heavily concussed.” The Operator winces at that. “I did some probing around her ribcage and major bones and didn’t find anything outright broken, but that doesn’t mean it’s not cracked.”

“Badly concussed isn’t good. Even where I’m from, the best I can do is get her back up on her feet for either 24 hours or until the next time she goes to sleep. The problem is, that’s a one-time per month shot, and it could make the recovery worse.”

Ren shakes his head, even as Nora groans on the ground. “What do you mean by worse?”

“It differs from person to person. Some people take twice as long to recover. Some, the symptoms as they recover are much worse. Some aren’t affected adversely at all. It was designed as a way to get soldiers up on their feet again and give them a chance to get off the field and away from danger, not as a civilian treatment. On the other hand, it’s never been used on someone with Aura. Aura might be able to treat the damage that’s being suppressed while the temporary fix works. As a matter of fact, that’s probably why her aura hasn’t come back up yet - it’s trying to fix the damage that caused the concussion.”
Ren looks down for a few moments, completely silent. It stretches on until he looks up once more and says “Do it.”

“Alright. One moment,” the Operator says, stepping back and disapparating into a cloud of bright green energy that rejoins her Warframe and walking out the door, returning a second later with a small pen. “It’ll take about fifteen seconds to kick in. I’d suggest pulling that hammer away now and stepping back, she’s liable to think the fight is still going on and might be violent.” Yang picks up the hammer, stepping back a few steps as the Operator crouches down and presses the pen to the neck of Nora, before pulling the pen away and swiftly making her own distance.

There’s a long wait, seemingly longer than the stated fifteen seconds as Nora gradually stops moaning before bolting upright and leaping forwards, making a swinging motion with a hammer that isn’t there before she stumbles to a stop, realizing the total lack of Grimm. “Um, guys? Where’s all the Grimm?” she asks, confused. Looking around, she asks “And who’s that?”

“I’m your backup. Just call me the Operator or Tenno, everyone else does,” the Operator says.

Ren steps in. “How are you feeling Nora?”

“Well, my aura isn’t back up yet, but it’s getting there, but my back’s pretty sore. I guess that Ursa hit me pretty hard, huh?”

“You had a major concussion,” the Operator says. “I gave you some medicine to delay the symptoms, but it puts us on a ticking timer. In 24 hours or the next time you go to sleep, the symptoms will probably return.”

“Oh,” Nora says, deflating. “Well, thank you?” she says, questioningly.

“There’s more grenades for you in the floating thing outside,” the Operator says.

Nora perks right back up. “Ooh, more explosions! Just what I always wanted! Yang, gimme Magnhild!”

With a smile on her face at seeing Nora back to her normal energetic self, Yang hands it over, handle first.

Looking over at Jaune and Pyrrha, who just entered the room, the Operator says “We’ll take a fifteen minute break here to let you recharge your auras and catch your breath. Ask any questions that you have now. Once we’re back on the move, we need to keep our heads on swivels.”

A door explodes inwards as teams RWBY, JNPR, and the Operator enter what appears to simply be a well-constructed shed that conceals a long stairway downward.

“How did you know this was here?” Pyrrha asks.

“Sensor suite on the archwing picked up this tunnel entrance on flyover. Couldn’t penetrate deep enough to do any mapping, though,” the Operator explains. “Weiss, do you still have that datamass?”

“Yes. I’m surprised that we haven’t seen any Grimm, though,” Weiss says, confused.

“Grimm have animal intelligence at the very least. They were soundly whooped and sent running, it’ll take them a while to gin up their courage to try again,” the Operator says, descending the
stairway as a flashlight mounted on her chest flicks on, lighting the way ahead. The Veldt never once leaves high ready, aimed at the bottom of the stairwell some fifty feet away.

Continuing, the Operator says “Keep an eye out for any terminals. If I can get a map of this place, we can cut down the amount of time we’re here.” Exiting the bottom of the stairwell, the Operator performs a quick sweep of the room - ‘it’s massive. Why is it so tall? And why are the doors so big?’ - with the muzzle of the Veldt.

“Well, we-” the voice over the intercom is cut off by the bang of the Veldt as the speaker explodes.

“So much for stealth,” Blake observes.

“Itchy trigger finger,” the Operator says by way of explanation. “We need to keep moving. This place must have security.” The Operator moves through the door directly opposite of the entrance, rifle twitching to cover the two unsecured doorways in the new room.

“That was certainly… Impolite,” a voice says from the speaker mounted in the corner. The Operator’s aim snaps to it, but she restrains herself from shooting this one as well. “Uninvited guests, destroying property that they’re trespassing on? That’s just… uncivilized. I must say, I was quite impressed by your survival of the Grimm horde, but now I think I’ll just have security deal with you. After all, I can’t have any interruptions here.”

Loud clanking comes from both doorways. The Operator turns her head to look at the student teams, who are readying themselves for the battle and says “If I yell ‘cover’ and begin slowly progressing through gun katas, you need to keep things off of me. In the opening seconds of Peacemaker, I am very vulnerable. The ability is very powerful, but it does have its weaknesses.”

Nervously, Jaune asks “Why don’t you just open off with it when we’re better able to cover you, then?”

“My energy reserves are not endless, and sending that Grimm horde running ate through a lot of them,” the Operator admits, thinking to herself ‘They’ve recovered, but there’s no need to tell the students that.’ Continuing out loud, she says “It sounds like more of them are coming from the front; I’ll take that. You take whatever comes out of the right door.”

Seeing movement in the shadowed hallway, the Operator starts taking shots with the Veldt. To her consternation, some of the shots that hit seem to be deflecting off at varying angles, despite aiming at roughly the same spot with each shot. One or two disappear into something and don’t deflect, but there’s no accompanying scream of pain as the bullet tears into flesh that she would expect if the target’s aura had shattered.

As the Veldt trips on empty, she finally understands why the rooms and doorways are so big as the things come into the light. They’re massive - 4 meter tall monstrosities of thickly armored robotics, each carrying an equally long bladed staff. Seeing the marks in the paint, she realizes that she was only hitting the thighs of the massive robot, with only one shot seemingly having gone into a hip joint - and that one isn’t even slowed down by it.

And there are four of these walking tanks striding down the hall at a dead run, close enough that activating the Peacemaker would probably result in severe damage to the Mesa before it spools up.

‘This could be… interesting.’

‘----------------------------------------

“Big robot!” yells Jaune, finally clearly seeing the thing coming down the hallway.
“Yup! Two of them!” Yang confirms.

“Jaune, you and JNPR take one, RWBY will take the other.” Ruby says calmly. “You want first or second?”

“Uh -” Jaune dithers for a moment.

“The second one,” Pyrrha supplies.

“Yeah, the second one,” Jaune confirms.

At that moment, the first robot bursts into the room, taking a swing at Yang with the bladed staff. Yang calmly deflects it off of her gauntlets, before shooting Celica at the robot’s face to keep its attention on her as she falls back into the room, deflecting more strikes before hearing a call of “Ladybug!” from her sister.

A flash of red petals and a streak of black come in from two different sides behind the robot - the streak of black going for the knees and the red petals going for the head. Blake uses Gambol - no longer tied to her forearm - to tie up the legs, as Ruby uses Crescent Rose to wrap around the neck of the robot, pulling the trigger on a gravity-dust enhanced shot as soon as she feels contact.

The tripwire and the impulse of Ruby’s maneuver sends the metal giant falling to the ground facefirst, even though Crescent Rose doesn’t manage to tear off the head.

Yang solves that, leaping forwards with a yell as her sister rolls clear of the falling robot, Semblance flaring from the earlier deflected strikes as she punches, shattering the armored head of the robot and causing it to power down due to the massive feedback.

“Weiss, Yang, give it a few shots, make sure it stays down,” Ruby instructs, looking over at the other team to see an almost disturbing sight as Nora swings her hammer and hits a knee of a robot square on, bending it backwards. Seeing that the other team has their robot well under control, she turns to look at the Operator.

A fourth robot has just entered the room, and as she watches, the Redeemer lashes out and claims the hand of the first robot even as the Operator leaps over the swipe of a second, before somehow changing direction in midair and rolling away from another swipe, landing with Redeemer aimed perfectly at the torso of a third robot. Another earthshattering BOOM issues, and the robot’s chest is shattered and it falls backwards into the fourth robot, allowing the Operator to focus on the unimpaired second.

She rolls under a strike and leaps high, pulling a revolver off her hip with her off-hand, wrapping her main arm around the neck of the robot in a pseudo-chokehold, using its mass to protect her from the first. Pushing her off hand under the armored collar of the robot, she empties the revolver inside of the armored torso, causing a secondary explosion to blow off the chestplate and the robot to begin collapsing.

The Operator backflips off, stowing the now empty revolver while in the air, and slashes the Redeemer at one hip joint of the fourth robot. Unfortunately, it gets stuck most of the way through the joint. Ruby readies herself to jump forward and offer assistance, but another BOOM issues from the Redeemer, tearing the leg off before she rolls underneath the falling robot, coming up next to the handless first.

The robot takes a wild swing at her, but without the second hand the long staff is hard to control and the strike is easily jumped over. The operator uses this opportunity to hook the blade of the
Redeemer over the armored codpiece before coring the handless robot with another BOOM.

Replacing the Redeemer on her back, the Operator turns to the last robot, still struggling on the floor, and dodges the stab of its staff. Drawing the loaded revolver, she stuffs the barrel down the chestplate before emptying the cylinder inside, doing enough damage that the robot shuts down entirely.

This entire display had taken maybe seven seconds.

The Operator turns to the students as she reloas the revolvers, saying “Stop gawping and start moving. This hallway. We have a new side objective. I want to capture the plans for those robots.”

Teams RWBY and JNPR look at each other for a few seconds before Blake finally asks the obvious question. “Why?”

“These robots are his security system. He’s apparently been holed up in the Grimmlands for a while, and these have managed to hold off all the Grimm,” the Operator says, reloading the Veldt. “Could Atlesian Knights do that?”

The teams look at Weiss, who responds “Not without significant losses. But Knights are made to be expendable.”

Moving down the hallway at a jog, Veldt at high ready, the Operator calls over her shoulder “Everything in combat is expendable, especially the soldiers. Don’t forget the datamass.”

The teams run after the Operator, who does slow down somewhat to allow them to catch up. As they approach the light at the end of the hallway, the Operator stops, saying “I’ll breach and draw any fire, you break in after five seconds have passed.” Without waiting for any acknowledgement, she leaps forward in a massive bound, diving headfirst into the room and rolling, quickly spinning around inside and performing a threat assessment. “Room clear, move in. Bring up the datamass, we have a terminal.”

As the teams enter, they see the Operator already impatiently looking over the terminal. Without looking back, she holds her hand out and gestures for the datamass. Weiss steps forward and hands it over, and the Operator reaches under the console and slides it in.

There’s a few moments of silence before the Operator says “Five minutes to finish the hack. The map was easily accessed, I’ll upload that to your scrolls now. We’re moving out after that.”

The Operator maintains her watch as the students all pull out their scrolls. “What’s that big room there?” asks Nora.

“There’s no labels on the map at all. How do we know where to go?” asks Jaune.

“Better an unlabeled map than no map,” the Operator says.

Privately, the Operator asks Ordis “You got everything?”

“There is some encrypted data that appears to be research logs, given the timing and dating.”

“Break the encryption and give me the high-level.”

“Breaking. One moment. IT’S ALL VID all of the logs are video logs, Operator. It will take me
some time to collate the data.”

“Estimate?”

“Two hours.”

“We don’t have enough time to wait for that. What about the robots and the cameras?”

“The security system is on another network that is airtight, and there are no transmissions being sent to the robots that I can disrupt. As best I can tell, these robots have no over-the-air receivers. THAT MEANS I CAN’T HACK THEM - I can’t hack them without physical access.”

“Any blueprints?”

“Partials. He tried to delete it at some point in the past, but didn’t overwrite the data. I’ve been able to reconstruct 95% of the official blueprint, and the remaining 5% should be easy enough to figure out from there.”

“Good. Feed me any more data you find, and give me waypoints to any points of interest. Prioritize locating any escape routes, the control center, and laboratories, in that order.”

“There is one bullhead hangar, and there’s an experimentation center in the big room. I haven’t located the control center yet.”

“Waypoint the bullhead hangar. We’ll go there as soon as the five minutes is up.”

Chapter End Notes

The entire adventure on Doctor Merlot’s island was supposed to be one chapter, but I’ve split it into two or three in an attempt to get some additional feedback on combat writing - which is probably the weakest part of the story so far. Which is a problem, because combat is going to be featuring more heavily in the future. So please, criticism (constructive and not) and advice are very appreciated.

As a warning, the next chapter will almost certainly include some combat sections that don’t really serve a purpose other than practicing writing combat.

End Notes

Phew. This is the first fanfic I’ve published in roughly two and a half years, and this chapter is the result of almost 5 months of writing and mostly solo editing.

This chapter honestly exploded in overall length. I thought it would be a 5000 word chapter maximum, but stuff just kept happening that I needed to include.

Dialogue is hard. Especially for team RWBY. I spent a long time trying to get their characters right, and I’m still not 100% comfortable with it. But I decided it wasn’t going to get much
better with more editing passes, so I decided to post it and get to work on chapter 2.

Don't expect chapter 2 to come out in anything resembling a timely manner. I do have things planned for the story, but I have not started writing chapter 2 yet.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!