The Knights of Grimm - Act 4 - Whispers of Arkhonex

by Cosmic_Fictions

Summary

War has begun - Faunus and Humanity at each other's throats. And in a dying world, Ruby's inner demons are darkening her soul, turning her into a monster. Jaune realises that there is more to his family history than he thought, and Kassius now searches for Merlot. All in the hopes of finding a cure for Horridus Morbus, their destination is the same - The Lost City of Arkhonex...
Prologue

The cold winter air flows across the falling battlefield, rumbles of war reverberate through the cobblestone paths that the blood trickles down. A collection of ants that feast away at the Human and Faunus cadavers that lay scattered, clawed and stabbed and crushed by the armies of Grimm. Hundreds of beasts charge across a gigantic stone bridge built over a cavern, all roaring as they throw their muscular shadowy bodies at their foes. One of the Beowulves digs its claws into the chest of a warrior who cries with agony as it rips him apart. Gnawing at his skin and flesh in order to rip him apart. Blood sprays out from his body as it pulls and rips his body apart as he screams.

That is until the Beowulf clamps its jaws into his throat, viciously thrashing him around until his jugular is torn right off. Spraying claret out and across the black wolf that killed him. The Beowulf rears up on its hind bipedal feet, pulling its arms back to howl to the only partially fractured moon. Nothing compared to what it looks like now, and behind the Beowulf is a battalion of Mammoth-Sized Goliaths approaching the fort with deafening trumpeting roars from their trunks. The roars echo for miles as Nevermores glide overhead, launching Fatal Feathers down into the battlefield beneath them.

Giant black feathered blades come crashing down into the defences, catapults shattered like glass from the impact of such powerful feathers that impact them. Chunks of splintered wood and bent metal thrown through the air, impaling some unfortunate souls trying to defend the main gate. “They’re closing in! We cannot hold them forever!” A Knight wails with fear as the monsters charge, the ground rupturing before him as a massive Deathstalker explodes up from the ground before his very eyes.

With horror flowing in his veins, he screeches with horror until the massive glowing gold stinger comes crashing down and stabs straight through his torso. It swings round and roars, throwing the still screaming man into the horde behind it. Only for him to be swarmed and ripped to shreds by the vile monsters that move closer and closer. Burning boulders are thrown from trebuchets towards the army, exploding with brimstone impacting the Creeps and Beowulves that ceaselessly charge. A man on a massive Ballista turns the titanic weapon with all his might and fires. The huge bolt flies across the sky and nails a Nevermore through the ribcage, the screeching titan of a Crow plummets down to the ground, slowly disintegrating away into a thick plume of black smoke. But their efforts just seem effortless, because the army of monsters never seem to be faltered by the constant barrage of fire that the Knights unleash upon them. A Knight bellows as he swings his sword across the neck of a Beowulf to kill it, only for a Griffin suddenly grabs him and they both crash through the side of the cobblestone bridge, plummeting to their deaths as they scream.

One soldier staggers back with horror, seeing where his friend once stood, falling to his knees and hiding behind a concrete barrier to cover his ears as he cries. Not all of the weapons are so ancient though – for some of them are actually shooting dust rifles as well at the Grimm. Bolts of electrical dust burn through the bodies of Grimm that continuously charge further and further to the gates. Nailing some of them in their weakest spots.

The chinks in their bony armour plating.

Even some robotic Warriors enter the warzone as well, firing missiles from their shoulders to try and lessen the amount of Grimm that continue to make their attack on the walls of the fortress. The robots that they send forth make the Atlesian Knights look like they are made of paper in comparison, broad shouldered bulky mechanical beasts that march through the walls. Along with a huge mechanical titan with razor sharp feet.
Known as a Warden.

The panels around its triangular body slide apart to reveal the charging red laser that prepares to fire along with the trumpeting horn which challenges the Goliath getting closer and closer. The huge Grimm Mammoth erupts into rage as it lifts its trunk at the Warden whilst the Apostle Robots continue to assist the Knights holding the Grimm back as best they can. The Warden roars, blasting a thick red beam of energy into the head of the Goliath, and the beast roars with pain, staggering back as the burning hot laser carves across one of the massive curved tusks.

The tusk severs, crashing to the bridge with an almighty bang, spreading cracks across the bridge. Chunks of cobblestone plummet off the side of the bridge as the Warden stands it ground. Thick black smoke bleeds from the heavy wound inflicted on the Goliath, but the enraged titan just roars again. And it continues to march towards the gates, with a guttural growl as it moves closer and closer to the gates. Every footfall makes the ground shake, and a Nevermore dives towards the Warden.

The Warden screeches, turning and blasts ten tiny missiles from its back which explode as soon as they make contact with the Nevermore. The huge beast roars with agony, vaporised into black smoke before it could even get close. The Warden remains tall, firing the laser into the Grimm that continue to make their approach, slicing the arched tail of the Deathstalker clean off, which causes the stinger to fall and plunge directly down into the top of the Scorpion’s skull. The shrieking monster is silenced immediately as soon as the stinger impacts the skull, and it collapses to the ground.

The Goliaths roar with fury as they splay their huge black ears out to the enemy, constantly moving towards the fort. “The Warden doesn’t have enough power to take down three Goliaths! What are we going to do?” One of the Knights cries out.

The crying Knight hides behind the concrete barrier, his body shaking erratically with terror, ready to face the end that is coming for them all.

But then...

A man steps out of the fort.

Alone.

With just a sword and shield, slowly approaching the face of the battlefield. One of the Knights taking cover reaches out for him as he approaches. His hair is a greyish blonde with some weathered scars on his body, most likely across his entire body. The strange man wears an impressive suit of armour, one that is crafted with a rare metal named Isomacium. Not only that but it has been carved to represent the skulls of the Grimm, with Beowulf shaped skulls making his shoulder pauldrons, and he wears the helmet that looks like that of a Griffon’s head. He holds the helmet in his hand as he approaches, with the sheathed sword in the other hand. The hand he holds the helmet it has jagged metal claws built into the gauntlet, looking like the claws of an Ursa.

He shows no fear.

Just courage as he approaches, and the Knight screams out his name. “Vyrryk! What are you doing?” He screams, but the warrior known as Vyrryk says nothing.

He just stands before the roaring Goliaths that march on the Fortress. He puts the helmet on with ease, staring through the sockets of the Griffon and he clips it to the shoulder pads that he built.
Then he draws the sword.

It is simple looking, with a blue hilt and a yellow crossguard, and with faintly glowing symbols across the blade, and he holds the sheath in his hand. And it transforms into a shield that also has similar symbols inside.

It is Crocea Mors.

He clutches the hilt tight and his blue eyes glow fiercely, as he walks towards the army of Grimm. He slashes once at five Beowulves, and an almighty blast of lightning erupts from the blade that annihilates all of them in one swing. As a Nevermore comes for him, he swings his shield, and the impact creates a deafening back, and the shockwave spreads cracks across the bridge. As he calmly walks across the bridge, killing the Nevermore immediately with one powerful smash. The huge crow fades away into the realms of time and matter, Vyrryk looks ahead at the ground as Creeps tunnel towards him.

He jumps in the air and stabs the sword downwards, sending flames straight through the ground that completely annihilates all the creatures before they could even burst out of the ground. The Knights are shocked of what they are seeing; he has made more progress on his own than they have in half an hour of fighting. And he does not stop there, as an Ursa Major roars and charges at him, he suddenly vanishes right as it slashes its claws at him. Confused, the Grimm Bear looks around, only for Vyrryk to suddenly stab the blade of Crocea Mors downwards into the back of the Ursa’s head.

The Ursa grumbles with pain, collapsing to the ground, before fading away.

The Grimm begin to fall back.

Except for the three Goliaths on the bridge that roar at him, so he stares them down with the sword and shield in his hands. The Matriarch of the Goliaths charges towards him with a roar, swinging its huge tusk at him, since it is missing the other from when the Warden challenged the titan. Vyrryk sprints at the beast, diving into a combat roll which narrowly avoids the attack as it scrapes the huge bony tusk through the cobblestone. He stabs the sharp blade of Crocea Mors straight into the leg of the Goliath, and it creates a screech of pain.

The Goliath rears up with him still holding onto the hilt of the blade, as it attempts to crush him under its weight. Vyrryk uses the moment as an opportunity, throwing himself into the air as he floats above the Goliath as it slams its huge feet into the ground, nearly breaking the bridge as well. He floats over the creature, and the blue eyes of the warrior glow brighter, as he blasts down towards the Goliath, stabbing it straight through the head. The Goliath roars with agony, and he twists the blade round, taking control of it just by veering it in the direction of the others.

By guiding the head of the Goliath like the joystick of a Bullhead, he smashes the tusk into the side of one of the other Goliaths. The sharp curved tusk carves deep into the thick hide of the Goliath and it roars in pain, black smoke billowing up from the laceration. He pushes the blade forward to force the Goliath into a charge, and it smashes the other towards the edge of the cliff. The Goliath bellows, as it falls, plummeting down into the chasm with a roar, fading away into the gloomy mist beneath, eventually hitting the ground.

Vyrryk turns to see the injured Goliath making a charge into the Matriarch, and it stabs both tusks into the Goliath’s side, making it trumpet out with pain. The Goliath snarls with anger, and with its only tusk it manages to hook the creature by the neck, and then smashing the skull of the Goliath into pillar, which collapses and crushes the Goliath to finish it off.

Finally...
Vyrryk rips Crocea Mors out from the skull of the Matriarch and it stumbles slightly in pain, but still goes to attack him with its trunk with anger. But as Vyrryk rises above the beast, he channels his aura into the blade and the hieroglyphics shine brighter this time, as bright as the sun. He blasts downwards, using his powers to propel himself into the Goliath.

With Crocea Mors extended, he plunges straight through the head of the Matriarch, and he shoots through its head like a bullet. He lands down on the bridge, pressing the blade of the sword into the ground with a shockwave. And the Matriarch collapses to the ground with a groan. And before they know it...

The battle is won.

All the Knights stare at Vyrryk with shock and awe as he rises up, huge clouds of black smoke forming around him as he stands there. The huge Elephants fading away into smoke around him.

He looks at the Knights of the Arc Family and he nods.

Sheathing Crocea Mors into the shield that collapses back into its scabbard form.

“Protect The Sword...”

“It must find the Final Knight.”

The voice echoes through his mind...

And Jaune gasps, sitting upright in the bed that he has been in a stage of recovery in for the past few hours. He pants with sweat trickling down his face, looking around, to see Pyrrha still asleep in the bed next to him, also recovering from their fight against Hyde.

He presses his hand to his head...

Remembering the ghostly words of his great, great grandfather – Vyrryk Arc.

His eyes now turn to Crocea Mors leant against his bed, seeing the glimmering markings still present on the sword.

“What are you?” Jaune questions with curiosity...and fear as well.

The blade Crocea Mors – Yellow Death – has more tricks up its sleeve than he realises.

And perhaps...

So does he.
He traces his fingertip across the Isomacium forged blade of Crocea Mors, able to feel every single groove where the ancient Arkhoni Markings have been engraved onto. He can see exactly where the light shimmered from, and every now and then as he touches it, there is a very slight shimmer. It could not be the reflection of the sunlight – since the window and the sun are not in reach of the blade itself.

His large blue eyes focus on the blade...wondering constantly what its secrets are.

Why was it passed down to me?

Who is the Final Knight?

Is it me?

Is it one of my sisters?

Did my parents know about whatever that man said? My great...great grandfather how many times over?

Before he can wonder any further, he lifts his head at Nora and Ren who have both fallen asleep after keeping their eyes on their friends the whole night. Nora mumbles as she sleeps with her head on her boyfriend’s shoulder, then her head slips from his shoulder. And she gasps with a snort as well, looking around as she jolts awake. Then she sees Jaune awake as well, with that same smile on his face as ever.

She takes a powerful inhalation of air when seeing him awake, and she punches Ren in the shoulder – pretty hard as well. “Ow!” Ren exclaims as he presses his hand to his shoulder, snapping back into the realm of the awake. Then he sees Jaune sat upright and his eyes widen with disbelief, and he immediately gets up at the same time as Nora. Whom instantly wraps her arms around him, and he yelps as she squeezes him tight with her freakishly unnaturally strong arms.

“You’re okay! By the gods!” Nora squeaks with ecstatic joy as she bounces up and down like a crazy Kangaroo.

“Hey...love you too Nora...can you please stop crushing me?” Jaune strains as his face starts to turn purple and his voice becomes harder to decipher as he struggles in her grasp.

“Oop!” She squeaks, releasing him and colour returns back into his face and he sighs with relief, looking up at Ren to see him with a kind...yet saddened look on his face. Then he looks at Nora, and sees the same expression.

Neither he or Pyrrha know of what happened in the courtyard.

What Vir Nominis Umbra has done...

“Guys...what’s wrong?” He asks them, and they both sit down beside him with shaken expressions. Their joy did not last long...it was as if that happiness was drained from them the moment that they
remembered what happened. The sound of the impacts of that hammer against Oobleck’s head...the shriek that Raven let out when watching her fiancé die right in front of her eyes.

The things that Vir Nominis Umbra can never be undone, they will never forget the punishment he inflicted upon them. Then they hear Pyrrha waking up as well, groaning as she presses her hand to her head as she rolls round and she looks at Jaune first...then seeing Nora and Ren.

But seeing the looks in their eyes...

“Guys?” Pyrrha whimpers fearfully as she looks at them with teary emerald eyes.

Nora is about to say it, but Ren does it for her...so then she does not have to be the one to break the news. He holds her hand gently, rubbing his thumb across the top of her hand. “Vir Nominis Umbra came here...just after you two and Kassius went looking for the meds to help Yang.” Ren reveals and they both look worried. Because they did see him there with Kassius, but they never knew what he did.

“He was with us as well...he told us that he punished us for something...what did he do?” Jaune fearfully asks and that is when he sees Nora rub a tear from her eye.

“He...” Nora stammers tearfully, but Ren is the one that takes the shot.

“He murdered Oobleck, Roy, Nolan...and Taiyang.” He reveals – Jaune and Pyrrha’s eyes both widen with horror and it is like getting stabbed by Kassius all over again. A shockwave of heartbroken emotions flow through his body when hearing those names...and he can literally picture their faces. Oobleck’s...after everything that he had done for them all...as if losing Professor Port wasn’t enough!

He clenches his hand into a fist and he snarls with anger, his eyes squeezed shut. Pyrrha turns and looks at him, clutching the bed cover over her body. “Jaune?” Pyrrha gently speaks as she reaches out to him.

“How?” Jaune questions with a rage fuelled voice and Pyrrha looks increasingly worried. Both Ren and Nora are delighted for them to be alive...but the loss of their friends...it is drowning their joy out with sadness. Jaune grips onto the hilt of Crocea Mors with every ounce of strength in his hand, almost stopping the blood flow in his entire hand. He is shaking with anger, and all he wants to know is how they died.

“Jaune...you don’t –” Nora whimpers fearfully, not of Jaune...but of having to repeat the memories in their heads. How sadistically he murdered them all...they have never witnessed anything like it – something pure evil.

But Jaune needs to know.

“How did they die?” He repeats with his eyes closed, trying to focus his emotions as best he can. He knows that his emotions may grant him strength but he also knows that he cannot let them overpower him...otherwise he will end up like some of their foes that they have to fight. Like Ortega with the loss of Penny and how Hazel turned out with the loss of his own daughter, Amber. But he managed to pull himself out of that darkness that he was trapped inside of.

Ren looks at Nora...and he sighs, then looking at Pyrrha who is scared of the answer that they are beating around the bush about. But they know that they deserve to know the truth, even if it is haunting. “Umbra...took a claw hammer and he...smashed Oobleck’s head in...beat him to death...right in front of us.” Ren stammers as he can hear the sound of the metal hammer crashing
against his skull. The wet squelching crunch that ever bang followed up with...enough to send nightmares through his soul.

Jaune flinches and Pyrrha begins to sob, covering her mouth as she hears the words. He never deserved to die like that – nobody deserves to die like that, she would never wish that kind of death upon anybody.

Not even Umbra.

What he deserves is something far more severe.

“Ruby got angry and she aimed her rifle at him...but it didn’t matter, because he used her to kill Nolan. Pulled the trigger for her, and killed him as the bullet went through him.” Nora describes with a trembling voice and Jaune tenses more and more as he hears the way that they died. “Then he just murdered Roy because he felt like it – threw a damn spear through his chest.”

Pyrrha shakes her head...waking up to this news is not what she ever wanted to hear. But then again, after what they witnessed, and that Kassius has vanished out in the wilderness...how will they ever wake up with a happy morning ever again with this as their foe? “And Tai?” Jaune asks, calling him by the nickname that both the Branwen Twins named him by. It still feels surreal for Nora and Ren to come to terms with the fact that they will never see Taiyang again.

Or Oobleck...

How must Ruby and Yang be feeling?

Wherever Ruby has disappeared off to?

Raven and Qrow must be heartbroken as well, both of them lost something very close to them last night. Qrow lost a brother, and Raven lost the love of her life...in a single second...everything she ever dreamt of having...was snatched away from her in an instant. Ren sighs, as he gives Jaune the answer to his question finally. “Vir Nominis Umbra challenged Ruby to a game of his – she never told us what happened where he took her. But she must have failed – because the next moment...Umbra launched one of those goddamn spears through him.” Ren describes.

Still hearing Raven’s cry for the man she loved.

Nora begins to cry as well, having to cover her eyes as she sobs beside Ren, and he gently puts his arm around her, pulling her close to his side as he caresses her ginger hair with his hand. He kisses the top of her head affectionately...

Until he notices that Crocea Mors is beginning to glow brighter instead of shimmering when in the grasp of Jaune. Pyrrha notices it as well, along with the sweat which beads from his pores and the sight of his muscles tensing up and the sound of his breath getting harsher and harsher. Pyrrha would normally be attracted to the sight of Jaune’s body being as muscular as it is...but this is different.

The air is thick with anger and it surrounds him, then his eyes open up slowly as he grits his teeth with fury. “Umbra...” He growls, then he screams with rage and there is a pulse that erupts from the blade of Crocea Mors, fluttering their hair around, and both Nora and Ren gasp with disbelief from what had just happened there. Pyrrha stares at Jaune with shocked eyes, remembering when she saw something similar happen after Hyde had stabbed her.

The blade glowed and when the swords impacted, there was an incredible shockwave.

Like when he gets angry, the sword seems to channel something through him, or perhaps the other
way around? Either way that sword has some mysteries to it – mysteries that they need to find out soon...because if it can help take down Vir Nominis Umbra...they need to know about it. Jaune ends his cry of anguish, enraged that he could not save those who have been butchered by a monster...and after what he saw in the Charred Forest...he cannot even think of what Umbra could be doing to their souls right now.

The only thing they can do now is avenge them.

Is to find the weakness to Vir Nominis Umbra, the chink in his armour...so then they can kill him once and for all.

The aura that swirled from the blade of Crocea Mors fades back into his own and he calms down, still dripping from the hair with sweat. “Damn it...” He sniffs with anguish, sick of failing.

Neither of them decides to ask the question on their minds...because clearly neither Pyrrha or Jaune really have any idea of what the hell is happening with Jaune and Crocea Mors right now.

“There wasn’t anything you could have done, Jaune.” Nora states, and she is confident of that after seeing the epic battle that took place in the courtyard between Ozpin and Umbra.

“Where is he?” Jaune questions, staring at them...and that is where they are faced with the rather perilous task of telling him about the return of a certain individual. An individual both he and Pyrrha do not trust for as far as they can throw him.

“Ozpin...woke up...and challenged him.” Ren reveals...

And the silence that fills the room sends chills through both their bodies at hearing those words. After all these years...he has finally woken up. “Ozpin’s...awake?” Pyrrha fearfully questions and for good reason – Cinder may have been the one to kill her but Ozpin was the reason it all went down that way. He would have sacrificed her future, her own soul to become the Fall Maiden.

“Yes...and...he has a lot to explain.” Nora states as she looks at Ren.

“But he hasn’t said a word, not since...well...” Ren awkwardly says, since everything has gone wrong.

All in one night.

“Since what?” Jaune asks.

“Ruby has gone missing, just like Kassius. We could not track either of them down, they have both vanished off the map. Not even Cinder can track Kassius down, she thinks he might be knocked out.” Ren explains, remembering the things that Cinder had told them about her efforts to try and contact her brother.

“What about Ruby? What do you mean she is gone?” Pyrrha asks fearfully for the safety of her friend. They all are, especially after that letter that she had left behind.

“We found a note on her bed where Oscar had left her to recover...Umbra did something to her. She was being possessed by him at the end of the battle...and...she said he threatened to kill us all. I think she’s ran because she wants to protect us...after the deaths of her dad and everyone else...” Ren sighs as he thinks about her, but Nora shakes her head.

“It isn’t her fault though, it is Umbra messing with her. He is lying to her.” Nora states, but she does not know Umbra as well as both Pyrrha and Jaune do. And they know that there is one thing about
Umbra that he never lies about.

And that is that he never lies to begin with.

He tells the truth, just not the full truth at times. Or he will tell others a truth or plant potential ideas into people’s heads.

But he never changes the truth... he never lies... he just misconceives them for those he tells them to.

“He wouldn’t lie.” Jaune states, and they look at him with confusion.

“Huh?” Ren asks.

“Pyrrha and I spent a long time with him in the Charred Forest – he is many things but a liar is not one of them. Whatever happened... Ruby must have messed up and gotten it wrong.” Jaune states, not trying to sound cold towards her, but not lying either. Probably the only good quality that they have seen Vir Nominis Umbra display so far is the fact he never lies to people.

“Ozpin has told us that he is not going to tell us what he has to say until we find Ruby. And then we can have the funeral for everybody that we lost to him.” Ren explains to him, then Jaune sighs, throwing the covers off his body and he slides off the bed and onto his feet. Nora looks at him with worried eyes.

“Jaune?” She asks.

“Where’s Ozpin?” Jaune questions as he sheathes Crocea Mors into the scabbard attached to his belt.

“Jaune he won’t say a word, he is being stubborn.” Ren states.

“I don’t care, where is he? Where is everyone else?” Jaune asks, and he turns to see Pyrrha getting up as well, her armour has been fixed up after the battle against Hyde luckily and her wound has healed. Just another scar to her collection, this time it is on her stomach, same as the one Jaune now has. Along with a couple others, like the slash across his chest from the Beowulf years ago in Mistral. And the burns in areas from the battle he had against Pyrrha when she was under the control of the Onyx Phantom.

Who according to Vir Nominis Umbra is also still alive somewhere... hopefully Ozpin has the answers to that as well.

Ren looks at Nora and he stands back up, opening the door for their friends. “They are in the courtyard, Glynda is trying her best to repair the damage.” Ren tells them.

“Okay... let’s go have a chat with our dear professor.” Jaune states, walking in front of his team, and they follow him.

As a black crow with red eyes and a crystal beam in the tree outside their window watches as they leave.

And it caws, before flying away.

Vir Nominis Umbra is always watching.

Always.
Oscar

Glynda holds her crop upwards, using her magical semblance to rebuild the damage done to the school’s courtyard, telekinetic energy lifting up huge chunks of rubble and fusing it back together. She has already rebuilt the Colonnades luckily, even after the battle she had against Umbra. She levitates the largest chunks from the tower that was smashed apart during the godly battle between the Soothsayer and the Knight of Vengeance. It fuses back together but she sighs, dropping forward to regain her strength whilst pressing her hands to her knees.

As she regains her strength to continue with the reconstruction after the battle while she still can...Oscar is sat on the edge of the fountain with his hands gripped onto the letter which Ruby had left behind. His hazel coloured eyes staring straight at the words, and while he reads them Hazel is looking at him, then at Ozpin who is knelt down on one knee. They have never noticed before the ways in which he actually did act like a Knight.

Very calm.

And he would always have his mind focused on his objective and nothing else...it is bizarre that they never noticed it before.

Oscar reads ever single word...

Every letter as he pictures the beautiful face of the woman he loves.

I'm sorry...

I'm so, so sorry...

This is all my fault, and I never should have gotten anybody into any of this. I let my anger control me and I killed Dew, I was not fast enough to save Gray, Serena and Vos and they all died. And now I Oobleck, Roy and Nolan...even my dad...they're all dead because I failed.

I know you are all my strength.

But he made a threat to me before he left...

He threatened to kill all of you...

He made good on his last threat and I will not challenge that again. I will not allow anyone else to die for me, not after this.

Oscar if you are reading this then please do not come after me.

I am going after that fucking Soothsayer myself.

And I will kill him.

But nobody else will die because of me.

I'm no Huntress anymore.

I am whatever I need to be to kill Vir Nominis Umbra.
I'm sorry.

And I love you all.

- Ruby Rose

He knows her handwriting off by heart and this definitely was written by her...and he can even see the tear stains on the paper where she began to cry. Her torment must be eating away at her constantly, and with Torchwick always present in the back of her mind...it must be getting worse and worse without him there to help her. It is killing him – not knowing where she could have gone.

The only consolation he has is that she could not have gotten far.

Hazel sits down beside Oscar and the massive man’s presence completely breaks Oscar’s endless chain of thought that surrounds his girlfriend, and he turns to the large man. “How are you holding up, Oscar?” Hazel asks him, and he looks up at him. It is strange, both he and Cinder have had a child and father relationship with this man.

And once he tried to kill Oscar and she killed his real daughter.

Perhaps people really can change.

Perhaps forgiveness is possible even for the most horrendous of crimes.

Oscar folds the letter up and he presses it down on his lap and he presses his hands to his face as he sits forward, exhaling heavily through the gaps between his fingers. “Goddamn it...this is all such a mess.” He says to Hazel with a trembling voice and the deep gruff voiced man nods his head.

“Hmph...I know...I didn’t know Oobleck...or any of them that well...I’m sorry.” Hazel says to him, and Oscar sighs as he pushes one of his hands through his messy black hair. He cannot help but think on how much of a defeat they have suffered, and not just with the deaths of their friends.

Everything they fought to save, to free...and now they are back at square one. Atlas is under Acolytes of Lien control, Mistral too and the White Fang have fallen back into the old rule with Mazen as their new High Leader. And Vacuo has been completely taken over by the Grimm as well. “How are we supposed to beat something that managed to take down three kingdoms in half an hour? How are we meant to challenge him when after everything we threw at him he just countered it all?”

“Except for Ruby.” Hazel states, and he pauses with a sigh. Most people would be hopeful at that, but Oscar knows Ruby well and he knows that she would never want such a burden to be hung on her shoulders like that. She already has enough to cope with in her own mind, let alone the power that she wields...a power that could kill Umbra.

And even then after she did it he was not killed, they just managed to hurt him.

“Not much of a victory though, is it?” He sighs. “We hurt him...that’s it.” He sighs as he sits there, looking at Ozpin and he looks pretty resentful. “Why the hell is he holding all of it back? Why didn’t you come and save them before he killed Oobleck?” Oscar mutters with anger, and it seems that Hazel is in agreement...perhaps all of them are this time as well. They are sick of him not telling them things, but he seems insistent that Ruby be here for his explanation.

Oscar and Hazel’s attention turns when they see Team J.N.P.R storming towards Ozpin, all four of
them with angry looks on their faces. Ozpin just stares down at the ground as he waits, seemingly meditating, and Jaune stands right behind him. “Talk.” Jaune demands with a growling voice, and Ozpin slowly opens his brown eyes, turning them ever so slightly to look in his direction.

“Mr. Arc...I’m glad to see you are awake.” He says.

“Cut the bullshit, talk. Now!” He demands, and Ozpin sighs, taking his cane and standing tall. No longer wearing his cog based Armour that everybody referred to as the Entity of Time – and now wearing his old traditional outfit he always wore.

“I will explain everything when Ruby Rose has returned to us.” Ozpin states.

“Just Ruby? What about Kassius?” Jaune questions sternfully, desperately wanting to punch the Headmaster for countless reasons. Pyrrha may be alive now, but he is still partially responsible for what she endured.

“How do we know he is still on our side? Things did not look particularly promising from your side.” Ozpin asks, and Jaune scoffs with amazement at how quickly he is throwing both Kassius and Hyde under the bus for what happened.

“It wasn’t him, or Hyde! Umbra did something to Hyde, he was not in control.” Jaune explains, remembering it perfectly well.

“And how can we be sure of that?” Ozpin asks him, but then the familiar voice of Kragen Nox appears behind him.

“He is telling the truth, Oz.” Kragen reveals and the Knight of Vengeance turns to the old Silver Eyed Wizard who stands there, with his robes around his body again. He approaches them with his cane in his grasp, and Oscar watches him approach cautiously. At the moment, he is the only one here that knows of what he did back on Menagerie.

Of how Gray, Vos and Serena died, and why.

“I saw the aftermath of their fight, Hyde seemed to come back at the end. He was freaked out and he ran away when I tried to calm him down. Even Cinder cannot find him with her semblance, he could have been captured.” Kragen explains, and they turn to see Cinder leant against the wall.

“If someone gets knocked out I cannot contact them.” Cinder states, worry is clear in her eye as she stands there, twiddling her fingers around. Pyrrha looks at her, and she looks away...she has conflicted thoughts of Cinder right now and so does Jaune. They both respect she is trying to atone but both remember her crimes.

That is not easy to forgive.

“Well...if he has been captured then we must continue without him.” Ozpin states, but Jaune cannot hold it back any longer and he yells with rage. He punches Ozpin straight in the jaw and the Headmaster recoils back with a grunt, staggering across the cobblestone and everyone gasps. Pyrrha grabs his hand and pulls him back, and Ozpin chuckles as he cracks his jaw and stares at Jaune.

“Okay...I might have deserved that.”

“Oh trust me I was holding back.” He snarls with anger, fury almost glowing in his blue eyes. Ozpin sighs as he paces back and forth.

“In all honesty? There are only four individuals that are of priority for this explanation. And only three of them are here right now.” Ozpin explains, looking at the trio.
Jaune

Pyrrha

And Oscar

All they are missing is Ruby. “I am sure that Kragen has informed you that the four of you are pivotal in the war that has begun?” Ozpin asks them, and Pyrrha looks at Oscar as he approaches.

“He brought it up.” Oscar answers as he walks over, his hazel eyes trained on the old Warrior, who knows why he is cautious of him.

“Then you must understand why I am holding back until she is here. The information I have is too important for me to risk repeating myself without her here. Umbra could be watching us at this very moment and none of us could know.” Ozpin explains, looking at the many trees that surround them, looking for the Crystal Beaked Crows.

None to be seen for now...

But that does not mean that they are not there.

None of them are thrilled to see him up and walking, especially after the fact that he only seemed to wake up after Taiyang died, and Oobleck, Roy and Nolan before him. But as they all focus their attention on the mysterious professor, Glynda looks to her scroll when she feels it vibrating in her pocket. She pulls it out and she flicks it open, seeing it is call from the Valerian Police Department.

With a curious expression, she answers the call since they rarely ever get calls from the police since they handle most small stuff. “Hello, this is Professor Glynda Goodwitch speaking.” Glynda announces, and they all look at her, listening to what she says to them.

But as the officer on the other end speaks to her, Jaune glares at Ozpin who stands tall. Still not saying a word, not until they locate Ruby.

“Arc?” Goodwitch questions, instantly getting Jaune’s attention off Ozpin, his eyes looking surprised, then Glynda looks at Jaune. “Um okay...I will be sure to send some Huntsmen and Huntresses there right away.” Glynda assures, as she ends the call and puts her scroll away.

On the edge of his seat, Jaune asks what rattles in his mind. “Professor? What is going on?” Jaune asks her.

“Do you have a twelve year old sister called Alyssa?” Glynda asks him, and his heart skips a beat when hearing her name. His youngest sister, she is the sweetest of them and now he is terrified to find out why they had to call Goodwitch about this.

“What’s happened to her?” Jaune fearfully asks.

“She’s fine, but she has been found in the streets after there was a fight. Apparently a bunch of armed thugs were found murdered, and she is saying that a Huntress saved her life. She seems certain it was Ruby.” Glynda explains, remembering what the officer had told her. All of them look very hopeful now, just hearing her name gets Oscar ready to locate her.

“Where is she?” Jaune asks, still concerned for his baby sister.

“She’s at a dust shop...it’s...the same one where I first met Ruby.” She points out...the irony as well.

“I know the place.” Jaune assures, since he has passed that place a couple times before.
“I’ll get Blake; she needs to be with us in finding her. Qrow...what about you?” Oscar asks him, but he sighs.

“I need to help my sister...I don’t think she’ll want to see me...especially after what happened to Tai.” He says with a deeply saddened voice, he desperately wants to come with them but after what happened, he is right. He needs to help Raven, and soon they need to track down the Witches in the Restless Marshlands all the way in Mistral.

“It’s okay, we can find her.” Oscar assures as he goes to the Amphitheatre to see Blake, and she is still sat with the Afflicted. Yang is the only one still asleep, passed out technically...she has been stabilised by the medication but it is not enough to save her. It just gives her some strength, but the Witches must know how to make a cure...somehow.

Blake is sat down beside Sun, caressing his blonde hair affectionately, and he is turning his back to his girlfriend. He has tears in his eyes...feeling so much guilt in his bones. “It wasn’t you fault, Sun...He said it himself.” Blake gently whispers to him – seems that he is taking it personally...thinking he is the reason that the four died.

Because he called Umbra a freak to try and lighten the mood as he always did. But she is right – Vir Nominis Umbra was always going to kill them, he just took the opportunity when he could to come back.

But Sun does not see it that way. “If I wasn’t a damn idiot...they would all be alive.” Sun sniffles, tearfully and it is heartbreaking to hear someone usually filled with joy to be crying. Neptune is shaken too; as is Weiss...she is shaking on the spot as she lays there. Still seeing the deaths of them in her head, the sounds of their deaths...the cries that echoed across the courtyard when he murdered Tai and Oobleck.

She kisses his cheek lovingly; pressing her cheek to his gently as she warmly holds him. “Nobody blames you; he was always going to do what he did.” Blake whispers. “I need you Sun...Please don’t let this break you...” She whispers, trying to hold her own tears back. He has always been so supportive for her, now it is the other way around. And it is so strange for her to see him so fragile...and not just physically. She can literally feel his muscles deteriorating from the lack of exercise compared to his normal daily workout routines.

Oscar closes his eyes then he sighs. “Blake?” He calls out, and her black feline ears perk upwards to the sound of his voice. Blake turns to him, seeing the young man standing there.

“Yes, Oscar?” She replies.

“We have a lead on where to find Ruby.” Oscar tells her and her eyes widen, even Sun turns his eyes slightly but refuses to show his face. Refuses to show the tears that stream down his cheeks as he sniffs.

“You do? How?” Blake asks with intense curiosity in her voice, Neptune and Weiss both look interested as well.

“The Police Department, they called Glynda. Jaune’s little sister claims that Ruby just saved her life from a bunch of criminals. All of them are dead though.” Oscar tells her, and Weiss looks increasingly concerned. She never did forget that moment back in Vacuo when Ruby snapped at her because she was hiding stuff from her. Or when she cut down Dew when Team N.D.G.O betrayed them.

Ruby’s Inner Demons are getting worse and worse, because the Ruby they used to know would
never callously kill somebody.

Even if they are enemies.

Blake turns and looks at Sun, and she affectionately holds his hand as she kisses him gently on the cheek again. “I’ll be back soon...hopefully with Ruby with us.” Blake assures with her loving voice. He nods ever so slightly, and she stands up, but before she leaves she adds one last statement.

“And Ozpin better have some answers for us.” She states, with narrowed amber feline eyes.

Jaune

The six of them took a couple of cars to the site of which the Officers reported, Blake and Oscar in one and Team J.N.P.R in the other, all searching for their very dear friend. The two cars decelerate as they approach the Dust Shop that Ruby Rose defended from Torchwick.

And now it has come to light that the man she saved was Umbra all along, just in hiding, most likely causing the events to happen in the first place. He let her go after Roman, which most likely lead to her meeting Glynda and got her to meet Ozpin...and started the whole chain of events. Vir Nominis Umbra was behind it all, and none of them ever expected the joke they had running for so long...to be their ultimate foe after all this time.

They both park up by the other police cars outside the shop, which now has an all new owner. With the Old Man Shopkeep no longer in sight...it sends chills down their spines to come back here. Jaune opens the door with Pyrrha beside him, looking around at the place with nervous expressions. On the way there, they were informed about Old Man Shopkeep, and Ozpin being the Knight of Vengeance.

But there is still so many more questions that Ozpin must answer...but at the moment...their priority is just to find and help their friend. Because that is what family does for their friends...they look out for each other.

They all have their weapons on them, and Nora looks at the shop with Ren beside her. “So this is where it all started?” Nora asks, looking at Blake as she walks past. She sighs, remembering when Ruby showed them where she first met Torchwick when they were looking into the Dust Robberies seven years ago.

“Yes.” Blake answers as she looks at Nora and she looks at her Faunus friend. Nora smiles kindly as she pats her friend’s shoulder.

“Come on, let’s go see what happened here.” Nora says, she does not even need to bring up the problems that Sun is suffering from. Because she knows that Blake is trying her best to help him get over it. Even though it was not his fault in any way, Umbra probably planned on that happening.

Jaune walks towards the yellow tape where the cops have sectioned off the shop, and one of the officers walks up to them. “Excuse me, civilian – you cannot enter here. Crime Scene.” The Officer states as he holds him back.

“We’re from Beacon Academy, Professor Glynda Goodwitch sent us. You asked for some Huntsman to check it out.” Jaune reminds, understanding their caution since they are just wearing casual clothing opposed to armour.
Easy to make that mistake.

Then her small and adorable voice gleefully cheers as he sees her running past the officers to him with a fluffy blanket wrapped round him. “Jaune!” Alyssa happily coos, running right into his arms. She is tiny, with a tiny blonde ponytail and blue eyes just like her brother. She wears – under the blanket – a pink hoodie with the Pumpkin Pete’s Bunny on the breast pocket. She also has her teddy bear constantly in her grasp, and Pyrrha smiles gently with happiness in her eyes. He catches her and he holds her close with relief, seeing with the officers is one of his other sisters.

Her name is Nylah Arc – she is the oldest of the seven sisters...or the six, since Skyler is dead. She has blonde hair too and it is much longer than Jaune’s, but not as long as Yang’s. In fact it is around the same length as Blake’s, curly as well. Her large blue eyes look to her brother, and her Commanding Officer allows her to go speak with him. She is a very beautiful young woman, and she immediately wraps her arms around her brother, relieved to see him. “Hey you two...” Jaune whispers softly as he holds them both close.

“I’ve missed you!” Alyssa squeaks happily, but her naivety does not notice the pain in the eyes of everyone here. But Nylah notices it practically immediately, seeing it in all their eyes.

“Are you okay little brother?” Nylah asks him, and he sighs, grunting as he feels a little pain in his stomach. It is natural for some pains to still be there even after Aura has fixed the damage, but it is like the pain someone feels in a bruise. He looks at Alyssa and then at Nylah...he cannot say fully with her baby sister there...and Nylah might not even believe him. So he just briefs it.

“We’ve suffered a heavy loss.” Jaune tells her, and her eyes widen and she closes her eyes sadly. She may not have known the people that died but she has the respect and care for her brother to feel his pain.

“I’m sorry, bro.” She gently says as she looks at him. Then her eyes drift to Pyrrha Nikos...she is filled with so many questions...but also knows that she would not understand. There is a reason why she chose being a Police Officer above being a Huntress.

“Hello...” Pyrrha sweetly says with a little wave, and then Nora and Ren both do the same. Blake and Oscar also wave too, they must have probably heard some stories over the years from Jaune.

“You’re her...” Nylah gasps with amazement...mostly from how beautiful she is...proud that her brother has found such a perfect partner. But also Jaune has told stories about her, clearly she must have heard about what happened in Beacon all those years ago.

But Jaune did not come here to catch up, perhaps that can be saved for when he goes to visit them again. He crouches down by his youngest sister and he sees the little scuff on her cheek, one that could have been given to her by the thugs. “What happened there, Alyssa? I got the call...did they hurt you?” He asks her with a concerned voice.

“I...um...” She nervously stammers, as she always has as well. “T-Th-They...” She stutters, revealing a little issue that his sister has. Alyssa has always suffered with a stutter since she was born, but that is always due to being stressed out in certain situations. Clearly the trauma is causing her stutter to activate again, until Pyrrha crouches down and she smiles as she reaches into her bag.

“You can have a candy bar.” She says as she hands it to her, clearly trying to cheer her up. “Do you like sweets?” She asks her with a beautiful smile, truly showing that Pyrrha is completely back now, not a shattered memory of whom she used to be. The mirror of Pyrrha Nikos is fully rebuilt and now she is the girl she was before Cinder had killed her again.
Like a fish, Alyssa is drawn to the candy bar. “Yes...” She nervously coos as she looks at the sweetie.

“Here you go.” She assures with a smile, placing it into the tiny hands of the child, her delicate smooth hands dwarfing Alyssa’s. Jaune smiles happily as he looks at Pyrrha, filled with gratitude that she did that.

“Thank you.” Alyssa adorably thanks with a shy smile as she hides in her blanket, nibbling on the chocolate.

“Pyrrha is my new girlfriend – do you like her?” He then covers his mouth jokingly as if Pyrrha cannot hear her. “You can say no if you like.” He jokes, in which Pyrrha gasps and sarcastically slaps his arm with a smile. The fact that they can put on these smiles for her – in light of what has happened – is impressive enough.

Alyssa giggles, and that is enough to warm the injured hearts of the Huntresses and Huntsmen. “Yes.” Alyssa replies with a happy smile, bouncing up and down with a giggle.

Jaune smiles, and he looks at her hand...noticing something in her clutches. His eyes widen when he realises what it is. “Alyssa...can you show me what that is in your hand, please?” He asks her softly and she smiles, doing so and she opens her palm...and it is what he thought it was.

It is Ruby’s Steel Rose Badge, the one inspired by her mothers.

“Alyssa – why do you have that badge?” Jaune asks her, and she stops nibbling on the sweet that Pyrrha gave her. Both of them look at her, not sternly, just curiously...which gives an answer.

“Huntress...” She shyly answers.

**Alyssa**

“What were you even doing out this late?” Jaune questions, his voice echoing through her mind as she remembers.

“I was having a sleepover – r-round a friend’s...” She answers with a stutter, that’s when her memory returns.

The little girl sleeps silently in a sleeping bag in the living room of her friend’s house, with five other kids the same age as her down there too. Two on each sofa, whereas she chose to sleep on the floor, her head resting on her comfy pillow she has. The bag warmly encases her, happily asleep for a few hours.

Until she and she alone was woken up by the sound of somebody screaming down the street. She opens her large blue eyes and she sits upright, rubbing her eyes with her hand, looking around. She can hear nearby yelling and thuds as well, thuds that sound like punches and kicks.

Curious as ever, she gets up as silently as she possibly not to wake her friends up. Not even so then she does not get caught, but just because she is so sweet that she does not want to annoy anybody or disturb them. She is as stealthy as a cat, as she moves towards the back door and she can still hear the shouting. So she sees the key still left in the door and she turns it as quietly as she possibly can.
Every parent’s worst nightmare.

And she is making it a reality for the Arcs, as she opens and closes the door so quietly that nobody would have even noticed. She sneaks her way down the street in the night, with the faint glow of the sun soon rising – she knows that the dawn is about to approach. But she keeps going so then she can investigate what is happening nearby, and why she can hear yelling.

She turns the corner and gasps, hiding behind a motorcycle parked when she sees the dust store. There are five armed thugs, but six motorcycles, meaning one of them is probably elsewhere right now. They all have weapons but only one of them has a gun, pointing it at the head as the dust shop owner. “Please! I don’t want any trouble! Just take the money!” He begs with terror in his voice.

“Oh no buddy boy, we want you to give us the money. Come on!” One of the thugs yells with anger as he punches the man in the face and drags him over the counter to kick him in the face. The man cries out with pain, on the ground with the other store worker that they have been beating on. He is unconscious from the beating that put on him and they all start kicking and punching him over and over again. Whilst one of them starts to take the money from his pockets and from the counter.

But as they punch, one of them notices Alyssa at their bike and he stops. “Whoa! Hold up!” He yells, and they all freeze and look in the same direction he is. And that is when they all saw her, staring straight into her blue eyes.

She gasps, trying to run but she falls, hitting her face against the floor which scuffed it as well. Her skin is scratched and slightly bleeds as she whimpers...she turns to see the men walking towards her. “Well, well...looks like we got ourselves a little spy.” The ringleader chuckles as he stares at the little girl. She shields her eyes with her hand with fear.

“P-Plea-Please do-do-don’t hurt me!” She stutters with terror, beginning to cry, but the men laugh at her impediment like the pathetic pieces of scum that they are.

“W-W-W-Wh-Wh-Why?” One of the men mimics, and they all start to do the same thing, all making sounds to make fun of her impediment. The more she sees it, the more she begins to cry as she hears the bullies she has to deal with at school do the same thing in her head. She sniffles and begins to cry.

But then...

There is a blood curdling screech that echoes from down the alley, the direction of which the sixth member wandered off to. The five men all spin around with bone chilled scared expressions on their faces. The echo passes through the city of Vale for a while until nothing, but silence remains. The Ringleader is the one to break that silence though, aiming his pistol in multiple directions whilst the others hold their melee weapons tight. “Marco! Marco where are you! Are you hurt?” He yells, screaming for his friend.

No response.

“Marco!” He yells again.

Still not response.

“Marco!” He repeats.

“Polo.” The female yet stern voice announces from above and they all gasp, looking up at the roof to see a young woman with a tactical suit of clothing on and a long red cape and hood over her head. Her single silver eye staring down at them all with blood dripping from Crescent Rose.
It is Ruby Rose.

She suddenly fires the rifle and shoots down towards them and immediately cuts the head of one of the thugs clean from his shoulders. A spray of crimson blood shatters into the sky, and Ruby has landed right before them, with gritted teeth on her face. The thug crumples to the floor and his head bounces and rolls across the floor as Ruby stands there.

One of the thugs yells as he runs and swings his baseball bat at her, but she ducks down and spirals round to smash her arm right across his face, spinning the scythe through her fingers as she growls with pure rage, slashing straight across the throat of another. So hard that she cut his machete clean in half in the impact, blood sprays like a fountain from his throat as he staggers back and falls. As another jumps onto her back she dashes away from him and he falls onto the ground, surrounded by red petals.

Ruby suddenly brings the curved blade down with all her might, stabbing straight through his spine and leaving Crescent Rose there, instantly killing him as well, adding to the pool of blood. “Stay there.” She snarls as she ducks down to deliver one powerful punch square in the centre of the Ringleader’s face, making him stagger and breaking his nose. With only two left for her to defeat, she draws her combat dagger that she has sheathed on her leg, and she slashes it across the hand of one of the thugs and she rolls across the back of another.

With an incredible display of skill, she manages to take the knife and carve it straight through his throat, and it his throat hisses with blood as she lands on both feet, only for her to push him to the ground with her boot. The Ringleader rushes towards her and he fires his pistol at her but Ruby ducks, before grabbing the hand that holds the gun and forcing him round, as she then drives the dagger right into his temple. She pushes him across small fighting zone and stabs the blade with his head impaled onto it against the wall, pinning him there and killing him instantly.

Ruby swiftly rips the blade from his head, panting so aggressively.

This is not the Ruby Rose they remember anymore.

Finally she turns to the thug she stabbed, who is still barely alive, choking on his own blood as she walks towards him. Taking out the rest of her anger – and it might not even be all of it – she rips Crescent Rose from his back and he tries to beg for mercy. “P-Please.” He chokes, only for Ruby to transform the scythe into its rifle form. She takes the stock of the rifle, and violently smashes it against the back of his head.

Over and over again.

“Die!”

She hits again.

“Die!”

Every crash sends a jolt through Alyssa as she watches the whole bloody ordeal. “Die!” She cries out, desperately letting her rage that she wants to direct at Vir Nominis Umbra out on these men.

The final one kills the man, putting him out of his misery, then she looks up at Alyssa, seeing her staring at the event that just happened. She sighs, standing tall again, but then she flinches with a snarl as she feels a slight pain in her side where Corsac stabbed her with his knife back on Menagerie. Residing pains still there even afterwards. She turns and looks round, staring at a crow that watches her from the tree with a growl.
But it is not one of Umbra’s, it is just a normal Crow.

Then Alyssa speaks again. “You...you s-saved m-me...” She stutters, her hands still shaking with terror from those men. She may be scared of Ruby because of what she did to them, but she also hopes for Ruby to have a reason. Nobody else would have done what she did. “Wh-Why?” She stutters.

Ruby snarls, sharply turning and glaring at Alyssa, her silver eye glowing fiercely as she stares at her. So harshly that Alyssa gasps fearfully, expecting Ruby to snap at her.

But she doesn’t...

She calms down and sighs, closing her eye, and Alyssa can see how tired Ruby is. Not just physically but mentally. “I guess I can only save people I don’t know...” She sighs, before looking at the young girl again. “Get out of here, girl. It ain’t safe in Vale at night.” She reminds, staring at her as she stands there.

As Alyssa listens to her voice...

It hits her and she gasps, with a smile.

But Ruby is not smiling.

She just stares at her with a cold and cynical expression – and she is only twenty one years old, and she has this sort of mindset now. Ruby just turns and walks away from her, but Alyssa stands back up. “Wait!” She calls, and Ruby stops. “You’re Ruby Rose! That Huntress from B-Beacon! A-Aren’t you?” She stammers, but with excitement this time, because from the stories that Jaune told her.

She became a fan of Ruby.

Ruby stands there, and she looks down at the badge she always wears, and takes it off, staring at her own reflection.

Her answer cuts deep.

“Not anymore.” She replies, dropping the rose onto the ground, and walking away from Alyssa, as a petal drops from behind her and it lands on the rose, before crumbling away.

Alyssa watches as she walks away...

She can see the pain she feels.

**Jaune**

He holds the rose in his hand...

Knowing that Ruby is getting worse. He looks at Oscar and can see the concern in his hazel coloured eyes and he looks at Jaune. “This is bad, Jaune.” Oscar states. “She would never kill callously like that, yes she kills people when in major combat situations. But only one had a gun, she would have incapacitated them.” Oscar explains to Jaune, and he knows that is the truth as well.
“Do you think that...Torchwick is starting to get worse for her after what happened?” Ren asks.

“I hope not.” Oscar stammers with fear for the girl he loves.

“She can’t be far.” Blake states as she looks around, seeing the body bags that hold the thugs that she killed.

Jaune stands up and he gently rubs the top of his sister’s head. “I’ll visit soon.” He assures, and she smiles, hugging his leg. Then he looks at Nylah.

“I’ll take her home, my boss has allowed me.” Nylah assures.

“Thank you.” Jaune says with a smile.

Nylah smiles back and she crouches down to her sister as he turns to the team of six he is a part of.

“We need to find her.”
The Traffickers

Yang

Darkness...

The cold air brushes across her face as she looks around, terrified wide lilac eyes, seeing the scorched trees that surround her. The crimson tained dying sky with the completely shattered moon above her head with clouds of thick smoke floating in the sky. Ceaseless screams of terror and agony echo around her as she stands there, and she knows where she is...she even says the words with a trembling voice.

“The Charred Forest...” She gasps, staring at the hundreds of skyscraper tall blackened trees around her. Snowing thick flakes of ash fall upon her and into her stunning blonde hair.

Her eyes gaze down to her arms, almost instinctively, and she can see she has both arms here. Her eyes widen and she gasps when seeing both arms again, until a faint snarling collection of whispers echoes through her mind. For some reason she is wearing her cream coloured dressing gown that she has for the morning...or if she needs to recover from a nightmare. The fluffy gown seems to protect her frail body from nothing in this chilling landscape. Her hair has also been curled slightly as well, making her long beautiful blonde hair wavy. She raises her head slowly to see something in the distance.

A dark entity walking away from her and passing by a destroyed tree.

Curiosity takes the place of fear, so the Sunny Little Dragon begins to follow the entity she just witnessed disappear from her very eyes. The ground is so soft, the soil contaminated with the ashes of countless realms and universes that have been destroyed by him. The screams that make up this realm are so endless, overlapping each other so much, that she cannot even decipher the words that they scream. Distant howls and roars of Grimm echo endlessly, most of the roars are unlike anything she has ever heard.

Like something straight out of hell, titanic monsters ready to be unleashed on their world when Vir Nominis Umbra decrees it to happen.

The land is utterly haunting, devoid of colour and beauty, only replaced with destruction and chaos. But she continues to follow that mysterious entity through the forest, unaware that she is starting to have very similar nightmares that Ruby has had in the past. It is like a nightmare that spreads like a disease. “Yang...” The heartbreakingly familiar voice of Taiyang speaks with a whispering voice into her ear.

She flinches and spins around, finding nothing there. Just the endless expanse of the Charred Forest before her very eyes. “Daddy?” She mutters with fear, her voice breaking at the very mention of his name...for the poor girl still remembers the sight of her father being impaled by a javelin of shadows.

“Tell me Yang...why did you want to become a Huntress?” Oobleck’s distant voice echoes, faint memories pulsating through her mind of the people that they have lost. She continues down this path as she follows the entity, and she continues to walk her eyes are set on a bench. A cloud of ash rises from the ground, forming the shape of young Yang and younger Ruby.
Ruby must have only been five years old here, dancing and playing with her sister. She can still remember this memory, it was when Patch had heavy snowfall one time and it was one of their favourite memories. Playing in all that snow was like a dream for the tiny little Huntresses, whilst Taiyang watched with a smile on his face. With the still alive Summer Rose beside him – only a few weeks before she would die at the hands of Death.

The giggles of both of them enter her memory and it hurts her tender heart, seeing Ruby with two eyes – with a smile on her face. Little does she know how much she has fallen now, taking all her rage out on random criminals that she comes across. Yang continues away from that memory, leaving it behind and the ash memories float away, losing form and carried off in the winds of memory.

Turning the corner on this path of ash and destroyed life, she sees the dark entity standing there with its hands clasped together. A pair of glowing red eyes focused on her, but when she blinks...she gasps as it has changed its form. Now it has taken the form of Adam Taurus again, walking towards her with one hand holding the hilt of Wilt. She gasps as she backs up, just like her nightmare she had when she was still at Patch.

And just like that nightmare, she backs up and looks at her arms, finding that they are now loaded with Ember Celica. She stares at them, it has been a long time since she has seen both of them, ever since the other was abandoned after she lost her arm. But she grits her teeth and musters her rage as her lilac eyes erupt into flaming red irises. She screams with rage, firing the two Gauntlets at Adam as he walks towards her. He does not stop and the shells just pass straight through his ghostly form, only shimmering as they make contact.

Just like before.

She backs up...and an absolutely terrible, excruciating level of pain rushes through her arm, so bad that she cries out and falls to her knee. She looks down with tears in her eyes, to see that her arm is missing now and Ember Celica is gone. She gasps as she stares at the stump where her arm used to be.

Even now...

It still haunts her.

But she has no time to mourn the loss of her arm, when she sees the boots stop right in front of her. She gasps, seeing they are no longer the boots that belong to Adam, so she lifts her head to see who it is. She gasps – for it is him.

The Soothsayer.

Vir Nominis Umbra.

The evil man smirks sinisterly as he stares down at her with a faint tint of red behind those fake brown irises of his. It was always him that gave her nightmares, even that time when she had it on Patch – it was Umbra even then. Messing with her mind in the disguised form of Adam Taurus, knowing that it was make her suffer. “No matter how hard you try, you are just like your sister. A failure – who will never be able to protect the people you love.” Vir Nominis Umbra scorns with a smile on his face.

He sharply spins around and he launches a Javelin of darkness across the domain and Yang screams out with horror as she sees Taiyang on his knees. It plunges deep through his ribcage and he holds back from the impact. Yang reaches out to her father with a wail of heartbreak, desperately trying to
save him but she cannot even get to him. Vir Nominis Umbra crouches down beside the broken girl with a grin on his face as he stares at her. “Why continue to fight, sweet beauty? You cannot stop the coming annihilation.” He states with a cold and cruel voice, smiling constantly as he caresses her cheek.

She swings her fist at him but it accomplishes absolutely nothing, just distorts his form. “Leave us alone...” She cries on her knees, but then she looks up to see something utterly soul crushing. Seeing Kassius lying on the ground, with his own sword rammed straight through his chest. Dead with his blood trickling across the ground and touching her hands. She screams with terror, totally freaked out from that...the man she loves uncontrollably...seeing him dead like that...

But she shakes it off, knowing that Vir Nominis Umbra is just playing with her mind. “Get out of my mind!” She screams, pressing her hands to her ears, and he looks down at her with a grin. “Fight it all you want...you will not survive.” He states, as he suddenly forms a sword and he rams it straight through her heard, and Yang gasps with shock as he pushes her across the floor with the blade sticking out her spine. Blood drips from the blade as she grabs his arm, desperately wanting to survive.

“P-Please...” She stammers.

But he just smirks. “Everything ends, my dear. Tis the natural order of things.” He states, as he forms a second blade with his other hand and he slashes it at her throat.

Yang lets out a scream of terror as she wakes up from her terrible nightmare, still feeling that burning pain of feeling a blade being stabbed straight through her heart like that. Still feeling the cold breeze of that dead Realm, covered in the ashes of every soul he has ever claimed.

The sound of her scream gets the attention of Penny and the other Afflicted. Sun has managed to hide his grief by simply wiping the tears away. He remains in his bed though, looking at his friend with concern in his blue eyes. Penny runs up to Yang’s side, relieved to see her awake again, but also worried about whatever nightmare that she just experienced. “Yang...are you okay?” Penny asks her as she checks her temperature with her hand. She is still burning up due to the fever she has contracted.

Just like the others, the medication is starting to stop nothing, just keeps the pain at bay for some time. But the Horridus Morbus pathogen is still flowing through her with ease. Penny then turns her wrist and she gasps when she sees that some of her veins are slightly discoloured, turning black from the plague. And that is not the only concern, her skin around her wrist is darkening too, and there could be more signs underneath her clothing as well. The plague seems to get everywhere in her body.

The blonde haired Huntress stammers as she begins to recover from her nightmare, pressing her hands to her head. “Y-Yeah...just a nightmare.” She stammers, sniffling as she sits there. Weiss looks over at her close friend, coughing as she feels her lungs burning slightly. Qrow opens the doors with his aura up to not contract Horridus Morbus and he looks at Yang. He too is relieved to see her awake.

“Oh thank the gods...you’re awake.” He sighs as he walks towards her, and he immediately wraps his arms around her affectionately. He hugs his niece lovingly, since he is still filled with such grief for the loss of someone he held so close. Like a brother, and another like a friend.
“Hey...Uncle Qrow...” She sniffs, just as heartbroken as her Uncle, the death of her father did cause her to pass out after all. Not just the plague eating away at her body as time kept passing by.

“I was gonna as how you’re feeling...but I think we all know.” He sighs as he stands there with his head held low, still thinking of the death of Taiyang. Victory has never felt further away than it does right now. Yang is barely able to take a breath without feeling that urge to cry, like there is a lump of emotionally scarring energy building within her soul.

“Y-Yeah...” She stammers, brushing the tears from her cheek, and Qrow sighs as he sits down on the edge of her bed. Penny looks at Qrow and she looks just as hurt.

“I was gonna tell Penny and the others but since you’re awake I guess I can tell you in person.” Qrow says to her.

“What are you talking about, Uncle Qrow?” Yang asks with her voice on the edge of breaking down into tears.

“Kragen, Yenna, Architect and I – we are going to track down the Witches in the Restless Marshlands. We went to them recently about the Spring Maiden...they are pit best bet in making a cure for whatever this is.” Qrow explains to her, since those Witches are now their only hope. Even if they cannot be completely trusted.

“What about Mom?” She asks, fully expecting that she would be one of the people going with him. Qrow sighs, scratching the back of his neck.

“She wants to stay here with you...with Tai still on our minds...she just wants to be here for you.” Qrow says, and Yang thinks on that topic...and a name comes to her head. Someone she loves with all her heart is not here right now and she does not know where he is, or where Ruby is.

“Where’s Ruby and Kas? I need to see them.” She sniffs, then Qrow looks at Penny – since that is a troubling topic. Yang can see the look on their faces and dread fills her body, because she was unconscious during the Battle against Vir Nominis Umbra and she has no idea that Ozpin is back either. “No...They can’t be...” She stammers with horror, but Penny calms her down by gently laying her back down on the bed.

“Ssh-Ssh, it’s okay. They’re not dead...well we don’t know...it’s kinda complicated.” Penny stammers as she looks at Qrow, she just nods her head and he nods to her. Qrow walks away from them as Penny takes the responsibility of telling Yang about what happened when she passed out.

“Penny...what’s going on? Where are they?” She asks with fear in her voice.

“We’re not sure, Ruby took off after it all ended. Umbra messed with her head...a lot of things happened after you collapsed, Yang.” Penny states, thinking of that battle that took place.

“What do you mean?” She asks.

“Ozpin woke up – after Taiyang died.” Penny reveals and Yang’s eyes widen with complete and utter disbelief. “He’s a Knight of Grimm, Yang – he is Vengeance, the one that Kragen freed from his Curse? It seems that the Knight learned a few things afterwards. He challenged Umbra and they started fighting...nearly destroyed the school in the process.” Penny explains to Yang – a good thing that they have Glynda here to help repair the damage done to the school. But the scars can be seen in faint cracks in the ceiling when both Umbra and Ozpin came crashing straight through it.

“He’s...one of them?” Yang stammers with shock, and Penny nods her head.
“Yes...he seems to be on our side but he is not saying anything until Ruby is back.” Penny explains, even she looks angry at how Ozpin is acting right now. But then the mention of her sister brings her to the original topic again.

“Penny...where are they?” She asks.

“We aren’t sure, Yang.” She repeats. “Team J.N.P.R, Oscar and Blake are currently searching for Ruby in Vale. They have some leads, hopefully they can convince her to come back...but she doesn’t seem to be doing well.” Penny explains, both her and Yang – and the others are all thinking about Ruby’s mental issues that she is suffering from at the moment with Torchwick flooding her mind.

“And...Kas?” She stammers, and Penny scratches the back of her neck.

“We don’t know – he went with Pyrrha and Jaune to find you and the others some medication to keep the infection at bay for a little while longer. But Jaune and Pyrrha said that Hyde snapped from something – something to do with Merlot. That he just went crazy over something, so bad that even Hyde didn’t even have control.” Penny explains, and Yang looks so worried for the man she loves. “He attacked Pyrrha and Jaune...nearly killed them – but Hyde snapped out of it after he stabbed Jaune.”

“Are they alive?” She asks.

“Yes, just carrying new scars now.” Penny assures.

“Then...what happened next?” Yang stammers fearfully.

“Kragen showed up and tried to calm Hyde down, but he was agitated. He turned and he fled from Beacon...but we fear he has been captured by someone. He is knocked out maybe or something...Cinder wants to try again soon. But we don’t have a clue of where he could be right now.” Penny reveals and Yang begins to cry...

All she wanted to do was hug Kassius...and even he is not here right now. “Why do we always end up being separated?” She questions with a crying voice, and Penny looks at her with a gentle expression.

“What do you mean?” Penny asks and Yang sighs, as she exhales and holds her tears back as best she can.

“I knew Kas for a long time, we were friends before we ever started to...fall for each other.” Yang explains, and Penny nods her head with understanding. It is natural for that to happen, when kids are younger they do not really have those emotions until they get older.

“Didn’t you and he have a relationship before?” Penny inquires.

Yang sighs, and nods her head. “Yes. I was only fifteen but he was seventeen – well it wasn’t really a relationship per-say. We were just dating at the time...but...well...I’ll tell you the whole story.” She sighs as she sits up and begins to tell the tale of their past.

Nine Years ago...

The fifteen year old girl, almost sixteen at this point, is sat down in a chair with her blonde hair in a ponytail. The young girl has her arms crossed with a frowning little face, her eyebrows furrowed and
eyes staring at her knees. “Yang.” The voice of a teacher speaks, trying to get her attention but she never lifts her head. Yang has a little bruise on her cheek from a fight that she got into over something. Then the teacher touches Yang’s chin with her finger to lift her head so then she looks at her. “Yang.” She repeats, stern this time, but Yang pulls her head away and looks away from the teacher again.

The teacher lets out a huff as she looks down at her. “What are we gonna do with you? This is the third fight you’ve had in the last week. I’m sick of giving this lecture and I’m sure you’re sick of hearing them.” The teacher states as she looks down at her, but Yang just shakes her head, looking at her with just her eyes, not even turning her head.

“I don’t care.” Yang replies, narrowing her eyes as she stares straight at the teacher. The Teacher nods her head slightly as she exhales through her nose.

“Yes that does seem to be the crux of your problem.” She sighs as she walks away from Yang and to the window, looking out at the school. The sun is beginning to set, and it is in the middle of winter with ice on the roads and frost forming on the rooftops.

“Why am I the one being punished?” Yang questions, looking at the question with frustration.

“Why? You punched Jack in the face and broke his nose.” The teacher reminds, but Yang scoffs. “He was picking on my little sister.” Yang states, meaning Ruby must not be in detention like she is.

“I told Ruby to go to lunch break, you two only have yourselves to blame.” The teacher states, only seeming to anger Yang more and more.

What kind of logic is that? The kids who are being bullied are the ones that should deserve detention for defending themselves? Or her big sister protecting her?

“How was it her fault? He was pushing her calling her mean names.” Yang defends with angrier eyes, but the teacher just seems insistent on being against Yang and Ruby for some reason.

“Does that give you the right to start throwing punches at a boy two years younger than you?” The teacher grills, but Yang sighs as she looks down at the floor. Then something comes to her mind, a memory of something that the boy called Jack said. Something that just seems to hurt her soul even more as she thinks about it.

“It wasn’t just about my sister.” She confesses, and the teacher turns, looking at her. She walks over to Yang and looks down at her.

“What was it then?” The teacher inquires, Yang looks up at her, but refuses to tell her. Perhaps just because she feels it is none of her business.

“Nothing – you wouldn’t understand.” Yang states, but the teacher seems to try to get this information out of her further.

“Try me.” She challenges.

“I said no.” Yang starkly repeats, staring straight into the eyes of the teacher. The teacher sighs as she turns to walk away from her, but before she leaves the room she stops and looks back at Yang.

“No matter what we try – you seem insistent on following the same sad road as that boy. And your father, your uncle, and your mother.” She states, before shaking her head with disappointment.

“What a waste.” She sighs, walking away from Yang and closing the door behind her.
cut deep for Yang, the teachers here have never liked that Yang has been going to Signal Academy – these people are not fans of the Huntsmen Academies.

Yang fully expects to remain here at the school for another hour, for her detention lasts three hours of staying at this hellhole of a school. She twiddles with her fingers as she huffs and puff through her nose, until the sound of her scroll begins to beep on the table where the teacher had left it. Curious as ever, she gets up and sees there is a message on the scroll of hers.

*Look out the window*

She does so and she searches for whatever the message was hinting at, then her eyes widen as she gasps with awe. She can see a young man with a black hoodie and his arm waving to her. His blue eyes looking at her from all the way over there. She gasps with a big smile on her face as she presses her hands against the windowsill. “Kas!” She squeaks with joy.

His eyes still blue due to his little disguise he used after he survived the Terror Bird attack, to hide his relation to Cinder the whole time. She looks back at the door and she cannot hear the teacher anywhere near, so she takes the chance and she slides the window open, and vaults over it to get onto the rooftop. “Okay, Yang...let’s do this.” She sighs as she makes her way across the tiles that have been intricately placed across it. Every step that she takes is extremely slippery, making her gasp and have to right her balance as she moves.

Her scroll beeps again and she checks it, seeing another message from Kassius. “Careful, it’s icy.” He warns, making her roll her eyes and smile.

“You don’t say.” She scoffs as she walks across the rooftops, trying to not disturb some of the other students that are also stuck in detention right now. Some are deserving and some are not, just like her. She gets to a point where she must climb so she jumps up and catches onto the top of the brickwork of the building and hauls her much lighter body up. Placing each foot onto a section of brickwork that perfectly helps her get up the side of the wall. As soon as she gets up, she gasps as she feels the floor become extremely slippery due to the frost that has formed from the brittle temperatures.

She struggles as she slips down the tiles, and she reaches with her hand and catches onto a pipe, stopping her from falling off the edge and sending bits of moss and dirt falling off the edge and into the courtyard below. Yang grunts as she hauls herself back up and she looks around.

“No way across...except for the sky bridge. Meaning I need to get back inside – great.” She sighs, as she scales the roof of the building towards a window. She fits her fingers underneath the window and she pulls upwards with all her might, and she manages to open it. The window rises up and locks into place, remaining open so then she can get inside. The warmth is welcoming compared to the cold temperatures outside, and she sneaks along. Keeping her body close to the floor as she approaches the sky bridge.

But as soon as she does, she sees that teacher walking out of a classroom to see the Headmaster of the school walking out from the sky bridge.

*Good thing I didn’t try and rush the sky bridge.*

The teacher turns when the Headmaster greets her. “Good evening Caitlin.” The Headteacher greets with the respectful bow of his head, but the teacher stops him.

“Connor, did you hear about Xiao Long?” Caitlin asks him, and he sighs.
“I did – she protected her sister from Jack, didn’t she?” Connor presumes as he picks up a file collection and walks towards another room to go over them.

“Yes, but Jack never hit Ruby. I watched Yang and she just started punching him.” Caitlin describes and Yang’s eyes widen with disgust and disbelief.

_That wasn’t what happened! He pushed her on the floor and she scuffed her face! You lying bitch._

But it seems that the Headmaster is not as strict and biased as some of the other teachers in this school. “Well, Miss Xiao Long does not strike me as someone who would not attack like that for any reason. I believe Jack probably had it coming, he has always seemed to pick on Ruby because she is sweet.” Connor states as he walks towards the classroom.

“Why do you keep avoiding the truth? Children who go to Signal more than they do here are prone to be more violent.” Caitlin states, sounding more ungrateful for the Huntsmen Academies than ever before. Headmaster Connor sighs as he turns to Caitlin.

“What do you want me to do?” He asks her.

“You know my opinion on the matter.” Caitlin states with the shrug of her shoulders, but Connor laughs it off.

“No, I am not giving up on the two girls like we did with Kassius.” He states.

“The three of them are just as bad as each other! Their father really expected that they could handle this school along with Signal so then they could get a better education. But the damned Combat School is turning them into thugs just as it did that boy.” Caitlin explains to him, and Yang just clenches her hand into a fist with disgust.

The school – Golden Rose Education – is a normal school for children who do not want to become Huntsmen or Huntresses. Since Signal Academy allows students to come whenever they feel they are able to, Taiyang thought it be best to send the three of them to both schools so then they can get a better education. But many teachers here despise the combat schools, and as Caitlin stated, they think they turn children into thugs.

Kassius would get into fights all the time at school to protect both Yang and Ruby, sometimes he would lose – but not very often. Because he refuses to stay down in a fight. Connor stops and he turns to her, with a sigh. “Look, I’ll talk to them both tomorrow. Okay?” He says to her and Caitlin sighs.

“Goodnight, Connor.” She says, and he smiles.

“Goodnight, Caitlin.” He returns, closing the door as he heads towards the door on the right which leads to the stairs and to the car park. Yang waits for the perfect opportunity, with Connor out the building she just needs to wait for Caitlin to be out of sight. The teacher wanders around as she picks up some text books that the children were reading today and she takes them into another room, opening and closing the door behind her.

_Now’s my chance!_

Yang rises from behind the wall and she moves quickly into the room, rolling into a crouch to avoid detection when Caitlin walks into the room again to pick up the rest of the books. Completely unaware that Yang is right there. She picks up the books, and she continues on her way, leaving the room that Yang is in. She gets up and runs towards the doors and she carefully opens them, making her way onto the sky bridge that was her target the whole time.
Remaining low to the ground, she quickly walks across the bridge and further through the school, searching for a way round to where she saw Kassius at. She opens the door and she looks around, she can hear some kids muttering who are here on detention as well. She peers into one room and there is nobody inside. So she walks inside of the classroom and uses its window to her advantage. She opens the window and she climbs out of the building, vaulting over and climbing up the side of the wall.

She learned how to master climbing from some of the lessons that both her father taught her and what some of the teachers taught her in Signal Academy. She reaches up and grabs onto a slightly pushed out brick and uses it to haul her body upwards, placing her feet smartly on individual points. She finally gets back onto the roof, now all she needs to do is follow the roof to the building where she saw Kassius waving at her from.

Carefully jogging across the rooftop to avoid slipping, a breeze of icy cold air rushes right up her back and she gasps from how cold it was. “Ooh! That was cold!” She squeaks, moving further and further towards where Kassius last was. She turns right where the building turns at a sharp angle, and she jumps across the little gap between the two buildings. She lands perfectly, rolling the rest of the energy from the landing off and she looks around, trying to find where he is.

But she cannot see him.

“Kas?” She mutters as she looks for him, until a pair of arms suddenly wrap round her and swing her around with a familiar laugh.

“Ha-ha! How’re you gonna be a Huntress if a loud idiot like me can sneak up on ya?” He jokes as he releases her, and she giggles, shaking her head.

“Alright.” She sighs as she looks at him with a smile.

“Good to see you again, firecracker.” Kassius chuckles, but then his jokey personality shifts as soon as he sees the bruise on Yang’s cheek – just as he did when he saw Yang’s cybernetic arm after their reunion at the Diner. “Wait...what is this?” He asks her as he points at the bruise on her cheek and she sighs. “Seriously? Another fight?” He questions.

“It was nothing.” She brushes off, but Kassius raises his eyebrow.

“Yeah but you promised me and your dad you’d stop getting in so much trouble all the time.” Kassius states as he stands there, and she sighs with frustration.

“He was bullying Ruby.” She states, and Kassius immediately realises why she did it.

“Ah...protective older sister instincts kicking in, huh?” He presumes, kinda knowing what that feels like with Cinder.

“Yeah – he kept saying that my mom abandoned us because we mean nothing to her and Summer is dead because we were too much hassle.” Yang recites, her voice breaking at the mere mention of Summer after everything that happened.

“Yeah well you know the saying – do as I say, not as I do, huh?” He shrugs as he looks at her.
Kassius then takes off his stetson and fits it onto Yang’s head and she grunts from how much of her head it takes up. “Hold onto this for me, huh?” He asks her, patting her shoulder. “Now let’s get you out of this shithole.” He says as he walks towards the door that he propped open.

Yang takes off the hat and follows him, she has never really been a big fan of hats – ruins her blonde hair that she loves so much. The two of them walk down the stairs towards the outer gate that leads to the car park. Kassius opens the door and lets her go through – a gentleman through and through. She throws his hat to him and he gasps. “Not a fan of hats?” He asks her.

“Nah, makes my hair go crazy.” Yang states, making Kassius chuckle as he walks with her. He has always been taller than her, and Yang has always been quite a tall girl. She has been five foot nine since she was twelve, and thus school dances were always awkward with kids that were shorter than her. But luckily she didn’t have to worry about that, since it was always either Kassius or Ruby.

The couple walk round the corner and Kassius points at something. “Check it out.” He says and Yang gasps, seeing a motorcycle parked in the corner. It is not Bumblebee but it is the motorcycle that Kassius always rides, the black bike with a growling engine.

“Wow, you finally fixed it up.” She gasps.

Kassius and Yang both found this bike when looking for parts in a scrap yard when building Bumblebee, since they worked on it together. But this is something he has been working on for himself in the meantime. “Uh-Huh, finally got it finished today. Wanna go take a ride? Pick up Ruby and see a movie or something?” He asks, desperately trying to get her to do something with him.

That’s when she catches on, looking at him with suspicious eyes and he pauses. “What?” He asks.

“I know you Kassius – and I know you’d only try and do something like this...when you’re trying to make up for something. Like that time we couldn’t go on that school trip.” She describes, and the school trip she mentioned happened a year or two ago. Ruby and Yang were so excited to go on a school trip with Kassius to Mistral. But when the school decided to cancel the trip since not enough students signed up, he took them to see movies, and had fun instead.

All to make up for that.

Kassius looks at her and he sighs, scratching the back of his neck awkwardly. “Damn you really are perceptive, aren’t you?” He states with a chuckle, then he sighs, lowering his head. “Okay...”

He presses his hands against the seat of his motorcycle, exhaling heavily through his nostrils. “Y’know I signed up to join the Huntsmen Academies?” He asks her.

“Yeah...” She agrees, remembering it well.

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“Yeah...well I didn’t get accepted into Beacon – I was accepted into Haven. In Mistral.” He confesses, and the reaction from Yang is enough to hurt. Her eyes widened and he could feel how saddened she is by this news. The two of them had only started to develop feelings for each other, it may have been young love – but it was still love. “I’m sorry, Yang.” He sadly apologises, but Yang wipes a tear away from her cheek and shakes her head.

“No...don’t be. Who knows maybe we could end up there as well when we sign up...” Yang suggests as she looks at him, holding her arm as she looks at the floor. Kassius stands tall and walks over to her, wrapping his arms around her kindly and she does the same.

“Doesn’t mean we won’t see each other again, Yang. I’m sure I’ll get wrapped up in your crazy adventures one day.” He says – and oh boy is he right.
Yang smiles. “I hope so...I’ll miss you. You’re the only one who finds my puns funny.” She jokes, making him chuckle.

“That will be the dullest part of Mistral, I bet.” He says with a chuckle as he approaches the bike. “So...instead of moping on how much time we have left...let’s have some fun, huh? Shall we go get Rubes?” He asks her.

Yang smiles.

“Yeah.” She agrees as she nods her head.

Kassius smiles too...

And it was at that moment.

That his life would change forever.

**Kassius**

Somewhere in Vacuo...somehow...

Kassius stands with a few bruises and scuffs on his face with his shirt off that exposes the scars he has collected over the years, including the slashes from the Grimm Terror Bird that nearly killed him years ago. He has the same cocky grin on his face as he always had, just as a fist smashes right into his face and knocks him back. Kassius grunts as he staggers and presses his hands against a rock in the middle of the bone dry desert.

He remains on one knee as his foe holds his arms out, cheering to the others. “Oh yeah! Check me out boys!” He laughs maniacally, clearly one of the Traffickers and not one of the slaves who have their wrists bound by rope and connected to each other. The Leader of the Traffickers – a man named Kelham – is sat on a rock with a blade that looks very similar to the one that Raven uses. It would make sense of how they manages to get to Vacuo so fast, by using the teleportation ability that those red blades have. Must have used it to get out of Vale fast, but not straight to their base. They must know that the Knights Bannermen are tracking teleportation across Remnant. Especially from all the Bandits with their eyes peeled, for any signs of Bannerman activity in the area.

Kassius chuckles as he wipes the blood from his lip, rising back up with both fists clenched together. “Gonna have to hit harder than that, pal.” He challenges the Bandit, standing tall.

“Come on then, handsome boy!” The Bandit challenges again with his fists raised, bouncing on his toes, whereas Kassius doesn’t.

“Let’s go.” Kassius replies, pacing back and forth on the baking hot sand. They have robbed him of his clothes and only leave him with some cloth trousers, and that is it. Just like the rest of the prisoners, except the women at least have bras on but have skirts on instead of trousers. Kassius paces back and forth, using his hand-to-hand combat training to good use right now. The Bandit rushes forward and swings his fist at him, but Kassius backs up and dodges it.

He immediately returns the favour with one extremely hard punch straight to the Bandit’s jaw, knocking him back, and Kassius quickly kicks him in the side afterwards. The Bandit staggers across
the ground with an aggressive grunt, pressing his hand to his side as he gets back up. He snarls with anger, and foolishly goes for a second punch but Kassius blocks with his cybernetic arm. He punches the metal and he screams out with agony, nearly breaking his wrist. The metal twangs from the impact of his fist and the Huntsman immediately grabs him and throws him against the ground.

He gets on top of him and he smashes his fist into the Bandit’s face over and over again. But then the Bandit kicks him in his six-pack to knock him off, rolling backwards and back onto his feet. He paces back and forth as he keeps his fists raised, whilst Kassius doesn’t need to, he can move fast without having to keep his guard up. “Ha-ha! Looks like you’ve had a fair few fights with those scars, huh?” He questions as he points at him.

“I’ve had my fair share our bouts.” He assures, still remembering how agonising it felt as those talons from the Terror Bird dragged across his body and nearly started eating him. The Bandit charges at him and he knees Kassius in the gut and he smashes his elbow down into the back of his neck. Kassius snarls with anger, grabbing him and he sprints with the Bandit in his grasp. He smashes the Bandit into the side of the Carriage that has some loot and some slaves too. The carriage rocks from the impact and the Bandit punches Kassius in the head over and over again.

But having little to no effect on his body. Until he cheats, grabbing a whiskey bottle and smashing it against the side of Kassius’ head. The Huntsman yells with anger and pain, feeling a tiny shard of glass punctured into his skin. He rips it out and drops it onto the floor as the cheating Bandit paces back and forth. “Come on!” He challenges with a laugh. “Winner takes the girls!” He laughs, and Kassius scoffs.

“Already got one waiting for me when I break out of this place, buddy.” Kassius assures.

“Break out? Ha! You ain’t getting outta here!” He laughs.

“Try me.” Kassius replies, as he counters the attack from the Bandit, spinning round and smashing his wrist round across his head to make him stagger. But then the Bandit runs and kicks him in the chest, knocking him into the crowd of Bandits watching. One of them grabs onto him like a zombie and Kassius snarls with annoyance, smashing his elbow against the Bandit holding him. “Hey! Asshole, let go of me!” He yells as he smashes his elbow against him over and over again. The Bandit pushes him towards the one he is fighting and he gets punched right in the nose, so hard it knocks him over.

“I’m gonna kick your ass!” The Bandit laughs as he punches him in the face over and over again. The sand blows up into the side of Kassius’ face, then the Bandit takes both hands and forces his head down into the ground, trying to break his neck.

“Get. Off. Of.” Kassius snarls...then his eyes ignite and he snarls as his voice transforms into the demonic voice of Mr Hyde. “Me!” Hyde roars, immediately smashing his fist right up the jaw of the Bandit, throwing him off his body. Kassius rises back up, no longer under Hyde’s control, only a moment of anger right there. He forces his knees against the shirtless Bandit’s tattooed chest and he snarls at him. “Alright – my turn.” He snarls, throwing fist after fist into the Bandit’s face, breaking his nose and snapping a tooth with every punch delivered.

He goes to do it again, until the metal arm of the same Bandit that took his hat grabs his arm. “Enough!” The Bandit yells.

“Aw come on, Thorn! Lemme finish him!” Trying to get free from Thorn’s grasp, who still has his stetson on his head.

Then the bloodied and bruised Bandit spits at Kassius’ feet. “I’ll track down that girl of yours and
beat her to death! I’ll make her mine!” He yells, trying to set Kassius off, but he just scoffs.

“Yeah? Good luck with that, she has handled worse assholes than you.” He assures, finding it hilarious to imagine what Yang would do to him if he even dared touch her hair. But then Kelham comes down and he ends the fight, that he was watching.

“Alright, enough fighting. Let’s keep moving. Tie him back up with the rest and let’s get back on the move!” Kelham orders, yelling at Thorn.

Thorn nods as he pulls Kassius back towards the group of Slaves bound together with Rope. He gets him there and some bandits start tying up his wrists to the others so then they can march them back to their base. “You’re not gonna see your girl again.” He promises.

“We’ll see – and besides – I can promise you one thing.” He says.

“Oh yeah? What’s that?” Thorn asks.

He leans over to his ear with a smirk. “I’m getting my hat back.” He assures with a scoff, and Thorn scowls at him, and takes his Ball Whip and slashes it against his back with force. Kassius grunts as it breaks the skin, feeling the hot pain down his back that his aura manages to heal. However they have implants attached to all the slaves which null down their aura so then they cannot try anything.

“Get moving!” Kelham bellows as he lashes one of the women, making her cry out with pain. The three herds of slaves begin marching across the desert.

No water.

No food.

To get to wherever their base is.

And Kassius is in the middle of all of it.

And only two things are on his mind.

Yang.

And that damn hat.
Across the Desert

Oscar

Walking through the city of Vale, Team J.N.P.R, Blake and Oscar continue down the trail to find Ruby before anything worse can possibly happen. He keeps his hands to his side, close to Traveller’s Atrocity, just in case. Vir Nominis Umbra left an impression, a scar that does not seem to be willing to go away any time soon. But the young hazel eyed Time Traveller keeps those emotions at bay as best as he possibly can, focusing on finding the girl he loves.

But as he walks with Blake, he can see that something is shaking her up. Obviously it must surround their true enemy and what he is capable of, so he would not be surprised if it has something to do with that god-awful Soothsayer. “Blake? How are you...holding up?” He asks her, nervously since he can tell that nobody is holding up very well after seeing how Umbra slaughtered Oobleck right in front of them. Smashing his head in with a steel claw hammer was brutal even by his standards.

Blake’s ears are folded downwards, sadly as she thinks on the events that have lead up to this moment. Being framed for the death of Sienna Khan to destabilise the White Fang, Adam’s death, and now the execution of Oobleck, Taiyang and the remaining survivors of Team B.R.N.Z. Words cannot even describe how she feels, how any of them feel after that fall that they have suffered, and they fear that worse failings await every single one of them.

But only some words do come to mind. “Once...I claimed that there was no such thing as pure evil. I was in an argument with Weiss over the White Fang...before I showed them what I am.” Blake explains as her ears move slightly when she remembers them. Oscar looks at her ears – and it is strange for him, since he has never known Blake with the bow despite that he has been told stories about it. The bow that the young Faunus Huntress used to wear all the time to hide who she was from the world.

Oscar keeps his eyes on his friend, and she closes her eyes with a trembled exhale...then she concludes her statement. “I truly believed it...until I met...him.” Blake snarls as she pictures the face of the ruthless Soothsayer himself. That cold and cunning smirk he always has, the jokes he pulls from his sleeve with ease and the prancing about he will do as he murders someone they love. He is a cold and evil bastard, and he must be stopped.

But at the same time...

How?

It is entirely possible that they have not even seen the full extent of his power yet – all the more reason to find Ruby.

As Jaune walks at the head of the group, Pyrrha keeps her hand close to his as she walks, looking at some of the people that pass by. There is an energy in the air now, when once there was calm – now there is dread, the question in the back of everyone’s minds. Mistral, Atlas and Vacuo have been taken over by the enemy in the span of thirty minutes. And Vale is the only location that has not even been touched.

The question is:
When will we suffer the same price? And what will happen to us?

Will we be eaten?

Burned?

Infected?

Ruled over?

She cannot even continue to wonder in the back of her mind, so she just shoves those questions aside and she looks at Jaune. She can see the concern in his eyes, not just for Ruby but for Kassius as well. “Jaune? Are you okay?” She asks her boyfriend with concern in her regal toned voice. Jaune sighs, closing his blue eyes.

“I’m worried, Pyrrha.” Jaune says to her, turning to face her. “Ruby was already struggling long before all of this, Torchwick and Tyrian were stuck in her head...and now she is missing and six thugs have turned up butchered. She never would have done anything like this – and...Well you saw what happened with Hyde. I don’t know what Umbra did to him but he managed to do it with the snap of his fingers.” He explains, sighing as he thinks of his good friend.

The time and effort Kassius put into helping Jaune, Nora and Ren in locating Pyrrha and bringing her home – despite his own personal opinions of Destiny. It forged a strong friendship between him and the entire team, and Pyrrha might not have known him for as long as they have, but even she has immense respect for the man. Because he strikes her as a very honourable individual with a heart of pure gold.

Unless if you are his enemy, then he can become scarier in an instant.

Pyrrha gently moves her hand to his as they walk and she links her fingers with his, holding his hand as she walks, resting her head on his shoulder lovingly. “We’ll find them – besides Kassius seems like he is pretty clever and resourceful. If he has been captured then I am sure he can find a way out of it.” Pyrrha assures, and Jaune chuckles.

“Yeah – I wonder if he’ll try Operation Smart-Ass again?” He chuckles, making both Ren and Nora giggle. But Pyrrha – bless her soft heart – has absolutely no idea what that means.

“Huh?” She asks, making him chuckle.

“Operation Smart-Ass is a tactic Kas uses to distract people, by essentially being a smart-ass all the time. So I guess that wouldn’t be easy for someone as sarcastic as him.” Jaune explains, remembering how he used that same strategy in Atlas to distract everyone from the sight of Jaune sneaking through the Operations Centre to get to Pyrrha. It is a good tactic, but a risky one as well.

But Kassius doesn’t care, all he and Hyde care about is getting to use some of their most creative and funniest insults that they can come up with. “Wow, no wonder Kassius and Yang are a perfect match.” Pyrrha states with the shrug of her shoulders, and they all chuckle in agreement on her statement.

“Ain’t that the truth?” Oscar chuckles as they follow their little pathway, until they notice a possible clue of which way Ruby has been going. They all stop beside it, and Jaune crouches down, but Ren is the one that can decipher what it is. The Kuroyurian Huntsman crouches down beside his Team Leader and he stares at it, knowing what it is.

Ren’s eyes stare directly at the scuff on the ground, and it looks like it is Ruby’s Scythe scraping
through the floor, cutting the ground up in the process. But there is something odd about these scratch marks, and Ren is the one that states it as well – they all know Ruby very well for this to already seem out of character. “It looks like she...was dragging her blade through the tarmac.” Ren states, turning to them and Blake arches a brow with confusion.

“What? Ruby loves Crescent Rose too much...why would she risk damaging the blade like that?” Blake mumbles as she thinks about it.

“Something isn’t right.” Jaune says as he looks around the town with confusion. Clutching her collar with fear she turns to look at Oscar since he knows Ruby better – especially with what she is suffering with in her mind.

“Could...Torchwick be having an effect on her? On her mannerisms?” Nora inquires, remembering some of the things that they have informed them on their friend’s problems. Oscar thinks on the things that Torchwick did...but Blake remembers how he acted so only she could possibly know for sure. Especially since Team J.N.P.R never fought him in person.

“He could...” Blake agrees, fearful for Ruby’s current predicaments in her mind at the moment. She suffered before Umbra had done what he done, but this is only going to make her condition much, much worse.

Jaune turns to look at Ren, whose eyes are examining the road and the damage done to the area from the curvature of her blade. But from the look on his face, it is as if he is not so sure of his previous statement. “Ren? What is it?” He asks him, heart starting to beat harder now from his concern for his old friend. He can still imagine the old days when she was that adorable little girl that helped him find his way through Beacon. It seems so long ago when life was as simple as that – when their biggest troubles was getting to class on time.

Now?

They have a monster that can control the very choices that people make for his own gain. Ren continues to stare at the many scrapes in the ground and he furrows his eyes, becoming a Huntsman in more ways than one. He caresses his finger across the scuffs, because now there is more than once, unlike the initial one that they came across. “Something’s not right here...if it was Ruby dragging Crescent Rose it would be a constant line. This is unlike that, as if there are lots of sharp pieces of metal scuffing the floor over and over again.” He explains to them all, standing up with his head hung low as he watches the ground.

Following the many scuffs, it seems like they are forms of footsteps marching down the path, and there is a patch of soil right ahead of them. Which begs the question – what will the footprints look like. They all know Ruby down to the size of her feet and the style of boots that she wears. Meaning that the footprints in the soil will be enough for Ren and the others to identify whether or not these tracks are even Ruby’s or not.

And even then, they are still pretty disturbing. No civilians or even soldiers leave scrapes in the ground like this; the armour is not designed in that way.

But as they approach the next path towards that patch of soil...their answer is found. Ren crouches down and he touches the footsteps which are ice cold, despite only being an hour old at this point. And there are more than just a set from one individual. There seems to be at least five people here, all with the same jagged looking footsteps. “It's not her...” Ren tells them with a sigh, until he stops and his eyes widen.

Concern fills the heart of the pleasant soul that belongs to Pyrrha Nikos. “What is it, Ren?” She asks
him, and he notices that he was wrong.

“Ruby’s footprints were here...but whoever was here an hour ago messed them up.” He explains.

“What?” Nora questions. “Who would do such a thing?”

Ren’s eyes turn when he senses another clue, a sword that has been left behind by whom it belonged to. It is sharp and fractured, jagged pieces of black steel sticking out all over the place. They all stare at them and Pyrrha’s eyes widen - because she has seen those blades before. “Knights Bannermen.” She gasps.

“Huh?” Nora asks.

“The Knights Bannermen – servants of Vir Nominis Umbra. I have seen them in the Charred Forest, corrupted souls that do his bidding.” Pyrrha explains, her voice shaken at the mere mention of the chilling knights and what it is that they do. The same Knights that Team S.T.R.Q, Cinder and Hazel came across on their travels. And they all saw them when they were at Beacon too.

“They were at the Academy as well...the ones that forced us to our knees, weren’t they?” Blake assumes with a fearful voice.

“Yes.” Pyrrha nods.

“They are going after Ruby too, seems Umbra isn’t finished with her yet.” Ren sighs as he pushes his hand through his long dark hair with pink lines in them. Oscar clenches his hand into a fist out of anger, pacing back and forth.

“When will he just leave her alone? She has suffered enough!” Oscar snarls with anger, but Nora extends her hand to him with a smile of friendship in the hopes to calm him down. They already have one kind soul suffering with rage; they do not need any more of them on their hands.

“Oscar...we’ll find her, it’ll be okay.” She promises with a kind smile, whilst Blake walks over to Ren and crouches down beside him, also examining the marks left behind by the Bannermen that are also pursuing the Silver Eyed Warrior.

“Are the tracks enough for us to figure out where she is going?” Blake asks him, and he lifts his eyes just from seeing some of her prints that have not been obscured. He follows them, and he sees a possible location.

“She looks like she is headed for the docks.” Ren states, and Oscar stops with widened eyes.

“The docks?” Oscar asks them, and the whole team turn to look at him with curiosity.

“Yeah...why?” Ren asks, and Oscar opens his hand that holds the rose badge that Ruby left behind, the one that belonged to her mother – Summer Rose. He sighs and holds it close, lifting his head and opening his eyes.

“I know where she is.” He states.

Ruby
Completely unaware of the coming threat of the Knights’ Bannermen nearing…

The young woman paces through the busy streets of the Valerian Docks, with her red hood pulled over her head, looking down at the ground constantly. Everyone that walks past her, some which bump against her shoulder just keep moving – completely unaware of who she really is underneath that hood she wears. But even so – her messed up mind continues to affect every single thought that she has.

*They’re watching us…*

*They’re going to hurt us!*

*Kill us!*

*Shut up, let her focus!*

*She’s being so stupid!*

*She cannot stop him!*

*It was all your fault…*

It is becoming increasingly clear now that Ruby, the once adorable ball of sunshine and happiness, has now realised that she has unlocked a side to her that she never knew existed. She appears to suffer from a form of Psychosis, and it must have been activated either from the deaths of her father, Oobleck, Nolan and Roy – and Port as well – or it was formed from the possession from Vir Nominis Umbra.

Or maybe this is all from Torchwick to torment her mind.

With Crescent Rose collapsed into its deactivated form and attached to her waistline belt, hidden behind her red cape – she is constantly ready to defend herself if anyone tries to challenge her. She listens carefully to her environment around her, sensing the sound of a man on a loudspeaker. “Final crate count for shipment to the island of Patch!” The employee calls out, pacing back and forth on the deck of the ship that prepares to take off.

Both flying and floating vessels are present on this docking bay, and this Transportation Ship is just large enough for her to sneak into the storage bay of the ship.

*There it is!*

*She won’t make it!*

*Shut up, she can!*

*Times running out…*

The voices are overwhelming, and they all sound just like her with whispering voices – yet these are not her thoughts at all. Meaning her psychological state is crumbling apart faster than they can even comprehend. She hisses with pain from her mind overflowing with all the voices that congregate in her head – all devoid personality and humanity.

Ruby slowly but surely approaches the loading section of the vessel, feeling the vibrations in the air from the powerful engines beginning to fire up for take-off. Countless crates tattooed with the Schnee Dust Company insignia are being loaded onto the ship, with hundreds of shards of crystal.
The Huntsman Academies were not the only schools that have stopped working the way they should – even combat Academies and even normal schools have gone silent.

The Acolytes of Lien have taken over the entire planet and the many educational sites alongside them. They have heard that they are using the resources there to create their own Huntsmen that serve them – indoctrinated into believing their fictions. Ruby is no fool, having Huntsmen and Huntresses at their disposal will make those Mercenaries even stronger – they had the technology and the experience to kill them – but creating warriors that can challenge them?

That is something else entirely.

They have an extreme disadvantage in this struggle now, they were already outmatched and outgunned – but with Vir Nominis Umbra at the helm he has now made them be outsmarted as well as the former two.

Ruby walks closer and closer to the ship, noticing that a soldier guarding the entrance is in fact not an Acolyte of Lien though. No tattoo and he is wearing Valerian Armour. She stands in the crowd and with them noticing she disappears, leaving only a couple of red petals behind. The Huntress performs a perfect combat roll as the petals blow past her as she lands, and she immediately takes cover behind one of the crates.

A Valerian Soldier armed with an Assault Rifle loaded with high calibre dust rounds to use if the need arises. Walking with him is a worker on the ship, conversing about the supplies. “We need to deliver at least ten crates worth of dust to every single Combat School across the globe.” The worker explains as he ticks some boxes with his pen, countless areas to fill out on the clipboard.

“Understood, well we have approximately twelve more crates being loaded onto the ship.” The soldier assures.

“Very good, the faster we get this done the better. Don’t want to risk any massive Grimm closing in on our sector.” The worker states with a concerned voice as he sighs, walking off with the soldier. Ruby peers around the crate carefully with one hand kept close to her combat knife sheathed on her leg. Ready to plunge the cold steel blade right into anyone that tries to stop her. Every step she takes is silent as she moves closer and closer to the loading bay. But as she moves she gasps and her single eye widens with shock, immediately diving into an evasive roll.

She lands the dismount behind a wall, and a large Construction Class Paladin marches across the large open platform on the ship that she is standing on. Painted yellow with countless markings for health and safety reasons, unlike the mostly black and white colour scheme that the actual Military paladins has. It was through with the large mechanical arms holding a stack of crates and placing them down. The huge Paladin turns and walks away from where it placed them, the pilot speaks through the radio built into its cockpit.

“This is Paladin – 05, package delivered.” The pilot speaks, taking the Paladin away, and Ruby waits for the textbook moment. As soon as the huge mechanical suit walks away, Ruby emerges from her hiding spot with the doors to her destination. The area looks clear so she runs with quiet feet towards it. She slides down to a crouch, scuffing her tactical trousers in the process. She reaches to the door plate and pushes it open, stepping inside. She closes it silently behind her and she sighs, looking around at the hundreds of crates that have been loaded up in here.

She takes a step forward…

…and a cold barrel presses to her temple and she freezes. Her silver eye twitches and the creepy voices in the back of her mind return.
We’re caught!

How did she not see it?

She is such an idiot! One job! That is all she had to worry about and she messed that up!

She always messes things up…it’s the only thing she is good at.

Failure…

Trying her best to ignore the voices, she keeps her hand close to the blade as she stands there, and she slowly turns her head to see who it is that has stopped her. Then her eyes widen with disbelief, since she thought he died when Mistral was destroyed. He is a scrawny man with a Viper-Like pair of eyes and even Viper-Like Scales on his arms and neck.

“Sidewinder…” She mutters with disbelief.

The Hacker that offered to help change Weiss’ identity with the White Ursa machine that he had hidden away. Only for Jacques to show up and mess the whole situation up for the Ice Queen – just like always. “Long time no see, Huntress…See you’ve picked up your fair share of scars along the road.” Sidewinder chuckles as he stares at her eye patch that covers the scar tissue that remains where that glass arrow ruptured her eye.

“Been a long road…see you turned out alright.” Ruby says to him as she stares at the clothes he wears. He now works for the Shipping Companies that help transport supplies across the world.

“Yeah it has – but even if you can call us old friends…you shouldn’t be down here.” Sidewinder tells her, keeping the gun on her head. But he looks back and forth with a sigh. “But I am reasonable – if you leave now I will not tell anyone. Deal?” Sidewinder asks her curiously as he looks at her with a raised eyebrow. Ruby glares at him with a stern scowl, her voice sharp like the serrated blade of her knife.

“No deal, I am getting on this ship, Sidewinder.” Ruby states with a snarling voice, and Sidewinder sighs.

“Look – I respect you, and I thank you for your efforts. And most of all – I am truly sorry for what has happened to you. But at the end of the day it’s my job to make sure we don’t have any stowaways.” Sidewinder explains, acting totally differently to how he acted back in Mistral five years ago before the city was destroyed. He used to be one to live against the law, resided in the lower sections of the city where crime is at an all-time high.

Things have changed.

But so has Ruby, and she retains that cold hard stare on Sidewinder. “I said – I am getting inside.” Ruby snarls viciously, and he sighs.

“I can’t! My job here’ll be finished if I do that!” He argues.

He gasps with shock as Ruby suddenly slams him up against the wall with her knife drawn and the steel blade pressed to his jugular. The impact creates a loud crash but she holds him there with the blade slightly cutting his neck and drawing blood. He gasps as he grapples onto her arm desperately, hoping to survive her attack. Her words might be threatening from his perspective – but even she does not even realise the importance of her following statement. “Do it – or you’re finished.” She orders with a snarl.
The same words that Roman Torchwick used when he threatened the White Fang Soldier to finish loading up the cargo and starting the train when they planned to attack Vale the first time. “O-Okay…” Sidewinder answers, and Ruby pulls the blade hard from his neck and he falls to his knees. Feeling a terrible burning sensation in his neck, he presses his hand to his neck from distress, still feeling some blood leaving his wound.

He coughs and looks at Ruby as she walks away from him. “What happened to you?” He questions as he watches the grown-up warrior walking away.

Ruby walks into the Cargo Bay, but she stops with a sigh, looking back at him. “I’m sorry, Sidewinder… but I’m not that girl anymore.” She sadly answers as she looks back at him, and he looks at her with saddened eyes.

“I can see that… what happened?” He asks her, strangely concerned and Ruby closes her eyes and she answers.

“I failed.” She replies, turning and walking away from the old acquaintance of hers as she approaches some crates that she goes to rest on. But she knows fully well that she will get no sleep on this journey. She jumps up and she takes Crescent Rose from her belt and rests it on her legs as she sits on the crates, stretching her legs back. She lies all the way back and rests her head on a pillow that she found in an open crate. She looks at her knife and she contemplates on the things that she has done when staring at the reflecting blade of steel.

Killing Tyrian by dropping him from the edge of a cliff.

Butchering Dew.

Even Fennec, it might not have been her that delivered the killing blow but she still let her rage take the better of her. She can still feel the consequences of those decisions now, phantom pains in her side where Corsac’s Spiralling Dagger stabbed through her in that battle. She presses her hand to that point and she unzips part of the tactical shirt that she wears and opens the lower region.

She has yet another scar added to her vast collection, a deep stab mark where that terrible dagger punctured straight through her and twisted. She is lucky to be alive from that attack, otherwise she would just be another casualty.

She leans her head back and she sighs, closing her eye as she lays there. Her condition worsening the longer she is away from her friends, her family and the man that she loves. But at the same time, she is terrified of being around them for what could happen as a consequence. Her father is dead and in her eyes, it was because she failed to complete a simple task.

But as she ponders on her many failures… his voice returns.

A sinister yet conniving laugh builds up to her right and she opens her eye and just turns her head to see him staring at her. His spiritual apparition staring straight into her eyes with his black bowling hat with the feather attached to it and long streaks of orange hair hanging loose over one eye. “Do it… or you’re finished… ha-ha, you stealing my lines now, little red? How uncreative, I truly expected better of you.” Torchwick sighs as he shakes his head and pinches the bridge of his nose.

Ruby sighs as she turns her head away from him and looks up at the steel grey ceiling of the ship. “Go away.” She softly says as she stares up at the blank and boring ceiling. Roman chuckles as he sits there, clearly not about to leave anytime soon.

*Oh gods, he’s back again!*
It's her fault he's in our head!

She should have done better.

What more could she have done?

All she does is fail, fail, fail…it is all she knows…

“My, my…Psychosis? I never knew you suffered with that.” Roman chuckles as he looks at her, pressing one hand on his knee as he sits on that crate.

Is he talking about us?

Ruby continues to push the whispery voices from her mind as best she can, but it is not that simple. All the questions of why her Psychosis has made a return though, from it surrounding Vir Nominis Umbra or even Torchwick…none of them are true and the explanation is far simpler than that. And since she has nobody else to talk to about this – she may as well give a revealing explanation. “I have suffered with Psychosis since I was seven…whispers of my own voice in the back of my head. My emotions were confused and I would always end up…seeing things.” Ruby explains.

Fully expecting Torchwick to make some kind of snide remark to her problems…but he doesn’t…he just listens. There has always been some sort of sense of honour about the criminal; it was just extremely hard for people to find. “It started not long after my mom died, and I was torn apart…so bad that I stopped showing emotion at all. And I wasn’t stupid – people just assumed I was too young to understand what was happening…but I knew. I always knew.” Ruby explains as she sits there, feeling the voices coming back.

She didn’t believe you!

Shut up! Yang loves us, why would she betray us?

She tried to ditch us when we arrived at Beacon, why would she care now?

Ruby shakes the thoughts away and she tenses her hands into fists, struggling more and more with every thought that enters her mind. “I had to take Psychosis Pills…Uncle Qrow and Dad knew…but nobody else…it would come back every now and then like it did when I first got to the Emerald Forest. But I haven’t been able to take my pills in a few months because of everything…and now they’re back.” Ruby whimpers as she presses her hands to her head with distress.

Roman looks at her and he nods her head, Ruby turns and glares at him. “What? No witty remark?” She questions as she shrugs her shoulders in her laid down position.

“Why? It seems I am already starting to affect you by the things you have done. The way you killed those thugs? Dew? The way you tried to kill Fennec Albain? You are becoming more and like me! A bloodthirsty lunatic…just embrace your Inner Demons, little red. Then you won’t suffer anymore.” Torchwick explains and Ruby snarls, looking away from him and she strains a cry, feeling the pain of her disorder becoming worse.

The spectre of Roman has only one last message for her. “No matter how far you run…how much longer you continue to deny it…you cannot escape the truth. The truth is…

“…you and I are not very dissimilar to each other.” Roman states.

Ruby spins around and stares at the direction she heard the voice…and there is nothing there…just her surroundings.
But there is something still there.

*She’s going to die…*

*You tried to abandon us in the dark, but we are always here for you*

*He will hurt you; seek the love of your sister instead*

*He will win*

*Vir Nominis Umbra will win.*

The voices echo in her mind and tears begin to stream from her eye as she cries with distress from the many voices that speak over each other in her head.

Ruby Rose was never a perfect ball of sunshine.

She has just hidden in, and now it is back with a vengeance.

Yet another thing to torment the gentle girl.

**Kassius**

The scorching heat of the sun burns against his skin as he walks across the dunes of the desert, his arms bound together with rough rope to the others being pulled as well. With Bandits on Horses, one of them – Thorn – with Kassius’ hat, takes his ball whip and slashes it down the back of one of the other slaves. He screams with a cry of agony, nearly collapsing as he tries to walk. Blood leaking down his back from the constant barrage of whips hitting his back.

The heat wave is bringing some people to their knees, barely able to walk a few more steps let alone seven miles of desert to get to their destination. Mirages ripple before their very eyes in the distance, creating the false sense of hope when they see the sight of a lake or a tree...but there is in fact nothing at all in the area. Just the vast expanse of the Vacuo Desert, waves of sand dunes for as far as the eye can see.

His amber eyes stare endlessly at the wasteland as he keeps moving as best he can, feeling the sand collapsing underneath him with every single step in which he takes. Sunburn forming all over his unprotected body which also shows the new tattoo that he got recently as well. A large Eagle with its wings splayed out across his back and shoulder blades, hiding some of the scars that he has collected over the years.

Not hiding them out of fear, but just because he wants to for Yang – even though she does not mind them and loves him either way. He just wants her to see something cool on his back instead of some of his bad memories.

But right now his memories are constantly focused on Yang as his objective has become extraordinarily clear. He needs to get back home to her, she needs the man she loves right now and he needs her...both of them have suffered, but Kassius does not even know about Taiyang, Oobleck, Roy and Nolan yet. The explanation of that to him will be very tough, especially since Taiyang took him in when he could have easily just left him to die on Vytal when the Grimm came attacking in force.
Skin feeling tighter and lips hardening from the lack of drink, this is not a good looking situation. But then, Kelham takes his fingers to his mouth and he blows to create a powerful whistling sound and everyone stops. “Water ahead people! Rather not lose our slaves before we even get the pricks there.” Kelham orders on his horse, moving further and further towards the watering hole that he has mentioned.

The group move closer to the summit of the dune and their eyes widen to the marvel of something that is not actually a mirage this time. There is a small pond of water in the caldera of sand beneath them, and some of the bandits laugh with joy as they slide down the dunes towards the source of water. Immediately shovelling water into their mouths with a ravenous thirst controlling them.

The slaves move down the dunes slowly, and Kassius stares at the water, desperately wanting to have some to fill his body with water. It might not kill the agonizing pain that he feels across his body from the sunburn, however there is some comfort in the idea that once he is at his cell he can use his aura to repair any damage done to his body.

And hell he may even have a sexy tan afterwards...he needs to set his priorities straighter.

First his hat and now the idea of a good looking tan.

Well there is always a silver lining everywhere.

Kassius approaches the water and he collapses to his knees and he immediately shovels some water down his gullet. Some of the other slaves do the same, one of them being an older woman to his left and beside her is a younger woman. The young woman, must be the older woman’s granddaughter has a heart shaped head with long emerald green hair and pale skin, despite the burns on her body that she has gained. Due to all slaves wearing hardly any clothing he can see the heart with an arrow shot through it as a tattoo on her waist. She is shapely with a very pretty face that resembles her grandmother.

The older woman is lest ferocious at drinking like her granddaughter, gently scooping the water into her mouth hand at a time. Her hair has turned white but the her eye brows are darkened, meaning her daughter must have once had dark brown hair like her grandmother did. The Grandmother lacks the tattoos but she seems to have the body of either a fitness instructor or an athlete because the signs are there. Muscular tone in her legs and core and she even still seems to be pretty fit despite being around seventy years old.

She looks at her dark blue eyes focus on someone behind Kassius who clips his ear with his hand. “That’s my spot.” The bandit known as Thorn tells him, immediately choosing to challenge him. Kassius turns and he just scoffs at him, shaking his head as he drinks a little bit more.

“Wait your turn, asshole.” Kassius states, and Thorn growls with frustration as he goes to punch him straight in the face. But Kassius catches his fist and stands up swiftly and throws his knee upwards into his gut. Thorn roars in pain and other Bandits sprint at Kassius still bound to the other slaves. But Kelham just sighs and he presses his thumb down on the device he holds and Kassius screams in pain.

The device that is imbedded into his neck activates with a snarl and blasts a powerful force of electricity into his system and he collapses to the ground, writhing around. Thorn gets up, despite being beaten up by a bound and exhausted Huntsman, he acts like he won the fight. “Whoo! That’s right!” He laughs as he throws his fists in the air, and immediately kicks Kassius right in the head with his boot.

The Huntsman grunts in pain, and in anger as he spits blood from his mouth, still tasting the metallic


repulsion of blood ever-present. Thorn spits at Kassius and he walks away, as Kassius wipes the drool from his face, slapping the sticky liquid into the sand. “How respectful.” He sarcastically says as he sits up, pressing his hand to his jaw. He looks up to see that older woman and her granddaughter approaching him.

“Are you okay?” She asks him and he sighs, nodding his head.

“Yeah...had worse.” He assures as he holds his cybernetic hand up to the two of them. The granddaughter crouches down and she touches the tender bruise on his cheek. “And who might you two be?” He wonders.

“My name is Nadine.” The older woman tells him, before looking at her granddaughter. “This is my granddaughter – Neryth.” Nadine introduces and Neryth smiles as she nods her head to him.

“You’re either really brave or stupid to take on a bandit when restrained and with one of these little buggers on your neck.” She says, pointing to a similar one implanted into her own one.

“Yeah...noticed that.” He strains after still feeling the electricity flow through his veins like that. He looks at her and he can tell that she has the hots for him, she is literally staring at his abs and some of the scars he has collected. Clearly her thing seems to be scars and muscular dudes that are badasses like her. “So how long have the traffickers had you under their eye?” He asks them.

“Three years...for reasons.” She sighs, but Neryth does not even seem bothered.

“Hmph, I don’t mind having sex with some bandits and people. I don’t need them to chat to me I just need them to have fun.” Neryth shrugs her shoulders, clearly a slave used for Prostitution. Kassius sighs, feeling for her but worse for Nadine since clearly she never wanted Neryth to have a future like this.

“I’m sorry.” Kassius apologises.

“I’m not, some of them are really fun and they don’t hurt me much either because I give em a good time.” She says, still checking him out. “Say...when we get there...wanna screw around?” She asks him suggestively with a grin. But Kassius is loyal and deeply in love with Yang Xiao Long, and would be crazy to cheat on her.

“No thanks, got someone waiting for me.” He says to her, but she looks around and shrugs her shoulders.

“I don’t see your girlfriend. And besides, there is no getting out of here.” She assures.

“There will be. I need to get back to her.” He says with a mutter, thinking of her in every single way...the feeling of her touch, the sound of her voice, the beauty of her face...he needs to get back to her fast.

For all he knows...

Horridus Morbus could have already killed her by now.

“Forgive my granddaughter.” Nadine states as she whacks her on the back of the head with an impressive smack. She yelps from the hard impact of her hand against her head.

“Ow!” She exclaims.

“She has always been a bit of a party-girl.” She says as she plants her hand on her hip.
“What about you? What type of slave are you?” He asks her curiously and she shrugs her shoulders.

“Medical – I was a nurse when they captured me.” Nadine tells him, but then their attention is caught when they hear Kelham’s thunderous voice erupting from the summit of one of the sand dunes. “And speak of the devil, there is the man that captured my daughter and I.” Nadine says as she stares at Kelham.

“Kelham, right?” He asks.

“Correct, leader of the Traffickers. Tends to take most of the prostitutes with him some nights...” She snarls, being as protective as any grandmother should. “He’s a real scumbag.” She snarls with anger as she glares at him, and then Kassius sees Thorn walking over to Kelham with his hat still worn firmly on his head.

They cannot hear the quiet conversation between the two Bandit Leaders, and Thorn looks at the leader who whispers to him. “We have a lot of first timers with us – so make sure they get it. We stop for nothing...and no one.” Kelham states as he stares directly at Kassius who glares right back. Thorn nods and stands right at the edge of the huge sand dune to deliver his message to the large group of Bandits and Slaves alike. Kassius can see different kinds, the Prostitutes seem to have less lashes but that does not count for anything in the bedrooms with these bandits. The workers have the most lashes and scars, forced to work hard, and the fighters have more combat scars than lashes.

Thorn finally speaks.

“If this is your first crossing, then listen up!” Thorn yells, his powerful voice echoing around the desert as he stands at the head of the caldera of sand. “There is absolutely no water for the next few miles until we get back to our base. And remember to keep up, because if you collapse out there, you’re on your own. Move out!” Thorn roars as he holds his pistol above his head and fires it into the sky.

They all walk up the dune and Nadine gasps when she sees the huge expanse of just sand dunes ahead. “Oh by the gods...looks like this’ll be a very long walk.” Nadine says, but Neryth giggles, also wearing a black band around her neck like the other prostitutes.

“Aaaand, hot! If ya smell something sizzling, could be me!” She giggles flirtatiously to Kassius, but he ignores her attempt and just stares ahead, exhaling through his nostrils.

He follows the herd of people towards the Decayed Expanse, marching through baking hot sand to make their way to wherever it is that the Traffickers have made their home at. With the scorching sun watching callously overhead. Hundreds of slaves and around fifty Bandits overall guiding them all with occasional lashes to keep the mass moving at a good pace.

Nadine is right.

This is going to be a very long walk.

The Decayed Expanse has been known to be the harshest land of the Kingdom of Vacuo, harsher than the deserts of Menagerie that were always very extreme. But this is something else entirely, so hot and so dry that nothing can survive out here. Nothing except for the Creatures of Grimm that stalk the landscape, and with this huge group of people...soon they will close in on the Traffickers.

They know it.

With dunes surrounding them and a completely blue cloudless sky, the relentless sun continues to bare down on them all with extreme heat that cooks their skin. Kassius struggles to simply keep his
eyes open with the amount of sweat that trickles across his bare body...which makes him wonder how the Bandits must be faring in all that clothing. But they are not the ones being burnt constantly by the sun. But as he looks at the Bandits on their horses, he can see some of them are fighting the elements as best they can as well.

He looks at Nadine and she is shaking her head every now and then to stay upright, as is Neryth, who falls to one knee at one point. But Kassius immediately helps her back up, keeping her moving so then she survives.

Kassius looks up at the sun, praying for some clouds to form to give them some shade for a while but nothing comes. As they continue moving further, Kelham and Thorn are stood on a ridge as they watch the group, also keeping a watchful eye out for any Creatures of Grimm following their trail. There are massive monsters to be aware of out here, from massive worms to Deathstalkers the size of football pitches. His horse grumbles as it shakes its main around to get the heat out as best it can.

Kelham turns to Thorn, who wipes the sweat from his brow. “We’re moving too slow.” Kelham tells him, his deep harsh voice speaking straight into him like the blade of a dagger. Thorn exhales as he pushes his hair back and nods.

“I’ll pick up the pace.” He assures as he turns and he yells at the top of his lungs. “Come on people, let’s move!” He roars and some of the Bandits take their whips and they lash them aggressively. One whip cracks across the back of a teenage male, so hard that he collapses with pain, so much blood leaking from his wound. But he manages to get up, but from how hard that hit it is unlikely he will make it.

And that would be the case when the sun sets, and somehow it still feels just as hot at night despite that it should be as cold as Atlas during winter in Deserts. But Kassius looks down at the ground with Neryth and Nadine at his side, seeing that young man crying on the sand with his whole back covered in blood. “Help...me...” He wheezes, dehydrated and dying from blood loss.

Kassius goes to help but the voice of Bandit gets their attention. “Hey! Keep up!” He yells, pulling them closer with the rope, since he cut the boy loose. Kassius looks back and his eyes widen from what follows them.

Beowulves, foaming at the mouth as they stare at the boy.

He wanted to help him...but he could not, because he cannot fight in the condition he is currently in. The boy rolls over and he cries out with terror. “Please! No! Ahh!” He screams with agony as they jump onto him and begin to devour him, ripping him to shreds piece by piece.

Days pass, sun rises and moon falls, fractured moon rises and sun falls. Over and over again, the same cycle never ceases to repeat itself.

They must be close...

But on their trail...

The Beowulves continue to pick apart that boy’s bloody corpse, stripping the flesh from his bones and breaking the limps to get as much out of them as they can. But as they feast, suddenly a Spiralling Dagger stabs straight through the skull of a Beowulf and kills it instantly. One of the others turns around and its met by a Chainsword Blade that slices the head clean off.

Standing there...

Is Mazen Ursus, staring out at the trail of footsteps headed somewhere. With him is Corsac Albain
and some new Elite White Fang at his disposal. One of them looks like a Snake, another like a Boar and there are many soldiers with him as well, with a few Bullheads with plenty of weapons.

Mazen clenches his hand into a fist.

He is going after the White Fang and Faunus prisoners to fight in their war.

A War that has only just begun...
Motherless

Qrow

The Branwen Huntsman stands with his head pressed to the hilt of his sword, right in front of the body bag that carries his best friend. Zipped up and ready for the funeral, which will only begin once they get Ruby back. Tears trickle down from his eyes as he holds the hilt of his sword tight...

Why?

Why him? He was always the best of us...he was there during Summer’s darkest days, helped Raven and I get out of the Bandit Tribe...

He never blamed Raven for leaving.

He raised two girls, one of which was not even his own.

Why?

Why was it him, and not me?

Anger overcomes him, cocktailing his sorrow into fury and he takes his sword and with a yell he slashes the blade straight through one of the curtains in the library where they are being held for the time being. He immediately grabs one of the bookshelves and he pulls with all his might, taking all that pent up anger in his body out on the inanimate objects around him. The huge stack of books topples over with a heavy crash and smashes against the ground.

Qrow lets out a roar of rage, throwing his sword onto the ground, panting with teary eyes, pressing his hand against the wall to keep his balance. He fights the heartbreak as best he can, until he hears a familiar set of cries down the hallway from him. He turns when he hears her voice...a voice he has not heard crying for a very long time.

Raven.

He walks up the stairs to see her sat down in the corner with her arms hugging her knees as she sobs uncontrollably, her Bandits that survived Vir Nominis Umbra’s attack walk around the outer perimeter, and even they are scared too. They lost twenty soldiers in a couple seconds from an entity that did not even look at them as he wiped them out. He just walked right past them all, letting them all fall dead to the ground.

Qrow approaches his sister and he crouches down beside her, and she lifts her head, face wet with tears as she stares up to her twin brother. Just like when they killed their first ever victims that night when their parents were murdered by those Traffickers that attacked and raided their home. Before being taken in by the Tribe that would later become the Branwen Tribe after the death of its former leader.

Qrow looks at his sister and she sniffles, before trying to breathe leads to her crying again, burying her head in her knees. Qrow reaches out to her and presses his hand to her shoulder. “Raven...I’m – I’m so sorry...” He softly says to her, closing his own tear eyes at the loss of their closest surviving friend.
Because now they are all that remains of Team S.T.R.Q.

Just the Branwen Twins.

And the sad thing is, deep down Raven had a feeling it would end this way. The two Hunters that have semblances that revolve around luck, and the ones that would live would be them. And not the ones that they care for most in the entire world. Both of them have lost someone that they love so deeply now, and the feeling has not changed one bit. A combination of sorrow and anger combined into one.

That feeling – is called grief.

Her shoulders bounce up and down as she cries and Qrow slumps down beside her with a thud, and he reaches into his coat pocket to grab his flask. But he feels nothing, remembering that he vowed to quit drinking after the destruction of the Volcanic Chain Isles...but it is times like this...that make him drink.

So then he can forget it ever happened in the first place.

Then he comes out with a heartbreaking statement, one that even Raven knows cannot be true. “It’s like Summer all over again...he’s dead because of me.” Qrow growls with anger at himself, clenching his hand into a fist with rage, tensing his muscles when he just thinks of Vir Nominis Umbra, the face of the Soothsayer.

Everything they did when fighting him, it amounted to Ozpin just hurting him.

Hurting him.

How do they fight that?

Raven stops crying when she hears Qrow say that and she lifts her head, her eyeliner and makeup smudged down her face from the tears that flow from her eyes and down her cheeks. She turns and looks at him with bloodshot wet eyes, hiccupping tearful breaths. “What?” She questions, breathing thickly.

“My goddamn bad luck charm...it got Summer killed...Ruby probably lost her eye because of me, Sun lost two of his teammates. Then we go to Menagerie...and Port dies, Serena dies, Vos dies and Gray dies. All because...of me...and now Oobleck, Tai...Roy and Nolan.” He stammers with a broken voice as he pictures all of their faces. They were alive literally twelve hours ago...and now they have to live with the fact that they will never see their faces again.

Never hear both teachers berate them on their homework not being handed in on time, not hear Taiyang ever make a pun again with Yang.

A lifetime of happiness.

Snatched away.

In an instant.

Raven stares at her brother and she shakes her head with disagreement in her red eyes. “No.” She states, still with a trembling voice as she feels so much torment in her soul. He turns and looks her in the eyes with confusion.

“Huh?” He questions.
“It was not your fault, brother.” Raven states, but he shakes his head.

“How else do you explain it, sis? I was there for all of it!” He argues.

“Yeah, but I was at that roundup too. Maybe Port and the others did die because of you curse, or maybe it was their time card...I dunno. But Tai?” Raven explains as he stares at him and he stares right back. “That was Umbra...not Ruby...and certainly not you.” Raven explains as she glares at him, and he looks down at the floor. He lifts up his hand and he grasps the necklace of the sideways cross that he wears.

He pulls it so then it unclips and he stares at the silver sideways cross with mournful eyes, rubbing his thumb across it. He sighs heavily as he stares down at it, feeling his bones aching from his sorrow. “Did you know I got this after I lost Summer?” He asks Raven, and she looks at the medallion that he has in his grasp. Staring directly at it, almost seeing his own reflection in the silver. “It is an old tradition...for those who mourn the death of a loved one...” He says as he holds it close, thinking of both her and Taiyang.

“I remember...I was there when you got it...I wanted to be there for you when she died...but after everything, I doubted you would’ve wanted to see me.” Raven explains, and he looks over to her. “You made up for it in the end, sis.” He assures as he pats her shoulder affectionately. She wants to say thank you, but the emotions she feels are so strong that speaking alone could make her cry.

Raven desperately is trying to find something to change the subject on; just so then she can stop feeling this depression eating away at her like moths devouring clothes on a line. And unfortunately only one thing comes to mind, and it surrounds her daughter and the plague of Horridus Morbus she suffers from.

She turns and looks at her brother. “So...are you gonna speak with the Witches?” She asks him, remembering the three Mysterious Mistraalian Witches in the Restless Marshlands.

“They’re our best hope.” Qrow answers as he shrugs his shoulders.

“Do you really think that they will help us?” She asks him, and he looks at her.

“They don’t really have a choice, that damn plague will destroy the ecosystem no matter what. They have to help us, and if anyone can possibly make a cure – it is them.” Qrow explains, yet even then if Merlot could not make a plague, then there is a heavy chance that the witches cannot. However the Witches have a few things Merlot does not – thousands of years of experience and skills in the dark magic arts.

That has to count for something.

“I hope so...for Yang and her friends...” She sighs as she sits there.

“I just want to be able to save...someone for once.” Qrow sadly says.

Raven and Qrow both stare down at the ground and his sister says something that nearly makes him cry. “We were gonna get married...” She sniffs with so much pain in her voice, and Qrow looks at her with tears welling up in his eyes. She sniffs her nose and she rubs her eye with her sleeve to remove the tears that stream down her cheeks. “We had it all planned out...we’d have the ceremony at Summer’s grave so then she could be there. Everyone would be there; Architect would give out the speech.”

Qrow chuckles. “I’d have loved to see that.” He chuckles, imagining the sight of the Architect
reading wedding vows is somehow comedy gold.

But Raven is not laughing; she still is broken by it all. “But now? That goddamned Soothsayer...he
snatched it all away. Finally I had a chance for a normal life, one I actually wanted to have. And that
son of a bitch...he took the one thing...that could have saved our family. For a game.” Raven snarls
with anger, clenching her hand into a fist and Qrow looks up at the ceiling.

He then puts his arm around his sister’s shoulders, and he pulls her to his. She looks at him for a
second with confusion but does not fight his embrace. She rests her black haired head on his
shoulders, tearfully crying on his shoulder whilst Qrow focuses on one thing in particular. Something
both of them can find the strength to keep going for. “He will die for what he has done. Vir Nominis
Umbra will pay.” Qrow promises, and she growls and clenches her hand into a fist too.

“Yeah...he will.” She agrees.

The Branwen twins both stare at the body bag that holds their old friend.

They need to find Ruby.

She needs to be there for the goodbye.

Ruby

The Shipping Freighter finally arrives at the docking yards of the Island of Patch, luckily it did not
take long. Only a couple of hours, and Ruby stares out the window of the holding bay. Seeing the
sun has risen, and Torchwick is stood by the window with a grin on his face. He chuckles
menacingly with his arms crossed, uncrossing them for a second to take his hat off his head. “Tell
me, Red – what the hell are you hoping to find back here?” He asks her, but she just rolls her eye
and she hops off the crate she has been resting on.

She walks past one crate that has Crescent Rose leant against and she connects it to the magnetic
strip on her utility belt around her waist. As she walks, she sees Roman stepping out from round one
of the crates that obscures the vision of what is behind. He walks alongside her, as gleeful as he was
when still alive. “But really, Red! Is there something on this silly little island? I mean your home was
destroyed, remember? The only thing left there is Tyrian’s bones!” He asks her, but she just rolls her eye
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destroyed, remember? The only thing left there is Tyrian’s bones!” He asks her, but she just rolls her eye
and she hops off the crate she has been resting on.

She crouches down and takes cover behind one crate, watching the many people that begin to unload
the crates of stuff into the facility that the ship has landed at. But as she watches them, Roman walks
round the crate and crouches down right in front of her with a smirk. “Oooh! Is it your mom’s grave
you’re visiting? I’m afraid she can’t hear you, the only dead person you can talk to – is me!” He
laughs maniacally but she just stares through him and he rolls his eyes with a sigh.

“You’re no fun today.” He says as he walks out from her field of vision.

But as she watches the many guards that take the crates from the holding bay, she hears the voices
return with a vengeance.

*She thinks she can make it right!*
What? How can she make it right? Her father is dead all thanks to her!

What is talking to your mother going to prove? That you failed to save your dad and your mom?

Leave her alone! She has a lot to cope with!

Yeah! Leave her alone!

She has a war raging inside her own mind, voices that sound like her own are just arguing against each other. Some defending her and others are not, but she is trying her best to ignore them as best she can. Taiyang always taught her to focus on some kind of objective to ignore the voices for a while until the medication would kick in. It would also help her ignore any hallucinations that would form and could keep her delusions at bay for some time too.

She keeps her eyes focused on the guards that move around, waiting for the best possible window to move. There are lots of them, some armed with rifles and others with batons. They must work for the Acolytes of Lien now, after everything that has happened, it is not crazy to assume that lots of companies have just fallen to provide for them.

As Ruby waits and waits, she notices one of the guards trips and drops one of the crates. The lid of the crate breaks opens and countless dust crystal are thrown out from the crate and across the floor. Luckily they do not detonate and blow the entire dockyard up, otherwise Ruby would be dead as well.

The employees and guards all panic, storming over to the man that dropped them and he stammers as he stands there. “I-I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to!” He cries out.

“You idiot! You trying to blow us to the moon?” One of the Guards questions as he points right at his face, and pushes him too.

Now! Go now!

Why is she waiting!

Move it!

She takes the perfect opportunity and she uses her semblance, dashing forward in a pulse of petals, running with her body close to the ground and moving right past the guards that surround the one that dropped the crate. She immediately ducks down behind a crate when one of them turns, thinking he saw something. The guard cautiously approaches the crate of which she hides behind and he slowly reaches for his pistol, so Ruby comes up with a plan.

She reaches down at a crystal that fell from the crate and rolled over to where she was. She grasps the green crystal in her hand and rolls it across the floor towards one of the other crates. The sound of a rolling crystal gets his attention and he turns, Ruby takes the chance. She dashes out of sight in a burst of petals, and as soon as he looks back, he just sees some red petals left behind. “Uh...someone bring a bunch of flowers?” He asks.

One of the soldiers turns to him.

“Eh?” He grumbles, looking utterly gormless.

“Look, a bunch of rose petals are just sitting here.” The guard states as he points at the petals left behind. But the other guard just shrugs his shoulders and turns back to the crystals, helping put them all back in the crate that the guard had dropped.
Ruby peers back around the corner of which she dashed to, seeing she has a car that she can steal and use to get to her destination.

*Wow those guards are stupid.*

For once, Ruby and the voices in her head are actually in agreement. She runs to the car she can see, an open hood military jeep that she can easily jump into. She jumps upwards and lands in the seat, and she sees the keys are still in the ignition. She twists the key and the engine activates and she breathes deep.

She has driven cars before.

But has never passed her driver’s test.

“Just a car...you can handle this Ruby.” She whispers to herself, and she pushes her foot down on the acceleration pedal, and the car takes off ahead, and some of the guards spin round with shocked faces as the car drives off.

The guard that saw her petals stares at the car with widened cars.

“I knew those petals were fishy.”

Escaping view from the guards at the Patch Docks, Ruby keeps her eye on the road, with her scroll being used as a GPS to find the location of which she seeks. Her old home that was destroyed in the fight against Tyrian, and where her old Crescent Rose was destroyed in the blast. She tries her best to block the world out around her, but she can see in the reflection of the rear view mirror is Roman again.

The Spectre of her old enemy is leaned back in the chair, with both legs lifted up and crossed over the head of the passenger seat shotgun to Ruby. “So you’re just gonna go after Umbra on your own? You and all your buddies couldn’t land a dent on him the entire time.” Roman scoffs as he sits there, staring straight at Ruby as he speaks. She looks on ahead but his voice does not go away. “You cannot take Umbra down, Red. He is pretty much a god.” Roman states.

“Get out of my head.” Ruby mutters to herself as she drives, keeping her eye on the road as best she can.

“There it is again, you just focus on a single objective but you never question whether or not you can actually achieve it or not. Have you not even pondered in the idea that maybe you cannot win this battle? That Vir Nominis Umbra is beyond what mere mortals are capable of challenging?” Roman asks her, and she grits her teeth together with anger when she hears him asking her that.

“What else do I have left?” She questions, and he raises a brow with pure surprise on his face.

“Wow...you really have changed.” Roman scoffs and she sharply stares at the reflection in her mirror to see him there.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” She questions.

“Once you would have never just thought like that – maybe you should actually be there for your friends? Your family?” He asks her with a scoffs but she just narrows her eye with anger in his direction.

“All I will bring them is pain and suffering. It’s the only thing I am good for.” She argues as she looks on ahead, turning down the crossroads to the left on her journey back home. The car moves up
the hill and over a waterfall that crashes down into a chasm below, meaning that they are getting closer to where Taiyang and Summer built their home to move on from. Now destroyed with every single memory that they once had burned to ash.

Ruby once thought that they could survive without those pictures – that they were just paper – but without her dad...now she realises how important those pictures really were.

As the car she stole keeps driving, Roman continues this conversation with Ruby. “Crap – respectfully, Red – that is a load of crap.” He states and she keeps staring ahead. “Your uncle, now he is one that brings pain because of his little semblance. But you? You make questionable decisions but I can help you make them better.” He says, and Ruby tightens her grip on the steering wheel.

For a second there.

For a complete second.

She really thought that Roman was being legitimately kind to her, but as always he always brings it back to her releasing control and letting him take over. “I will never let you use me. You did once...not again.” Ruby snarls with anger, still remembering how she butchered Dew the way she did, all because Roman fed his own blood-thirsty nature into her once kind soul. Her innocence has been tainted by her suffering, and she is becoming something truly scary, it can be seen in her eyes.

“Let these foolish ideas fill your mind, red...but you cannot hide from the truth forever. The truth of what you really are.” Roman says, and Ruby looks up at the reflection in the rear view mirror.

And he is gone.

She sighs as she keeps driving and her eye widens when she sees he location ahead of her. The destroyed home left behind to be overgrown, chunks of wood buried under bushes and grass that has grown across it all. Animal all evacuate the remains of her home and they disappear into the brush as Ruby parks the car there. She opens the door and she steps out, dropping down to the soil as she approaches, hearing the whispers in the back of her head over and over.

She’s getting too close!

Get away!

Why did we come here?

Shut up! Let her grieve!

Ruby walks closer to the destroyed remnants of her childhood home, hearing and feeling the shards of shattered glass crunch underneath her boots as she walks closer. The wood is blackened by the scorching flames that covered their bodies, now infected with flora that has claimed the remains of her home. Her eyes stare at the home and flashing memories echo through her memory, seeing the house once completely intact and perfect.

Then her memory fades and she returns back to the present, seeing it collapsed and blown apart when the fuel canister inside the house exploded. She walks round the house as she stares at the damage, seeing the point of which she was thrown from the explosion, feeling phantom burning pains on her body. She touches the side of her cheek where the faint burn scars can still be seen. The flash in her memory shows the explosion and her being thrown through the air from the blast, her cape and clothes charred and burning, flames melting her skin.

Breaking bones and throwing shrapnel into her delicate sixteen year old body at the time. She looks
at the floor and she can see a flash of the sight of her old Crescent Rose, snapped in half from the explosion. Sparks bleeding from the severed wiring that once kept its heart pulsing. She may have an upgraded replacement – but it is still a replacement, and not the original thing.

Her eye moves towards the path of which Yang carried her to, in order to escape Tyrian but the madman never gave up. She can still hear the echoes of his laughing in her mind as she walks down this creepy path. Every step she takes she has the urge to look over her shoulder, fully expecting to see Tyrian sprinting after her. And the sound of the agonising struggle between Yang and him, the sound of Yang crying out with pain hurt so much. But she survived and beat Tyrian bad.

But he did the same to her too.

Gave Yang a parting scar through her eyebrow and a few stab wounds across her body in places during their fight, like right through her hand.

_Look behind you!_

_He’s coming!_

_He’s behind you!_

Ruby instinctively turns and a scream erupts from her lungs as she sees him leap towards her with is pincer blades extended. He slashes them towards her with an insane laugh that echoes through her soul, but as soon as the blade touches her.

He vanishes in a pulse of smoke, and she stands there, shaking with fear. She drops her head downwards, feeling the pain in her heart from how much of a shock that was.

Her Psychosis is getting worse and worse, starting to see hallucinations, not just down to her P.T.S.D. She grasps her long hair that sits down her right shoulder fiddling with the black and red highlighted locks she has. She turns and immediately walks away from the sight of which she remembered seeing him lunge at her.

Then...

She gets to the sight of the final stand.

She sees the grave of Summer Rose before her, sat right at the edge of the cliff where she crouches down and places her hand on the stone that she has found.

_Summer Rose_

_Thus I Kindly Scatter_

Ruby feels the cold stone against her palm as she sits before her mother’s grave with tears trickling down from her eye and down her cheek. She sniffs as she sits there, desperately wanting her mother to be there with her. “Mom...” She sniffs as she stares at her mother’s grave, the rose symbol that she once wore but left behind. Obviously there is no response from the gravestone, but she speaks anyway, hoping that Summer can hear her somewhere. “I’m so sorry...Dad...he’s dead because of me.” She sniffs.

Breathless from heartbroken emotions, she finds herself hyperventilating slightly as she sits by her mother’s grave with her hand still pressed to the stone. “It’s all my fault – I made a stupid decision, thought I knew the answer to a simple question when I didn’t. I became arrogant...and he has died because of it.” She says with a shallow voice.
The silence is only contaminated by the smallest sound, the tweet of a bird or the gust of the wind around her on the cliff face. “Oh gods...they must hate me for what I have done...I don’t deserve to be your daughter.” She says as she thinks of the badge that she always wore, the one that reminded her of her mother.

Explaining why she dropped her badge back there with Alyssa – she does not even think she deserves to be Ruby Rose anymore, let alone be a Huntress.

“I don’t know how to do this without you...”

She sobs by her mother’s grave, with so few memories of her she is left alone in this world with a monster about to annihilate their entire universe. Her sister and friends dying from a plague unleashed by that very same foe, and three entire Kingdoms conquered in thirty minutes.

Torchwick is not wrong.

*How can we beat him?*

And that time the thought was her own.

But as she remains by her mother’s grave, a chillingly familiar voice speaks behind her when she looks over the cliff to see it. The faint sight of Tyrian’s skeleton at the bottom, claimed by nature and forgotten.

But not by everyone.

As she hears the voice behind her, filled with sinister madness. “My little flower...” The voice of Tyrian speaks, and Ruby’s eye widens with legitimate fear. She slowly turns around and she can see him stood there, staring straight at her, also seems to be haunting her mind even in death. Standing tall with his hands on his hips and his scorpion tail arched over his shoulder, yellow eyes focused on her with a maniacal grin on his face. “Did you really think I would be gone forever?” He asks her and she clenches her hand into a fist with anger.

Just seeing him there...

He may be dead but the sight of the hallucination of her old enemy is bringing back her worst memories. The pain she endured in Salem’s Sanctum, when she branded his eye with the Salem Eye Iron in his little torture chamber he had. “Wh-What are you doing in my head?” She whimpers fearfully as she stares at the dead Scorpion Faunus who looks right into her eyes.

He giggles as he stands there, walking back and forth before her very eyes, his feet not even affecting the floor beneath him. “Oh my dear thorned rose – I have always been here, you just tried to block me out. But we both know you cannot run from your memories forever, don’t we?” He asks her with a smirk on his face and she stands up slowly, instinctively keeping her hand close to Crescent Rose.

Even though he is only in her head.

She killed him, she knows she did. She could see the remnants of his skeleton at the bottom of the cliff where she dropped him.

“Leave me alone! You had your fun! Just leave me alone!” She cries out desperately, screaming at something that is not even there.

He chuckles with an intimidating tone as he stands before her, walking ever closer with his eyes
focused on her every move. “You cannot escape your past – you should merely accept that we are forever a part of you. And you are not the gentle little flower that you always hoped you could be. You have proven that.” Tyrian explains as he approaches her, still taller and still terrifying to Ruby.

She keeps her head low, trying to look away from the Scorpion Faunus that speaks to her, merely an illusion though. Her Psychosis and P.T.S.D eating away at her more and more, making her suffer constantly. “You’re dead...just stay in the past.” She begs as she looks away from him, and he walks past her, peering over the cliff to see his own bones at the bottom where he fell.

“Ooh...so that’s me now, huh?” Tyrian chuckles, and Ruby stares at him.

“Yeah – forgotten.” Ruby snarls, still keeping some defiance against him.

He turns slowly with a grin, staring straight into her eyes with a smile. “Not entirely, it seems.” He reminds as he looks at her. He seems so real it terrifies Ruby down to her core, seeing him smirk and stand right before her with that giggly voice of his.

“You...you will not torment me anymore.” Ruby states as she stands before him and he chuckles, looking past me.

“I don’t think it is me you should be worrying about, little flower.” Tyrian says, and Ruby stares at his eyes, noticing that they are looking at something behind her. That is when she hears the sound of the doorways between the realms shattering into hers. A crackling bang erupts a couple times, and she sees the dark portals opening up, and five Knights Bannermen emerge from the portal to the Charred Forest.

The same ones that were following her in Vale.

She spins round and Tyrian is gone, just another phantom that is forged into her soul to torment her every single day. Ruby grits her teeth with anger, turning back to the Knights Bannermen that emerge from the portals with swords, axes and hammers in their grasp, ready to fight her. She reaches to Crescent Rose and draws the powerful weapon, transforming it into its Scythe form as she stands in front of her mother’s grave.

Rose petals trail from her cape as she stands there and she snarls, staring the Bannermen down as they stand there. The Captain of the group points at Ruby with its battleaxe. “Kill her!” The monstrous entity roars, much bigger than the others, and the four others charge towards her. Ruby dashes towards them and she slides under the blade of one of the Bannermen, and it just misses her head.

She rolls and she swiftly spins Crescent Rose round, firing the sniper rifle behind her and she rides the recoil with a furious battle cry. She slashes straight at the Bannerman and it snarls with anger, as the blade cuts across the armour and sparks burst from the impact. It staggers but instantly swings the sword back around, narrowly missing as Ruby moves back. She then hooks the sword onto her curved blade and she twists round with force. The arm of the Bannerman snaps from the pressure built up in the metal armour that builds the skeletal entity. The twang echoes and the Bannerman snarls with pain, only for Ruby kick the sword from its loosened grasp.

She roars with rage, rotating the scythe round with all her might and stabbing the huge curved blade straight through the side of the Bannerman’s skull, killing it instantly. She fires the sniper rifle and uses the recoil to rip the head clean off the entity’s shoulders. The body of the Bannerman explodes from the inside, then collapses into itself as they always do. It creates a powerful roar of rage as it is taken back to the Charred Forest, the head sucked from the blade that it was stuck to.
Ruby turns and she gasps, seeing that Captain roar as it slams its battle axe downwards at her, only just missing her and tearing up the ground.

**Behind you!**

Her voices in her head may torment her but they do also have their uses, like in combat they help her avoid danger at all costs. The Bannerman with the mace swings it straight at her face, and she ducks down, rushing into the abdomen of the entity with her shoulder. The Bannerman grunts, staggering back from the smaller yet strong young woman charging her shoulder into it. She takes Crescent Rose and she scrapes it through the ground and she slashes upwards, cutting through the chest plates of the Bannerman.

Sparks erupt from the contact of the blade against the armour, and it snarls, spiralling all the way around the curvaceous blade of Crescent Rose, and she immediately jumps in the air and kicks the Bannerman in the side of the head. But as she lands, one of the enemies with a hammer smashes it right against the side of her head with force.

She falls to the ground, stunned with blood leaking down the side of her head for a second until her aura quickly fixes the damage made to her head. Her head throbs with pain, almost killed from that hit if not for the aura immediately repairing the damage made. The Bannerman slowly walks towards her with a snarl, holding the hammer in its hands, then the voices cry out to Ruby.

*Get up!*  

*He’s coming! Get up, Ruby!*  

*Get up!*  

*Get up!*

Ruby grits her teeth with fury and she pushes her hands against the soil and grass, reaching down to her knife on her leg with a snarl. The Bannerman swings downwards with full force but she dashes away in a burst of petals, and she appears right behind the Knight. She screeches with furor, stabbing the blade straight through the back of the Bannerman’s head so hard that she kills it instantly. It implodes immediately, and Ruby rolls across the floor as she falls from the Bannerman as it collapses away.

She grabs onto Crescent Rose and she spins round, firing a round towards one of the other Knights Bannermen that charges towards her with a pair of axes. She fires the sniper round and it deflects the bullet with the blade of the axe, swinging straight at her. She ducks down, then immediately rolls to her left when it brings its right arm downwards with full force. The axe head smashes into the ground and gets caught in the roots. The Bannerman struggles to pull the axe from the soil with anger, but as it turns, it is met by the blade of Crescent Rose.

She slashes straight across the chest and immediately brings the huge weapon round in a blur of red as she carves right through the middle as she slams it downwards. The Bannerman erupts with a flash, a dark imploding singularity devours its body to send it back whence it came from.

The Bannerman she faced earlier with the mace swings at her again, and she cartwheels out of the way, and she uses an attack she has never done before. Since she has grown stronger she is able to pull off the attack, she spins round and launches Crescent Rose towards the Bannerman. The huge scythe spirals round at great speeds like a spinning propeller and slices the Bannerman clean in half, finishing that one off instantaneously.
With only one Bannerman remaining, she spins round to find the Captain rushing towards her and
going that battleaxe straight at her. But she ducks under the attack and she draws her knife since
Crescent Rose is imbedded in a tree right now. She jumps up and stabs her knife into the Captain’s
back and it lets out a roar with pain. It staggers around and reaches for her, but then she jumps off
and her eye glows.

She reaches out her hand and the silver energy latches onto the Isomacium fused into Crescent Rose
2.0, and it flies from the tree and spins through the air towards her. The scythe slices straight through
the captain and kills it instantly, collapsing into itself with a deafening roar.

Ruby lands on the grass, holding Crescent Rose in her hand, and she exhales with exhaustion. The
Knights Bannermen that has been following her are now dead, but she knows that Umbra will never
leave her alone.

Until...

A voice she loves but fears speaks.

“Ruby?” Oscar says, and she gasps with fear, turning.

And they have found her.

Salem

The Dark Queen stares across her domain, feeling strong again now that she is back home.

The huge shards of Shadow Dust protrude out from the ground like the old bones of some kind of
massive creature that died off millions of years ago. The huge Grimm Dragon is landed on the roof
of the building of her Sanctum, looking at her as she stands there, and she looks up at it. The Dragon
softly grumbles as it looks at her, and she smiles, reaching her pale hand up to the Creature of Grimm
to touch its jaw gently. “Our time is coming, old friend. I promise.” She assures with a smile, looking
back out at their landscape.

Destroyed and ancient buildings in the distance of the mysterious deep purple landscape with the
Fractured Moon watching overhead. Her red eyes shimmer faintly as she stares off into the distance,
but she turns slowly when she hears the doors opening behind her. And she has guests that emerge
from the doors which opened.

Neopolitan and Kannix Volantis – once the Spectre – walk in first, still guests in her Sanctum and
they look to her. But they are not the only ones, for the Knights of Grimm emerge as well with their
weapons sheathed and their eyes focused on the dark queen. No sign of Vir Nominis Umbra,
meaning she has the floor here, and her Dragon takes off from the building, making the whole room
shake.

The Seer floats beside her throne as she walks towards it, and she takes her seat, gesturing her hand
to allow the others to take their seats. The Knights of Grimm, however, do not, they remain stood.
Death with both his armoured hands resting atop the pommel of Ferrum Arctus. Kannix and Neo on
the other hand oblige willingly and take their seats.

Salem turns and sees that there is another guest as well.
The Lord of the Wood.

The huge Leshen stands there, its snapped Antler showing that it is indeed the same Leshen. It stands in the corner, with its head lowered but the burning coals for eyes still glow, meaning that he is listening.

Salem looks to them all, placing her hands on the table. “I have heard of the reports of what happened in Beacon Academy last night – it seems Ozpin is indeed alive.” Salem explains, apparently aware that he is also the Knight of Vengeance.

“I do not know how it could be possible, Wymerus was freed from his curse by Kragen Nox. It should not be plausible for his soul to still reside on Remnant.” Death explains as he speaks, hardly even moving from his stance, whereas Fear chuckles.

“I know how – he must have used the Relic of Creation in Mistral to create himself a brand new form. New identity, everything.” Fear explains as he paces back and forth.

“What about the fact that he is also a Traveller? I didn’t know Wymerus had the gift.” Starla asks with curiosity.

“Wymerus has been alive for a very long time now, it is not ridiculous to presume that he has learned a few things along the way.” Salem explains to them all, staying rather calm over the subject of Ozpin not only being alive but actually awake now and back on their enemy’s side.

“Or he used the Relic to grant him the powers.” Fury suggests.

“Perhaps – but that does not matter right now, we cannot change the past. The question is – how do we proceed. Vir Nominis Umbra has already executed four of their allies and four others were killed in Menagerie.” Salem agrees as she nods her head, thinking on the matters at hand. Kannix looks at her and he adds another point.

“Along with Adam Taurus and Fennec Albain.” He states.

“They are merely pawns, the White Fang will fall. They cannot hope to defeat our forces on their own.” Salem states.

“Do not underestimate the smaller things, Salem. They can surprise you.” He assures, thinking of Ruby Rose and her power that she has. He never expected her to be able to transform into a massive Big Bad Wolf from anger alone, all down to her Spirit Animal Form activating at the right time.

“Well, with Horridus Morbus giving us a bigger advantage against the opposition, our enemies are going to focus on finding a cure. Something that our dear Doctor Archer Merlot seems to have been looking for as well.” Salem explains.

“In Arkhonex.” Kannix adds.

“Correct, the city of which he has managed to hide inside of so perfectly.” She says, but not out of frustration, but out of legitimate admiration.

“Merlot has betrayed us, and Admiral Ortega is a concern.” Death states.

“How so?” She asks.

“He is merely motivated by the revival of his daughter, but with Merlot out of the picture now, his dedication to the cause is...unclear.” Death explains to her and she ponders on it.
“Well...we shall keep an eye on the dear Admiral, then. Jacques and Whitley Schnee however have been of a great help already, however the Atlesian Vault is more complicated than we initially thought.” Salem explains.

“Aye, I have seen it myself.” Kannix agrees and so does Neo.

“Explain.” Death demands.

“Well they have impressive security measures, measures that no doubt only Ozpin actually knows the codes to. Now that Ironwood is dead.” Kannix explains to him.

“Can’t we hack through?” Loss asks.

“No, we have tried every rule in the book and nothing gets through. And it seems to be made of Isomacium, nothing we throw at the doors, the walls, anything. Nothing is getting inside that Vault unless we get those Access Codes.” Kannix explains to everyone in the room.

“Hmm...well perhaps we shall wait for them to get there first.” Salem states, thinking smartly as well.

“Let Ozpin open the Vault and sneak in?” Fear presumes.

“Correct, we get inside. Grab the Relic, and escape before they even notice.” She explains to them, showing her strategic mind at play. A very lethal strategic mind as well.

“What of the Silver Eyed Girl and the other three? Umbra has stated that they are a threat.” Death asks.

“They are a target and we have already sent Knights Bannerman to her position. They should handle her easily.”

But then...

The voice emerges from behind the doors...

Whistling.

"A grin as candid as children, as sweet as bee honey,"

"His voice kind and sharp, as the blade of a razor,"

"Brings you from elder to youth, within the blink of an eye."

"Wishes be granted, be it: love, riches or luck,"

"His face like a mirror, fear shall consume you,"

"Anger through truth, loss through acceptance."

"For the end of your journey, Death will come for you,"

"Charcoal Cities, come waiting for you,"

"The Soothsayer shall wait, for his voice will control you,"

"Torment and Control, till the moon will shatter..."

They all fall silent and they turn, Neo’s eyes wide with fear as she sees the doors open up and he
emerges. Walking inside in the form of the Soothsayer, his hands held together with a smirk always on his cruel and evil face. “Tsk, tsk, tsk...Salem my Executioner – I truly thought you would be wiser than that.” He sighs as he walks into the room, and everyone stands up.

Even Salem.

He walks past them all slowly as he looks at her. “Those Bannermen you sent have already been destroyed by Miss Rose – you really should stop thinking she is no threat. Underestimating an enemy is the first step towards destruction.” Vir Nominis Umbra advises as he walks towards her.

Salem stares at him as he walks past every chair that is at her table she has had built for her. The Seer whispers softly as it looks at him approach and he stops right beside the Seer, looking at them all. “However we have a new plan.” Vir Nominis Umbra reveals, and Salem looks at him.

“And that is?” Death asks.

“Knights of Grimm – you will continue your search for the Winter Maiden. We know the identities of Fall and Spring – and Summer is...well...” He sadistically chuckles as his eyes ignite as he stares to them all. Those who were not present, other than the Lord of the Wood, widen their eyes with shock when they see him using the Summer Maiden’s powers. After he killed and eradicated her soul, devouring her very life essence.

Stealing the power for himself, for he does not have gender when he is not human, or even alive in some cases.

“Locate the Winter Maiden, and then we can begin the fall.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains and they nod their heads.

He then turns to his Proxies – Neo and Kannix. “Neo, Kannix – I want the two of you to go after our foes. Their journeys are bound with ours, I want you to make sure they do not have it easy.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains.

Kannix nods and so does Neo.

Then...

He turns to Salem.

“And you, my dear...” He softly says, caressing her chin with his thumb, but she snarls and looks away from him.

“You will use the Grimm and search for Merlot.” He orders.

He looks to them all and he just claps his hands together. “Go on! Chop! Chop!” They all turn and make their leave, the Knights of Grimm all transform into their beast forms. The Bat, Nevermore, Wyvern and Dove all fly out from the building, whilst Neo and Kannix bow their heads and also leave the room.

Leaving only him and Salem inside.

He looks at her and he smirks. “Haven’t you got somewhere to be?” He asks her.

She scowls at him and he continues to smile, knowing she hates having her power sucked away like that. But she turns and walks away from him.
He chuckles menacingly, and he jumps onto her throne, resting both legs on one of the armrests as he lies down on it. He pulls an apple out from his satchel on his leg, red skin covering the apple.

He bites down into it and chews it.

Smirking as he does it.

The Enemy are making their next move...
Forgiveness

Ruby

“No...”

Her soft trembling voice hangs on her wobbling bottom lip as she stares at the man she loves with all her heart, desperately wishing him not to be where he stands. Or her close friends as well, seeing Team J.N.P.R and Blake with him. Her heart pounds harder and harder as her eye becomes raw, red with tears welling up within it as she stands there. Her breath starting to hyperventilate as she staggers back from them, hearing the voices in the back of her mind getting worse.

*You’re gonna hurt ‘em!*

*You’re gonna kill ‘em!*

*Stay away from them!*

*They’ll die because of your failures!*

“No...Stay away...” She whimpers fearfully of their safety, staggering away from them as she presses her hands to her head. Oscar slowly walks towards her, not in an intimidating way but in a very gentle way. She tries to run away, but she can’t, she just shrivels up as he walks towards her, sensing her emotions forcing her away from the people she loves. Terrified that they will die because of her just as Taiyang did – in her eyes.

“Ruby...please come home.” Oscar whispers affectionately as he walks towards her with his hands open to her, just wanting to her to come to her.

The others don’t get involved for this part, because they know that only Oscar can really calm her down. But it hurts for all of them to see Ruby so scared of just being near them, feeling so certain that she is the one responsible for everyone that died by Umbra’s hand. “Please Ruby...” Blake softly begs as she stands there with the others, all of them wanting her to come back with them.

“No! Stay away from me! I’ll only bring you pain!” She yells as she steps back from Oscar, pointing at him with tears beginning to stream down her face. Her delicate voice croaks whenever she speaks, falling apart from her emotions that flow through her veins. Jaune looks around, making sure that there are no more Knights Bannermen around them, but it seems that the ones they caught Ruby destroying were the only ones.

“You could never bring us pain, Ruby.” He assures as he walks towards her, but she shakes her head, the closer he gets she presses her hands to her head, letting out a cry of what sounds like pain. But it is her desperately trying to fight the voices and the delusions that are fed into her head by her Psychosis.

*He’ll die because of you!*

*Run away!*

*Don’t run away, he loves you!*
They will all die if you follow them!

Vir Nominis Umbra is right!

“No! They’re right! Stay away from me!” She cries, sobbing now as she tries to run away, but Oscar catches her in his embrace. He wraps his arms around her and he rests his head by the side of hers, holding her close as she cries. She struggles, fighting to break free from him but she cannot – not because he is holding her tight – but because deep down she does not want to.

Finally...

She stops fighting her grief and she begins to sob uncontrollably, tears pouring from her silver eye as she stands there, hanging her head low. “It’s okay, Ruby...and I am so sorry.” He whispers to her, gently rocking her back and forth in his loving hug he has her in. It brings a tear to Nora’s eye when she hears her crying like that, like any friend they just want to help her and stop her from crying.

“He’s dead...because of me...” Ruby hiccups with sadness as she cries, her tears trickling down and dropping down into the soil and grass with a splash. Oscar just holds her close, his warm embrace helping her let out her tears...

And somehow...

The voices have been silenced by his embrace alone.

As he holds her he closes his wet and hot red eyes, the emotions that he can feel through the aura connection affects him too. “No...It wasn’t you.” He softly whispers to her, in her ear so then only she can hear him. Team J.N.P.R and Blake give the couple their time, but they remain nearby, staying by the trees as he talks to her. She sniffles, trying to breathe through her sharp intakes of air, looking up to the sun with her tears glistening in the light.

“It was...” She gasps, panting through exhaustion – emotional fatigue coursing across her body. “Umbra challenged me to decipher what his name meant – and I thought he was the Brother of Darkness...and I was wrong.” She sniffles as she begins to cry again, remembering the times he would tickle her and make her laugh. When he would tuck her in at night and read her bedtime stories.

Even after Summer died.

He was always there for her.

The father that Qrow could never be, and that is why he left her with him. But as her memories flash before her, she then remembers every time she ever got mad at him. Whenever she would claim he was a terrible dad or when she left with just a note and not saying goodbye.

She never said goodbye...

And now she never will.

Because of him.

“He had to put up with two little girls – who took him for granted for so long...and now?” She cries as she stares at the sun, before she falls to her knees in the dirt, crying to the floor uncontrollably. Oscar fights his own tears as best he can, because he cared for Taiyang as well – and because poor Kassius has no idea either. He was like a father to him too when he saved him and took him into their little family.
How will they tell him?

For now he focuses on the love of his life, walking round and kneeling down in front of her. He holds her by the head and he looks right at her, seeing the heartbreak on her face. He gently caresses her cheek, moving the locks of black and red hair from her silver eye so then she can fully see his face. “He loved you – with all his heart. He knew you never meant the things you said, not really. You were a kid, kids say stupid things sometimes. I know I did to my Aunt.” He says to her, his voice soft and cracking as well.

“But your Aunt is still here.” Ruby shakes her head, her gentle voice so weak.

“I know – but I don’t know for how much longer. I regret leaving the way I did, I never told her I left when Ozpin convinced me to find Qrow in Mistral.” Oscar explains, remembering that long trek, and when he first ever met Hazel and the warning Ozpin gave along with it. He then looks up at her and he moves his hand through her hair, holding her close. “But you are not at fault for what happened, Ruby. How were you supposed to know that he was not the Brother of Darkness? We all thought the same thing! Even Kragen did, and he has been around for thousands of years.”

“I was supposed to be correct! It was the challenge, I failed and he died! How is that not my fault, Oscar?” She questions, sniffling uncontrollably.

“Because you did not – send the spear through him.” Oscar states, flinching when he remembers the horrific sight. “Only he did.”

“Then what about the others? That was all because you guys came to rescue me and we took the relics. Three lives for three relics – that’s what he said!” Ruby argues.

“What choice did we have? Let Salem use them and take full control over the world? This is all part of that cunning bastard’s game, Ruby. He wants you to fall like this, he wants you to run so then he can kill you himself.” He explains, horrified at the mere thought of that happening to her as well. He sniffs now as well. “If – If that happened to you...I-I don’t even know what I would do...I’d be...lost...” He weakly says, lowering his head down, before lifting it and pressing his head to hers.

“I can’t lose you...” He whispers to her, closing his eyes.

The shattered heart of Ruby Rose warms when she feels him close, and somehow the shards come back together slowly. She puts her arms round him and she presses her head to his, closing her eye. Her red aura and his green one both faintly glow when they do that, their melded auras connecting together. “Don’t leave me...please.” She cries, she opens her eye and looks right into his eyes.

“Never...” He assures.

He pulls her closer and he presses his lips to hers, and she finally pulls herself closer to him, warmly embracing him as they share their moment. Their kiss lasts for a few seconds before it breaks, and she sniffs, wiping the tears from her cheek. “Do you know?” She asks him.

“The voices?” He asks her, and she looks shocked. “I could hear them when I walked to you...how long?” He asks her, she sniffs as he sits there and lets her lean against him.

“Since I was seven.” She answers, and then he looks at her.

“Why didn’t you ever tell me?” He asks, and she sighs.

“My Psychosis – I was always too frightened to confess to everyone about it – because I didn’t want
people asking questions. Because whenever I thought about it, I’d hear the whispers again.” She explains, still unable to hear them right now. It is as if being near Oscar has been muffling them somehow.

“You wanted to forget...didn’t you?” He asks her, and she nods her head.

“Something like that.” She agrees, soothed by the feeling of his hand gently caressing her long black and red hair.

Ruby looks up at him with a sigh. “What do we do, Oscar? Without dad...I don’t even know...” She suffers, feeling that ever present pain in her heart whenever she pictures her father’s face. Then Oscar decides to break it to her, about the Funeral.

“We’re preparing a funeral...to say goodbye to them. I told them to hold it back until I brought you home – I could never forgive myself if we had a funeral for them and you were not there.” Oscar explains and she closes her eye sadly.

“I – I’ve never been good at funerals.” She dejects, but he shakes his head.

Then he makes the risky decision to show the other reason – not Oscar’s reason for coming after her – but Ozpin’s. “Well Ozpin wants you back too – but for a different reason to mine.” He explains as he holds her close. Ruby narrows her eye, still not even close to trusting him after everything that has happened.

“What does he want?” She questions.

Then the others walk over, seeing that it is a better moment for them to speak to her. “He wants you to be there for when he explains – a few things. He hasn’t said what.” Blake explains, and Ruby looks up at her with a smile. It is as if she did not even hear what Blake told her, just seeing her friends there is enough to put a smile on her saddened face. Jaune smiles gently as he looks at her.

“Hey, Crater-Face.” He chuckles, using her old nickname and she scoffs.

“Sure that nickname is in taste considering this?” She asks as she points at her eye patch and Jaune scratches the back of his neck.

“Ooh...guess not.” He agrees awkwardly, as Pyrrha crouches down beside her with a smile, placing her hand on Ruby’s knee kindly.

“We’re here for you, Ruby. You don’t have to run away.” She says to her, and Blake smiles too.

“I’m certain that if the others could move they would be here right now.” Ren assures with a smile on his face. Nora smiles too to her close friend. But their kindness, their love for their friend, it just scares Ruby because of the threat that Umbra made towards her. Because he knows that Ruby is not afraid of dying for her friends, but her friends dying for or because of her?

That is different.

“You never heard what Umbra said to me when he possessed me...he threatened to make you all suffer and die just to hurt me.” Ruby explains with a cry, covering her eye with her hand to hide the tears.

“Let him.” Nora states and Ruby looks up at her fearfully. The Valkyrie shrugs her shoulders with a grin. “The devil can eat me up as much as he wants, but he will definitely spit me right back out after how much of a pain of an ass I can be.” Nora states with a smile, making Ruby laugh and Oscar
smiles with gratitude.

“Yeah, let the bald bastard try. At least we’ve all got good heads of hair.” Jaune scoffs as he flicks his blonde hair back slightly. He then playfully bats Pyrrha’s wolf tail and she gasps, before narrowing her eyes at him and he chuckles.

“Silly.” Pyrrha mutters.

“He can try and divide us but he won’t.” Blake promises as she also sits down beside Ruby and leans against her shoulder. “We are family – and family looks out for each other.” Blake states as she looks at her with her feline amber eyes. Nora and Ren sit down with the others and so does Jaune, all there for Ruby so then she can recover from her heartbreak. Ren looks over at Ruby and he sighs, since he has seen this type of rage she suffers with before.

“I know how you feel, Ruby.” He says to her, and the black and red haired girl looks at him. “When the Nuckelavee killed my parents – all I ever wanted to do for years was kill the thing. I nearly let my rage get myself and even all of you killed – in the end – I didn’t kill it for revenge.” He explains. “I did it to protect the people I care for.” He says with a smile.

“But he is after me.” Ruby says, the Knights’ Bannermen that came after her are enough proof of this fact.

“And me.” Oscar adds.

“Me too.” Jaune too.

“He’s been after me for ages.” Pyrrha agrees, and Ruby looks to the three other wildcards that Umbra just cannot predict, he cannot control the choices of.

“Whether you like it or not, Rubes – we’re a package deal. All of us – if he wants you, he’s gonna have to go through all of us.” Jaune explains, but Ruby shakes her head.

“I don’t want anyone dying for me.” She argues.

“And I don’t really wanna die...” Nora states with the shrug of her shoulders. “But it’s a risk of being a Huntress I guess.”

“You are not responsible for any of this, honey.” Oscar says to her, as he has repeated over and over. “It is Vir Nominis Umbra and his sick little game he has been playing. And the only way we will learn how to stop him is by hearing what Ozpin has to say. I don’t trust him either, but he is a Knight of Grimm – one that is free from his curse. And he has learned a lot over the past few years, and he might know some things about Umbra. About how to free the other Knights of Grimm. Even the Demons like the Lord of the Wood and the Onyx Phantom.” Oscar lists, explaining his reasons very carefully.

“What was your plan? To run off and challenge him to a 1v1?” Jaune questions, and Ruby looks at him with a sad expression.

“The only way we beat him.” Pyrrha says as she holds Ruby’s hand. “Is together.” She concludes, then Ruby feels Oscar place his hand over Pyrrha’s. Then Jaune, then Blake, then Ren and then Nora.

All of them place their hands atop each other, united together as a unit.

“Together...or not at all.” Oscar says with a gentle smile.
As they take their hands away, Oscar gently places her Rose Badge onto her hand and she sees it with a gasp, but not of relief. “No...I can’t wear that.” She dejects, putting it on the floor, unable to look at it.

“Why? It was your mothers.” Oscar says as he looks at her.

“I know – and I wore it because I vowed to be a Huntress like she was. But I am not like her.” Ruby states.

“How?” Jaune asks.

“Because...Because she never failed to save people...not like I have.” She says.

“Ruby, we said –”

“I know what you said!” She snaps and they all are taken aback by that sudden outburst that Ruby stifles quickly to calm herself down. “I am not talking about Dad...I mean...Serena, Vos and Gray...Port...even Dew...I am not a Huntress. Huntresses do not fail like that or kill in cold blood. I am not like my mother – and maybe I am not supposed to be.” Ruby explains, confusing them of what she means by all this.

“What are you saying?” Blake asks.

“Maybe...being a Huntress is what is holding me back. Maybe to fight him – I need to be worse. Fight fire with fire.” She explains, clenching her hand into a fist, then Oscar’s eyes widen.

“You mean let Torchwick take over? Gods no, he will never let go.” Oscar argues against the idea.

“No – I – I don’t know what I mean exactly – I just can’t fight like I used to. You saw how our enemies fight, they play on our emotions. Maybe I need to learn to find the middle ground or something.” Ruby mumbles, even she is not overly sure of what she is talking about right now.

“Ruby, that is dangerous. It could be what Umbra wants.” Jaune warns.

“Yeah, or it could be the opposite.” Ruby states with the shrug of her shoulders. They all sigh, since this is a conversation with another time – specifically after Ozpin has explained the things he needs to say.

“Come on, Ruby. Let’s take you home.” Oscar gently says to her, holding her hand as he helps her to stand back up. She sighs, giving in and accepting the fact she must go with them. She walks over, but Jaune has to say one thing.

A very simple thing.

“Thank you, Ruby.” Jaune says, then Ruby stops to turn and look at her old friend.

“For...what?” She asks him, wiping some of her tears from her eyes.

“For saving my little sister.” He says with a smile, and Ruby thinks back, remembering the little blonde haired girl that she rescued from the thugs in Vale. The ones that she was taking her anger out on.

“That was your sister?” She asks him.

“Yup – Alyssa. She is...somewhat a fan of you from the stories I told.” Jaune answers with a smirk.
“What stories?” She asks nervously, since not all are...dignified.

“A wide range.” He smirks, making his team giggle and chortle.

“Oh no...”

Kassius

Unaware of the White Fang currently following his trail...

Kassius wanders with the rest of the herd across the desert of Vacuo, luckily not attacked by any massive Grimm along the way. And by the looks of it, their home has been set up on a border between the Jungle of Vacuo and the Desert. And the structure on this border is gigantic...and not from this generation of builders.

It is some sort of Arkhonol Coliseum.

Utterly massive in size and incredible for someone to stare at, half of it has been consumed by the deserts but most of it is relatively intact. The huge circular coliseum is partially fractured with some holes in the titanic piece of architecture that looks like a combination of Roman and Victorian – even Egyptian in areas. The Arkhonol always created very intriguing structures before this generation of Humans and Faunus ever existed.

Covered with weathered scars from all the wind and rain erosion it has suffered over the years, it is incredible that it is still in such a prime condition. Kassius gazes at the Arena with stunned eyes, before feeling his wrists be yanked by the rope wrapped around his arms. He grunts as he is pulled across the sand towards the border of the Decayed Expanse, to the Forgotten Forests of Vacuo. So mysterious are these Jungle Woods, and so strangely placed right next to a devoid of water desert.

Covered with sunburn, he for once cannot wait to be put into his cell just to embrace the shade. And since they are going to be secure, his aura can actually be used to fully repair any damage done to his body from the sun. “Welcome to the home of the Traffickers you worthless hunks of flesh.” Kelham scoffs as he rides past them on his horse. “Here you will do as we command – whether you are to fight in the arena, work...or pleasure our hard working men and women.” He says with a wink, staring at one of the young women there.

She whimpers fearfully, looking away from the older man’s gaze as he trots past, then he approaches Kassius as he is pulled along. “I’ve noticed a few of our girls checking you out, boy. Maybe I’ll let them have some fun with you.” Kelham says, but Kassius glares at him with a snarl.

“I’ll kill them if you even dare it.” He snarls, and he raises a brow at the prisoner.

“Why’s that? Being a source of pleasure for some very pretty women would be seen as a pro for most slaves. It’s the least you lot deserve.” Kelham states as he rides around him.

“I have someone waiting for me back home.” Kassius replies, constantly loyal to Yang no matter what. His loyalty to her astounds Kelham.

“She is a lucky lady to have someone so loyal, I’m impressed.” He says with a scoff.

“What? You’re surprised not everyone chooses to sleep with every single girl he sets his eyes on?”
Kassius challenges with a growl, staring up at the leader of the Traffickers. Normally he would get a kick in the jaw from a Bandit if he said something like that – yet Kelham just seems to be impressed by his courage to say that to him, despite his current circumstances.

“You’re a fighter alright. I think you’d do quite well around here.” Kelham says with a muffled chuckle before he scratches the back of shoulder with his hand.

“I would never sink to the level of Living Traffickers.” Kassius snarls, glaring at him as he is taken closer and closer to the entrance of the Coliseum.

“And yet...here you are.” Kelham scoffs, riding on ahead with a laugh as he approaches the head of the herd of slaves. Kassius sighs, looking at his feet as he is taken closer and closer to the gates. Then Neryth leans over to Kassius’ ear, despite him always saying that he is loyal to his loving girlfriend, she still seems to have a thing for him.

“I mean...she doesn’t have to know.” Neryth flirts, but Kassius just gives her a sudden and very hard stare, straight through her soul. So hard in fact that she actually sees the faint flicker of orange in his amber eyes when Hyde has an effect from his anger.

“I will not cheat on her.” Kassius sternly states, setting the bar right there.

Neryth rolls her eyes with disappointment. “Argh, Kassius you’re so old-fashioned.” Neryth sighs as she walks on ahead. Kassius watches her move past then looks at her grandmother – Nadine – who constantly looks so disappointed in her.

“I wished she could be better.” Nadine sighs as she keeps walking to catch up with them, she too looks thinner just from the walk with sunburn across her body. Kassius looks on ahead when he hears the sound of Kelham calling up to the guards at the Gate.

“Open up! We got fresh meat!” Kelham roars, and he hears the voice of one of the guards chuckle.

“Goodie – been wanting some more fighters.” The guard says as he pulls the lever and the huge metal barred door slowly rises up, revealing the inside of the huge fortress that they have taken over. Lots and lots of slaves that work with tools to repair the Coliseum, and they have hundreds of workers. Seems that as the guard said that they mainly want slaves for entertainment now.

Gladiators opposed to workers, ones that are strong opposed to weaklings that are only good for rebuilding the Coliseum. The sound of whips cracking lashes down the backs of the slaves echo throughout the place as they enter, hearing cries of agony from the poor men and women forced to do this. Kassius walks by a large stage and his eyes widen from what he sees.

Three hanging corpses, lynched up by the throat and left to die in front of everyone as a dark reminder. Left with them are signs that have been nailed onto them with charcoal written words in them.

*Thief*

*Killer*

*Lazy*

“They killed a man just for being lazy? That is all kinds of cruel.” Kassius says as he keeps moving and Nadine sighs as she looks at their bodies.

“He wasn’t lazy, he was just whipped so many times that he could not stand anymore. So they
hanged him.” Nadine explains, somehow making his death sound all the more worse. That they are the reason he died and pinned his crime as laziness. These people are really testing the patience of both Kassius and Hyde right now. He even hears the voice of Hyde in the back of his head comment on all of this.

“I so wanna set off right now.” Hyde says with anger, but Kassius subconsciously manages to calm his inner demon.

“Calm down, Hyde. We’ll get ourselves killed if we do that...we need to wait for the perfect opportunity.” Kassius subconsciously says to Hyde, and the statement does ease his anger for a while.

The herd is split off, the few worker slaves are taken to one section, Nadine one of them since she works in the hospital with a few other nurse slaves. They begin to move down the path towards the next section, and the sound of moaning and laughter can clearly mean that this is where the Prostitutes are kept. Unlike the others, the Prostitutes are taken and immediately cut loose, and Neryth smirks as she walks up to one of the Bandits. She literally grabs him right by the balls and he yelps as she does it with a smile. “C’mon, handsome. Wanna have some fun, been a long journey.” She whispers and he grins.

He goes with her into the Brothel that they have made, entering it immediately to join the sounds of pleasure. Kassius just keeps moving, ignoring the sounds that echo from within, as he and the remaining slaves are taken towards the Gladiator Cells.

The doors are pushed open by Thorn and he pulls them in. With the chips keeping them under their control, the Bandits take each of the slaves and cut them loose. Before throwing them into their cells. Thorn grabs Kassius and yanks him away, and Kassius scoffs. “Alright! Calm yourself!” Kassius cockily scoffs as Thorn moves him towards his cell. It is in the corner and he opens the gate made of metal bars and he cuts his rope bindings, kicking him into the cell. Kassius crashes into the stone floor with a grunt.

“Welcome to your new home, Prince Charming.” Thorn scoffs, and Kassius laughs.

“Man, five stars! Where’s the toilet, by the way?” He asks, and Thorn chuckles as he shuts the door and locks the heavy bolt in.

“You’re looking at it.” Thorn says, and Kassius looks around at the cell, jokingly acting like a fool.

“Oh, I get it.” Kassius snaps his fingers as he points at him. He then suddenly swings his cybernetic fist straight into the lock to break free. But as soon as his fist hits the door, the impact throws him right back and he slides up against the cold stone wall. Thorn chuckles, walking over to the bars and grabbing onto them.

“Nice try, pretty boy. This shit’s Isomacium – you ain’t getting out of here. So you best forget about that pretty girl of yours – because you’ll never see her again. So for your sake? Have some fun with the girls while you can, they have the hots for Gladiators.” Thorn suggests with a grin, but Kassius snarls at him like a rabid dog.

“I am getting out of here. And I am getting my hat back.” Kassius promises, his snarl turning into a grin. Thorn looks up at the hat he wears and he scoffs, tilting it slightly.

“Have fun.” Thorn says, turning and walking away from him.

Kassius lets out a heavy sigh, sitting and pressing his back to the wall. He tenses and he feels his aura
beginning to regenerate around the burns he suffered on the journey here.

_By the gods these burns hurt like a bitch..._

He groans as he sees some of his skin beginning to peel already, across the scars he has collected across his body over time. The crackling orangey red aura moves across his body, slowly healing up the burns he endured, turning the red blemishes into a tanned brown instead and killing the pain that he experienced.

He closes his eyes with relief to be freed from his pain.

But as he sits there...his eyes slowly open, and he sees someone sat on the bed next to him. Someone that nobody else can actually see.

Wearing his black and red suit with his top hat and the walking cane on his lap, his grin has faded away and he just looks at the floor. Now he looks far less monstrous than he used to look, because instead of having yellow jagged teeth, they are normal white ones now. And his skin is humanoid too – perhaps him coming to terms with his existence has helped him change his form. But his eyes are still a fiery red as always, but he looks calm.

A projection in Kassius’ mind – Hyde looks over to him.

Hyde sighs as he sits there. “This is all my fault...I’m so sorry.” Hyde apologises, truly showing how much he has actually changed now. But there is so much conflict in him, finding out that he is actually a demon must have been the worst revelation possible for him. Kassius shakes his head when he looks at the other half of who he is.

“It isn’t your fault Hyde – you didn’t know. And it was Umbra, he took control of you.” Kassius explains, since he can partially remember how Hyde panicked when Umbra’s control fled from their bodies.

“But I should have been able to control myself, Kassius. Don’t you understand my concerns with this now? Vir Nominis Umbra managed to take control of me and used me to attack Jaune and Pyrrha...they could be dead for all we know...” Hyde stammers as he buries his face in his hands. Kassius looks over at Hyde, feeling so much for the entity that once brought him so much torment.

Even now it is shocking to Kassius to see Hyde with so much humanity.

“...they’re not dead. Kragen was there and he was getting them to Yenna – she must have been able to heal them. Help them recover from what we did.” Kassius says.

“You mean what _I_ did?” Hyde presumes.

“No – I was still a part of it...I shouldn’t have fed my anger into you, otherwise that would’ve never happened.” Kassius explains as he sits there.

“After everything we went through to improve my – behaviour – and that is what I do...because I’m...a demon.” He stammers as he thinks of the very word, the revelation that he was given. Kassius looks over at him, hearing him say that and a curious question comes to mind.

“Do you really remember nothing?” He asks him.

“No! Nothing – I just remember being bound to you when you were a baby...but...” He stammers as he sits there, thinking and thinking as he looks into his memories. Kassius raises a brow as he looks over at Hyde.
“But what?” Kassius asks.

“I dunno...I feel like there is something there...he called me the Ebony Berserker...and that does sound familiar.” He admits for some reason, but he cannot place why he remembers hearing that name.

“He seemed to know you, Hyde.” Kassius says.

“I know – and that is what frightens me.” Hyde says with a sigh as he thinks on it. Kassius leans his head back against the wall and he closes his eyes.

“Well...maybe we can find answers together once we get the hell out of this godforsaken desert.” Kassius sighs as he closes his eyes.

The two of them enter a deep sleep, ready for whatever the Traffickers may have planned for them tomorrow.

Best to lay low and play it safe.

No doubt Kelham will throw him into the Ring tomorrow to fight as a Gladiator.

Ruby

She sits in the car whilst Jaune drives it with his hand on the wheel, her hand on her cheek as she stares out at the window at the cars that they drive past. Everyone is just going about their business, either aware of everything that has happened and trying to ignore it – or just blissfully foolish. Oscar sits in the middle of the pickup back seats, whilst Nora and Ren in the very back with their eyes keeping open for any signs of danger. Whilst Blake is sat beside Oscar on the other side, Pyrrha next to Jaune in the front passenger seat.

They are returning back to Beacon with Ruby to say goodbye to everyone that they have lost. But as she stares out, she looks at the rear view mirror and her eye widens. Where Oscar sits, he has been replaced with Tyrian, smirking as he looks at her. “All you will bring these good people is pain, my little flower.” Tyrian chuckles with a gleeful and maniacal smile on his face. She looks away from the mirror but as she does she literally just sees in the reflection of the wing mirror to see Pyrrha replaced with Torchwick.

“We can protect you, Ruby. We can keep you safe – all you need to do is hand over the controls and let us take over. Nothing will stand in your way them.” Roman assures with a sinister smirk on his face. She flinches from the pain she feels in her head from the constant hallucinations that she suffers from, until Oscar’s hand touches her shoulder and she looks at him. He has a smile – obviously knowing that she is struggling more and more with her hallucinations.

“You okay?” He asks her softly and she sighs, nodding her head.

“As okay as I can be...I guess.” She sadly says as she looks down at her knees with a glassy eye.

“Okay...we’re here.” Jaune says as he decelerates up at the front of Beacon Academy. The car slows to a halt, and they all step out of the car when they open their doors. Ruby looks at the school...and now it just feels so...empty...with everything that they have lost. But already she can see the damages have been rebuilt thanks to Glynda, the physical ones to the school anyway.
But when they approach...

The body bags have been taken.

And nobody is here.

“Where is everyone?” Ren asks as he looks around, until they hear the familiar voice of the Architect behind them.

“Come with me.”

Moments later...

The covered bodies of those who died have been gently set onto their own personal floating boats being sent off onto the river that feeds into the Valerian Ocean. All of them slowly begin to make their journey away from the cruel world that they were so viciously taken from, and to the gentle afterlife which awaits them.

Taiyang Xiao Long

Doctor Bartholomew Oobleck

Professor Peter Port

Roy Stallion

Nolan Porfirio

Brawnz Ni

May Zedong

Serena Raye

Gray Malachite

Vos Wolstonton

Ten souls all sent off, all killed and taken too soon from this world being tormented by the rule of Vir Nominis Umbra. As the boats begin to float away, Qrow stands tall as he reads a goodbye speech to all those that they lost.

“We shared many laughs...many tears...many arguments – but no matter what we were always family. Together we could part the clouds with our strength, and without you in our loving hands...it will never be the same.” He begins.

Ruby stands with her candle in her hands, for it is a Silver Eyed Warrior Tradition in this funeral to send off the souls of those that were lost. There are even the bodies that could not be recovered like Serena, Vos and Gray but even all the other Silver Eyed Warriors that never returned. Even the Branwen Bandits that were killed by Vir Nominis Umbra are given the send-off as well. Ruby sniffs as she holds her candle with her message thoughtfully decided for her father specifically.

“But now you go to a better place than this cruel one, a place where loving hands will always greet you. Where the warrior’s song will always sing, and where you shall forever smile.” Qrow continues
Kragen stands with his head low and his own candle in his grasp with his cane in the other, Yenna at his side with saddened eyes. The Architect also has a candle as well, along with Penny and everyone else. Hazel stands there, and with them are the afflicted as well, for even they should be able to say goodbye – whether infected or not.

And Ozpin stands behind them all with his head held low.

“It is a far better place you go to...than I have ever known.” Qrow concludes as a tear trickles from his eye, holding his candle close when he looks over to his sister and then his daughter. But the sad truth is...that her father died yesterday – her real father, not the one that conceived her with her mother.

Her daddy.

Ruby sniffs as she crouches down to the mouth of the river and she whispers to the candle to give her message to the soul of her father, her voice nearly breaking down into tears when she says it. “Forgive me...dad...” She softly says, as she places the candle onto the water and letting the current carry it away. Yang stands beside her sister with tearful eyes and she does the same, whispering her own message and sending it off.

They all do, every single person sends their candle off so then it can join all of them in their journey to the afterlife. A beautiful goodbye ceremony, as multiple gentle candles lit with a tiny flame carry off with the bodies of those that they lost.

None of them even realise that there is a hidden person watching and paying their respects to this funeral.

It is Death.

He stands in the distance, far from view with his red eyes watching the event with his head held low. And he is not actually the only one, for emerging behind him are the other Knights of Grimm. Fear, Loss and Fury all stand in the distance with their heads respectfully bowed to their fallen foes.

Especially honourable of Krekras to do so, since he did kill Gray, Serena and Vos – and here he stands to pay his respects to them as they leave this world.

Ruby stands tall as she watches the many bodies move off into the distance with her tears trailing down her cheek. “I’m...so sorry, Dad...” She sniffs as she watches them sail away from their view. “I always thought I was like Mom...but...I’m nothing like her.” She says sombrely as she looks down at the floor with tears in her eye.

Qrow looks at his daughter with affectionate eyes and he reaches out to her with his hand, hoping to comfort her. But then he realises that he was never a father to her, her real father just floated away from view. So he takes his hand away from her back slowly and he lowers his head.

But then...

Of all the people...

Raven walks over to Ruby and she places her hand on Ruby’s shoulder, managing to fight back her own sorrow just to help her niece. “I was there when you were born...” Raven begins and Ruby looks up at her slowly. “You were born prematurely, Qrow was terrified of being near to you because of his semblance. He feared you wouldn’t make it.” Raven says as she looks at Ruby.
She closes her eyes as a tear build up in her eye, then she turns to the river that moves towards the sea, no longer able to see her fiancé’s boat anymore. “But Tai...he never doubted you...either of you.” Raven assures as she looks at both of Taiyang’s girls with a smile. “He always knew that you would have the strength to make gods run scared...and by the looks of it...he was right.” Raven says with a smile.

“He killed him...” Ruby sadly sniffles, but Raven smiles.

“To get to you – because he is scared.” Raven tells her, crouching down to look her in the eyes, same with her daughter. “Both of you are stronger than you know – and he always knew you could stop him. And so do I.” She says with a smile.

They all spend a couple more seconds to take in the moment as they say goodbye.

Kragen with his head respectfully bowed as he thinks on the three poor souls that he sacrificed and whether or not it was worth it. Perhaps Ruby and Oscar were right – perhaps they could have beaten Death.

But it does not matter anymore.

Ozpin stands there and slowly turns his head, seeing the Knights of Grimm in the distance watching the funeral. They slowly turn and they walk away, paid their respects to their fallen foes.

Returning to their task at hand.

As he looks forward again, Ruby stares straight at him.

“It’s time I told you all the truth.”
Demons, Gods and Knights

Ozpin

The impending tick of the clocks inside of the Amphitheatre is all that they can hear in the dead silence.

Everyone has been gathered, making sure their auras are still up to protect themselves from the Horridus Morbus contagion that the Afflicted suffer with. Ozpin – uncharacteristically – is sat at the edge of the stage where he used to give out his speeches. Now he is just sat there with one leg hanging over the edge and the other bent up as he rests his arm on it. He looks at them all, since they are all ready to hear it.

The truth...

Hazel stands the furthest from Ozpin with his huge arms crossed and his eyes glaring straight at the man sat there. Even Glynda looks suspicious of Ozpin, after everything that they have been through together – she never even knew that he is the Knight of Vengeance the whole time.

“So...” Ruby begins, looking up at Ozpin with her single silver eye narrowed. “What’s the truth?” Ruby inquires as she looks up at him, her hand tightly clenched into a fist, the same as Jaune as he sits with Pyrrha at his side, her head resting on his shoulder. Raven is sat beside her brother with her sword sat on her lap as she taps the blade, waiting for the man to finally speak of what is going on.

“The truth...” Ozpin chuckles softly as he sits there. “Something I have kept from so many for centuries...I am the Knight of Vengeance, you saw that during that...terrible night.” Ozpin explains to them all, some of them still flinch at the memory. They may have been able to send off their lost ones in a way that gives them honour and closure – but that does not make it hurt any less.

“Why did you never tell us?” Glynda questions, her fist clenched. “Tell Ironwood or the other Headmasters? Tell Qrow?”

Ozpin turns and looks at her. “Because I could not risk revealing my identity with him always watching.”

“Him – you mean, Vir Nominis Umbra?” Weiss asks fearfully of that name.

“That is correct...” He sighs, and then looks over to Kragen. “I am once a man named Wymerus Ozymandius – Captain of the Dauntless when Arkhonex was still in its power. I was young then, and I lost my family to people I could never get revenge on. Vir Nominis Umbra saw that as an opportunity and most likely altered the events so then we would find him on the Volcanic Chain Isles.” He explains, as he lifts up his cane and he holds it in both hands after letting his bent up leg drop down over the edge of the stage.

“What happened to your old weapon? The stories of the Knights of Grimm always told of the weapons you were given...they were cursed by him, right?” Blake asks curiously.

“Yes – mine was a mace forged with the power of the storm itself. Named Fata Mihi Vindicta – Higher Arkhoni for Fate of Revenge.” Ozpin tells them; able to picture the weapon as perfectly as when he had it.
“Then what happened to it?” Ren asks.

“Well – when Kragen managed to break my bonds to the weapon, I destroyed it. But deep down it is still a part of me…” He says with a sigh.”

“What do you mean by that?” Qrow asks.

“It is unfortunately of no coincidence I believe…that the reason I could awaken my body when I did...was because of the deaths of Taiyang, Oobleck, Roy and Nolan.” He guiltily admits with his head held low, and Yang’s eyes widen with sadness which changes into rage.

“What do you mean? You best keep talking.” Yang growls with anger, until her thrusting movement upwards causes her to cough in pain. Ruby helps her big sister sit back down and eventually her wheezing coughs subside.

“I was trying to awaken my body the whole time Vir Nominis Umbra arrived, desperately trying to save you. But only my urge to avenge them was what reactivated my form...meaning that no matter what, I am still his monster deep down. I can just control it...more or less” He sighs as he stares at his own open palm, before closing it into a fist from his sense of failure to not save them in time.

Then, Kragen stands up as he looks at the man that was once Wymerus – who looks completely different now.

“How...how can you be here? We freed you – you should be at peace, old friend.” Kragen states as he stares at Ozpin – strange to see even the wise Silver Eyed Knight totally lost for words for once. Ozpin looks at him and he stands up, walking around the stage as he speaks to them all.

“I could have been – but just as I said before, my curse of revenge never left me. You merely broke my bonds to the curse that controlled me, allowing me to control it now.” Ozpin explains as he walks around the stage with his hand using his cane as he always did. “When you managed to convince me that I am more than what the curse was...helped me by showing me the graves of those who I sought revenge on...I could see more clearly. And when I faded to the next world – I was faced with a choice.”

He stops and swivels round to look to them all, holding one hand out. “End my existence to rest in peace.” He states with one hand raised, like he is showing that option, and then holding his other hand up. “Or return and help destroy the entity that wishes to bring the end of everything.” Ozpin adds.

Both arms drop back down to his side. “I chose the latter.” Ozpin tells them all, and Kragen stares at him with shock – takes a very determined soul to turn down the chance to feel at peace to return back to the cold and monstrous world he left. “My duty was not finished and it still remains the same – I will never be at peace until Vir Nominis Umbra is destroyed.”

“So you directed your curse towards him instead the rest of the world?” Cinder asks.

“Yes.” He confirms.

“But you look so different than I remember.” The Architect says to him as he looks at him from where he stands, his rifle leant against the wall.

“Well when I returned I was faced with an opportunity. I managed to find the four Relics that Kragen had hidden in that tree.” Ozpin explains, looking over to him. Kragen’s silver eyes widen from when he remembers that battle that suddenly ignited, the night when he and Yenna were torn apart for thousands of years.
“I spent decades learning how to use those Relics, and when I finally did...I used the Relic of Creation to build myself a brand new form. The form you see before you is indeed that body – the body of Ozpin.” He explains, his hands held out to them all – created by the Relic of Creation.

“Then how did they end up in the Academies?” Nora asks.

“Well the Academies and the Kingdoms never existed for a very long time; I and many others started them up. Kragen included – but I hid my true colours from you the whole time.” Ozpin explains, looking over to the man who stares at him. The look in his eyes shows that he truly had no idea that Ozpin was his old friend the whole time in a brand new body to hide the truth. “I had to hide the truth, become absorbed into my own lie – because Vir Nominis Umbra was always there. But with every decision I made I could tell he was starting to catch onto what I really was.”

“Wait...do you mean that the Battle of Beacon?” Before Jaune can even finish, he answers.

“Yes – that was when Vir Nominis Umbra realised who I really was, and launched an assault on the school. We were lucky that I did not reveal too much to you.” Ozpin explains.

“I think it would have helped if we knew what the real enemy was.” Ruby dejects.

“Yeah! Why the hell did you have us focused on Salem when she too is but a pawn in his game?” Sun questions with an angered voice, yet Ozpin just stands there with his never shifting calm expression.

“I could not risk it – he is always watching. He is probably watching right now, his many little crows always listen to what we say. It is how he can be everywhere at once and know everything about everyone.” Ozpin explains, sending chills down all their spines – Pyrrha can even hear the faint howls of the screaming souls trapped in the Charred Forest in her memory. “And believe me when I say – if I told you all the truth about Vir Nominis Umbra, the Battle of Beacon would have been much worse.” He warns.

“How worse?” Neptune asks with a fearful voice.

“No one would have survived his attack.” Ozpin explains, painting a very scary picture for them all of what they are up against. They have always known that their true foe is unlike anything they have ever faced before – but thinking about it like this...truly puts things in perspective.

“Why does he not just kill us all then? He wiped out twenty of my forces without even looking at them. Why does he not just do the same to us?” Raven questions, wisely as well.

“Because it would take the thrill of the fight away from him – he likes having worthy adversaries so then he can kill them all in his own way. Or because he wants to use us to complete our Universe’s story.” He explains to all of them, and it makes him sound like he is some kind of author writing his own story.

Oscar looks over at Ozpin and his eyes narrow, since he always knew him as the Spirit of Time itself, there are so many questions he has on his mind now. “So what? The whole story of you being born at the end of the world...was that also a lie?” He questions.

“I am afraid so – I had to tell these lies in order to throw him off. If any of you were to figure out that I was alive then Umbra could track me down. I had to throw him off the scent.” Ozpin explains to them all.
“So if you are the Knight of Vengeance...are you infinite just like the other Knights of Grimm?” Pyrrha inquires softly as she looks at him, he looks across the room to her to answer her query.

“No – that is another property that the curse has on the Knights. Once the curse is broken, so is our inability to end. I have also created a physical form, meaning I can die just as easily as any of you.” Ozpin explains, in which Cinder begins to ponder on that thought. The battle they had in the Vault...

“Then...how did you survive...you know...” She awkwardly asks him, looking through her fringe of hair over her blinded eye.

“You collapsed the roof of the Vault onto me, that is true. But I never forgot the fact that you let me live, so when you left I changed form and I fled to a regeneration pod I found in Vale.” Ozpin explains to her, remembering the end of that battle so clearly.

“Changed form?” Penny inquires.

“My Spirit Animal form is that of a Green Hummingbird.” He says, and Oscar’s eyes widen and so do Jaune’s. Both of them remember seeing that Hummingbird multiple times in the past, and now it all makes sense. The Hummingbird has always been a symbol of time itself. “I must say, I am proud of you for changing.” He says.

“If that is the case then why did you shun me? After I lost...” She stammers, remembering the horrible memory of Kassius getting mauled by the Terror Bird Grimm when they were kids. He may have survived but the memory will never fade away.

“That is because I went through time...spoiled the future I guess you could say. I saw how your future would turn out – so I decided I had to play the part of your own personal devil. Until you would meet the real monster.” Ozpin explains to her, in which answers some questions but also raises even more questions. This one specifically coming from Kragen.

“That’s another thing – how the hell did you get the power of the Travellers? Surely it was not from the Relic.” Kragen questions.

“In fact it was – I needed to create an ability that I could use to plan ahead to find a way to stop our enemy. Took me a long time to learn how to use it...” Then he stops and looks to Oscar. “Not everything I told you that day was false, Oscar. The story of when I tried to change the past was true – and it was not the only time I tried to do so.”

“What do you mean?” Oscar asks.

“Well once I tried to protect a village from a Grimm attack before Arkhonex fell – but instead my actions actually caused the attack in the first place.” Ozpin reveals and Oscar’s eyes widen in horror. “Sometimes even when our motives are to commit good deeds...we can cause the bad ones to happen in the same moment.” He sighs, his brown eyes turning to face Pyrrha and Jaune, sending a chill through her spine.

Jaune can finally ask his question. “Why did you do it?” Jaune questions, and Glynda looks at him.

“You know why, we told you.” Glynda attempts to defend, but Ozpin holds up his hand, to silence her.

“No, Glynda. He is right to be angry with me for what happened, and it was wrong.” He says with a saddened expression for what happened that night. “The truth is, Jaune Arc – is that I was desperate. I knew that Vir Nominis Umbra was catching onto my tail, he had Salem command Cinder to attack Amber.” He says, and Hazel releases a soft snarl that gets Oscar’s attention as he turns. “He was
working his way to launch a full scale assault, Mountain Glenn and all the Grimm congregating around the area – the signs were clear.” Ozpin continues to explain.

“So you forced the powers onto Pyrrha.” Jaune growls.

Fully expecting Ozpin to defend himself with some sort of statement like *I gave her a choice and she chose...*Jaune stood there ready for it. But yet again, Ozpin’s response to that gives him a chill. “Yes.” He states, and they all stare at him with shock. “I gave her an ultimatum that I knew she could never refuse...because I wanted to get the power out of Amber and make sure that Pyrrha got somewhere safe to hide it.” Ozpin explains, before he looks at Cinder slowly. “But no matter how hard I tried – the events still happened.”

Jaune looks at Pyrrha, seeing the look in her eyes that reminds him of that day when she spoke to him about Destiny. Like such a heavy burden has been weighed down on her shoulders at all times. Jaune crushes his eyes shut before asking the question that haunts him, so he stares the Professor right in the eyes. “Did you know?” He questions.

“Know what?” Ozpin asks him for he seeks clarification.

“That Pyrrha was gonna die that night?” He clarifies with a croak in his voice, even though she sits beside him...alive...it still hurts to picture it. Pyrrha gently holds his hand as she looks at him with a smile.

“Yes...I did. Yet I still had hoped I could change the past by telling her to find Glynda, Qrow and James. But time has a way of forcing events to happen the way that they must happen.” Ozpin explains to them all, raising another question.

“Wait, how far back did you go?” Penny questions with her green eyes open wide. Ozpin looks at them all and he sighs, turning his eyes to Oscar.

“What I told you – was not a full lie – because when I used my powers are went forward in time...but I did not realise how far I went.” Ozpin explains, and Oscar looks fearful.

“The Shivering Dominion...you saw it didn’t you?” He asks.

“Yes – I was not born in that moment and I never saw my parents frozen in time before my very eyes. But I was taken to a frozen point in time – like an important marker...” He stammers as he pictures the moment in his eyes.

“What did you see?” Ruby asks him.

“The world frozen in ice and smothered with snow, Beacon Academy invaded and destroyed by the Grimm. Vir Nominis Umbra stood on the tower with his three Demonic Children at his side...and multiple brave warriors fighting to the death at the fountain outside.” Ozpin explains to them all, and Ruby looks behind her at the area too. Seeing exactly where Ozpin is describing.

“Who were the warriors?” Weiss asks, and Ozpin truthfully answers.

*Some of you.*

The answer gives them all chills, knowing that by using the word *some*...that means that *most of them* will die before that moment ever comes. “I will not say who is not there...because I do not wish to have that plague your minds. I know better than anyone what it is like to know where you future will lead – it is not as useful as you might think.” Ozpin states, Glynda and Qrow can see the pain in his eyes.
And as if Ruby’s fears were not enough...now she knows that more people she cares for will die before this moment ever comes. Even she could die before it even arrives. “Do...do we win?” Ruby asks, and Ozpin just stares at her.

“I don’t know.” He replies.

“How can you not know?” Yang questions.

“There are some things in this world that I simply do not wish to know.” Ozpin states, looking down at the floor. “And many memories I wish I could forget forever – but alas they remain for the rest of time.” He states as he sighs, looking down at the ground with his cane beneath his hands.

“Wait...” Nora says, and she slowly looks at Ozpin with a worried expression. “Demonic Children?” She asks him with confusion.

Why wouldn’t he call them the Knights of Grimm?

Unless...

He is talking about something else.

Ozpin nods his head as he walks back and forth. “The Onyx Brotherhood.” He reveals and Pyrrha stares at him wide-eyed when hearing that word...onyx...the Onyx Phantom. “There were originally four Demons that he created to serve him. The Lord of the Wood.” He begins, and Nora gasps when she realises that the Leshen that has hunted her for so many years is actually one of these demons.

“The Onyx Phantom.” Pyrrha flinches at the mere mention of the entity’s name. “The Ebony Berserker – or as you all know him, Hyde.” He says and Yang’s eyes widen with disbelief. “And the Whisperer.”

The Whisperer...

Of all of them that is the only one of these entity’s that they have not even met yet. “Hyde is one of them?” Yang fearfully questions.

“He used to be.” Ozpin answers.

“Hold up, he used to be? The how come he does not remember?” Ruby asks.

“I can tell you.” Ozpin assures.

He paces back and forth as he begins to explain the legends behind the Onyx Brotherhood, the four Higher Demons that Vir Nominis Umbra had forged. “The Whisperer is the first and the wisest of the Onyx Brothers, then the Lord of the Wood followed. The Whisperer has always been a sadistic and evil entity, one that is a master of blending in with his surroundings and using his words to manipulate people to his will. Whereas the Lord of the Wood is the only one that is not evil, other than Hyde obviously.” Ozpin explains.

“Yeah? I beg to differ.” Nora scoffs, touching the place on her chest where she still feels that scarred handprint of the Lord of the Wood.

“The bond you have with the Lord of the Wood has no malice in it, that is merely down to the fact you touched the totem. The Lord of the Wood is more like an animal than an entity, he merely does his duty – if you had never touched that totem he would have never cursed you. He might have even helped you find your parents.” Ozpin explains and Nora’s cyan eyes widen with disbelief.
“What?” She questions.

“The Lord of the Wood has been known to help children that never touched his totems or harmed his landscape, holding their hands to guide them to the nearest town. He only attacks people if they are armed or harm his totems or the territory his totems are placed.” Ozpin explains to them all, really making sense as well behind how the Lord of the Wood operates. It never struck them as a Grimm but also not a demon...like a machine almost.

“But the Onyx Phantom is dead – I killed her.” Pyrrha states.

“No – you merely destroyed the fragment that was bonded to your soul. That is why it appeared as a darker form of yourself – the Phantom always reveals itself as a darker version of the person it speaks to. If it speaks to Blake it will be the opposite to what she really is – if it spoke to Sun he would see the same. Usual characteristics are black hair and orange eyes.” Ozpin explains, and the description is exactly what they have all seen. Even the Assassin’s form had the same sort of look, even when Neo was acting as her.

“And...Hyde?” Yang questions.

“Yes...the Ebony Berserker, or as he is now named as Mr Hyde – he is in fact the youngest of the Demons. Created to ignite rage and feed of that anger on anyone he would possess, bringing war everywhere he would go with that anger. However over time he developed a conscience, when he possessed a child he began to question why he was doing this. Umbra could sense the betrayal coming and when he did...he banished the Berserker. Bound him to the firstborn of future person he would bind a contract with – wiping the Berserker’s memory until he would remember to be a demon.” Ozpin explains to them all, revealing the truth behind Hyde as well.

Or the Ebony Berserker.

“When we saw Hyde yesterday, he kept muttering that he was not a demon.” Jaune remembers, Yang looks at him with so much concern both for the man she loves and even the demon trapped inside him.

“Then his memory is returning...perhaps if Kassius can free himself from wherever he is now Hyde can tell us something very interesting.” Ozpin states.

A silence fills the room for some time, just of people comprehending that there are now four Demons that they have to handle. “The Whisperer...I never heard of him.” Ruby says.

“You wouldn’t, I have never even encountered the entity. I have merely heard the whispers once...he hides in the darkness and manipulates people.” Ozpin says to them all.

“If you know all this...then surely you must know what Umbra is.” Weiss presumes, but even Ozpin does not know exactly what he is.

“No...But I do have a theory.” He says as he walks around.

“That’s better than what we had earlier.” The Architect says as he shrugs his mechanical shoulders.

“Okay...let’s hear it.” Oscar says as he sits forward, listening to what Ozpin’s theory on Vir Nominis Umbra could be.

“I believe – that he is the embodiment of Evil itself.” He says as he walks back and forth, they all stare at him with a confused expression.
“You mean to claim he could be Evil in the flesh?” Jaune asks with confusion.

“Everything I have seen him do is because he enjoys it, and as he has made clear, he does it all because he chooses to. He creates deals and contracts with those that end with them losing their souls. I believe that could be a possibility of what he is – however I have been wrong before, I may be wrong about this too.” He states.

“Okay...what weaknesses does he have?” Qrow inquires.

“Unknown.” He replies, shocking all of them.

“Surely he must have a weakness.” Ruby denies.

“Not many – I have fought him in the past and you saw what he was capable of yesterday. The only time I have ever seen him be weakened was yesterday when Ruby used her Silver Eyes on him...I have never seen that happen before.” Ozpin explains, looking right at Ruby.

“Indeed – not only this but her powers are beyond any I have ever seen.” Kragen agrees with the firm nod of his head. “When we were training she managed to lift up to twenty huge boulders on her second try with ease...no Silver Eyed Warrior has been capable of such a feat before.”

“But...I don’t know how I did that.” She stammers.

“And she changed into Fenrir – the Legendary Big Bad Wolf.” The Architect adds, even giving a name to the huge wolf that she became as well. “I have never seen that Spirit Animal before.”

“Fenrir?” Jaune asks.

“An Ancient Giant Wolf from a long lost Universe.” Ozpin states, and imagining entire Universes being lost and forgotten terrifies them.

“Umbra...did he destroy it?” Ruby asks, remembering what she saw in that Visionary Book, seeing all those worlds being completely destroyed and reduced to not even ash. She never forgot the horrifying image of Vir Nominis Umbra at the end there.

“Yes...he did...one of the many he destroyed.” Ozpin answers, and that one sends gasps through the Amphitheatre.

“Wait...what? He destroys entire Universes?” Weiss whimpers with terror, only adding more weight to how much of a monster they are up against.

“You will want to listen carefully to what I am about to tell you all because I will not repeat myself.” Ozpin advises, so everyone – even Hazel – listens extra carefully. “I once found an Old Visionary Book that is now burned to dust from a battle I had against Fury. What I saw...was similar to what Ruby had seen, except it was more complete.” He explains to them all. “I saw the stars disappearing in the sky and the moon shattering completely and once it did, the Grimm came through the sky like a storm of endless demons. They flooded the world I saw it from and attacked everything that moved.”

“In this Universe, the people there did not have the same abilities that we had, did not have auras or semblances or even dust. They were easy pickings for the Grimm and their cities were wiped out. Umbra then used the stars as weapons, causing them all to supernova at the same time, wiping out everything in that universe. Every single person, animal, plant, fungus...even strand of bacteria. Nothing survived.” He explains to them all, really creating a helpless picture for them all.
Ozpin looks out the window at the stars and the moon and he exhales. “The stars have already started to vanish and the moon is breaking apart faster and faster. We are running out of time.” Ozpin explains, then Ruby looks out the window and she gasps.

He is right.

There are less stars than there used to be three years ago for example. There used to be billions of stars out there.

But now...

There are so many less.

“Vir Nominis Umbra has been destroying Universes for so long now I doubt he even remembers which one he initially even comes from anymore. Even parallel universes to our own – for example a version where Ruby never fell in love with Oscar is a universe of its own. One that Umbra could have already destroyed and we have no idea.” He states, giving them all the chills at the idea of it.

“If there are infinite universes...then why does he try to destroy them all?” Winter asks with a fearful voice.

“I believe he may want to see if Infinite really is forever.” Ozpin states, a scary idea. Ozpin continues on with his explanation of what he has learned over the many, many years. “But I do know that not everything from those past Universes is forgotten – we have been fighting the remnants of past universes for as long as we can remember.” He explains.

“What?” Qrow questions.

“The Creatures of Grimm? They are echoes from forgotten Universes – the Nuckelavee, the Taijitus, the Kraken...countless other forms of Grimm are merely creatures taken from each Universe he has conquered and turned into merely shadows of what they once were.” Ozpin tells them.

“The Knights Bannermen...they’re people?” Ruby asks fearfully and he nods his head.

“Nothing more than echoes of who they all once were.” Ozpin concurs.

“And Salem? What was she?” Oscar asks, and Ozpin pauses, standing there with what appears to be guilt in his eyes. He sighs as he lowers his head, placing both hands atop his cane.

“My...greatest failure.” He shamefully says as he lowers his head down.

“What did you do?” Glynda sternly questions, then Ruby looks at Kragen, who looks just as ashamed as well. Clearly he knew who Salem used to be as well.

“You all know she was once a Silver Eyed Warrior, correct?” Ozpin asks.

“Yeah.” They all respond.

“Well – when Pyrrha Nikos’ Great Ancestor, Cynthia Nikos helped start the Silver Eyed Order with Kragen...I came to her...under the control of Vir Nominis Umbra still.” He sadly reveals as he closes his eyes and Oscar stares at him. He still remembers Cynthia and how she fell in love with him – he was the one that took him to her as well. “She was loyal to the cause...but she was heartbroken and the monster in me fed off that. I offered her the stone...the one in her head...and after a moment she accepted.”
“And became Salem...” Qrow softly says as he fits all the pieces together.

“She is the way she is because of you?” Raven sternfully snarls, but Qrow just presses his hand to her chest to stop her from storming towards him.

“Yes – and it is my greatest regret...one I so desperately wish I could change. But alas – the past cannot be changed...I may just end up causing it to happen in the first place.” Ozpin shamefully tells them all, practically spilling his darkest secret to them all. Something none of them ever expected him to actually do.

And then...

Silence falls again.

So many minds trying to process everything that Ozpin has informed them all on. Except for one thing. Ruby looks up at him, the final question she wants answered. “Why are we different?” She asks him, and he looks down at her, then to Oscar, then to Jaune and finally to Pyrrha. “You said that he has destroyed countless Universes...why are we so different?” She asks him.

“I do not know why – but I know how.” Ozpin says.

“How do you know all this?” Oscar questions before Ozpin even answers Ruby’s question.

“When I was under Umbra’s control I learned a great deal from him, that and a few thousand years of searching for answers...it gives you a lot.” Ozpin assures.

Yet Oscar still does not feel over convinced by that answer.

“Vir Nominis Umbra knows how to manipulate the future choices for individuals in every single Universe...yet here we are and the four of you stand. Your choices somehow always manage to go around the ones that Umbra has placed for you.” He explains.

“When?” Ruby asks.

“The arrow Death shot at you was meant to kill you there and then, Pyrrha Nikos was meant to become his slave, but she broke free from the Onyx Phantom and his control. Jaune was meant to die in a miscarriage many years ago but you survived, then you survived the Major Ursa attack in Forever Fall. And Oscar – you were never meant to find these people – yet of all the people I happened to bond to you when I began repairs on my form.” Ozpin explains to him.

“Wait...you never meant to find me?” He asks.

“Not in that sense, dispersed my aura and it happened to find you...but as soon as I realised your importance, I had to help you. I had to guide you to find Ruby.”

“Why?”

“For that prophecy?” Ruby asks, remembering the one of a Traveller and a Silver Eyed Warriors’ child bringing peace once and for all.

“Maybe...I do not tend to focus on Prophecies too much. Because your four have clearly been able to prove most of them wrong.” Ozpin explains.

“But why us?” Ruby asks him.

“I don’t know – perhaps the Gods have plans for you yet.” He states.
Ruby sits back down, as she thinks on all of this, the Onyx Brotherhood, past Universes destroyed, the truth of what the Grimm are, Ozpin being the Knight of Vengeance and how he became Ozpin. Even Salem...it explains why she was so determined to kill Ozpin when Ruby was captured by her five years ago.

Ozpin sighs as he sits back down, feeling so much of a weight lifted from his body. “Well...there you have it. Now you know the truth.” Ozpin tells them all as he sits there, and what a truth it was.

But...

They still do not know what Vir Nominis Umbra really is and how to beat him, only a theory and that Ruby could be the weakness that they seek. “Okay...then what now? What’s the next step?” Jaune asks.

“Well, the first is to find a cure for Horridus Morbus.” Ozpin states, and Yang looks up at him.

“Really?” She asks with confusion, considering what the real threat is.

“Yes – I may be the Knight of Vengeance but I am still your headmaster. And thus your safety is still my priority.” Ozpin assures with a kind smile, and for the first time in quite a while – that is just like the Ozpin that they remember.

“Then where do we start?” Ren asks.

“Well – Qrow, Kragen, Architect and Yenna already have a plan. To find the Witches of the Restless Marshlands and get their help. They are the best curers the world has left to combat this plague – we will find out if they can and whatever it is that they need to craft one.” Ozpin explains.

“Then what?” Sun asks with a strained voice.

“Then we locate the Visionary Books, learn as much as we can about the Knights and Vir Nominis Umbra. If we can break the curses that the Knights are bound to just as I was, they hopefully will help us. Then...we will hopefully find a way to beat him.” Ozpin explains.

“Merlot found something...Vir Nominis Umbra has ordered his death and his forces have turned against the Doctor but they cannot locate him.” Jaune remembers, since Umbra did mention that Merlot found something...so did Yuma.

“Then we will have to find him before Vir Nominis Umbra does.”

Kassius

Sat down in the cold dark cell he has been thrown into, Kassius keeps his eyes shut as he rests.

The Fractured Moon floats above the home of the Traffickers in the middle of the night, like the watchful eye of the gods. The sky is cloudless, and Kassius has not even noticed the things that Ozpin has warned the others of. The slowly diminishing amount of stars can be seen here too, and the Fractured Moon is worsening, more chunks breaking away from it and floating away.

Once the Moon shatters...
The end will arrive.

However the coming apocalypse is not what Kassius will need to worry about, as suddenly his door bursts open and Thorn storms in towards him. “Get up!” He yells, grabbing him and smacking some cuffs onto his wrists.

“Argh! Alright, easy! Ah...” Kassius groans as he is taken out from his cell. “I was having a really good dream too.” He sighs as Thorn keeps pushing him across the hallway past the cells. Where a few other Gladiators are forcefully being shoved out from their cells and towards the gate that is being prepared constantly.

“Keep ‘em coming! This should be a good fight!” He laughs, and Kassius sighs.

“Great...a fight at this time? You guys do crappy showings, ya know.” He jokes.

“You won’t be making jokes in a minute.” Thorn states.

“Ooh, I wouldn’t hold your breath pal.” Kassius assures with an ever-present grin on his face.

Thorn shoves him further as he moves him and some other Gladiators towards the door at the end of the hall. The one that leads into the armoury where they are able to choose what weapons that they will be using. Thorn opens the door and pushes Kassius into there after he takes off his cuffs, then the others follow him inside.

Kassius looks around and he chuckles. “Wow...what a shithole.” He scoffs, it literally looks like they kept animals in here. Hay everywhere and the stench of crap in the air that makes a couple people gag with disgust.

“You best get used to it, cause you’ll be seeing it a lot. Good luck.” Thorn says as he forcefully slams the door shut and locks it. Kassius cracks his neck and he walks over to the weapons, picking up a couple of swords.

Not Lash Equinox but it will do.

As he checks them out, one of the other Gladiators stumbles over to Kassius and prods his much more muscular arm. “Hey! I wanna that sword!” The man slurs, but Kassius just scoffs.

“Get your own.” Kassius advises as he grabs a chest garb, leather and bone plated piece that is like a bandolier. It covers over his left peck and he takes a kilt made from bur hide and fur around his waist. He also picks up a pair of boots too, nothing like what he normally wears but it will get the job done.

“Nah! It’s mine!” He slurs again, as he swings his fist at Kassius, but he just steps out the way and he falls flat on his face. Kassius stares down at the pathetic excuse of a man and he just chuckles.

“Wow.” He says, just walking away from him as he spins his swords through his fingers. Not used to how light these blades are, but then again there are no mechanical pieces inside to make it shift and fold – or even combine into a spear.

It’s weird...

As he stands there another Gladiator pokes his shoulder and Kassius turns to look at the nervous young man. “Um...I know you’re a Huntsman...I’m not...Could you...Let me win?” He asks nervously but Kassius just scoffs.
“And get punished myself? Sorry pal, I ain’t a hero.” Kassius states as he stands his ground, waiting for the doors to open up.

“Please! I don’t wanna die!” He cries out.

“Trust me, if I fake it and you live, you’ll suffer a fate worse than death.” Kassius assures, he knows Bandits and they would probably make an example of him just as they did to those people they hanged.

Except it would probably be whole lot grislier.

“Damn you...you Huntsmen are heartless beasts!” The Gladiator cries out with terror, shaking erratically as he stumbles away. Kassius just ignores that comment, he feels for the poor lad but all he cares about is getting out of here and getting back home to Beacon to Yang. Nothing else matters.

Except for his hat.

“Ladies, Gentlemen! Why I am excited for this little show we have!” The familiar voice of Kelham roars from outside the room that the Gladiators all stand inside of. Kassius cracks his neck and swivels his shoulder round in that chest clothing he wears, whilst a couple people just stay in their underwear or get different clothes to wear. “We got two Huntsmen here in this fight! I wonder which will win!”

Kassius stands there, listening to his words.

Two Huntsmen?

I don’t recognise anyone here...and none of them even look like Huntsmen.

Who is Kelham talking about?

“Let’s show off these scumbags, shall we?” Kelham roars.

“Rude.” Kassius mumbles as the doors begin to open up into the arena. Kassius walks out first and is greeted by welcoming boos and fruit being thrown at him. Kassius however – being the smartass that he is – just cheers with his arms in the air as a tomato hits his chest. “Yeah! Many thanks, love you all!” He sarcastically cheers to himself.

The other Gladiators are not as...crazy...as Kassius seems as he catches a tomato and takes a bite out of it. Immediately spitting it out since he hates tomatoes anyway.

“Now! Let us reveal our next contestant!” Kelham roars.

Kassius readies himself, no longer joking around as he holds the swords the same way he holds Lash Equinox. One pointed at the enemy and the other crossed horizontally to deflect any attacks.

“He is our reigning champion!” Kelham cheers with the crowd as the door begins to open up before Kassius.

“Never beaten!”

“He is...the legendary...”

The doors open up and he emerges from the darkness, dragging his weapon across the sand as he approaches the arena. He has burnt-orange hair that used to be combed backwards with a slight peak at the front, and indigo eyes. His hair now is longer and covers his ears, messy and unkempt. He also
has grown a bristly burnt orange beard too. He wears silver-grey armour with gold trim. The chest plate sports a bird with its wings outstretched. Underneath the armour, he wears a black shirt with red trimmings and black pants with a red belt tied around his waist.

He drags his huge mace across the sand with his indigo eyes focused on Kassius.

“Cardin! Winchester!” Kelham roars and the crowd cheer with him.

Immediately...

Kassius’ eyes widen from all the stories Jaune has told of this man.

And only two words form.

“Holy shit...”
Locke Vs. Winchester

Kassius

“Winchester!”
“Winchester!”
“Winchester!”

The Crowd of Bandits all roar in unison, cheering the surname of the Huntsman that stands before the other gladiators in the arena. Kassius stands tall with his two swords held firmly in his grasp as he sees Cardin pacing back and forth, dragging his huge metal mace through the sand, and almost looking feral. From the stories that Kassius heard, he was more of an asshole than a creature like he seems at the moment. He also has some new scars on his arms as well that he never had before, and weathering scars on his skin as well, clearly from the sun and the sandstorms that Vacuo suffers from.

Sat down atop the booth that he found, made with ancient Arkhoni architecture, Kelham watches as the battle begins. He has multiple Prostitutes with him as well, Neryth being one of them with a giggly smile on her face as the Bandit Leader bites a chunk out of a chicken leg he has roasted. “Ooh... who do you think’ll win, Kellie?” She asks him as she seductively bites his ear, and he doesn’t even flinch.

“Dunno... can’t wait to see.” Kelham chuckles as he throws the chewed leg onto the floor, resting both his legs onto the barriers that keep people from falling over the edge.

Back at the bottom of the Arena, Kassius stands still with his swords in his hands, waiting for the match to start as everyone moves out across the arena to their positions. Most of the Gladiators are getting as far as they can from the Huntsman since they know that they do not stand a chance against him in combat. Cardin stands still with his hand holding his mace in one eye, his hair covers over one eye until he flicks it back round so then he can stare at his foes. “So this is Cardin Winchester, huh?” Kassius mutters to himself.

“Let the battle begin in three!”

The weaker gladiators shake on the spot with sweat beading down their skin whilst there are some that are calm and others that look utterly insane, bouncing on the spot. Some with hammers and others with knives. Kassius just remains calm, focusing his senses, he has fought against much, much worse odds in the past.

“Two!”

Cardin tightens his grip on his mace with a snarl.

“One!” Kelham roars before one of his bandits blows a huge horn that echoes for miles, with a triumphant bellow. Cardin walks forward, and Kassius spins his swords through his fingers as he prepares to fight.

It is clear who the Huntsmen are.
Since everyone else just charges towards each other like animals or runs away from the fight to try and escape.

Whereas Cardin and Kassius both wait.

The gladiators scream with bloodthirsty rage as they smash into each other, as soon as their bodies and weapons collide there is a thunderous uproar from the crowd. Kassius can feel the reverberations through the floor just from the pounding cheers and beats from the crowd as they stop their feet against the floor. The Huntsman with the Split Personality turns his head when a man sprints at him, screaming like a lunatic. Kassius just steps aside to dodge the swing of his hammer that smashes into the ground.

Kassius slashes across the chest of the Gladiator, spilling his blood across the floor as he screams, before he plunges the curved blade of his other cutlass straight through the Gladiator's ribcage. He gasps with agony before Kassius twists the blade to finish him off, pushing his boot against is corpse.

He turns...to meet the mace of Cardin Winchester that crashes right into his chest, sending him flying and smashing straight across the circular walls of the arena. The walls buckle and crumble, chunks of concrete and adobe sandstone crumble from where Kassius smashed through. Pieces of rebar hang out from the walls, dust pluming from the place of contact. Kassius grunts as he rolls across the floor, some cuts and bruises across his body and even some lacerations. Wounds that his fiery orange aura swiftly regenerates immediately, closing up his wounds, leaving only a few stains of claret on his chest and arm.

Kassius cracks his neck before wiping some of the dust and sand from his body, turning to see Cardin walking towards him with a glare. The huge Huntsman turns to one of the Gladiators who attempts to fight him, jumping towards him with one dagger thrusting forward towards him. Cardin yells with rage, grabbing the Gladiator by the throat, turning on his heel to smash the man into the floor. The dull thud accompanied with a crunch erupts from where he crashed into the ground from Cardin’s attack. He wheezes in pain on the ground, only for Cardin to finish him off with his mace, smashing it downwards into his head – killing him instantly.

Kassius cracks his neck as he stands tall, ready to fight again as he picks his swords back up. He walks past the many Gladiators that fight against each other. Even terrified souls thrown in here against their will, being stabbed to death on the floor by others with knives, spears and hacked apart by axes. Their blood-curdling screams echo across the arena, only met by the cheers of the similarly blood thirsty viewers in the arena crowds. Blood soaks the sand along with the corpses of brutally murdered people.

But Kassius has seen it all before.

And by the looks of it, so has Cardin. A lot has changed since Beacon was destroyed, and it seems he has changed quite a lot. Cardin flicks the blood from the mace of his, running towards Kassius this time, jumping in the air with his mace held above his head. The red crystal inside activates with a heated flash of fire. He bellows as he swings it downwards, smashing it down into the ground where Kassius was stood with all his might. When the Mace hits the ground, a huge fiery explosion ignites through the sand, creating a chasm of destruction, scorching the ground beneath them. The Huntsman he fights against rolls out of the way, instantly spiralling round to slash Cardin across his side.

Cardin grunts, his orange aura protecting him as always, flickering around that wound. He swiftly spins round to smash the mace downwards at Kassius again. The massive mace crashes down into the ground with a heavy bang, an attack Kassius dodged as he bounced back. Instantly rushing forward to jump up and smash his knee up into Cardin’s jaw to cause him to stagger. Cardin roars
with anger as he staggers back, as Kassius slashes his cutlass across his leg to bring him down to one knee.

Kassius thunders a yell as he slams both blades downwards at Cardin, only for the Winchester Huntsman to hold up his mace, stopping the two blades. Kassius stares into his eyes with gritted teeth, holding him down. “So you’re Cardin Winchester? I thought you’d be taller!” He laughs, receiving a roar from Cardin as he tightens his grip, Kassius turns his attention to the red crystal within the man’s mace. His eyes widen when he sees the red energy channelling into flames as he blasts fire out and it wraps around the mace.

Cardin pulls the mace away from Kassius and spins all the way around, smashing the mace into his chest. Kassius grunts, thrown into another wall, lodged inside it this time with his arms hooked into the rebar and concrete. Cardin stands up, his eyes focused on Kassius. “I don’t believe we’ve met before.” Cardin states as he walks towards him.

“We haven’t, but I know Jaune!” He yells, and Cardin stops walking when he says that, his eyes widen with disbelief when he hears his name. Showing what appears to be relief in his eyes opposed to anger.

“He’s alive?” He asks.

“Last I saw him he was!” Kassius yells back as he tries to free himself, Cardin stands tall with his eyes focused onto his mace as he stands there.

“As much as I’d love to stand and chat, we still need to fight.” He says.

“Well then...if we both survive...then I guess we'll chat later.” Kassius chuckles, somehow making friends with Cardin even when trying to beat him in combat. Cardin smirks, but he spins round when another Gladiator charges at him with a spear, trying to skewer him like a kabob. Cardin catches the wooden spear in his huge hand and pulls the Gladiator round and throws him straight into the others. The Gladiator screams as he clatters into the side of another, winding him in the process. One of the others manages to pick up a Crossbow and loads a bolt into it. The weak man has to put the ranged weapon on the group and use his leg to help pull the limbs of the weapon back so then he can serve the bolt into the chamber.

Cardin walks towards the three Gladiators, two of them getting back up after his attack he made on them. The Crossbow User finally loads it and he struggles to lift it up, aiming it straight at Cardin to fire. He fires the bolt but Cardin spins his mace through his fingers to deflect the bolt – the wooden arrow shatters upon contact with his mace, and then he accelerates into a charge. The Crossbow firer screams with fear as he turns to run away, whilst the other Gladiators pick up some weapons left on the ground to fight.

One picks up a Battleaxe whilst the other picks up a sword and they both run towards the huge man. The Axe-Man jumps at Cardin to cut downwards onto his aura but Cardin ducks and dodges his attack, smashing his mace straight into his chest. The metal hooks in the mace puncture into his ribs, keeping the screaming man stuck to the weapon. Cardin smashes him downwards and rips the mace from his crushed chest, instantly thrusting his armoured shoulder into the sword.

The blade snaps against the shoulder pauldron, sparks burst outwards from the breaking of the sword, shards of metal thrown across the area. Cardin swiftly takes is fist and ploughs it straight into the Gladiator’s face, before swiping his mace across his legs to knock him onto the ground. Finally he takes his mace and smashes it down into his head, crushing the skull and splattering blood everywhere.
The crowd erupt with a monstrous cheer from seeing such a grisly death. Blood drips from the mace and Cardin sighs as he flicks it off, turning to see that man that fled. Running away desperately and trying to climb his way out.

Kelham watches as some of the people try and escape and a smirk grows across his face, so he turns on his chair to look at Thorne. “Looks like we got some cowards.” Kelham says and Thorn chuckles.

“Unleash the beasts!” Thorn bellows, and the man on the gate turns with terrified eyes as a pen rises up from underneath the ground. The concrete and sandstone floor shifts open to reveal a cage with a creature inside. But this is not actually a Creature of Grimm, it is a form of Vacuo Wildlife. A huge Lion-Like animal but with crocodilian skin and razor sharp teeth. The legs of some kind of dog or cheetah and the muscle of a Lion or Tiger, it turns its flaring orange eyes to the desperate man attempting escape.

The monster roars with furor, charging towards where he screams with terror, standing beneath the climbing man now. “Please! I wanna go home!” He wails, only for the creature to start to place its claws limbs onto the metal fence, climbing up behind him with a growl. He looks down and he cries with horror as it bites down onto his leg and pulls him down. “No! Please! Argh! Help me! Please!” He screams with agony as the creature throws him into the floor, blood leaking from his lacerated and shredded leg. The huge monster prowls behind him, the taste of blood covering its jaws as it closes in. His cries for help go unnoticed, and the monster jumps onto him, his screams drowned out both by the sadistic cheers of the crowd and the haunting growls of the monster.

It claws and rips at his body, ripping chunks from him and disembowelling him on the sand, shaking him around in its crocodilian jaws. His screams are muffled when the creature slowly closes its jaws around his neck, and ripping his head from his shoulders. A fountain of red sprays into the air as the creature begins to devour him inch by inch. “The Faeli Suchus!” Kelham cheers as he watches the beast feasting on his remains.

From behind the fences, one of the Bandits fires a shock round into the Suchus’ side, making it roar with pain and rage, spinning round to stare at him with teeth gritted together and blood drooling down its jaws. To keep it focused on killing the others opposed to feasting on its first victim.

Kassius continues to struggle, trapped inside the wall where Cardin had smashed him into, forcing his arms as hard as he can to break free from his current predicament. He looks around to see the Suchus stalking across the field of battle, seeking out the weakest link. Setting its eyes onto him and snarling as it approaches. “Oh you’ve gotta be kidding me!” Kassius exclaims as he pushes his metal arm as hard as he can against the concrete and metal. “You have not come this far to get eaten in a goddamn wall!” He roars as the Suchus charges towards him with a monstrous roar.

Kassius finally breaks his arm free from the metal and he jumps out from the wall that he was imprisoned inside of, landing on his feet. The charging Faeli Suchus jumps towards him with a monstrous roar to savagely attack him. Only for Kassius to uppercut the monster with his cybernetic fist, causing it to grunt and be thrown a few feet from where he was standing. The Suchus crashes to the ground with a snarl, its armoured scales scraping across the ground.

Kassius glances down to where his swords are...

They have been snapped in two, from Cardin’s attack. Leaving him with nothing more than his fists. “Alright then.. guess we’re doing this the old fashioned way.” Kassius chuckles as he cracks his knuckles when the Suchus stumbles back up with a guttural hiss. The huge creature paces back and forth, sizing Kassius up and determining how best to take him on. Kassius keeps his eyes focused on it, every single move it makes, these things are still Crocodilian in nature, meaning that can exert
extremely fast and powerful attacks.

Blood stains the white teeth of the Faeli Suchus, drooling that man’s blood into the soil. Kassius’ heart is in his mouth, fighting people is one thing but challenging a creature like this with no weapon is something else. The growling grows and grows, then it attacks, lunging forward and snapping its jaws at him, but Kassius moves out the way at the perfect moment. He smartly lands a punch with his metal fist too, causing it to stumble from that attack, but it does not back down.

It immediately attacks again, charging forward and smashing its head into Kassius, so hard it throws him onto the ground. Kassius slides across the sand from the beast’s attack, but it quickly jumps onto him, pinning him down against the sand, growling as it goes to bite him in the head. But Kassius holds his metal arm upwards to stop the jaws, and the teeth bite down onto it. The teeth scrape across the metal and his aura crackles where it constantly gets attacked.

Kassius strains as it shakes him around like a chew toy, reaching out for anything he can use as weapon against the creature. He finally catches onto a rock that chills out on the floor next to him, best opportunity he has. Kassius grabs onto it and roars with rage, smashing the rock straight into the Suchus’ eye, so hard that blood actually squirts out from its head. The creature stumbles away from Kassius with a growl as the blood trickles down the side of its scaly head.

Most animals would back down.

But this thing does not.

It just continues to snarl at Kassius as it prepares to attack once more.

Across the arena from Kassius, Cardin gets hit across the chest finally by a competent enemy in the area. A huge brute of a man with a huge war hammer that crashes into Cardin’s chest plate. He grunts as he is thrown back and crashes across the ground. He tumbles and tumbles until he slams his mace into the floor to slow himself down. The large man charges towards him with a couple other guys as well. Cardin cracks his neck and he charges at them too, unleashing his semblance upon them all.

A semblance called the Wickerman’s Rage.

He tenses his body and roars with fury, as the crystal inside his mace ignites and blasts energy through his entire body. His skin burns and turns black like charcoal with crackling embers trailing through the cracks in his body. His eyes glow red as he roars, sprinting towards them as he uses his Semblance, smashing the mace into the chest of one of the Gladiators. The single impact kills him instantaneously, flames ignite across his body as he falls to the floor, and the scent of burnt flesh fills the air.

The next one to try and attack the Wickerman is met by the mace that falls downwards and crushes his skull, blood pours down his shoulders from where the mace had ended up lodged. Cardin releases the mace and with a bellow he starts punching the men with an animalistic vigour, pound for pound he beats them down. Arching his huge muscular arms all the way back to deliver undeniably lethal punches.

The Winchester Huntsman’s semblance is ironic – for he is an effigy to his own sins in his life, an effigy that never burns to dust.

Cardin’s punches are well placed and skilled, three fast hits to the lower abdomen of one of the Gladiators and then one hard punch straight to the face. Every single time he hits them he blasts the flames across his body into them, burning them alive and spreading his Wickerman Traits to others.
The large man swings his hammer at Cardin but the Huntsman catches the huge hammer in his massive hand, channelling the flames into the palm of his hand to melt the metal down. His semblance looks similar to Kassius’ except his cracks have expanded into burning his whole body and he does not even feel it.

Whereas Kassius’ has another mind entirely.

Cardin pulls the hammer from the fist of the man that wielded it and throws a powerful hit into his chest. He jumps high in the air and he lands on the last other Gladiator’s chest and he punches him repeatedly in the face over and over again. Flames igniting with every punch that he delivers, until finally the Gladiator is dead on the floor with his skull partially collapsed from how hard those punches were.

Cardin rises back up, and he disengages his semblance, staggering slightly and his aura immediately repairs the damage. His blackened skin flushes back with Caucasian skin and the cracks fade away. He reaches down to pick up his Mace and he turns to see Kassius still fighting the Suchus without a weapon.

Locke slides underneath the jaws of the Suchus and he grabs its open jaws with both hands, pulling it across the ground and punching it in the head with force. The Faeli Suchus roars with anger, slashing its sharp claws across Kassius’ chest, knocking him over. The deep cuts quickly heal on his pecks and shoulder thanks to his aura. The Suchus snarls as it jumps towards him and bites hard into his shoulder.

Kassius roars with furious pain as it drags him across the floor, the teeth digging hard into his flesh even with his aura fighting to repair it. It shakes him around viciously, attempting to rip chunks out of him. As it keeps bashing him into the floor, Kassius pushes his hands against the floor as he grits his teeth. His eyes glow brighter and brighter and the cracks begin to burn through the faint marks on his body where they have come through in the past. Multiple lines that ignite with fire when angered enough.

“Get off of us!” Hyde bellows as he takes control, a blast of hot energy erupts from Kassius’ body and it throws the Suchus from Kassius’ back, with some of his blood coating its jagged teeth in its huge snouted jaws. It snarls as it lands on the ground, dragging its heavy scaly tail the sandy ground as it watches him, feeling the still warm sand beneath its feet. Drawing energy from it to make fast attacks – it is more dangerous in the day since it can absorb heat and energy from the scorching hot sun.

The Suchus watches as Hyde takes temporary control over Kassius to beat this thing, since he can fight just as viciously as this monster can. The markings have all ignited across his body, across his human arm in places, over his pecks and down his shoulder blades. Normally that is not seen, since usually it is just around his eyes that the cracks burn through. Embers trail out from the fissures that have been formed and the Suchus roars as it lunges at Hyde.

He jumps at the creature and he grabs it, tackling it into the ground. He thrusts his cybernetic fist into the face of the Suchus over and over again, breaking some teeth from its jaws. It crawls away from him to catch its breath, but Hyde grapples onto the long tail and drags it right back. It roars with frustration until Hyde digs Kassius’ hands into its mouth, holding onto the teeth. It shrieks with pain as he slowly pushes the jaws apart, opening its mouth wide as it roars.

Then...

Bang!
Hyde twists the whole skull of the Faeli Suchus and there is an Earth Shattering crunch from the sound of its neck and even the jaw bone snapping from the action. The roars are silenced instantaneously – giving the animal a quick death at least. It was humane, for a Demon.

Hyde releases the cadaver of the Suchus and it slumps to the ground with a heavy muffled thud, its head crashing against the floor. Hyde relinquishes control and Kassius shakes off the residual pains from the scars igniting again. “Thanks for the help, buddy.” Kassius whispers to Hyde.

“All time...you were taking too long as well.” Hyde jokes.

“Cocky.” Kassius scoffs, until he turns to see that Cardin stands across the battlefield from him. Dead Gladiators around them all and one dead beast that was unleashed to them. Both of them know that they must fight each other – luckily they have just met, so there is not much holding each other back. Kassius turns his attention to a sword on the ground from one of the dead Gladiators, so he crouches down and picks it up, spinning it through his fingers.

*Prefer having two...*

Well I guess beggars can’t be choosers.

Cardin roars as he charges straight at Kassius and he jumps extremely high in the air with his black mace held above his head with both hands clasped to the grip. Kassius rolls out of the way when the crystal ignites and blasts a huge explosion through the ground, throwing chunks of concrete and adobe into the air. The dust blows into his face but Kassius slashes his sword sideways at Cardin. Winchester grunts, spiralling round with his mace to swing at Kassius with force, spinning it through his fingers when Kassius ducks and swings it upwards.

It thwacks against Kassius’ chest, throwing him up in the air with a couple of deep gashes across his chest from the sharp prongs in the mace. Kassius crashes against the ground as Cardin charges towards him. Locke stands up quickly and throws the sword at Cardin and it pins through his mace, not breaking the crystal but perfectly getting caught inside it. Pinning it to the wall behind him. Cardin refuses to let go as his mace is carried off and gets stuck to the wall by the sword which Kassius had thrown.

He pulls but it refuses to come free, he snarls and turns back to Kassius, both of them now only using their fists. Perfectly equal now opposed to the situation that Kassius was in earlier with no proper weapon to use.

Kassius raises his fists as Cardin cracks his neck, walking towards him and raising his own. The two of them pace around each other with their eyes focused on one another, ignoring the roars of the crowd. Cardin attacks first, and that was his first mistake – Kassius moves aside and grabs onto Cardin’s arm, pulling it downwards and using his leg to keep his arm down there. Kassius yells as he punches Cardin across the face multiple times with both his human and metal fists.

Cardin takes multiple hits from the Vytal Huntsman, ones that even his aura cannot shake the dazed effect that his fists inflict upon him. Cardin growls with rage as he tenses his muscles and he throws his arm up that Kassius had his foot pressed onto. Kassius summersaults into the air and crashes onto his back. The sand beneath him blasts away from the force of his impact, Cardin rises up and he swings his fist downwards at Kassius’ head.

He rolls out of the way, and as soon as he gets up he lands a precise kick against the side of Cardin’s head. Seems not all of Cardin has changed, he seems to struggle a bit in Hand-to-Hand combat, opposed to Kassius who has become a master at it, like Sun and Ren as well. Cardin rolls from the impact of Kassius’ boot that smashed against his head, but he tumbles back to his feet, seeing
Kassius stood before him with his fists still held up, pacing back and forth. Cardin grits his teeth as he glares at the Huntsman, running at him again, always making the first attack.

Cardin strikes hard and fast, swinging his huge fists forward at Kassius, who backs and veers to avoid each fist thrown his way. He pushes one fist aside and he smacks both hands against his ears, stunning him for a second. He takes that second to jump up and slam his knee upwards into Cardin’s jaw to make him stumble. He rolls under his legs when Cardin punches downwards to knock the Huntsman down. Kassius rises back up and jumps onto his back, hooking his arm around Cardin’s neck, pulling him back.

Cardin lets out a bark of anger, reaching back with his massive arms to try and grapple onto Kassius. The spider monkey like Huntsman pushes his feet against Cardin’s back, rolling the landing off and sliding across the sand, staring straight at him. Cardin growls with anger, his attention turned to a spear on the floor, the same one he caught earlier. He yells with fury, grabbing it and throwing it straight at Kassius.

His eyes widen as the spear smashes into his chest, his aura protects him from being impaled but the impact launches him back, falling on his chest. The spear snaps upon contact with Kassius’ chest, the spear head rolling across the floor. Cardin smirks, running at Kassius, and this time he has the upper hand. He kicks Kassius in the side to roll him onto his back, and he starts to punch him over and over again in the fact.

Then...

One punch breaks his aura, and Cardin stops when he sees the orange crackle across Kassius’ body.

He could finish him right now...

Why doesn’t he?

Jaune...

_He knows what I did to him...he must be a friend of his...I...I can’t..._

He grunts as he pulls his fist back, stepping off him as he looks at Kassius. Kelham stands up, pushing Neryth off his lap as he walks over to the edge of his platform, staring down at Cardin. “What are you waiting for, Cardin? Finish him off!” Kelham bellows, but Cardin looks at Kassius and he sighs, shaking his head.

“He’s beat – let him live.” Cardin says to Kelham, looking up at where he stands.

“You know the rules – only one man is left standing.” Kelham states.

“Sure – but wouldn’t two deadly Huntsmen be worth more than one?” Cardin asks him, and it is clear that Cardin has been here for a while now. And he knows how to talk to men like Kelham, since all that he sees when he stares at them is – how much lien will he get for them?

A small grin forms on Kelham’s face as he watches the defeated Kassius roll onto his side with a grunt. For all his skill and tactics...Cardin was simply stronger and luckier.

And had a thicker aura and did not have to take on a Faeli Suchus on his own with no weapons.

Kelham nods his head, turning to Thorn behind him with a girl sat on his lap, touching him up in places. “Take them away – turns out the brute has a point.” Kelham chuckles as he picks up his horn of wine and he finishes it off.
Cardin looks down at Kassius who lays there with a groan, bruised and battered from their fight. “You fought well...reminded me of Yang actually.” Cardin says with a chuckle, surprising that he actually remembers them.

Kassius scoffs. “Well...she is my girlfriend.” Kassius admits, making Cardin chuckle as well.

“Small world.” Cardin says to him as the Bandits approach. Cardin just pushes one of them out of the way, since he knows where to go.

Kassius looks up and he sees Thorn dropping down with a thruster on his back, softening the landing as he drops down in front of Kassius. Still wearing his hat as he approaches with a smirk. “Nightie night, handsome.” Thorn chuckles.

Thorn stamps down onto Kassius’ face.

Knocking him unconscious.

Ortega

Parallel to Kassius’ predicament, the ice cold air of Atlas sends a slight chill up the Admiral’s spine as he stands inside of an elevator with his hands behind his back. His head held low like any high ranking soldier would, along with a couple of Acolytes of the Coin soldiers at his side as well. With his chrome revolver holstered on his hip, he waits for the elevator to reach the right level.

Eventually it does with a bing, and the doors open up for him. He walks out, and the two soldiers follow him with their rifles in their hands. The Admiral is far from defenceless, he does not need to have two soldiers guarding him. But it is more for appearances – an attacker would be more intimidated if he was on his own – be more of a shock when he can actually kick the living hell out of said attacker if he made his strike right now.

But that is unlikely considering where he is going.

He walks through the Schnee Manor with his hands behind his back as always, his brown eyes glance over at some of the pictures that are on the walls – and to his surprise they are all still the same ones that were there before. Even after everything that Jacques and Whitley have done, everything that has happened to the Schnee Family...he still keeps their faces on the walls.

Perhaps for a constant reminder of his own failure?

It matters not, Ortega just keeps walking onwards with his two soldiers. He approaches the door to his office, and he looks over his shoulder at the two soldiers with him. “Clancy, Parker. Wait here, this’ll just take a moment.” Ortega says to them, even showing that he knows the names of two random Mercenaries that work for him. It is highly possible that he knows the names of all his soldiers.

Because he respects them.

Ortega clears his throat and he knocks on the door with his hand. “Come in.” The muffled voice of Jacques Schnee speaks up, thus Ortega pushes the door open and enters, closing it behind him. Sat at his desk as ever is Weiss’ Father – his hands clasped together on the desk as Darren walks into the room. His well kempt ice white moustache concealing his lip, and a conniving look in his blue eyes.
“Ah Ortega, always precisely on time.” Jacques chuckles with a grin behind the facial hair.

“I try my best.” Ortega replies as he stops at the head of his desk. “You summoned me here, what is it you want?” He asks him.

“Straight to the point too, one of the many thinks I have always admired about you.” Jacques says to him with a smirk, Ortega turns slightly when he senses the presence of a third individual in here. That individual being the shadow of his father – Whitley Schnee, one arm tucked behind his back as always.

“I like to get to business right away – helps me get it done faster.” Ortega explains, looking right back to the cold businessman.

“Well, since you are indeed here. We have a new source of intrigue, one I would like my son to accompany you on.” Jacques begins to explain, getting rather suspicious look from the Admiral when he turns to Whitley.

“What does that mean?” Ortega questions.

“Our – employer I guess you could call him – has informed me of a new development that stands as an interest for us.” Jacques states, as he takes out his scroll and opens it to show the holographic image. It shows an Auction Date that is being set up in the coming days...and on the Auction list is a familiar name.

_Nikos Family Crown_

*Beginning bid: 25,000 Lien*

*Being Sold By: The Ackerman Trading Corporation*

It also shows an attached photograph of the crown on a pedestal where it is being advertised for any investors or businessmen. A very valuable artefact to have, especially from such a renowned family. Seeing the photograph sends a jolt of anger through his body, still feeling great resentment towards Pyrrha Nikos for the death of his daughter, even though she is alive but as a machine.

Yet he still does not see her that way.

And Merlot is his best chance of getting her back.

“That’s...” He slowly says, before Jacques answers for him.

“Pyrrha Nikos’ circlet.” Jacques states.

Ortega stares past the crown at Jacques who waves the hologram aside so then they can actually see each other. “What interest is that crown to us? Want it as a trophy?” Ortega questions with a scoff.

“If only – no, no...I’m afraid there is actually significant importance behind this circlet. You see Vir Nominis Umbra has informed me that this Circlet has ancient wisdom from the Arkhoni on it...wisdom that may help us locate Arkhonex’s location.” Jacques explains to the Admiral.

“I don’t get it, if he knows all this...if he really did help destroy Arkhonex and is as old as he claims...then how come we need to find it? Why doesn’t he just take us there?” Ortega questions.

“Because he wants to see us locate it – remember this is like a big game to him.” Whitley reminds with his arms now crossed.
“I’m afraid I believe my son is right, he may know the location of this lost city…but he refuses to tell us. As said, it is entirely probable he wants us to find it – wants us to learn I guess.” He scoffs.

“What a fantastic teacher.” Ortega sarcastically mutters, clearly not very fond of the Soothsayer.

“He isn’t perfect but he is who we have – now, I want Whitley to go and purchase this artefact. With the S.D.C funds we can easily afford this crown, however I fully expect my daughters and her friends to somehow learn of this as well. They always end up interfering with our business. So I want you to send a good leader there with plenty of soldiers to guard the area. As soon as you spot any of those brats you take them out.” Jacques explains.

Confused around one certain point though. “Why am I not going then?” Ortega questions.

“Because I need you aboard the Drift of Wandering Star – keeping an eye on the forces and making sure we are secure. With the White Fang against us we need to stay vigilant.” Jacques explains to him, and Ortega sighs.

“As you wish…I will inform one of my lieutenants to oversee the exchange.” Ortega assures as he walks out of the room and closes the door behind him.

Jacques sits there, watching the door before looking to his son.

“He does seem...problematic at the moment, doesn’t he father?” Whitley asks him.

“He does...” Jacques agrees.

“I guess we need to keep an eye on him...his deal with Merlot may make him a threat.” Whitley states.

“If he tries anything we eliminate him, as simple as that.” He states.

“Let us hope so.”

**Kassius**

A throbbing pain beats into the side of his head as he begins to wake up with a groan, slowly sitting up on the floor where he was dumped. Hearing the monotonous sound of a ball hitting the wall over and over again. His vision fuzzy from the concussion he suffered from Cardin, he shakes his head as he regains his strength, sitting upright as he looks around.

His cell is different, bigger and not so much of a dump anymore. As he looks around he realises he is not alone in the cell, and sat on the other bed in here is Cardin. He is laid back with a tennis ball that he was given, throwing it against the wall and letting it bounce back into his hand. Repeating this little cycle over and over again from his boredom that eats away at him. The Winchester Huntsman looks over at him, seeing he is awake finally and he chuckles. “Hey, you’re awake. Starting to worry that you were dead.”

Kassius groans as he sits up and leans against the stone wall next to his bed. “How long’ve I been out?” Kassius asks, pressing his metal hand to his head, each plate of metal intricately moving as a normal hand would.
“About five hours now.” Cardin answers and Kassius groans.

“Shit...I need to get out of this shithole.” Kassius says as he stands up, grabbing onto the Isomacium Bars that keep him from getting out.

“Don’t bother, I’ve tried breaking those bars, even with my semblance. Nothing breaks through that stuff.” Cardin assures.

“It’s Isomacium...seen it before...” Kassius sighs, letting go of the bars, then he turns to Cardin. “We good?” He asks him.

“Let you live didn’t I?” Cardin replies with the shrug of his shoulders. Kassius bounces his eyebrows up and down once, turning and walking around the cell.

“Cardin Winchester...must admit you were the last person to meet in here.” Kassius says to him, and Cardin scoffs.

“Yeah well, I didn’t think I’d be fighting a competent foe today. Guess today is all about surprises.” He says to him. “And if you know me...then clearly Jaune has told you about...me.” He sighs, sounding guilt as well when he says it.

“Oh he told me all about it...preying on his weaknesses for your own gain. Trying to get him to hurt Pyrrha, though? Stupid mistake.” Kassius chuckles, and Cardin chuckles as well.

“Too bad she’s gone.” He sighs, totally unaware of...everything.

Kassius begins with informing him on the elephant in the room. “She’s alive.” Kassius tells him, getting a surprised and shocked expression from Cardin.

“What? How?” Cardin questions with disbelief in his eyes.

“Long story...in short, she was brought back by an evil being, was possessed by Jaune managed to bring her back...I spent five years with him, Nora and Ren tracking her down...and...” He stammers, feeling his hand shake just at thinking about what happened.

“Then what?” Cardin asks.

“Then something happened recently...I lost control...my semblance...I attacked them both and the last thing I remember before being grabbed by Kelham was having their blood on my hands...I don’t even know if they are alive.” Kassius sighs with grief as he slumps down to the floor with a guilty sigh.

“Guess we both have made our fair share of mistakes.” Cardin says.

“That’s putting it lightly.” Kassius chuckles as he sits there.

Cardin has so many questions on his mind, he never remembered seeing him at Beacon Academy – but that is because he was never there – he also never remembered Yang having a boyfriend at the time. “You said Yang’s your girlfriend?” Cardin asks him.

“Yeah, why?” He replies.

“Oh nothing...I just thought she was into chicks for a while.” Cardin admits, making Kassius chuckle.

“I heard that a lot.” Kassius agrees with a smirk on his face.
“Well...congrats man, you’ve got one smoking hot girlfriend.” Cardin compliments with a chuckle, but all this talk of the girl he loves gets him worried again. He does not even know if she is still alive back home at Beacon.

“I don’t even know if she is alive...” He stammers.


“Do you know about what happened at Vacuo? The Horridus Morbus plague unleashed?” He asks him.

“No...I was grabbed...haven’t heard anything since.” Cardin says to him, meaning that must be why Team R.W.B.Y, Oscar, Winter, Neptune and Sun could never track him down when investigating what happened. And that is another question that Kassius has for Cardin, surrounding everything that happened with the death of the Vacuo Headmaster and the Pyromancer...and his team...

But, he deserves to know what happened. “Well...a plague was set off in Vacuo...and Yang was there. With Weiss, Sun and Neptune as well. They were looking for you after what happened with the Headmaster. Ruby, Blake, Winter and Ruby’s Boyfriend Oscar were there but they left for other reasons.” Kassius explains, remembering when he was briefed, and Cardin has an expression Kassius never expected from the stories.

Empathy.

“I’m...sorry.” He apologises with a soft voice.

“Last I saw of her...she was looking bad, the virus was messing her up.” Kassius says, before the stress gets to him and he punches the Isomacium Bar with his fist, this time it does not throw him back. He is just taking the stress out on the bars. “I need to get the hell out! I need to know she is okay...” He defeatedly groans, pressing his head to the bars.

“She’ll be fine, she is the toughest chick I’ve ever met. Second to her being Nora Valkyrie...then probably Coco Adel. Get those three in a room and you don’t stand a chance.” He chuckles, making Kassius chuckle too.

“I don’t even know what happened...I just know that...he was there.” Kassius mutters, clearly talking about Vir Nominis Umbra. His voice is not one that you can forget, and neither is his presence.

“He?” Cardin asks.

“Man...you are in for one hell of a story.” Kassius chuckles.

He sits down and he sighs, looking around the room. “Hang on...” He realises when he looks around at the cell he is in. “Where are we? This isn’t my cell.”

“You’re in my cell.” Cardin tells him.

“Uh...why?” Kassius asks.

“Dunno, guess they just felt like tossing you in here with my ass.” Cardin chuckles.

“Wait so how did you end up here? Last Ruby told us you were nowhere to be seen.” Kassius questions, and Cardin puts the ball down on the floor and he sighs.

“I uh...well...do you know about...what happened?” He asks him.
“You mean your team or the headmaster?” Kassius questions, making Cardin flinch.

“Yes.” He sharply answers, since both happened, and from the way he answered Kassius decides to hold back.

“Go on.” Kassius says, letting him continue with his story.

“Well, I was on the run after...I killed them.” He sighs, looking at his own fist with resentment towards himself. Feeling so much grief over what he did to his own team. Kassius can tell that there is more to what happened than they even realise, layers that clearly Cardin is not comfortable talking about. “I was jumped when I was in hiding, knocked out by one of these.” Cardin says as he points to the electrical shocking disk on his neck, same as Kassius.

“I noticed...what is it?” Kassius asks.

“They use it to keep us under their control – stop us from going crazy.” Cardin explains as he taps the little disk that has been implanted into him.

“Great.” Kassius sighs.

“Next thing? I woke up here. A Gladiator in their ring, Kelham was gonna ransom me to the authorities but he found a better value of my life in slavery.” Cardin explains to him.

“Sounds like a real saint.” Kassius scoffs.

“That’s putting it mildly.” Cardin chuckles.

Kassius leans against the wall, staring out at the opening in the wall where he can see the Fractured Moon, looking much worse than it did four years ago. It is barely even a moon anymore.

“We’re gonna get out of here.” Kassius promises.

“Yeah? How’s that?” Cardin asks him.

“No idea – I’ll figure it out along the way.” Kassius states.

“Improvisation? No wonder Jaune likes you.” Cardin chuckles, making Kassius chuckle too.

“Name’s Kassius by the way.” Kassius introduces.

“Nice to meet you.”
Return to the Marshlands

Qrow

“Are you ready?” The voice of Kragen Nox asks the Branwen Brother, feeling his heart pounding heavily. Going back to the Witches of the Restless Marshlands is extremely dangerous, they may have helped them but there is no guarantee that they will repeat the offer. The Witches are unpredictable and have been known to kill people as soon as they enter their lands. Qrow knows how dangerous the Undertakers can be, since one nearly killed him in the past.

But at the same time – Kragen, Yenna and the Architect are all Arkhoni; henceforth there is the chance that they may listen to what they have to offer.

Arkhnionto Arkhoni.

That is, of course, if there is no bad blood between the Spring Maiden, the Architect and the Silver Eyed Warrior. Qrow finishes sharpening the blade of his sword and scythe crossbreed with the whetstone that his sister had lent him. He sighs as he concludes the session of sharpening the blade, standing up with the sword in his grasp. “Yeah...let’s hope that the Witches are seeing visitors today.” He says as he sheathes his sword onto his belt.

“We will teleport outside of the swamp; chances are high that the Knights’ Bannermen will pursue us when they sense the pulse.” The Architect warns, loading a fresh power cell into his rifle as he holds it in one hand, whereas Yenna walks over to them with her hands clenched into fists. Ready to battle against whatever waits for them beyond the doorway.

“I hope that they will listen to us, they are our last hope.” Yenna states.

“They let you go, and they hide from Umbra. This plague will destroy the entire ecosystem if we do not stop it. This is in their best interests too.” Qrow states as he stands in the room with the three other members going with him. However despite bringing up this very valid point, Yenna shows signs of discomfort.

“We have not seen signs of this plague infecting the natural wildlife, Qrow. They do not care about Humanity or the Faunus. They just want to look out for the natural world.” She reminds.

“Well – they best remember that if Umbra wins then everything dies. Their beloved Mother Nature included.” Qrow states, sounding pretty stern as well.

“Be on guard, they will have their sentries in the Swamp, awaiting command. And you do not want to get in a fight with an Undertaker – they are extremely dangerous.” Krages reminds, and Qrow scoffs, touching the scar on his chest where the feral Undertaker had struck him with its shovel. The same wound that was infected when he passed out in the swamp and nearly died, if not for the Witches’ Undertaker that retrieved them and brought them to the sisters for them to cure him.

“Trust me, I know.” Qrow assures, pressing his fingers to where the scar is, remembering the roar it made and the pain that flushed across his body when that sharp shovel made its mark on him.

“The Witches of the Restless Marshlands claim to be women of their word, so let us pray that they have not changed their minds.” The Architect says, standing ready.
“Okay...open the portal, Architect.” Qrow says to him with a nod, and the mechanical man does the same in reply. Electrical energy channels through the chassis of his body and he holds his hand out, blasting bolt of energy towards the open space. It pulsates and rips a hole in space time, allowing them to walk straight through and access the edge of the swamp. Qrow walks through first, but before he does he looks back to the others in the room – Ozpin and Glynda to be exact. “We’ll be back, with the Witches.”

“How do you know?” Glynda asks.

“Because if they don’t then we either come back without them...or we don’t come back at all.” He says, hinting that they will either kill the Witches or be killed by them. Time will tell what will happen next, and Qrow walks through the doorway that leads to the Infamous Restless Marshlands. He steps out, and the stench of the countryside returns with it as he looks around, the scent of manure fills the air along with decaying animals.

Qrow’s eyes widen from what he sees just as the others follow and the portal closes behind the Architect. It is a Grimm – a Creep in fact – devouring the remains of a Deer. Pushing its head into the belly of the dead animal with blood everywhere, feasting on its organs and every inch of its body. Using its bipedal clawed foot to keep the cadaver still as it feasts on the remains, which shocks them all.

“What the hell? Grimm never even touch the wildlife...why the hell are they attacking them now?” Qrow questions with actual fear in his voice.

“Why is it eating the Deer? They don’t have a digestive system.” Yenna reminds as she stares at the monster eating such a sweet and peaceful creature.

“Yeah...they rip people apart and eat people but immediately expel us...why the hell is it bothering?” The Architect agrees, then Kragen looks up to sky where he can see the distant Fractured Moon in the sky, even though it is daytime.

“We’re running out of time – the moon has been breaking apart at a faster rate, look.” He points out as he stares at the intimidating moon.

“The extinction event is coming; we need to find the Witches. The Knights Bannermen may have already come for them.” Qrow realises as he draws his sword and walks towards the Creep. The creature pulls its bloodied head from the Deer and instantly bellows at them with the claret drooling from its jaws. But Qrow just slashes its head off in one swing, killing it instantly.

The Grimm are back and in full strength, this was all part of Vir Nominis Umbra’s plan. Now the Grimm come back and are even more aggressive than ever, killing everything that moves on Remnant. And not just Human or Faunus anymore – everything.

The Architect walks at the very front of the four with his rifle pressed to his shoulder, since they can all tell that something is not right. The bog usually is filled with life and sounds, albeit not the friendliest of life forms since there are Alligators, Poisonous Frogs and Snakes lurking around here normally. But there is nothing, not a single tweet from a bird or even the croaking from one little Amphibian. “This isn’t right; from the two times I came here it was flourishing with life. Now though, it’s silent.” Qrow comments as he keeps his sword held tightly in his hand.

Then...

They all freeze in the same position, hearing the faint caw of crows around them. They all look up to the trees to see them watching their every move.
Red eyes and crystal beaks.

Either Vir Nominis Umbra or the Lord of the Wood is watching them right now, and then they all caw at the exact same time and take off. Yenna sniffs the air just as they move and her eyes widen upon noticing the thick black smoke that rises into the sky from a certain point. “Wood smoke...” She whispers as she stares at the tower of smoke which rises into the sky.

“There’s a fire! The Witches could be under attack!” Kragen yells.

“Then we need to save them! They are our only chance to cure the disease!” Qrow replies with a similarly worried voice. The four of them accelerate instantly into full sprinting, barging through the branches which dangle from the trees, forcefully pulling their boots from the mud as they run. The only one unaffected by the surroundings of the Restless Marshlands is the Architect since his pistons allow him to move practically unfazed.

The closer they get the more troubling it gets from the crackling of burning trees nearby as the fog that surrounds them begins to build and build. Then, they see the flames and their eyes widen with horror.

It is the hut that the Witches had lived inside of.

Flames roaring violently from inside and their potions completely destroyed inside, so many animals charred and burned to death in the thick mud where disease has riddled their bodies where they fell. The many runes have been damaged, something very powerful has attacked here, and so they all stand at the ready, for the fog begins to build up around them as they stand there. Yenna’s eyes ignite with her Spring Maiden powers and the Architect engages his visor to search for any signs of movement in the swamp.

There is movement everywhere in three hundred degrees.

“We’ve been surrounded.” The Architect warns.

“Do you see the Sisters?” Qrow asks him, so the mechanical man searches the entire bog for signs of people – either alive or dead. And the response is either worrying or filling them with relief.

“Nothing, not a sign. They may have escaped.” The Architect comments, keeping his rifle up and the systems scanning like the radar on a submarine. Kragen spins his staff through his fingers, watching and listening as carefully as he can as the four stand back to back in the building fog. Qrow grits his teeth, eyes narrowed with tension as they await the coming attack.

“Did you think me defeated?” A chillingly familiar voice suddenly yells from all around them, impossible to pinpoint the source. As if the wind itself was speaking to them – but the voice somehow belonged to Yenna. They all stare at her, but she is not the one that even spoke, meaning something is mimicking her.

“Who are you?” Kragen bellows.

“Where are the Witches?” Qrow also yells with anger in his gravelly voice, but the rather demonic sounding voice that replicates the tones of Yenna just laughs around them. It sends chills down their spines as it circles them.

“Gone from here...but we will find them. Their time hiding is over, the Moon is breaking apart and the end is coming. Nothing can stop it.” The voice snarls, and Kragen narrows his silver eyes.

“I repeat! Who are you?” Kragen bellows, and from the fog the voice transforms with demonic snarls
into his own voice, far more sinister than his own.

“Do you tell me.” The voice says, as it emerges from the fog before them. Opposed to his whitish clothing and hair, the hair is black and so is the clothing. With glowing fiery orange eyes and cracks formed across his entire body, embers of energy trailing from the right hand side of his body too...

From Pyrrha’s description, this is very familiar.

“Onyx Phantom...” Kragen gasps with widened eyes as it stands before him with a replica of his own staff in its hand, also channelling fiery energy through the ebony stick.

“In the flesh – or yours I guess we could say. Did Pyrrha Nikos really think me dead just yet? Oh no...She merely forced me from controlling her...but our fates are still bound.” The Onyx Phantom assures with a grin, speaking through Kragen’s voice that it mimics, pacing around them all, keeping the fiery orange eyes locked onto them at all times.

“Why are you doing this?” Yenna yells with rage in her strident voice, and the Onyx Phantom grins as it turns and shifts into a similarly evil version of herself. Also carrying the same traits, the crumbling ashes leaving her body and a pair of glowing orange eyes that seem to burn too.

“My, my sweet Yenna...I would have thought you would have understood now that dear old Professor Ozpin has informed you. We are here to destroy everything you have ever loved...and then move onto the next to continue our cycle.” The Onyx Phantom explains with her hands held out as she circles them, eyes glowing with flames burning around the irises as she smirks. She even mirrors the others, Qrow and the Architect. The Architect’s blue visor replaced with a cracked and scorched version that glows the same colour.

The Entity that Pyrrha had hoped would be gone from Remnant, yet here it stands.

“Why? Why now?” Qrow questions, since they have never appeared before, so the entity smirks as it takes his form, black clothing that burns away on the right side of his body just as the others did.

“Your window of peace has passed now, Warrior Servant. Your battle fought and done, and now you will join the rest of the fallen in our ranks. Then we will find the witches.” The Onyx Phantom states with smirk on his face, drawing a similar but flame coated version of his sword. Then Kragen raises an eyebrow at a certain word that the Demonic Entity had said just then.

“We?” He asks, then the caws of the crows builds up behind them as they all come crashing down in a plume of thick black smoke and it forms right behind them. It immediately slashes its huge jagged sharpened bark hands at them, hard and fast enough to cut down trees in a single swing. Kragen crosses his arms over to fortify his aura barrier to stop the hit, sliding across the muddy ground as a result of the move.

The Onyx Phantom laughs monstrously as it suddenly lashes straight at the person it has copied the form of, spiralling through the air to hack straight through his aura. But Qrow deflects the Higher Demon’s attacks with his sword but still takes a kick straight to the jawbone which knocks him straight to the muddy floor. As he pushes his hand against the mud, the Onyx Phantom roars and throws his clenched fist directly into the chest of the Huntsman.

The impact creates an almighty boom and shockwave that scares all the birds from their trees, and he crashes straight against the tree behind him, one of the only that was not destroyed when thrown through them. Shards of wood blasted everywhere from the impact of the Former Bandit Tribesman, and he rolls through the dirt, most of it sticking to his skin and his clothes. He spits the dirty mud from his face and turns to see the Architect swinging his metal fist at the enemy Demon. It catches
his hand and chuckles with awe, staring at the metal plates and then the Demon shifts back into its evil version of him again. “How incredibly disappointing for a High Tech Bot.” The Onyx Phantom scoffs, before twisting his arm and swinging round all the way to throw the mechanical person through the air, who crashes straight through a hut of the Witches’.

Whereas Yenna and Kragen both take on the Lord of the Wood that walks towards them, with crows calling out constantly as he summons them, pointing at the couple with his curved bark finger, and they all blast into them. The impact of that many blood thirsty little birds crashing into their chests blasts them across the bog as well, splitting them up in the fight. Qrow coughs as he focuses onto the Onyx Phantom walking towards them, taking his form once more and dragging the sword through the mud.

“Y’know...I was hoping that just for one second we could just have a normal day.” The Architect scoffs, whilst the aging Huntsman pushes his sword into the mud to get back up with a forced laugh.

“Yeah...I know what you mean.” He agrees as the Onyx Phantom unexpectedly blasts towards them at great speeds, moving as fast as the wind at one moment. It roars as it slashes the sword that Qrow uses across his red aura, knocking him down again. He slides across the mud and the Phantom jumps up into the air and lands down right on top of him. He and it slide through the mud as the Demon forces him into the mud, then throwing one hell of a powerful punch straight into his face with all its might. Qrow grunts from the powerful punches, this is unlike anything he has faced other than Umbra – the Phantom is so fast and aggressive.

This begs the question...

The Lord of the Wood is slow but powerful

The Onyx Phantom is fast but aggressive

Hyde clearly must have used rage when he fought when he was the Ebony Berserker

Umbra is essentially a God above all of them

Leaving the final question – what is the mysterious Whisperer capable of?

“Oh it has been so long since I killed last! That damned Pyrrha Nikos was always such a pain to control!” The Onyx Phantom snarls as it forces Qrow’s head into the mud with its hand, and Qrow can feel the burning hot heat from the burning up skin that covers the entity that attacks. “I wonder how the story will end for your beloved daughter?” The Phantom wonders as it holds both fists above its head, that represents Qrow but the dark side of him.

Qrow roars with fury, punching the Phantom in the chest to get it off him, and then the Architect throws his huge metal body into its side, tumbling with it and catching its heels. The Architect bellows, swinging the Demon round and smashing it straight through a burning tree with all his might, before smashing it against a rocky cliff face. Yet the Onyx Phantom does not even seem to be hurt in the slightest by any of this, just laughing away.

Polar opposite of the Lord of the Wood simply from how much it talks.

The Onyx Phantom gets pinned up by the Architect whom stares straight into the eyes of the Qrow Replica, which shifts into the form of himself, staring at his own inner demon. “That’s the Architect I was looking for!” He laughs; smashing its head into the Architect’s to throw him back. The metal man falls back before the Phantom kicks him straight in the side of the head; so far it throws him through the bog, muddy water splashing up across his poncho and metal body as he falls through it.
The Onyx Phantom shoots towards him at great speeds, almost like a bullet that arches its arm back and punches towards him. The Architect growls, taking his rifle in one hand and spinning round, pulling the trigger just as the barrel touches the mirror image of himself. The charged up bullet impacts the metallic armour plating with a resounding bang, and the impact throws the Phantom straight towards Qrow. He slashes his sword across the body of the Phantom, then stabs the blade through its chest to pin it into the ground.

The Onyx Phantom chuckles as it stares into his eyes with a smile, taking Qrow’s form again. It is like whenever he engages one of them he takes the form of them. “Ooh, seems the birdie is coming out to play.” He chuckles menacingly, wrapping his legs around Qrow’s arms and sword, twisting the blade inside of itself and not even wincing, since it cannot feel pain. It suddenly kicks Qrow in the chest with both feet, throwing him into the air and leaving the sword stabbed through its ribs.

The Onyx Phantom pulls itself upwards, literally straight through the sword and causing its body to flicker slightly with fragments of matter bursting out within, only to reconstruct the split body formed from escaping the sword. The Onyx Phantom grasps the hilt of Qrow’s sword and launches it straight towards Qrow whose eyes widen when he sees that blade coming straight for him. He rolls out of the way and the sword stabs straight into the tree next to him, wobbling where it had landed.

The Onyx Phantom forms his sword in its hand and blasts straight at him, moving so fast that the ground sets alight, meaning the Phantom must be the one responsible for the fire. It instantly slashes the fire covered blade of its demonic version of his sword at Qrow, whom rolls aside and punches the Demon in the side of its head. Qrow quickly transforms into Crow form to get round the Demon as it swings at him, swiftly returning to his human form, extending his hand to catch his pinned sword.

Qrow bellows, ripping it from the tree so hard that the entire tree severs and collapses behind him, crashing into the ground as Qrow slashes the blade straight into the Demon’s face. The impact slices the head that mimics his own clean in half, embers burning and trailing from the wound. Until the embers seem to rewind and form back in the place of which it has been cut clean. Immediately slashing the brimstone sword aggressively at Qrow over and over again, scraping it straight across his, and holding him steady. “We’ve already devoured the pretty soul of the Summer Maiden! We know of the others, but the Winter Maiden is hidden from our sight! Where is she?” The Onyx Phantom bellows, seems that they are also looking for the Maidens, not just the Knights of Grimm.

But the news of what has happened to the Summer Maiden shocks Qrow to the point of rage, as he fires the dual shotguns in his sword into the head of the Onyx Phantom. It does not have any real damage on the demon but allows it to stagger back from him. It snarls, until it hears the Architect charging up his rifle to fire at fully automatic.

The Architect roars with fury as he holds the trigger down, and unleashes a typhoon of dust charged bullets towards the Phantom, in which it grins, darting in a zigzagged motion towards the Architect. As soon as it reaches him, it swings its fist at the metal man, but he transforms his rifle into blade form and slashes the hand clean from its wrist.

The Onyx Phantom stares at the stump and it chuckles as the embers just continue to reconstruct the metal hand. “You are both good fighters, but will have to do better than that. Care to try again?” The Onyx Phantom challenges with hands held out.

“Sure... got all day!” He yells, blasting the thrusters in his metal legs to tackle the Onyx Phantom, carrying it across the bog and crashing down into the muddy floor.
Yenna

The cloud of smoke and the razor sharp crystal beaks of the crows slash across her aura as she covers her face with her hands. She grits her teeth with fury but before she even uses her powers, a bright white light burns the crows to ashes and their many crystal beaks all come crashing down into the mud. The light fades and the Lord of the Wood staggers back, as Kragen staggers, his eyes trailing with silver energy. However unlike Ruby he has mastered his abilities and does not pass out, but no matter what it still tires him out for a moment.

The Lord of the Wood growls as it rises up, looking up to see the Architect with the Onyx Phantom in his hand, smashing him down into the ground with Qrow following in his Spirit Animal form. The Architect smashes down with the Phantom into the ground with enough force to make the ground shake. Yenna snarls as she channels the power of nature up around her, forming the two blades she always uses from the roots in the ground and using fire and ice to forge the blades together into Obsidian.

She immediately leaps towards the Lord of the Wood who crosses his bark arms together to block her attack, which creates a loud metallic bang from the impact, and then the Leshen turns round to slash her straight across her aura with its massive bark hand across her face. Her aura heals the deep wounds immediately and leaves no scars but that does not mean that it didn’t hurt. The Leshen’s arms suddenly shift before their very eyes, for it has more tricks up its sleeve than they realise.

Pieces of bark slide across the body of the Lord of the Wood, allowing it to move faster this time and it even sheds some of it for this purpose. It forms a pair of flails connected with powerful roots and made from the cores of trees and the structures of rock, spikes of wood protruding from each flail. It suddenly starts to swing them violently towards both of them, tearing up the landscape with every single swing that the long flails make, crackling and crunching as they move.

One of the flails smashes straight into Yenna’s chest and throws her back across the ground, crashing straight through one of the Runic Pillars that the Witches had built. The Undertaker is also nowhere to be seen right now either. The Lord of the Wood spins one of the huge flails over its head and swings straight at Kragen, who rolls out the way and channels his silver eyed power into his Isomacium Staff he carries. He rushes towards the twelve foot tall Leshen and he ducks down, dodging the attack from the monster and rises up, smacking the mace across the back of its head to make it stagger.

But as he backs up from the next attack as it swings one of these flails downwards, it launches one of them towards him and this one wraps around his arm and Kragen yells in pain as he feels the roots tighten across his hand. It squeezes tight enough to stop the blood flow in his whole arm, turning the skin purple for a few seconds. Yenna blasts towards the Lord of the Wood and she stabs both of the her swords straight into the chest of the Lord of the Wood, before ripping one out and carving it right through the roots that crush her beloved’s arm.

Releasing the Silver Eyed Warrior, she continues to stab the Lord of the Wood in the chest over and over again, until suddenly the ribs open up and a swarm of crows erupt out from the chest of the massive Leshen which still has a curse on Nora. The crows push Yenna from its massive hulking mass and then it rolls out of her way when she blasts flames from her hand, something none of them have ever seen a Leshen do.

By shedding and shifting the armour, it has indeed made the Lord of the Wood far more nimble than before. It lands on both feet and rises up quickly too, but the patience and calm nature of the Lord of
the Wood remains, it simply can avoid some of their attacks better now, not having to always resort to using magic to escape their attacks. Yenna paces back and forth with her swords in her hands, staring the Lord of the Wood down. “What are you doing here? What do you want?” She yells.

But as always.

The Lord of the Wood stays silent.

It merely forms a new weapon where she cut the flail, and it appears to be some form of war axe that sharpens itself by the sudden strikes on the rocks next to the Leshen. The impacts sharpen the axe and it walks towards her again, so she throws one of her conjured blades towards the Lord of the Wood, but then it vanishes into the flock of crows. The caws surround her and she looks around, holding her hand out so the sword comes flying back to her palm, and it does.

Kragen rises back up too, looking around.

But then it suddenly lands right behind Yenna and grabs her by the head and she gasps as it lifts her off the floor and throws her across the bog again. She crashes down into the mud, ruining her long black hair and covering her face with the wet soil. It would have stabbed her right then and there if it were not for her activated aura protecting her from such attacks in the first place.

But as she looks up, she gasps when she sees the Onyx Phantom blasting towards her after launching the Architect through the house of the Three Witches and kicking Qrow into one of the cliff faces that surrounds the bog that they hid in. The Onyx Phantom grabs her by the throat and she gasps for air as the Phantom transforms into its demonic version of herself. Her burning orange eyes glare up into her actual violet ones. “Ah! I was hoping we could chat!” The Onyx Phantom laughs as it slams her straight into the bog with force, splashing the disease filled muddy water up into the air before it kicks her in her side, causing her to slide through the shallow muddy lake where Alligators once lived.

The Bayou erupts into the air, splashing violently from the Spring Maiden who has been launched straight through the thick mud and through a couple of growing trees. She groans, wiping the mud from her face as she presses her hand to one of the felled trees beside her. “Do you know the fate of the sweet Summer Maiden, Ayla? We eviscerated her soul, caused her to feel every second of pain she has ever experienced in her whole life – in her final moment. And ooh yes her wails of mercy were ever so delicious, like the cherry on the sundae.” The Onyx Phantom laughs.

Ayla?

No...She didn’t deserve that...she was pure!

Yenna grits her teeth with fury, her eyes slowly igniting with violet flames as her fury burns hotter and hotter. The Onyx Phantom smirks as she stands there, staring into her eyes curiously. “Did I hit a nerve?” She asks.

“You tell me!” She explodes, grabbing the whole tree and swinging the thing round like a baseball bat, her Maiden Powers allowing her to pick up a solid tree like it is nothing. The tree explodes against the Onyx Phantom and sends it flying across the bog and back towards the battle the others have against the Lord of the Wood. She grabs what remains of the broken tree and she roars with fury as she blasts towards the Onyx Phantom and smashes the tree against the Demon’s chest, blasting both of them through the home of the Witches.

The small burning hut ruptures into huge splinters of wood and shards of glass, mushrooms of thick black smoke from the contained pressure of the house finally released. Shesmashes the Phantom into
the cliff face behind the house and the whole tree she pinned the Phantom with crumbles apart and immediately sends her fist into the face of the Demonic Entity. She punches it in the head over and over again, but then it takes both elbows and ploughs them downwards into her spine, bringing her down to her knees.

The Onyx Phantom laughs with excitement, thrilled to finally be fighting herself again. “Oh you have no idea how free I feel! Being trapped inside that girl’s body was so monotonous...but this? I have never felt so alive! Ironic I guess, isn’t it?” She scoffs as she stares down at Yenna, who stares right back, eyes still burning with violet flames.

“No wonder Pyrrha hated you...you talk way too much.” Yenna states, as she suddenly throws an uppercut to the Onyx Phantom’s jaw, but the Demon dashes out the way of her next strike and delivers around thirty punches in a single second to precise areas on Yenna’s chest and stomach. Yenna takes a second to swing but the Phantom instantly headbutts her so hard it blasts her into the cliff face. Huge roots from trees above trapping her.

The Onyx Phantom stares at her with a grin on her face. “We will take your power my dear, but first...I think we will enjoy tormenting your friends in the Charred Forest with sweet little Ayla.” The Onyx Phantom taunts with a wink as she walks away from Yenna.

Then...

A fury that Cinder has not actually learned yet overcomes her, which ignites violet flames across her entire body, not burning her clothing since it has been specially designed not to burn from her flames. She lets out a defiant and berserk scream as she shatters the entire cliff with this ignition of fury, blasting right towards the Onyx Phantom and punching her straight in the face, so hard that the mimicked form it had flickers for a second, She grabs onto the Phantom and smashes it straight into the floor before picking her up and punching right down into her chest.

“That’s more like it! Let out the fury of a scorned lady!” The Onyx Phantom cheers as Yenna grabs her by the legs and throws her right into the Lord of the Wood before it could smash a huge stone and wood hammer down onto Qrow’s head. The two Demons crash across the ground and Kragen stares at Yenna with a smile, seeing her using her powers to her full strength against them.

The Lord of the Wood rises up and looks at the shattering cliff face, as trees collapse down the edge from her fury, plummeting down and crashing down into the sky. “Now!” Qrow yells as he rushes forward and kicks the Lord of the Wood in the head, before rolling back to avoid a huge boulder that falls from the cliff face. The Lord of the Wood blasts huge roots from underground and rips the boulder apart, launching them at the Huntsmen and Maiden. Qrow spins his sword through his fingers and cuts the rock apart into little pieces before shifting the sword into Scythe Form and leaping right at the Lord.

He hooks the huge curved blade around its huge bark torso, smashing it into the bayou. But as soon as he goes to behead the Leshen it vanishes into Crows, swirling around the clash as Kragen slams his staff across the head of the Onyx Phantom over and over again at great speeds, and then the Phantom punches him straight in the face. The impact makes him stumble but as he comes round he lets out a powerful battle cry and blasts a thick beam of white light across the bayou that burns across the body of the Onyx Phantom. The white energy flows from his eyes and then the Architect thrusts forward whilst the Onyx Phantom is stunned, smashing his metal knee into its chest.

He takes his sword and slashes it across the chest of the entity before stabbing it straight in the ribs and blasts bolts of electricity through it, which still has little effect. Only angering the Higher Demon more and more, but at first he did do damage.
It is the Silver Eyes, it seems to weaken the Demons enough to do damage, but only Ruby can do the same for Umbra for whatever reason.

The Onyx Phantom growls as it smashes its elbow against the side of the Architect’s head, who gets lifted off the floor by massive roots that emerge from the ground, lifting him up and smashing him down into the floor with force. The Architect grunts in pain from that impact, until Yenna shoots towards the Lord of the Wood, punching the huge Leshen in the skull with her burning fist. With her magical powers she does something similar that the Lord of the Wood managed, summoning roots from beneath her and that crawl up her body and around her arm, then she lunges them towards the Onyx Phantom.

The roots wrap around the neck of the Onyx Phantom, and the Spring Maiden swings the Demon through the many trees in the swamp, shattering the forest and dealing immense damage to the cruel entity that attacked their allies. The Onyx Phantom crashes into the ground, tumbling and sliding to a halt, only to blast forward and to smash her fist into Yenna’s chest to launch her back from the two Demons. Then the Lord of the Wood holds its sharp hand out and huge roots rise up and wrap around the four Huntsmen and Maiden, and they strain with anger as the two Demons stand before them.

“Why do you even bother fighting? Even if you manage to destroy our bodies, we will just be back. We are beyond anything your meagre minds can possibly understand!” The Onyx Phantom yells, only for a new voice to appear.

“Care to wager on that?” The female voice of the Sorceress suddenly erupts from behind them, and as soon as the Phantom turns, the Undertaker suddenly rises from the ground. It was buried the entire time, just waiting for its masters to activate it. It stands tall, towering above the Demon and it holds its huge sharpened shovel in one hand.

“Leave this place!” The Undertaker bellows, swinging the shovel straight across the Onyx Phantom’s face, throwing the Demon across the Bayou, and then stabbing the shovel straight into the chest of the Lord of the Wood. The Leshen snarls with anger and pain, staggering back as the others break free from their confinement in roots. The Alchemist walks forward and reaches down to her pouch, throwing a potion towards the Lord of the Wood. The Undertaker steps aside and the potion shatters against its body, blasting icy cold mist across its body.

The Lord of the Wood groans, staring at them with a snarl as it reaches out towards them, slowly stumbling across the ground to try and grab the Alchemist. But then the ice freezes over the huge Leshen, and she looks over to the Undertaker and she merely nods. The Undertaker pulls the shovel from the chest of the Lord of the Wood, and then swings it with all its might across its head.

Shattering the demon into a thousand pieces.

Sending it back to the Charred Forest, only for them to fight it once more.

The Onyx Phantom comes charging back and swings at the Enchantress but she ducks down and she blasts a pulse of magic into the Demon’s chest, knocking it back, and then the Sorcerer casts a spell, forming a glowing blue wolf that charges towards the Onyx Phantom and bites onto its neck. The Onyx Phantom snarls in pain as the Wolf throws it down into the ground, and then the Alchemist throws another potion, this one blasts powerful magic energy around the Onyx Phantom, restraining the arms with lightning to keep it still.

The Demon growls with annoyance as it stares up at the three Witches who have bested it when they least expected it.
The Undertaker also stands with them, rotten skin covering its body with a creepy smile carved into its face as it stares down at it with the shovel stabbed into the ground. The Onyx Phantom then giggles menacingly as it takes the shape of the Sorceress, staring into her eyes with a grin. The three young looking yet ancient witches stare right back. “You think you can run from it? You can’t...the end is nigh...look up at the stars and the moon. Your universe is nearing a great collapse.” The Onyx Phantom laughs maniacally.

“It didn’t destroy the Arkhoni, we will survive it again.” The Sorceress states, but that just makes the Onyx Phantom grin insanely with a laugh.

“You think that little empire was our campaign? Oh Sorceress, you misunderstand that what you all experienced was just a taste. The full course is coming soon and I doubt you will make it to desert.” The Onyx Phantom chuckles maniacally as the others break loose; and Yenna has calmed down and extinguished the violet flames around her body. “When the Moon Shatters, our numbers will be so vast we will darken the light of the sun and all life will die. And when nothing is left to challenge us? Everything will burn...nothing of your universe...memories or your culture will remain. Nothing more than ashes in a forgotten wind.”

His words send chills down their spines, destroying the world is one thing...but wiping an entire Universe clean is another thing entirely. “You cannot run from it, cannot fight it...cannot hide from it...so why do you try?” He asks.

The Sorceress conjures a magical sword formed from aura in her hand that glows blue with her eyes and she narrows her eyes. “It’s what the sentient do.” She answers, before slashing the neck of the Onyx Phantom swiftly, and then the Demon shatters away into crows that caw and all fly away from the Bayou...

And finally...

Silence.

The Grimm have retreated from the forest now that the Demons have left.

Qrow sighs with relief now that the Onyx Phantom and the Lord of the Wood have been destroyed, enemies they did not expect to face off against just when they had the task of talking to the Witches to worry about. But with all the destruction, things do seem to be in their favour now. “Good to see you’re not dead.” Qrow says to them as he wipes the dirt from his jacket and his shirt. The three Witches and the Undertaker turn to him and they do not seem to have the same expressions that they had the last time. The Enchantress is not trying to woo him anymore, for they have lost their home.

“Cannot say the same for our home.” The Enchantress sadly comments as she touches the dead flowers with tearful eyes, seeing the many dead birds that fell when those demons arrived.

“What the hell were they doing here? I thought the Grimm couldn’t enter because of your spells.” Qrow presumes as he approaches, but the Sorceress shakes her head.

“This was beyond anything our magic could hold – those two demons? The Onyx Phantom and the Lord of the Wood? They use dark magic, magic that can easily break through our fields that hide the Grimm.” The Sorceress explains, and then the Alchemist presses her hand to her breast.

“As you can see, the Demons were ruthless in their assault on our home. They must have known our place of hiding for a while.” The Alchemist sighs.

“What about the Grimm eating animals? I thought they never touched the native wildlife, only
Humans and Faunus were their prey.” Yenna points out as she flicks her long black hair over her shoulder again after that grisly fight.

“I believe it may have something to do with what the Onyx Phantom was speaking of – the Wiping of the Canvas.” The Enchantress states.

“Wiping of the Canvas?” Qrow asks, but Kragen answers before they do.

“The legend of Umbra wiping everything out.” He simply translates.

“The Omens have been speaking of the time for a eons, along with the other prophecy of the Silver Eyed One and the ‘Traveller’s Child bringing peace at last to Remnant. Whether the child is the one that brings the peace or merely the birth of said child is to be seen.” The Sorceress states as she shrugs her shoulders, before she notices that Kragen, Architect and Yenna are actually here. “Hello again...’tis been a long time.”

“Seems dear Yenna reunited with you after all.” The Alchemist comments with a smile.

“Yeah, she was the one that found us however.” Kragen chuckles as he looks at her.

“Well...we need to come together now more than ever I guess.” She says with a sigh.

“A plague was unleashed on Vacuo and Menagerie, and four of our friends have been infected with the strain – my niece included.” Qrow tells them, and the three Witches look rather concerned at just hearing a plague was unleashed.

“We have cured many pathogens but we will need more details – do you know the name of it?” The Alchemist asks them, and the name gives them chills.

“Horridus Morbus.” Qrow answers.

They all can see the dread in the eyes of the Witches, just hearing the very name of such a disease brings fear to their eyes. “The Horrid Disease has returned? I thought we eradicated all traces of it.” The Sorceress says with confusion.

“You did – in Arkhonex. But it appears that this is an evolved strain, one that has also been modified by our enemies to take over the Atlesian Military. It can be activated on command...and we have seen the effects of what this evolved strain does to people.” Kragen explains, remembering the horde they witnessed in Menagerie of corrupted Faunus infected with the plague as test subjects.

“What kind of effects?” The Enchantress inquires curiously.

“Reanimation.” Yenna answers and the Sorceress looks down at the floor, muttering.

“Necromancy?” She wonders.

“Not just Necromancy, the plague corrupts the D.N.A of the host into practically nothing...turning them into Grimm Hybrids. Feral and they kill anything that moves.” The Architect describes, and that shows real fear in their eyes, and the Alchemist turns away with fear present.
“I’ve never heard of a disease like this.” She says.

“Vir Nominis Umbra – it must have been him.” The Sorceress presumes.

“It was, he admitted it.” Qrow assures.

“You’ve spoken?” The Enchantress questions and he shudders.

“He executed four of our friends...the father of my niece included.” Qrow tells them briefly and the three witches express their sympathy by simply bowing their heads.

“You wish for us to craft a cure?” The Sorceress asks.

“Is it possible?” Kragen asks them.

“Well, we will need to see two infected subjects. One male and one female, we must analyse the effects on their bodies. And these individuals will have to be willing to...expose all of their bodies. We cannot leave even a millimetre unobserved – for it could be crucial.” The Sorceress explains, and warns at the same time.

Qrow thinks to himself on people who may be willing.

_I doubt Sun would be against stripping off in front of three young looking women, but Yang or Weiss? Yang maybe...but...I dunno...we’ll ask them._

“Okay, we will ask them when we get back. Do you need any help with anything?” Qrow asks them.

“No...We will go now. There is nothing left here anyway.” The Sorceress sadly states as she looks at what remains of their home. Destroyed and practically extinct, all the animals that they swore to protect.

Gone.

The Alchemist crouches down beside a dead rabbit, and she gently closes its eyes. “They will pay for this.” She snarls.

The Architect opens a portal with his hand and Qrow looks back to them. “Well, we can start by curing this plague.” He says to them and she sighs, nodding her head.

“Yes...let us leave this place.” The Alchemist agrees as she stands up and follows her two sisters through the portal that leads back to Beacon Academy.

As they enter the completely different environment, the three of them look around at the huge courtyard with the out of place Undertaker at their side.

“So this is Beacon Academy?

How...

Bland.” The Sorceress groans, used to the smells of the Restless Marshlands.

But now with the Witches onboard.

They are one step closer to curing the Horridus Morbus Pathogen.
Kassius

He paces back and forth down the Isomacium bars of their cell, like a dog waiting to pounce the moment finds a way out of this compartment. His amber eyes are narrowed constantly as he moves up and down the cell walls, whilst Cardin just throws his bouncy ball against the wall constantly. Repeatedly catching it in his hand when it rebounds back to him. Whereas the Huntsman named Locke finds himself constantly on edge, waiting for them to get dragged out or something. Always ready to start a fight or something like that.

Cardin glances over to Kassius with merely his eyes as he catches the ball in his large hand. He sighs, sitting up from his bed as Kassius slows down, gripping the bars with both his hands. “Are you gonna be pacing around all night?” Cardin curiously inquires Kassius, as he looks out to the window which reveals the falling sun and the rising Fractured Moon. Kassius looks back at him, his metal hand still holding onto the Isomacium forged bar.

“There’s gotta be a weakness.” Kassius says, pulling the bar with his hand, but even the concrete does not crack or move.

“Trust me pal – that shit doesn’t break. I have thrown myself at it countless times and it has not moved an inch. Hate to say it buddy, but we are stuck here.” Cardin informs with a heavy sigh.

“Quit being such a defeatist – we’re getting out of this godforsaken hell hole.” Kassius states, Cardin looks down to the floor with sunken eyes.

“Maybe some people should stay in cells.” He sighs.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Kassius questions, looking back to the Winchester Huntsman on his bed who bounces the ball up and down against the floor as he sits there, one leg hanging over the edge slightly. Cardin stares back at him with grief very clear in his eyes.

“It means I deserve this...what I did to my own team...even to the Headmaster and that Pyromancer. I should be dead – but I guess rotting away in a cell is a more deserving punishment for a piece of shit like myself.” Cardin mournfully tells Kassius, so much grief and depression bursting from his voice and heart.

“Quit moping then. You’re not the only piece of shit that failed their team, you know.” Kassius informs as he looks over his shoulder at Cardin, which gets his attention. “Do you see me giving up?”

“What happened? What went wrong?” Cardin inquires, and Kassius sighs as he lowers his head. He has not had to tell this story in quite a long time, yet the memories feel so fresh even now. He may have accepted what happened but it does not mean he has forgotten – he has just found another place for it. A place he has gone back digging to so then he can fill Cardin in on his own past.

“Gods...what didn’t go wrong?” Kassius sighs, turning away from the Isomacium bars and he sits down on his own bed, pressing his hands against his legs. “My team – Team K.R.D.V, Cordovan. Kassius, Rajah, Draven...and Vetra.” He describes, even though he has moved on from her death and is fully committed to Yang – it does not mean that he does not stammer at the mere mention of...
Cardin quickly catches onto that. “Did you and um...Vetra...have a thing? Before you met Yang?” Cardin inquires, clearly unaware of their long and pretty complicated history together.

“No...I knew Yang long before Vetra, we did start...kinda dating...I dunno it was a silly fling at first. We only kissed back then, never got far till I moved to Mistral.” Kassius informs, the whole past between the two of them is beyond awkward. But it was real just as it is now, realer than what he had with Vetra, but that does not make that fake either.

Love is a complicated thing, can either bring happiness or can bring destruction.

“Damn dude – crazy shit huh?” Cardin chuckles, making Kassius chuckle too.

“Oh yeah, could sum up my life that statement.” Kassius replies as he taps his knees, with a slight metallic sound effect as his metal digits impact the kneecap on his leg.

“So...what happened?” Cardin inquires with worry in his voice for his cellmate.

“Well – an old friend of ours, who turned out to be one of the White Fang, was manipulated by our enemies. The Knight of Fear actually, y’know the one I’m talking about.” Kassius states as he gestures his fingers to him.

“Yeah, from the Fable of the Four Knights, right? The ones you’ve been fighting.” Cardin presumes as he pictures the terrifying entity which uses fear to his advantage. The rotten flesh across its monstrous body and the huge torn wings of the titanic side Bat that would soar across the night sky.

“Yep, and after that – he used her to draw my team out into the open. We were in the forests of Mistral, middle of nowhere – and I got a message from Ilia to speak to her. Apparently she was close by, but she wasn’t there at all. When I returned, I saw my team being slaughtered by an assassin called the Onyx Phantom.” He tells, and Cardin’s eyes widen when he hears him say that. Something he could relate to but not in the same way as Kassius, for in his situation he was the Onyx Phantom.

“I’m...sorry.” Cardin softly apologises with mournful eyes.

“I saw her die right in front of me. And when Death showed up to take me when I lost my arm...I saw their bodies rot from his presence.” Kassius adds, and Cardin feels like he is hearing some sort of moment from a horror story, making him gasp and shudder in the same moment. Cardin might not know Kassius very well, but hearing about the things he has gone through, it really does make him realise how similar he really is to him.

Both of them have suffered greatly.

“By the gods...” Cardin gasps, barely able to grasp the monsters that are the Knights of Grimm, the things that they are capable of. Yet he has not even heard of the terrifying things that Vir Nominis Umbra is capable of, cutting down twenty soldiers without swinging or even glancing at them.

“Yeah...I think it was all part of his plan, part of Umbra’s plan. He used me to try and kill Pyrrha and Jaune, used Hyde. And here I am now.” Kassius chuckles as he holds out both his arms, feeling such guilt at how Vir Nominis Umbra has managed to manipulated both him and Hyde so easily. He sits forward with his hands clasped together and his head held low with an exhalation through his nostrils.

“Sounds...like you’ve had it pretty rough.” Cardin says to him, and Kassius just takes a forced sniff
through his nose.

“Yeah.” He answers.

They both sit in silence, contemplating on their own failures, even though Kassius did not fail, he was merely manipulated by something far more powerful than himself. Everything is a chapter in some cruel story written by a False God and they are its characters, characters with fates and plots decided, and their futures seem bleaker by the day.

Cardin lifts his head and looks over at him. “We’ve both lost things, Cardin – maybe for different reasons, but we have both lost.” Kassius explains as he looks over to Winchester. “I miss Vetra, I miss my team – I regret not being able to save them but I have moved on from blaming myself for it. Yang showed me that – helped me move on. And now? I am gonna fight like hell to survive, for her...and for them.” Kassius explains as he stands up and walks over to the Isomacium Bars on the wall that blocks their escape.

“So what do you wanna do, Cardin? Fight? Or roll over?” Kassius inquires curiously as he pulls on the bars again, full knowing he cannot break them with his hands, but that is the whole point. He will not die in here, he will not rot in here, and he will get back to Yang.

Because she would do it for him.

Cardin sits there, eyeing the ball in his hand that he wants to bounce against the floor, like a stress toy of some kind. He bounces it up into his hand with a sigh. “I respect what you are saying – but – it’s not the same.” Cardin states, and Kassius looks back.

“How? How are we not in the same situation right now Cardin?” Kassius asks him, and he sighs.

“Because you didn’t murder your team.” Cardin corrects, staring straight at Kassius with hot tears welling up in his eyes. Kassius looks back at him with saddened eyes, and he lowers his head, understanding what he means. Kassius may have blamed himself for what happened, but he was not the one that stabbed his girlfriend in the heart. Cardin exhales, throwing the ball across the cell and it bounces all the way back and into his own hand. He turns and rolls over with a sigh, staring at the wall. “I gonna go to sleep – I’d recommend you do the same.”

Kassius sighs, looking down to the floor with his hand still gripping onto the Isomacium bar, tensing at the thoughts of his own memories. As he stands there, something catches his attention down the hallway, hearing a couple of bandits chatting away.

“Have you heard about that Black Market Auction in the Fallingwater Estate on the far side of the Forest?” One of the Bandits asks.

“No, they have another going on?” He asks.

“Oh yeah, some really cool expensive stuff being sold there. Some old weapons, a Nikos Circlet from back in the day, a shield.”

He continues to list some of the stuff that he heard and Kassius’ eyes widen when he hears the mention of a *Nikos Circlet...Pyrrha wore a circlet.* And it was taken away from the sight, and then they found a photograph of it on Auction. The photograph must have been from that Estate that these bandits are talking about. Must be a well-known place for criminals to purchase valuable – black market – products.

“We could make a hell of a bounty robbing that place.” One of the guards chuckles, but the other scoffs, as they both start to walk away.
“Yeah right, the Acolytes of Lien guard the estate. No one gets in or out.” The other Bandit says, before leaving his field of hearing. He sighs with frustration, but his curiosity has been piqued.

He stares through the bars, and then he closes his eyes.

He has not tried doing this in a very long time.

He thinks very carefully of her face and he mutters to himself. “Sapphire...if you can hear me...connect with me.” Kassius whispers as he thinks of his twin sister.

Miles away, inside of her Dorm Room as the Witches begin to enter and set up their laboratory to try and formulate a cure for Horridus Morbus, Cinder lifts her head with a widened eye. With her mask on the side of her face taken off, the scars from the Silver Flames have healed up nicely and the eye itself is even starting to heal. However it will take some more time until she can see with both of them.

As she lifts her head, she can hear his voice whispering in her own head.

_C’mon, sis...please let me know you’re out there_

She exhales, deciding to use the semblance she has hated using for so long, closing her own eyes as she connects to him. Kassius opens his eyes and they glow just as hers do, and then his surroundings transform around him, his Spiritual Body being yanked from his own body for a few moments. He looks around, seeing the cell crumbling and the ashes of his surroundings shift into the colours of her dorm, the bed that she sits on and the open window where the sun shines in the sky.

A strange sight since the land around him has dropped into night.

He sets his eyes on his younger twin sister, seeing her looking up at him and she sighs. “I see you bro...but you’re really far away from us. How the hell did you end up all the way in Vacuo?” She questions with utter confusion in her voice.

“Kelham – he has a sword like Raven’s, red blade. He can open portals with it, managed to get us all the way to this Arkhoni Arena real quick.” Kassius explains to her, pacing around the room with his hand pressed to his head. “Man...still never got used to this.” He says as he recovers from the feeling of having his soul sucked out to where his sister is. Like being shot across the world in a rocket, G-Forces still have some kind of an effect.

“Honestly I’m still figuring shit out too.” Cinder agrees as she looks up at him. Kassius looks at her eye where she has taken the patch off and he smiles as he sees how better she looks.

“Wow...you look way better now, sis. Didn’t think your eye would recover after what happened.” Kassius compliments with a smile, and Cinder smiles back.

“Thanks...opening it is still pretty hard but it’s getting there.” Cinder assures with a smile as she even tries opening her damaged eye. The lids part for a few seconds, revealing the wounded iris on the inside where the amber has faded slightly. However when it is able to open again, the colour should return along with her full sight. Kassius stands there, and finally the question on his mind bursts.

“Yang? Is she okay?” He desperately asks her as he steps over to her, but she nods her head.

“Don’t worry she and the others are perfectly fine – well as fine as they can be considering.” Cinder assures, and he feels such a weight become lifted from his heart. “She passed out but we managed to find the medicine before it could progress any further. She is awake now.”
“Yes...oh gods...you have no idea what that means to me.” Kassius sighs with pure relief, giving a sweet smile to his sister.

“But...there have been some complications.” Cinder begins, knowing she must tell him about Taiyang’s death; however, that is not the thing that he goes to.

“What happened? Jaune and Pyrrha? Are they okay?” Kassius immediately asks afterwards with fearfulness, and then another voice appears beside him.

“Please...are they?” Hyde stammers, both Cinder and Kassius look at him with shock. This may be the first time ever that Cinder has ever seen Hyde in the flesh – or spiritual flesh – her amber eye widens and even the other one partially opens as well.

“Hyde? Wow...I never realised that Kassius’ drawings were really so accurate.” She states with a soft spoken voice as she stares at the entity that walks into the room before her eyes, summoned as holographic ghosts of Aura.

But both Hyde and Kassius look so worried for their health after the fight, truly displaying the progression that Hyde has had in his personality. “They’re okay.” Cinder assures, and they both gasp with relief, and Kassius presses his hand to his chest. He even sits down beside her, his aura form presses down against the bed with a cold exterior of energy trailing from him.

“Oh...thank the gods.” He sighs with relief as Hyde leans against the wall and takes his hat from his head as he stands there, feeling so much relief in his body.

“Are they, are they awake?” Hyde asks with a worried voice.

“Yes, they went out looking for Ruby...after...” Cinder pauses, when she thinks of Taiyang and everyone that has died. Her pause tunnels into their heads as they turn to see her with upset clear in her amber eye.

“After what?” Hyde asks.

“Sapphire...what happened?” He asks with fear now in his voice when Cinder begins to tear up and softly sob, sniffing with tears running down from her eyes and her cheeks. She lifts her head with a bloodshot single open eye.

“Umbr...” She softly stammers, worried to know what her brother’s reaction to their deaths will be like.

But he needs to know.

“He killed...Tai...Oobleck...Roy and Nolan...they’re all gone.” Cinder tearfully adds, rubbing the wet residue on her cheeks and around her eyes. She cannot even bare to look at Kassius, for Taiyang was as much of a father to him as he was to Ruby and Yang. He saved him and raised him...
“I could have saved him...” He softly stammers as he presses his hands to his head, squeezing his eyes shut as the heat behind the scleras builds and builds up with his crushed emotions in his body.

“Kassius there was nothing any of us could have done, even Ozpin could not return until they all died. He desperately tried but he couldn’t – must have all been part of Umbra’s plan.” She stammers as she bites her nail. Kassius cannot even begin to comprehend what she is talking about, Ozpin returning and Umbra controlling their futures? All that rattles in his mind is the fact that he is dead.

“All I did was go to get some meds for Yang and the others...” Kassius mutters, feeling he could have saved them.

“If you didn’t find those supplies they would be dead as well – none of us could beat Umbra. Even all of us combined did not do a scratch, well until Ruby used her Silver Eyes on him.” Cinder explains, getting their attentions taken off the death of Taiyang for a second. Knowing that their arch enemy has a weakness? That is enough to get them to focus for now, but the anger still resides in Kassius.

“What do you mean, her silver eyes? What did she do?” Hyde asks curiously, since he is still recollecting his memories. Cinder looks at him, and she cannot help but wonder about his past and everything that he once was – and if he is still that monster. Yet clearly from his kindness he is showing right now and the fact he is not trying to savagely attack her – he has changed a lot.

“Ruby snapped, after Umbra killed them a big battle followed. Ozpin, Kragen, Yenna and myself started fighting against the Knights of Grimm and Umbra but in the end we all worked together. Nearly restrained him but he still broke free. Then Ruby blasted her silver eyes out and it pushed him back from her and it did something to him...because when Ozpin snacked him in the head with his mace, it actually hurt him.” Cinder explains, and that makes their eyes widen with disbelief, since clearly from how she has described their battle against Umbra, he did not feel anything before that.

“That’s...some advantage I guess.” Hyde softly states as he taps his lip as he walks back and forth.

“Hyde...” She softly begins, and he stops, his eyes glancing round his shoulder?

“Yes?” He replies.

“Ozpin told us what you are – the Ebony Berserker?” She asks him and Kassius sighs.

“Sapphire, wait...” But Hyde interrupts him.

“No, no – it’s fine.” Hyde assures as he holds his hand out to him, and he approaches his sister, crouching down to look her in the eyes. “I swear on my soul – demonic or not – I do not remember anything of what I was and I do not intend on returning to it. You all showed me a better path, and if I did betray him then...I must have had a good reason.” Hyde explains and she sighs.

“He did say that you may begin to remember now that you know...do you remember anything of your past yet?” Cinder curiously inquires, something that now makes Kassius intrigued. The Demonic Entity searches through his mind for any clear memories of his past but none of them even seem to awaken for him, only feelings and glimpses of what he once was.

“Not...not really – I mean I have felt anger at times, a type of anger I have never experienced. And...I keep seeing...this ridge...”

They all stare at him curiously of what he means by that. “A ridge?” Kassius asks, wondering what he implies.
“Charred trees all around me and a landmass shattering and rising into the sky...with a completely shattered moon overhead.” Hyde describes, shaking the memories from his head so then he can be free from them. They all know exactly what that realm is that he is describing – it is the Charred Forest. “Maybe they will come back...”

“If they do – then you could help us destroy Umbra once and for all. You were one of his lieutenants, Hyde – you are not his puppet anymore...but together we can tear him down.” Cinder states and Kassius nods to him.

“If I remember anything else then I will tell you.” Hyde promises with a bleak smile on his face, very different to the smirk he would usually use when showing his avatar.

“Thank you Hyde – I am so proud too, of how far you have come.” Cinder kindly says to him, and Hyde chuckles as he pats her shoulder...and she could actually feel his hand. Not as burning hot as she had imagined, it actually felt...Human.

“Right back at ya, little sis.” He assures, standing up and walking back to the other bed and he sits down with his leg crossed over the other. Both their eyes move over to Kassius, seeing him still so hurt from the death of Taiyang. But as always he pushes his own personal feelings aside and he lifts his head, looking over at his sister.

“So...what’s the next step?” Kassius asks her.

Cinder sits up and she sighs, standing up now and she walks over to the window with Kassius and she points to the courtyard and the Amphitheatre. His eyes narrow before widening when he sees the Undertaker standing guard, the horrifying malformation of creatures into this entity with a rusted shovel in its hand. “What the fu-”

“It’s called the Undertaker, a Construct created by the Three Witches. Remember what Qrow told us about them?” Cinder asks him.

“Yeah.” Kassius answers with the nod of his head.

“Well we have been forced to turn to them for help in curing Horridus Morbus.” She explains and both of them stare at her with shocked eyes.

“Witches? You mean dark magic?” They both ask at the same time, chuckling at how similar their minds are now. Cinder sighs as she rubs her brow, turning back to them both.

“Fight fire with fire, I guess. The Witches are going to examine two of the afflicted; bets are on Yang and Sun. When they know what they are dealing with, they’ll tell us what comes next and whether they can cure them.” Cinder explains, and Kassius feels his heart begin to hammer, because he desperately wants to be there for his girlfriend. “She’ll be fine; I’ve seen the Witches and I heard what happened. They were attacked by Umbra’s forces, so they have no other choice but to aid us now.”

“You can’t trust Witches like them, Cinder. I’ve heard stories of what they are capable of.” Kassius states.

“I know, so have I...and they are not far off my own sins.” She states and he sighs, looking away from her.

“That was Salem – not you.” Kassius reminds.

“If you will try and tell me not to blame myself then stop trying to find ways to blame yourself, you
hypocrite.” Cinder scoffs, making Kassius chuckle at how right she really is.

“Guess that is a bad habit of mine, isn’t it?” Kassius sighs as he scratches the back of his neck awkwardly.

“That’s the understatement of the century.” Hyde chuckles, Kassius cocks his neck round and glares at him with frustrated eyes. “What? It’s a valid point.”

“Yeah but you didn’t have to say it.” Kassius sighs as he gestures his hands.

“Then – when we know what to do next we will free you.” Cinder assures, but both Kassius and Hyde shake their heads.

“No no, we’ll find our own way out. This place is crawling with Traffickers.” Kassius explains to her, and she sighs.

“Then...what’s your plan?” She asks him.

“Not a clue, haven’t thought that far ahead. But I’ll figure something out; planning never did really suit me.” Kassius chuckles as he looks out the window beside his sister. She scoffs with a soft giggle.

“No it hasn’t...okay...I’ll tell the others that you’re okay, Yang will be relieved to know.” Cinder assures him with a gentle smile, one that would be considered uncharacteristic from her when Team R.W.B.Y first met her as their foe.

“Thanks – I’ll contact you again when we break out.” Kassius assures, and then she catches onto something.

“We?” Cinder asks him.

“What am I? Dog shit?” Hyde questions with an insulted voice as he holds out his hands.

“No, no...Just...you guys are on your own.” She reminds.

“Well – tell Team R.W.B.Y, Oscar, Sun and Neptune that I have ended up in the same cell as Cardin Winchester. And things don’t seem to be everything they appear to.” Kassius informs and Cinder’s amber eye widens, even her other slightly widens as well, as wide as it can go.

“O-Okay...I’ll tell them you found him. How the hell did he end up there?” She asks.

“They grabbed him when he escaped the City of Vacuo – guess it was beneficial for his sake, huh?” Kassius scoffs sarcastically since Horridus Morbus was unleashed practically minutes after he escaped.

“Yeah, lucky bastard.” Cinder scoffs.

“Okay – stay safe, little sis.” Kassius reminds with a smile and she nods.

“You too, big brother.” She smiles back.

Kassius feels his Astral Form get pulled right back to his real body, the landscape crumbling around him and transforming back into the cell that he was inside of beforehand. And Cardin still asleep on the bed. Kassius has ended up leant against the wall, since his body slumped down after his Astral Body left and went to Cinder. He does not even bother standing up, because he feels such a weight of grief on his shoulders. A weight so heavy that he just remains there.
“He’ll pay for this, Kassius.” Hyde promises and Kassius grasps the sand beneath his hand and crushes it.

“Yeah...he will.”

**Yang**

She rests her head against the pillow of her bed, long soft blonde hair gently warming her cheek as she lays there. Weiss, Sun and Neptune also resting on their beds with steady heartbeats on their life support monitors, and with the two Branwen Hunters sat down inside as well. Qrow with his sword leaning against the wall and Raven with her Odachi sat across her lap. As Yang lies there, she just thinks of the man she loves so much, wanting to feel his hands around her, his lips on hers...the warmth of his body.

The doors open up and she glances over to see Cinder walking into the room. “Okay...I have good news and bad news.” Cinder begins as she stands at the foot of the steps, getting their attention, Yang does not turn though, and it is mainly Qrow and Raven that look at her.

“Oh yeah? How so?” Qrow inquires.

“Kassius is alive.” Cinder announces, and Yang’s lilac eyes burst open and she sits up faster than she has ever sat up in her entire life. She stares straight at the Fall Maiden, desperate for more information.

“He is?” She gasps with joy in her body.

“Yes, he managed to reach out to me and I spoke with him.” Cinder assures and she sighs with pure relief, leaning back and hitting the bed again.

“Well...where is he?” Weiss asks.

“Yeah.” Neptune agrees.

“Well that’s the bad news; he is all the way in Vacuo.” Cinder reveals, bewildering them on how that is even possible.

“Huh?” Yang questions with concern returning to her tender voice again.

“How the hell did he end up there?” Raven questions with total confusion in her voice and face, able to put her grief aside for her daughter’s benefit after all.

“He said he has been taken by the Traffickers, and that their leader – a dude called Kelham – has a sword like yours. Able to open portals with it and go anywhere he wants.” Cinder explains to her, Raven pauses and stares at Qrow with widened eyes. They never forgot the name of those Bandits, the ones that murdered her parents and the ones that Qrow and her were forced to kill when they were merely children.

“The Traffickers...” Raven snarls.
“Aren’t they…” Sun softly begins, remembering hearing the story that she and her brother told.

“The ones that killed our mom and dad, yes.” Qrow answers with the firm nod of his head.

“They are pretty well known bandits, for slave trade and being pretty deadly bandits. But if Kassius is in there then he can get himself out – they are not Huntsmen after all.” Raven explains, confident that he will escape their base.

“And...he found Cardin.” Cinder reveals, and a chilling silence fills the room as they stare at her. None of them forgot what they saw him do in Vacuo with that mace, killing the Headmaster, Pyromancer and the rest of his team before disappearing off the map.

“So that’s where’s he’s been.” Neptune mutters.

“He also said that some things are not as they seem with him.” Cinder explains.

“What does that mean?” Weiss inquires.

“Not a clue, I don’t think he knows everything yet otherwise he would have said so.” Cinder states as she walks in and sits down on the edge of Yang’s bed. Yang would have nudged away from her old foe if it were five years ago, but so much has changed that she barely moves her legs. But only so then she does not sit on them.

“So...he is okay?” Yang nervously asks her.

“He looked fine – pissed off that he got captured in the first place – but fine.” Cinder states with a small chuckle in her voice since she knows Kassius so well. Yang giggles a little bit too, happy to know the love of her life has not allowed these scumbags to change him that much.

But before any other comments can even be made...

The doors open up and the light from the sun fills the room and they all turn, to see a more intimidating sight. The three Witches stand before them in the doorway, walking into the Amphitheatre slowly with their eyes examining every nook and cranny. Constantly looking repulsed by the modern architecture and lack of natural life around them. “So artificial and bland.” The Enchantress shudders as she touches a paper plant in the corner, feeling not a single shred of life within it.

The Sorceress sets her eyes on the four infected individuals in their beds, hearing their steady heartbeats from here and not at all from the heart monitor. Behind them are Ruby and Blake who follow into the room with Oscar behind them. Ruby watches their every move as does Blake, whereas Oscar is just walking behind them, making sure that nobody else tries to start with them. Witches have attained quite a distrusting reputation for casting curses on those who they deem deserving and burning the crops of Villages merely because they can thanks to their gifts.

However these Witches intently seem focused on business, to cure them no matter what. “We have established our laboratory in the room in the back over there.” The Alchemist states as he points to one of the doorways to an office.

Oobleck’s Office.

“That’s Doctor Oobleck’s Office.” Weiss states as she follows the finger of the young looking Alchemist, despite the fact that they are actually thousands of years old. However that is the case when someone takes magical potions that restore people to their youthful bodies forever.
“I heard he lost his life a few nights ago, we apologise for you losses. It appears this doctor was very well acquainted with alchemy himself.” The Alchemist states with a smile as she stares at the doorway to the room that they have transformed for their own needs.

“Were you...gentle with his belongings?” Raven inquires.

“Yes, and we ordered the Undertaker to be careful in rebuilding his office in another empty room that we found.” The Sorceress promises with respect in her voice. They are definitely not what they were expecting, they may have been informed that they are not old looking – but they never expected the Witches to be so respectful to them.

“Thank you.” Raven softly says with a smile as she stands there, but it seems that the Witches are completely focused on getting straight to business as fast as they can.

“So the four of you are the ones afflicted by the Horridus Morbus Pathogen, correct?” The Sorceress inquires curiously as she walks forward with her youngest sister – the Enchantress. She walks past Sun and she smiles, running her finger across his chest, and normally he would wink playfully. But he just stares at her, and then Blake narrows her eyes at the Enchantress.

“She best not try anything.” Blake whispers to Ruby, and the young Silver Eyed Warrior turns to her friend and pats her back. She is really fighting to be there for her friends, starting to get over that lapse in judgement that she had.

“Pretty aren’t they? At least it will not be haunting individuals we will have to examine...like that one really fat man.” The Enchantress shudders at the memory, but the afflicted still look uncomfortable. As always the Sorceress stays on the topic at hand.

“I am afraid we will have to examine two of you – one male and one female. We would like to start with a woman first.” The Sorceress states as she steps forward and looks at them.

“W-What does examining...mean?” Yang nervously asks.

“Yeah...you’re not gonna stick something up my butt are you?” Sun nervously asks and causing Weiss to shudder at the thought of it.

“No no – merely observing with our eyes and maybe touching your skin in areas we need to check for any rot.” The Alchemist explains, sounding very professional, and even the flirtatious Enchantress changes her tone immediately as she stands before them.

“Do not worry – you are now our patients, your welfare is our priority. However we will need to see every inch of you, to see how far the infection has spread. How it spreads and the damage it has done, therefore we can plan on how to formulate a cure that will definitely work without any side effects. Unless damage has already been done of course.” The Enchantress explains to them, but that does not make their situation any less uncomfortable.

“We understand your discomfort – but two of you must agree if you want us to formulate a cure for this pathogen.” The Sorceress reminds.

Yang clutches the edge of her bed sheets and she flinches as she touches her side...so she sighs, looking at Weiss to see her looking very, very scared to show herself like that. She has only ever shown her body naked to Neptune, as has Yang to Kassius. However Yang is a little more confident than Weiss is – but not as confident as she would have been in her younger days.

Yang sighs, pressing her hands to the mattress to stand up, stumbling for a second but Raven immediately catches her daughter in her hands. She looks right at her with caring motherly eyes, for
she is the only parent she has left. “You sure about this?” Raven asks her with a concerned voice, and Yang flinches from the pain that rushes across her side.

“Mhm...if it helps us make a cure...then I’ll do it. It will only be for a few minutes, right?” Yang asks with a scared voice.

“Longest? Two minutes.” The Sorceress promises.

Yang exhales, her voice shaky as she stands in her mother’s kind embrace. “We will examine Miss Xiao Long first, and then we will examine whichever Young Man is willing to do the same.” The Alchemist says to everyone in the room with her hands behind her back as she approaches their lab. Yang looks at her mother and Raven lifts her chin up with a small smile on her face.

“You can do this.” Raven promises with a smile, and Yang smiles a tiny bit back to her mother, and Raven kisses her forehead. Yang turns away from her mother and follows the Witches to their lab, the Sorceress waiting for her to enter with the door held open.

Yang enters the room; it is quite dark and honestly pretty Gothic with all the candles and herbal scents that hang from the ceiling. Hard to believe that this was once Oobleck’s Office, now transformed into a highly dark ages looking room of sorcery, alchemy and enchantment. With glyph markings on the ground to summon the dark powers and tomes stacked up, seems the Undertaker retrieved as much as it could from the remnants of their home.

The Sorceress locks the door and she steps round Yang as she stands there, still with her arms over her chest even with her gown on. The three Witches stand before her, but none of them look demanding of her. They know that this is a lot to ask of someone they have just met, especially someone who feels as vulnerable as her right now. “My dear...I understand your fear towards us. We are Witches and we have not really gained the best reputation across the Four Kingdoms. But we are here to help you – it is as we said, you are all our patients, and as doctors your welfare is our only priority.” The Sorceress assures with a smile.

“So...whenever you are ready, we will begin our examination. It will take perhaps a minute or two, maybe even less than that.” The Alchemist promises.

Yang looks down to her gown, and she feels her whole body shivering with fear and nervousness, hands rattling as she touches the tied up fluffy belt around her. She slowly undoes the tie, and she lets it go loose.

She closes her eyes with a sigh, and releases...feeling the weight around her drop and the cold touch her skin as she stands before the three Witches. They approach her slowly but gently to not worry her, and they stare at the marks across her unclothed body. Her once sun-tanned skin has turned pale from the lack of sunlight and her muscle definition has decreased extremely. Sweat however still beads from the pores in her skin, despite feeling ice cold right now with her bare feet touching the stone.

The Alchemist immediately notices the biggest and most prominent sign of the plague in her system. “Major discolouring in her veins and arteries, mostly around her torso and her legs.” She describes aloud, and she shudders when she feels the Enchantress approach her.

“I am going to press my finger to this dark bruise around your back, is that okay?” The Enchantress professionally asks her.

“Y-Yes...” Yang stammers nervously, and the hand of the Enchantress ever so gently presses to the bruise and Yang gasps with pain from the fiery hotness that shoots through her body from the
“I’m sorry – okay, appears that the bruising is in the muscles, not just the skin.” The Enchantress deduces when she hears Yang’s reaction to feeling that bruise be pressed inwards like that. Yang actually starts to feel light headed from the discomfort she feels of having to stand here like a mannequin for the Witches to examine her completely. The Sorceress stands in front of her, seeing the many discoloured marks across her once unmarked body.

Around her globes is significant dark bruising, along with between her legs as well, meaning the female reproductive organs have partially been damaged as well. Or at least they have been partially damaged, and not completely ruined. “Significant marks around her reproductive organs...and perhaps even other organs as well from the locations of some of these bruises.” She describes just from seeing bruises alone.

These Witches have learned a lot about infections and damaged organs in their time. Then suddenly, a warm blanket gently wraps around the naked girl and she gasps with relief, shutting her eyes. “It’s okay, it’s over.” The Alchemist promises, helping her sit down on the floor. Yang begins to sob, letting all that stress out in tear form as she sits down on the floor. The three Witches crouch down with their patient, looking at her with gentle expressions.

“Well done, sweetheart. You were very brave.” The Sorceress assures with a smile on her face with her black hair over her shoulder.

Yang does not answer, she just softly cries with tears streaming down her cheeks from her eyes, before she wipes them away and regains her courage, exhaling. “I’m sorry...” She sniffs.

“It’s perfectly normal, dear.” The Enchantress assures and the Sorceress smiles.

“No...not at all.” Yang softly agrees.

“How did you? Ugly old hags with no teeth? Tell the truth we’ve heard worse.” The Enchantress promises.

“Well...I dunno I thought you would be...umm...meaner?” Yang sweetly says to them, making the three of them softly laugh.

“You are a sweet soul, such a shame this had to fall upon you, Miss Xiao Long.” The Alchemist kindly says to her, stroking her long blonde hair affectionately.

“So...what now?” Yang asks with her tears calming down now that she has this ordeal has finally ended. The longest minute she has ever had to experience in her life.

“Well, we still need to examine one of your male friends inside, either one of them will do. However I think that injecting the potion into your bloodstream will be the best course of action so far. And the infection looks very similar to the old strain we cured back in Arkhonex, just more aggressive. Maybe the same formula just with a few more catalysts inside?” The Sorceress discusses to her sisters after explaining the situation with Yang.

“Yes, probably the best choice we have.” The Alchemist agrees.

There is a short silence, then the Sorceress leans forward to Yang, touching her hands so then she looks up at her. “Yang...I am going to be honest with you now, we do not believe holding secrets from our patients is the right thing to do. When examining you I noticed vast bruising around your
breasts and vagina...meaning your reproductive organs have taken a hit.” She informs, worrying Yang.

“What do you mean?” She fearfully asks, and the Sorceress asks.

“If we do manage to cure you – there is a 50/50 possible chance that you may never be able to have children of your own.”

This tragic revelation shoots through Yang’s heart like a bullet, her lilac eyes widen with heartbreak, for she has always wanted to be a mother of her own one day. To be the mother for Kassius’ child maybe when all of this is over. This has created a terrible outcome for that possibility, an outcome that makes her lip tremble. “I-I under-stand...” She tearfully responds with her head held low. “But...there is an equal chance...that I might?”

“Yes, 50/50 chance. At the end of the day there is only so much that aura can repair.” The Enchantress says to her, agreeing with Yang and her oldest sister.

“We hope that your condition will be positive though, and we will cure you. I promise.” The Sorceress assures with a smile.

“Thank you.” Yang softly says.

The three of them stand up and they help take Yang outside after wrapping her gown back around her body and letting her return to her friends. Shaken from what she has learned about the chance of her never having children, when she sits down in her chair she is frozen with shock.

Weiss approaches her friend and sits down beside her, looking at her with her long white hair hanging over her eye. “Yang? How was it? Are you okay? Did they...hurt you?” Weiss nervously asks, but Yang shakes her head.

“No...they were kind and professional. But...” She stammers, still trying to comprehend this news.

“What is it?” Weiss asks, but before Yang answers the Sorceress turns to the two men.

“So...which one of you has decided?” The Sorceress inquires, to see Neptune and Sun sat there, deciding in the most Sun and Neptune way they have ever seen.

Rock Paper Scissors.

They both repeat the same pattern over and over again, but Sun loses, hitting rock every time and becoming very predictable for Neptune. “Fine...Guess it’s me.” He sighs, standing up and turning to Blake. He holds her hands and he pulls her in for a gentle hug, caressing her hair. “Don’t worry I’ll be fine.” He assures.

“They won’t hurt him, Blake. I promise.” Yang assures with a smile, and the three Witches nod their heads honourably to her. Blake sighs and she lets go of Sun as he approaches the three Witches.

“Ooh, a handsome knight!” The Enchantress giggles, as if outside that room she is a totally different person.

“Sorry ladies but this hunk of meat is taken.” Sun jokes as he follows them inside, and Blake sighs, feeling her heart pounding before she follows Ruby over to see how Yang is doing. She is not blind, and neither is her little sister, they can tell that Yang has something on her mind, and it is what the Witches told her. Ruby sits down next to her and Blake stands before her, before crouching down to look less imposing to the girl who used to look so much bigger than them.
“Yang? What’s wrong?” Ruby asks her softly, and Blake feels her hand shaking and her pulse pounding.

“I...” Yang stammers, fighting the tears. “I might never have children.”

Their eyes widen when she says that, and Ruby lowers her head sadly, knowing how much Yang has wanted children all her life. She has always been a mother to Ruby and has practically been perfect for the role. She is loving and kind, yet can be stubborn when needing to be disciplining – along with protective as well. And yet they have never seen her look so vulnerable, something that even gets Neptune to come over to her. “What do you mean?” Weiss delicately asks her.

“They told me, that my body has been damaged to the point where there is a 50/50 chance...either I can have kids, or I can never have kids.” She sniffs; just that cruel half-half difference can mean so much. Either the shattering of an entire family or the birth of one.

“I-I’m so sorry, Yang...but hey look on the bright side...there is still a fifty percent chance you and Kassius could have a baby.” Neptune replies, always looking on the bright side.

“Or fifty percent I could not.” Yang reminds, but Weiss shakes her head, somehow still being the Ice Queen even now.

“Oh come on, Yang – stop moping.” Weiss demands, surprising all of them for how she can say that in her current situation. “So what if it’s 50/50?”

Yang stares at her with confusion. “Weiss? What are you saying?” She sniffles quietly.

“So what? Focus on the future, I get that – but with the future looking as bleak as it is now? Don’t worry about that – because if you psych yourself up throughout all of this mess and then at the end you might realise your infertile...it will crush you. But if you accept the chances...if you just accept it...then maybe you’ll be surprised.” Weiss suggests with a small smile on her face.

“I...I guess I can see what you mean...it’s just...a little raw right now.” Yang says with a heavy sigh.

“So, do they think they can make a cure?” Ruby asks her sister.

“They sounded pretty confident but they still need to check Sun over, make sure he is similar to myself before deciding.” Yang explains to them all.

“I guess it is a good thing Sun went in there...he is a Faunus after all, might help make the cure universal for both races.” Blake states, just finding ways to be comfortable with it.

“Were they...weird?” Ruby curiously asks.

“No actually, just like doctors – asked my permission before they pressed any bruises – they really surprised me.” Yang states with a smile on her face.

“They definitely look younger than I remember...and hotter.” Neptune teases, getting a smack from Weiss on his arm. “Ow!”

“Dolt.”

A couple minutes pass by, after the Witches spoke with Sun and finished their examination of how far the plague has travelled in his body, Sun emerges in the same gown he entered with. Looking a little bit like Yang when it comes to expressions, just not as hurt as she was. Seems his diagnosis was not as sad as what Yang has to live with at the moment.
And in that time, Ozpin has brought everyone into the Amphitheatre to hear what the Witches have to say about crafting a cure. The Three Witches stand at the head of the stage with their hands behind their backs as they look out to all the Huntsmen and Huntresses in the room. “We have come up with a viable formula to cure Horridus Morbus.” The Sorceress announces, bringing so much hope to the afflicted and everyone else in the room.

“We have decided it would be best to inject the potion through syringes opposed to oral ingestion – anyone against this?” The Enchantress asks curiously.

Nobody raises their hands.

“Good, no phobias to worry about then.” She says with a smile on her face.

“So what’s next?” Pyrrha asks.

“Well – that’s the thing; this strain of Horridus Morbus is similar yet more aggressive than the one that struck Arkhonex thousands of years ago. However we can still use a very similar formula, just with a stronger catalyst. Now we and the Undertaker can collect the other materials, but there is another ingredient that we cannot find here or anywhere else in charted lands on Remnant.” The Alchemist explains to them all, walking up and down the edge of the stage as she explains, for she is the one in charge of crafting potions and other alchemical formulas.

“What do we need?” Ozpin asks them as he stands at the end of the room.

“It is called an Aphax Violet, a form of flower that exists in the Embered Grove.” The Alchemist answers as she forms a magical replica of the plant, one that lacks the same properties that the real thing has. It is a beautiful flower, one that glows an extraordinary violet colour with what looks like aura trailing from its feathers.

The eyes of the Arkhoni in the room widen when they hear the name of its location.


“It can only be found in the Lost Empire of Arkhonex.” The Sorceress states as she looks to them all, and that sends chills down their spines. “Now we would send a portal there...if its location was ever remembered. It has been thousands of years, and even still there is a magical barrier that prevents natural teleportation inside. Only Dark Magic beyond our recognition can enter the city, for the concentration of Grimm there is astronomical in size.” The Sorceress explains to them all, and the name of the location is one they knew they would hear again.

Arkhonex...

“We can protect the school; we can cast countless spells to protect the place and your soldiers, Raven Branwen.” The Enchantress assures, and Raven nods.

“I’m done hiding.” Raven assures, and her brother smiles to see her sister coming back.

“Very good, we will provide powerful potions to our patients, allow them to walk again and actually get outside. We have spells that can trap it inside you and refrain it from spreading.” The Alchemist states, and they look overjoyed to know that they can actually feel the sun again.

“I will be going with you.” Ozpin assures, looking to them all...but none of them fully trust him right now. Hazel grits his teeth as he glares at Ozpin.

“Then I am staying here.” Hazel snarls as he walks away from Ozpin and to the corner of the room.
“I owe them.”

Sun stares at him with narrowed eyes but he hides it by looking away from the murderer of his mother and father. “I am staying too, I can make sure everything stays as normal as they possibly can.” Glynda assures as she walks over to that side of the room as well.

However everyone else?

They stay right where they stand, and Winter nods to Weiss as she readies her blades. “Then it is agreed – we will all begin our search for Arkhonex today...question is where do we start?” Kragen wonders as he looks around, and Jaune looks at the blade of his sword. At the faint markings of Arkhoni design and then at the bracelet that the Architect made for them to translate Higher Arkhoni.

“I...I want to visit my family.” Jaune states, getting Ozpin’s attention. “I had a dream...and I think it was about my ancestors. We own an estate; I want to see if there is anything there. Pyrrha’s mom is there too.” Jaune states as he looks to her and her emerald eyes widen.

“She’s alive?” She gasps.

“Yes.” Jaune kindly assures with a smile. Pyrrha feels her heart warm with relief to know her mother is still alive thanks to his own family.

“We’ll come too.” Ren and Nora agree.

“Us too.” Ruby, Oscar and Blake agree too as they stand to their side.

“This is a family and personal matter – the rest of us will go over our strategy whilst you find what you can...and reconnect with your families.” Ozpin states with a firm nod with his head. None of them fully trust him, but they respect his willingness to let them go like that.

“Thank you.” Jaune says to him, and he nods.

“I guess the search for a Lost Empire begins.” Ruby nervously chuckles as she shrugs her shoulders.

Kassius

With his eyes closed, embracing his own sleep, his body finally feels relaxed. But filled with grief for the loss of Taiyang Xiao Long.

But as he sleeps there, a silhouette approaches the cell door of their room, and she reaches out to the handle, slowly opening it with a smile on her face. With a tied back brown ponytail, she slowly and stealthily approaches him, wearing loosely fit clothes. “Hey there, handsome man...wanna have some fun?” She coos as she goes to undo the belt around his trousers, since he still wears the armour he wore from the fight.

Suddenly his cold metal hand shoots up and grabs her straight by the neck and she gasps for air as the growling Huntsman lifts his head, revealing his amber eyes. They are not glowing – both him and Hyde are doing this. He rises up as he lifts her off the floor, dwarfing her in height and in muscular size too. She kicks and writhes in his choking grip, causing her lips to turn purple from a lack of air. “I told you...not...to...try it.” He snarls with fury in his eyes, the anger of a man who lost his father figure and taking it out on her.
“P-Please...” She strains as she grabs his metal arm, but then Kassius stares down the cell and into the hallway to see Thorn stood there with a grin on his face, arms crossed as he stares with his hat on his head.

“Wanna watch her throat get crushed?” He snarls almost ferally.

Thorn stares at him, but he just scoffs and looks away. “Go ahead, prove you’re a big tough handsome hero.” He coos sarcastically.

Kassius glares at him with gritted teeth and anger, but then he closes his eyes and scoffs.

“See...you really haven’t been paying attention, have you Thorn?” Kassius curiously asks him with her choking in his metal hand.

Thorn stares at him.

“I’m not...a hero.” Kassius states, and Cardin wakes up, turning to see Kassius choking the woman out in his hand. His eyes widen, from what Kassius does next.

He snaps her neck, breaking the vertebrae and crushing her jugular in the process with a thunderous crunch that causes Thorn to jolt with fear from how ruthless Kassius can be when pissed off.

If you are his friend, he will kill and die for you.

If you are the love of his life, he will kill for you and die for you.

If you are his enemy?

He will tear you apart.

Kassius throws the corpse of the girl onto the ground, her face turned purple from inability to breathe, and the force of her neck being broken with the squeeze of his hand has caused the blood vessels in her eyes to burst. Blood leaks from her eyes and the scleras has turned from white to red as she lays there, blood rupturing from her ears.

Kassius glares at Thorn with furious amber eyes, and the Bandit is terrified of him, as he turns away so calmly and sits back down in the corner. Even Cardin is pretty scared of Kassius right now, seeing what he just did so callously.

“What the hell, Kassius?” Cardin whimpers.

“I told them – I will not cheat on her – and I will get out of here.” Kassius states as he stares at the man wearing his hat, then he points right at his face with the metal hand that just took that woman’s life. “And I will get that hat back.”

Thorn snarls and he opens the door quickly to drag her corpse from the cell, and swiftly slamming it shut. He did not even bother trying to escape then because he knew it would be a stupid idea, he’d have no chance.

Thorn drags her corpse away from the scene of her death and Cardin sits back down as Kassius sits there. “Your loyalty is inspiring, dude...I would have let her bang me.” Cardin scoffs as he sits down, but Kassius closes his eyes with a sigh.

“All I want is to get out of this shithole.” Kassius sighs.

A man emerges from the darkness to his left.
And he speaks.

“Be careful what you wish for.” He says, and the voice is too familiar and his eyes widen. Kassius swiftly turns his head and his heart nearly stops for a second.

There he stands.

Shaved head.

Brown eyes.

Hands held together, and a sinister smirk.

Vir Nominis Umbra.
Kassius

He’d be lying if he claimed he was not scared, seeing Vir Nominis Umbra emerging from the darkness like that. Hands held together and that cunning smirk on his face, brown eyes staring directly into his amber ones.

Kassius glares straight back at the mysterious entity that is Vir Nominis Umbra, voice trembling slightly but combined with so much hatred for what he has done to the man he saw as a father figure. And for the deaths of Oobleck, Roy and Nolan as well. “You...what the hell are you doing here?” Kassius sternfully questions, causing Cardin to roll over with a confused and tired expression.

“Huh? Who’re you talking to?” Cardin grumbles, tracking Kassius’ line of vision to also see the Soothsayer standing there, in the darkness behind the stairs to the courtyard above. Cardin narrows his eyes, sitting upwards slowly to speak to him. “Who the hell are you?” Cardin questions as he presses one hand to his knee, able to see the trepidation on Kassius’ face right now.

Vir Nominis Umbra chuckles, tapping his fingers together, as he stares to the two Huntsmen in the cell. “Vir Nominis Umbra – also known as the Soothsayer – at your service.” He greets, bowing before the two of them with a smirk, and Kassius stands up quickly, faster than Cardin does. Winchester suddenly realises that the name that Kassius had mentioned was no lie, the entity really does exist – but he looks nothing like what he imagined. For something he has described with so much fear, he never expected him to look so friendly and human.

Vir Nominis Umbra walks forward, yet his hands stay held together, fingertips touching each other as he moves. “We meet again – and yet this time you can actually speak to me, Kassius. From what I can see – looks like you are in quite the pickle aren’t you?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks him as he approaches their cell, looking at the Isomacium Bars, a metal he could most likely snap as easily as they could snap a twig. But he does not – he clearly does not tend to broadcast his powers to his enemies, leaving them at a severe disadvantage.

“Yet suddenly I feel so much safer behind these bars now.” Kassius sarcastically scoffs as he stares at the Soothsayer, making the entity chuckle softly.

“Perhaps – but after my little performance back at Beacon Academy – I think maybe you know that these bars cannot protect you from me if I wanted to kill either of you.” Vir Nominis Umbra reminds with that conniving grin on his face. Kassius stares straight into the eyes of the devil himself and within those irises he sees absolutely nothing, no soul – nothing.

Just his own reflection in the gloss.

“How the hell did you get in here?” Cardin naively asks him, completely unaware that Vir Nominis Umbra can literally appear anywhere at any time, even be in more than one location at the exact same time. Time and physical forms are of no boundaries to him, just tools for his own sick pleasure. But as Vir Nominis Umbra always does – with his cruelly sarcastic sense of humour – he gives a pretty vague answer for the uneducated Huntsman.

“Long story, it’d bore you. Although I would prefer to focus on a more pressing matter – such as getting the two of you out of this pig sty.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains with the shrug of his
shoulders, leaning against the pillar in the centre of the room, crossing his arms. He looks over to the
two of them with a smile. “Because you both wish to leave this place – do you not?” He inquires.

“Sure, but how the hell can you do anything to help us?” Cardin asks, only for Kassius to sharply
give him a glare.

“What the hell are you doing?” Kassius sternly whispers, grabbing onto Cardin’s arm and pulling
him away from the Soothsayer. Vir Nominis Umbra remains still whilst the two have a small little
argument over letting him assist them.

“You’re the one who wants to get back to your pretty girlfriend – why the hell are you so content on
staying here?” Cardin questions, causing Kassius to press his hands to his head with frustration.
Levels of frustration so high that he nearly pulls his hair out, whereas Umbra just watches them with
a small smirk on his face.

“Have you not listened to a word I have said? That bastard is our enemy! He will use us for his own
gain and once we of no use he will kill us – just like he killed Oobleck and Taiyang.” Kassius
explains and Cardin’s eyes widen after hearing the name of one of his teachers on the list of the dead,
so he looks past Kassius to see Umbra standing there.

“Oobleck is dead? How did you know?” Cardin fearfully asks.

“Long story – in short my sister can contact me no matter where I am and she told me what
happened when Hyde was in control...Umbra won, just leave it at that.” Kassius explains, staring
back to the Soothsayer who waits for the Huntsman to speak directly towards him.

“Then why does he want to help us?” Cardin questions.

“How the hell should I know? He’s the Soothsayer not me! But whatever it is, he would never free
us unless he wants something in return.” Kassius explains, for he knows this entity well enough, not
as well as Jaune or Pyrrha do now, but he has heard his fair share of stories about him from plenty of
sources.

“Very true – Mr Locke – I am a merchant after all, and thus I do hope you will return the favour if
you wish to leave this place.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains, still playing the role of just a mere
merchant despite the fact that they all know who he really is. Perhaps he just does it because he finds
it entertaining for his own sake.

“Of course – can’t expect to get something for nothing.” Cardin says as he holds onto the bars,
leaving Kassius looking increasingly concerned.

“Cardin – we cannot trust him.” Kassius warns, but as always Umbra knows how to use words to
sway people.

“No you shouldn’t trust me – only a fool would trust a merchant – however, I do believe you would
be of better use to the world outside of this cell than inside it.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains, walking
right up to the cell and staring at both of them. “So...do you want my help?” Vir Nominis Umbra
asks them.

Kassius stammers, unsure of what will happen if he agrees, yet he is so right – they are of no help to
anyone when trapped in here, and if Umbra can free them then the situation is fixed. But as Vir
Nominis Umbra just said, they should never trust him because he could be holding back important
details. “How do I know you won’t double cross us?” Kassius questions, desperate for some
assurances.
“Double cross? Double crossing is merely when someone turns against the other who trusted them – you do not. But I will not lie.” He promises with a smile on his face, one that is crossing the line between reassuring and intimidating.

Kassius presses his hands against his head as he paces back and forth, whilst Cardin looks right at him. This is the only opportunity they have had so far, and Kassius knows that when Umbra says he can get them out, this whole place will be destroyed in the process. “How long will we have?” Cardin asks him.

“If you agree? One minute and thirty seconds precisely.” Vir Nominis Umbra answers.

*We will be free from this cell in ninety seconds if we agree...*

*We cannot turn the offer down, no matter what Umbra is capable of.*

Cardin looks at Kassius, who is fighting with Hyde in his own head, hearing his voice in his own head, most likely heard by Vir Nominis Umbra. “We cannot! The bastard is smart, he is preying on your love for Yang!” Hyde warns, and in his head Kassius speaks in return to the demon trapped in his body.

“I know – but he could free us.” Kassius reminds him.

“I get that, but after last time? What will stop him from taking control of me again?” Hyde stammers fearfully as he remembers that day when he completely lost control of his own mind and Kassius’ body, nearly killing Jaune and Pyrrha in the process. “I do not want to hurt any more innocent or good people. Only bad.” Hyde states.

How he has changed.

“Is it a deal, Kassius Archer Locke?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks him, and Kassius stops with widened eyes when he hears him say his full name, a middle name he never even knew he had. His middle name is his father’s first name – Archer Merlot. Kassius turns and stares at Vir Nominis Umbra with widened eyes. “I know more about you than you realise, son.” Vir Nominis Umbra states with his hands held together, tapping in the rhythm of his chilling song that he probably created.

“I...I...” He stammers as he stands there, back pressed to the wall.

“It’s our best chance, Kassius.” Cardin states, and Kassius gives in with a defeated sigh.

“Fine – but I do not want to be dragged into anything you have cooked up!” Kassius demands.

“It’s a deal – once you are both free we will reconvene at the crossroads of the Pilgrim’s Beacon, a nearby church in the forest. There I will offer you a potential...temporary alliance.” Vir Nominis Umbra hints, which Cardin gets intrigued by, yet Kassius just looks more and more concerned.

Vir Nominis Umbra walks back slowly with a smirk on his face. “Good luck – you’re going to need it.” He assures, before vanishing into a flock of black crows that caw constantly, flying up the stairs and out of the area, leaving their area. Kassius feels nauseous with fear of what they have just agreed to, he knows that they would have better odds of surviving a guillotine than making a deal with Vir Nominis Umbra and surviving.

*What does he want from us?*

“Shit...Shit!” Kassius yells with anger and fear as he presses his hands hard against his head, muttering to himself as he paces back and forth, unable to get the thoughts free from his mind. “What
the hell have we just done? We just signed our own goddamn death warrant and gave it to that Soothsayer piece of shit!” Kassius exclaims as he paces back and forth. Cardin stares at him with confused eyes.

“Is that the guy you were talking about?” Cardin nervously asks him.

“No, it’s the old Emperor of Mistral – of course it was him. And you just ate it right out of his hand!” Kassius argues as he slumps down to his bed, resting his elbows on his legs.

“Kassius – we can argue about this later but don’t you remember what he just said? We have ninety minutes until we are free. We need to stay focused and get to where they have our weapons stored.” Cardin explains to Kassius as he flicks the Isomacium bars that prevent them from leaving into the outside world beyond this cell.

“Do you know where that is?” Kassius asks him.

“Yeah – problem is it is on the other side of the damned coliseum – I hope Umbra’s plan to get us out is good because those guards need to be distracted.” Cardin explains as he looks up the steps to where it leads to the ground level. Until he turns and he sees a Bandit storming towards their cell with an annoyed look on his face.

“Oh! Shut your traps you filthy scabs!” The Bandit spits, slamming his baton against the bars where Cardin had wrapped his fingers around. Cardin steps back and the bang from the Isomacium rings loud, but Kassius continues to ponder on what Umbra said. That they will get out in ninety minutes. So far they have lost approximately one whole minute.

Kassius cracks his neck and he stops worrying and focuses on the bigger matter at hand – their escape with the help of their true enemy.

Alright – Operation Smart-Ass in effect.

Kassius stands tall, laces his fingers together and pushes them outwards to click them – despite the fact that one arm is metal but he doesn’t really care. He approaches the bars and he smirks at the Bandit yelling at them. “Hey so I’m wondering are these cells five stars...or four?” Kassius wonders as he leans his arm against the metal bars, getting a puzzled look from the Bandit as a response.

“Back off asswipe! You’re lucky you’re not in the ground.” The Bandit growls with annoyance.

“Gosh after a welcome this warm, who wouldn’t wanna just stay forever?” Kassius squeaks with laughter, and Cardin chuckles a little, able to tell that Kassius is just distracting him, hoping Umbra’s plan will be...explosive.

“Man you are insufferable.” The Bandit groans.

“Yep. And for two hundred lien, you get to hear my greatest joke! Ready for the punch line? And a one, and a two and a!” Before he finishes the bandit whacks the bars of the cell wall to get him to back off. Kassius gasps, amber eyes bulging from his face.

“I swear to god, I will pay you fourteen and a half lien to shut up.” The Bandit groans as he fiddles in his pocket, just feeding into Kassius’ smartass of a mouth.

“Fourteen lien? And a half? Wow I’m already planning my retirement.” Kassius sighs with fake joy, planting his hands on his hips as he stares up at the ceiling like he is posing heroically for the camera.
“Dude if you think all this talk is gonna make me let you out, you’re wrong. You’re not going anywhere.” The Bandit states with a defeated voice.

“Well in that case I want a box of Pumpkin Pete’s Marshmallows, a video game for my scroll which needs recharging actually...aaaaand let’s see...oh yeah – a Pony!” Kassius cheers, acting like a little kid with his unending sarcastic statements, just causing the bandit to explode with rage at his quick wittedness.

“Oh by the gods, will you be quiet!” The Bandit yells with desperation, but Kassius refuses to let up, he can even hear Hyde snickering in the back of his head.

“No wonder Yang fell in love with you, you’re perfect for each other.” Cardin chuckles as he watches, only wishing he had a bag of popcorn with him, seeing how Kassius is managing to make a man lose his mind from his relentless smartass personality eat away at him.

“You two are never getting out, how many times must I say it? Not even the gods are getting you out.” The Bandit states, rubbing his brow.

“Well it looks like we are in luck! Because I am the messenger of the gods, and I am here to free this good chap from his shackles!” Kassius cheers in an over the top posh voice, before he raises his hand and swings it in a Karate Chop motion into the bar. “HAIYAH!” Kassius cries out, and his hand smashes against the Isomacium and creates a soft bang, hardly even denting the metal or even making a sound. Pain shockwaves up his arm and he gasps with agony from how much that hurt. “Ow...” He winces softly as he grabs his hand and bounces around.

The Bandit scoffs as Kassius grabs his hand, bouncing on the spot like a little kid. “’Bout time you shut up.”

“You know buddy – we are getting out of here.” Kassius assures as he stands tall again, shaking the pain from his hand.

“No you’re not!”

“Yes we are.”

“No you’re not!”

“Yeah we are!”

“No you’re –”

Suddenly the ceiling above him explodes as a missile shoots into the building and the explosion blows the Isomacium door off, and the Bandit gets buried underneath the rubble. The large heavy chunks of concrete land on his head, splattering blood everywhere, killing him instantly, body still twitching from the shock. Kassius stands there by the open door and he looks at the body. “Told ya.” Kassius states as he and Cardin both run out from their cell, but as they approach the stairs, they see a Bullhead with a familiar symbol painted on the side of its hull.

The blood red Beowulf with three slash marks through it.

“White Fang...Umbra’s got a funny way of freeing his prisoners.” Kassius scoffs as he looks around, seeing the Bandits rushing around desperately to find their weapons. Kassius turns to Cardin, since he has been here longer than Locke has. “Alright, where’re we going, Winchester?”

Cardin stretches out his arm and points at a tent across the coliseum past many guards that stand in
their way. But as they stare at it, Kassius notices a familiar pair of individuals in one of the Bullheads.

The huge man jumps down with his armour strapped on and a huge Chainsword growling with thick black smoke billowing out from the engine that chugs. His full faced mask with glowing red visors around his eyes and a rocket launcher strapped round his torso, he is here to bring destruction to the Traffickers. Mazen looks around, and for once Kassius actually doesn’t want to stop him – these Bandits are monsters so they deserve everything that they get.

Landing down beside him is Corsac, his hood still pulled up and both Spiral Daggers in his hands, charges up with fire dust, prepared to bring destruction with the new High leader of the White Fang. He also has new Elite White Fang soldiers at his side, one of them is a young woman with a serpent like look to her body. Very slender with arching orange eyes and a forked tongue, hissing softly with a pair of knives with poison coating the blades.

Beside her is Hyena Faunus, one that also looks insane from the mad laughter that they can here from all the way over here, with small rounded ears poking through his brown hair. His eyes are bright yellow that look like they glow in the dark as well. He holds a pair of hammers, ready to bludgeon anyone in his path, in which he charges off immediately. Another is a Warthog Faunus, with curved tusks protruding from his jaws and muscular features on his body, with thick fur around his neck, like a mane.

Then a third drops down, quite similar to Yuma in fact, however instead of being a bat he appears to be an Eagle. He has huge feathered wings that stretch out from his back with mechanical legs with razor sharp talons attached to the bottom of his toes, digging into the back of one of the soldiers, who wails in agony as he falls face first to the floor, blood pouring from his wounds. He draws his bow and he pulls it back, and the arrow transforms with flames igniting around it. He fires it towards one of the Bandits fighting across the Coliseum from them, and it hits him in the spine, igniting his clothes and flesh.

The Bandit wails in agony, flailing around to try and put out the flames but his life ends as he falls into a pit of highly explosive barrels. That explode and throw chunks of debris burning constantly into the air.

Cardin and Kassius both watch as the Elite Faunus arrive, with Mazen Ursus leading the charge as the High Leader after the death of Adam Taurus. “Mazen...Alright let the White Fang handle the Traffickers. Let’s just get to where our weapons are and get our gear.” Kassius explains, and Cardin nods.

“Got your back.” Cardin assures, and Kassius gives him a surprised look.

“Cardin Winchester taking orders?” He chuckles.

“I can be a team player, Kassius.” He reminds with a smirk.

Mazen

Mazen walks slowly with his Chainsword held tightly in his hand, ready to attack any of the Bandits that challenge him. Corsac walks with him, and the Fox Brother turns his head when he spots a Bandit charging towards him with a mace held above his head, screaming idiotically. Corsac ducks
down then pushes up ninety degrees, driving both his daggers into the Bandit’s Chest, pushing him back before ripping them from his chest. The Bandit gasps in agony as his blood squirts from his two punctured wounds, limping back as he presses his hands to the bloody holes. The sanguine fluid drooling down his hands as he stands there.

Corsac roars, jumping and slamming both his feet down into the Bandit’s chest to knock him to the floor. With both blades he drives them straight into the eyes of the Bandit, his screams of burning agony echo past him until he twists them. The Bandit’s body jolts and he gargles, killed with ruptured eyes in his face, blood everywhere. Corsac has more ferocity now after the death of his youngest twin brother, with his fists clenched and teeth gritted together, he is furious.

Always wanting to get revenge.

Whereas Mazen walks forward as two of the men charge straight at him, but Mazen just grabs one of them by the throat and he slashes the Chainsword across the chest of the other Bandit. The barbed teeth cut clean through his armour plating and churns up his flesh, grinding the bones down with blood spraying everywhere. He still holds the Bandit by the neck, slowly squeezing the life force from him, until there is a crunch from him crushing his windpipe, throwing him down the stairs.

The body of the Bandit tumbles down the stone steps, and one of the Bandits running towards them trips over his body, his face hitting and scraping across the sharp steps. He grunts in pain, only to die from the feeling of the Chainsword being pushed down his back. Mazen has used hardly any energy as he keeps moving forward, looking around. “White Fang!” Mazen bellows through his mask, looking around to all the Faunus Soldiers that storm the Coliseum that the Traffickers have taken over. “Clear out these pests and find our brothers and sisters!” Mazen bellows as he holds his Chainsword above his head.

“What about the Human Prisoners?” Corsac asks him as he stares at some human slaves cowering in terror of their fates being undecided. Mazen stares at them and he sighs, walking right past them.

“What? They would abandon us just like they did before!” He questions, almost disrespectfully, but Mazen just stares him down.

“Then we must be better – we came here to free our people. Let the humans find their own way.” Mazen orders, walking past him as he snarls, charging up his Chainsword to make his attack. He grabs onto the Chainsword with both hands and he swings it downwards with fury, slashing straight across the head of one of the Bandits that rushes towards him. Blood scatters across the area as he walks forward. He stands at the centre of the battlefield and he turns to his Elite Faunus.

He speaks with a powerful voice, turning to the Eagle Faunus first. “Arkaas!” Mazen bellows, getting the Elite’s attention, staring at him with large blue eyes and ruffling his white and gold feathers. “Search for as many Faunus Prisoners as you can, Kaa go with him.” Mazen orders as he stands tall.

“Understood.” Arkaas agrees with the firm nod of his head, taking his bow and spreading his wings out, swinging them as he takes off into the air. Kaa follows him in the same direction, whereas Mazen stays and turns to the Hyena and the Warthog.

“Kardas, Anto – I want the two of you to go after the Bandits. Wipe them out.” Mazen orders, and the Hyena Faunus known as Kardas laughs maniacally as he holds both his hammers in his hands, with a maniacal smirk on his face as he laughs, whereas Anto the Warthog is calmer but just as
“Gladly!” Kardas laughs, as he charges towards the Bandits that run towards him. He jumps at them and he takes both his hammers, smashing them repeatedly into the skull of the Bandit he landed on. The Bandit tries to scream but his head caves in before he even has the chance to, blood splattering all over Kardas already, whereas Anto takes his axe and he slams it straight into the neck of the bandit, before ripping it out and hitting him again and again until his head flies off his shoulders.

Mazen looks away from his vicious soldiers and looks to his second in command – Corsac Albain, the last of the Albains left. “And us?” Corsac asks.

“We will track down the leader of these Bandits and we will kill him.” Mazen answers, clenching his hand into a fist and their eyes move up to the balcony above the arena itself, where he was sat when Kassius was inside of that arena the previous day. Mazen walks with Corsac, and overhead they see Kaa climbing up the pillar that leads to the very top of second floor, where Arkaas just flies towards. He spins through the air as he folds his wings away, and he draws his bow as he rotates round, firing an arrow that stabs straight into the chest of one of the Bandits.

The Bandit grunts, falling to the floor, and as the Eagle Faunus lands, Kaa climbs up and she charges forward with her two poisonous daggers in her hands, and she throws one of them into the chest of the victim. He immediately vomits and chokes in agony, falling to one knee, only for her to run at him and stab him right up the neck with her other blade, before pulling the first from his chest. He roars in pain as he falls to the floor, and she jumps up and wraps he slender legs around the next Bandit’s neck.

She and him both fall to the floor and she winks at him with a smile, her Viper-Like eyes staring into his. “You boys like girls huh? I’ll give you some fun.” Kaa promises as she opens her cleavage slightly to show her femininity, only for her mouth to open and her canines to fold out like the fangs of a snake. The Bandit’s eyes widen with horror and he screams as she plunges her fangs into his neck, pumping venom into his system. She rises up with blood around her mouth, before grabbing the other Bandit running at her by the neck. She twirls round and presses her body to his, looking up at him. “Hey there, handsome.” She coos, planting a kiss on him.

He jolts, as he feels a burning feeling travel from his lips and into his blood stream, only at the worst moment does he realise that Kaa wears poisonous lipstick. She truly lives up to the reputation of being a Serpentine Faunus, she has the venom and the cunning to take people down with ease.

Arkaas soars overhead and his metal legs extend as he grabs onto the shoulders of a Bandit, who screams in pain as the talons dig into his shoulders, he carries him in the air, staring down at him with a maniacal smirk on his face. “Going down?” He asks him, releasing him into a pit of feral dogs used in the Arenas.

“No! Help me!” He wails as the dogs swarm around him, savagely ripping him apart with barks and growls, ripping chunks of flesh from his bones as we wails for help. Dying slowly and painfully to the teeth and claws of the dogs that they starved for their own pleasures. Arkaas grins, before he flies towards a bunch of cages. The cages have Working Slaves trapped inside and he shoots the mechanism that keeps all of the cages locked.

“Stay if you wish to fight for the White Fang, leave if you want to be free!” Arkaas demands, yelling both to Humans and Faunus who want freedom. He turns and he draws his bow back when he sees a Bandit with a rifle aimed at him, so he fires and sends a bullet flying right towards him. Arkaas spins through the air, using his wings to his advantage to avoid that bullet. It shoots past him but the Eagle draws his bow back and fires it towards the soldier, and the arrow shoots straight into his eye. The Bandit dies instantly, and he plummets off the side of the platform, crashing into the ground.
below with a thunderous bang.

Across the Coliseum from them...

A bandit screams in terror as he gets dragged behind a door by Kardas who drops his hammers and personally beats this man to death with his own hands. His insanity is rivalled only to Tyrian’s, and even then he is not that far off. He punches him so fast and so hard that the blood begins to pool out from round the corner, crushing his head after he pushes his thumbs into the man’s eyes. He writhes and screams in agony as Kardas squashes his head like a melon, blood splattering everywhere.

He turns and picks up his hammer and he throws it straight into the back of a fleeing Bandit, the head of the hammer breaks his spine pretty much instantaneously, bringing him to the ground and crying in terror and in agony. He crawls with desperation, and Kardas bashes his head in with the hammer over and over again until his head is a pulpy mess on the floor. He laughs maniacally as he holds his arms back, screaming to the night sky. Blood drops off his brown hair as he stands tall, giggling constantly with his reflective yellow eyes searching for more Bandits to kill. He leaves the prisoners alone, per Mazen’s order that he gave him before he went in search for Kelham.

He keeps walking but he turns his head when he sees Anto slamming his axe into the head of a Bandit over and over again. Anto turns, charging forward at great speed and stabbing his tusk straight into the neck of the Bandit, causing him to choke on his own blood. Anto lifts him up before ripping him from the tusk, throwing him on the floor. These Elite Faunus are far more deranged than the last ones that he had, they were more like soldiers.

But these?

They are more like prisoners of war – who lost their minds.

The Elite Butchers continue to slaughter the Bandits like cows in a farm, just far less humane than anything that a farmer would do. They are showing themselves like the monsters that humanity fear them as.

Away from where they are, Mazen and Corsac keep moving, and the Last Albain charges towards the Bandits that protect the entrance to where Kelham must be hiding. He takes both his blades and he jumps towards him, stabbing them straight into the chest of one of the Bandits, killing him instantly. He ducks down to avoid the Highwayman’s swing, only for Mazen to grab him by the head with his huge hand. With all his might, Mazen cracks his head against the wall with force, blood spraying up the side of the wall from the impact. His dead hunk of meat slumps to the floor, blood pouring from the side of his head as Mazen keeps walking.

The two of them keep moving up, and it looks like most of the Bandits are gone, Thorn included. Mazen walks up the steps more and more, seeing a Bandit crawling with fear, only for Corsac to stab him in the heart to finish him off. Whereas Mazen just keeps walking up the spiralling stairs. His heavy footfalls are always so familiar, because he has such a hulking body, walking up these steps with that Chainsword in his hand.

Finally, he reaches the door and he pushes it open to see Kelham standing in his office. His back turned to Mazen and a smirk on his face, his sword resting on his chair. “It’s over, Kelham. Release our people.” Mazen demands with a snarling voice, but Kelham just chuckles.

“Y’know...I was wondering when you would turn up, old friend.” He scoffs, turning to face him with his eyes focusing onto the mask.

“You’ve grown old.” Mazen scoffs.
“I’d presume the same of you – if I could see past that mask of yours.” He states as he shrugs his shoulders. Kelham sighs with his hands at his side, turning to the coffee machine as Corsac enters. “Care for a coffee?” He asks him, but Mazen doesn’t answer, so he looks at Corsac. “What about you, Foxie?”

“Your time trafficking people is over, Kelham.” Corsac states, but he just chuckles as he pours himself a cup of black coffee with no sugars at all.

“Ah, straight to the point huh? See why Mazen likes you, no fun at parties obviously.” He chuckles as he takes his coffee and drinks it slightly, exhaling as he leans against his table. Constantly calm as he stares Mazen down. “So – how’s Adam doing?”

“He is dead.” Mazen answers coldly, and Kelham sighs.

“What a shame...I always did like him.” Kelham states, as he turns his neck to reveal the scales of his a lizard.

He is a Faunus.

And used to be part of the White Fang.

“Did he at least get young lass to marry him?” Kelham wonders, picturing the face of Blake Belladonna when she was younger – and how he is out of the loop.

“Blake Belladonna killed him – betrayed him and all of us. We are going to destroy Atlas and will rebuild a new trust between Humanity and Faunus.” Mazen explains, showing that he does not fight for the extermination of Humanity, but for what he has always fought for.

Equality.

“So what? You can only be equal when Atlas is out of the picture? What stops Humans from treating our kind any worse simply because of what we did?” Kelham wonders as he fiddles with his coffee.

“They will understand, it has been taken over by Jacques Schnee and the Acolytes of Lien, we would be doing them a favour.” Mazen explains as he stands before him, walking closer into the room, but Kelham does not look worried at all, with his fingers close to his red Khopesh on the chair beside him.

“A favour? Please – Humans never forget and are vengeful, just as we are.” He states.

“At least we haven’t fallen to selling people, Kelham.” Corsac reminds with a snarl in his voice, but all he does his shrug his shoulders.

“Slave Trade sells well, everyone likes a servant you know.” Kelham chuckles.

“Our people were treated as slaves for long enough. No more – we will take what the Traffickers have and we will move onto the next Slave Camp. But I will not let you escape this time.” Mazen states, but Kelham drops his coffee on the floor, the black hot liquid pours everywhere.

“Try and stop me.” Kelham chuckles as he swiftly grabs the hilt of his Khopesh and slices the air behind him, forming a red and black portal behind him. “See you around, Mazen.” Kelham departs as he jumps through the portal backwards, smirking all the way through as the portal closes behind him. Mazen swung at the worst moment, the portal collapsing just as it would have touched him.

Defeatedly, Mazen growls as he clenches his hands tight. “Damn it.”
Kassius

The Traffickers have fallen, with the White Fang storming in and gunning every single one that they spot down, and the Elite Faunus hacking them all down one by one...for once the two of them are actually on the same side as the White Fang. But that does not mean that they will risk being spotted by them. Kassius and Cardin keep low to the ground, for they can see the tent where their weapons are being stored along with their gear.

Cardin can see his armour he has always worn along with his mace, and Kassius can see his clothes and his jacket just shoved in the corner with both Lash Equinox and Vulcan Nox sat there too. Meaning they can get to their weapons, real question is how the hell are they even getting out of here. They both look back and forth as they charge towards their weapons and clothes. They have no time to get changed yet, so they are wearing their Arena gear for now.

They shove their clothes into some bags and they run with their weapons towards a gate that is still open that some bandits are using to escape. But are being shot down by the White Fang that wait outside. They cannot escape that way, so they turn to run back to the centre.

But when they turn...

They see Mazen standing at the end of the path.

He stares straight at them, and after the last confrontation that Kassius had with Mazen, it followed up with a fight between them. However Corsac is not there, and Mazen has not even drawn his Chainsword. Then, Mazen raises his fingers to the comms in his helmet to communicate with a specific regiment of White Fang. “East Gate – we have some prisoners escaping, hold fire.” Mazen orders, and Kassius’ eyes widen.

All Mazen does is nod.

Kassius never expected that, so in return he nods back and they both turn and run in that direction. As they turn the corner out of Mazen’s sight, Corsac steps round the corner, unaware that a friend of the killer of his brother was right there. “Mazen? Are you alright?” He asks.

“Yes – fine.” Mazen assures, as he turns and walks away.

He let them go.

Kassius and Cardin keep running further and further, but when they do they both gasp from who they see in the dirt with blood all over them. It is the body of Neryth, the prostitute granddaughter of Nadine, the medic. They both crouch down, and it looks like she was shot, in the back of the head. She never even knew what hit her.

Kassius sighs, closing her eyes so then she can rest, until they hear a cough next to them. They both walk over and they see a second person still alive, but dying. It is Nadine, and she has also been shot, in the stomach and she is bleeding out. “Oh no...Hold on Nadine.” Kassius whispers to her as he crouches down, holding her hand as Cardin presses his hands against the bullet wound she suffered.

She coughs but then she softly laughs. “How you have changed, Cardin...never thought you would be here...trying to save me.” She laughs softly. Cardin nervously laughs as he also tries to help her.
“Try not to move, you’re going to be okay.” Cardin promises as he keeps her still. But she sits up slowly, content with her fate, setting her eyes on the body of her granddaughter.

“No...this is where...I get off.” Nadine assures with a soft spoken voice, wincing in pain as she holds the hand of Cardin with her elderly ones.

“C’mon don’t talk like that. You’re gonna survive this.” Kassius promises.

“Kassius – I am an old woman, I am not going to survive a bullet wound.” She softly says to him with a smile, caressing his cheek. “You really are such a handsome young boy...promise me you will find your girlfriend?” She asks him with a smile.

“I...I will...” He promises with a kind smile.

Nadine looks up to the vast expanse of stars above her head and she sighs, even she has noticed that there are less of them now than there were years ago. But this is not down to pollution – the Vacuo Desert has always had incredible displays at night. With the Moon breaking apart more and more with every day that passes by – every star goes out with it.

Soon the Shivering Dominion will arrive, and the end of their universe will follow if they do not stop Vir Nominis Umbra.

“Who did this to you, Nadine?” Kassius asks her with a nervous voice. She coughs in pain, feeling the blood in her body leaving with every second.

“Thorn...” She answers, and Kassius grits his teeth with anger when he pictures his face, as does Cardin. “He still has your hat.” She jokes.

“Well...when I kill him it’ll be for more than that.” Kassius promises with stern eyes, searching the treeline for him, seeing the footprints that trail into the woods.

Kassius continues to hold her hand with his human one, making sure that she does not die alone. “What a beautiful night...” She softly says to them, as she looks at Kassius. “Never give in on your family...either of you...family is all we have.” She softly says to both of them, before she grabs onto Cardin and pulls him close.

“Cardin...you have to believe again.” She whispers, before he hears the sound of her breath leaving her body, and the muscles loosening and her pulse coming to an end. Kassius’ eyes sink when Nadine dies in their arms, her pupils dilating as the light leaves her soul. They both hang their heads sadly.

Then Kassius clenches his hand into a fist.

“Thorn...we will kill him for this.” Kassius snarls.

“But what about her?” Cardin asks, and he looks down at their bodies, and they wish that they could bury them.

“I guess...we should hope that Mazen does it for us.” Kassius states, and Cardin looks at him with saddened eyes. He holds his Mace in his hands, and Kassius tightens his grip when he draws Lash Equinox.

“We kill Thorn – then we find Umbra.” Cardin states.

“Done.” Kassius agrees.
They both set off, following the tracks that move away from where Nadine and Neryth were found, and they can only hope the White Fang will have the honour to bury two human prisoners that never deserved to become slaves. They both continue through the thick forest, the border between the desert and the forest is completely hidden, for it suddenly transforms on a perfect line. Kassius and Cardin both follow the blood trail further through the forest.

And as they travel, they hear the snarls of Grimm around them, barking and hissing. Charging from the brush are Beowulves and other kinds of smaller Grimm. Kassius ducks down as Cardin swings his mace round and smashes it straight across the skull of the Beowulf, killing it instantly. Kassius slashes his sword across the throat of a charging Creep then he spins the other blade of Lash Equinox downwards and through the roof of its head. Killing it swiftly, before he turns and fires Vulcan Nox and nails a Beowulf in the eye.

Cardin roars as he jumps in the air, mace held over his head and he activates the red dust crystal inside, creating a powerful explosion that throws the Grimm into the air. Kassius throws Lash Equinox and it stabs into the chest of an Ursa. The huge Bear grunts in pain but the grunt follows with a deep growl, lumbering towards them to swing its clawed paw at them. Cardin rolls underneath the swing and he smashes the Mace into its belly, causing it to hunch forward, but Kassius jumps off Cardin’s back, catching his sword and he slams them both together.

The metal shifts and the two swords combine together, two long blades extending outwards to form a double ended spear that he can launch straight into the skull of the Ursa that they battle. The Ursa roars but its bellow is immediately silenced by its outcry. They can hear the hooves of rare Vacuo Grimm named Mandrills, large monkeys with black fur and white crests over their snouts, huge curved canines that can plunge deep into flesh. The Mandrill roar as they jump through the trees to attack them.

Cardin grabs one by the neck and he crushes its throat with his hand before throwing it into another, then swinging his mace downwards and crushing the other that leaps at him. Kassius spirals his spear through his fingers, slashing three of them out of the air before thrusting upwards to stab through the gut of one that leaps at him. Black smoke surrounds them as they continuously cuts down the Creatures of Grimm drawn to their anger of the death of Nadine.

Cardin crushes the last of them with his mace, fury in his eyes but he never unleashed the Wickerman’s Fury, staring at his own reflection only to be repulsed by the puddle, and walking away from his own manifestation. Kassius watches him as he keeps walking, but then they hear the cry of a familiar voice.

Thorn.

They push through the brush, and they find him – and he is hardly even worth fighting. His leg ripped to shreds from the Grimm that must have been drawn from his terror to the hate of two men. He still wears Kassius’ stetson, and blood pools out as rain begins to fall from the weather change in the rainforest. He coughs in pain as he stares at Kassius. “P-Please...help me...” He begs with a terrified voice.

Kassius and Cardin both glare at him, and they were relishing the idea of killing him.

But now?

He is not worth it.

Not with the distant Grimm closing in on the kill, not even looking at them, just sensing the fear of one Bandit bleeding out. “C’mon man...I have contacts! I can help you.”
But they both say nothing.

Kassius walks over to him, and he reaches down to his stetson and he takes it off his head, batting the water from the crest of the hat. He slowly puts it back on, and he glares right into Thorn’s eyes. “Told you I’d get it back.” Kassius snarls, turning and walking away from him, and Cardin does not even question it.

“W-Wait! Please help me!” He begs, but Cardin stops and looks back at him.

“Did you give Neryth of Nadine help?” Cardin asks him, staring at the gun with no bullets left on the floor. They say nothing more, turning and walking away from Thorn as the Grimm close in on him. He whimpers with terror in the puddle, his back pressed up to the tree.

“He whimpers with terror in the puddle, his back pressed up to the tree.

“Please! No! Help! No! Ahhh!” He wails as the Grimm leap at him, and they ignore the sounds of his wails and the horrific sound of flesh tearing, bones breaking and blood filling the puddles. His hand twitches as his screams become muffled under the sheer amount of Grimm that feast on him, ripping flesh and skin away, disembowelling him and crushing bones.

They both just keep walking.

His blood taints the muddy water, and on that night.

The Traffickers were no more.

Kassius and Cardin both keep walking, in the hopes of coming across this Crossroads that Vir Nominis Umbra had mentioned. Yet both of them felt such a feeling of closure from killing that evil bastard, because they never had to lift a finger. All Kassius did was take his hat back, and they left him behind to be fed on by the Grimm.

Cardin looks at Kassius, seeing that anger on his face again. “You okay?” He asks him.

“Yeah – let’s just keep moving and find a way out of here.” Kassius states.

“Okay...” Cardin agrees, until suddenly they hear the sound of branches breaking around them. Both of them draw their weapons, rainfall pattering against the leaves and ground, and the brim of Kassius’ Stetson. Icy cold, and the constant sound of something moving through the bushes gets closer and closer.

“Do you hear that?” Kassius asks him.

“Yeah...it’s close.” Cardin agrees.

“Be ready.” Kassius warns, since in here it could be an animal, not just a Creature of Grimm. But in the dark and in the middle of a storm, the lightning and the thunder makes their situation far more dangerous.

Rustling gets louder and louder, along with twigs snapping nearby, and Kassius looks around, figuring out where it is.

**Behind us!**

Kassius and Cardin both spin round and Kassius aims Vulcan Nox, turning on the flashlight built into the firearm and what is about to jump out at them.

Except it is not an animal or a Grimm.
She is a young woman with medium-brown skin and dark-red eyes. Her hair is a light, mint-green cut with a straight fringe and bangs, as well as two long locks on each side, in the back. She wears two bronze-coloured rings on her middle fingers as well as a pair of high-heeled shoes. With three claw marks across her side, blood running down her hand and her leg, she has been wounded as well.

Kassius and Cardin both widen their eyes in utter disbelief when they realise who this woman is.

Her mint green cut hair is messier than they remember and she no longer has any makeup on for how long she has been on the run.

She is pale too, sick most likely.

Panting heavily.

Kassius says her name with disbelief. “Emerald?”

Emerald stares back, but then her eyes roll into the back of her head.

And she collapses, passing out from the pain.
Meeting At The Crossroads

Kassius

Cardin smashes his shoulder straight through a wooden door, which has been weathered down over the years by the elements. He stumbles inside as the door swings open, breaking the lock that held it shut. He steps aside so then Kassius get gat in, carrying the unconscious body of Emerald in his arms, still bleeding pretty heavily from her wound. A wound that really needs treating right now. He paces over to one of the wooden pews inside, for the building that they have found is a church.

Little do they even know that they have practically stumbled onto the location of where they were to meet with Vir Nominis Umbra. Probably part of his plan all along, finding Emerald and getting her to safety. Emerald’s blood leaks down onto Kassius’ metal hand as he sets her down, and then onto the oak seat that they have laid her down onto. “Shit...she needs bandaging.” Kassius mutters as he looks around. “Stitches too! If you can find any medical alcohol then that would be good too.” Kassius calls as he walks away from Emerald, searching through the cabinets left behind. This place must have been attacked by the Grimm years ago due to the slashes in the wood and the smashed windows.

Cardin walks round one of the pews and his eyes widen when he sees the remnants of a skeleton lying there, crushed ribs and torn off limbs, stains of blood all over the floor. There were clearly still people inside of this church. He looks up to see the statue of a young woman with her hands held up over her head as she looks up to the stars. It appears to be one of the many old Religions that are dead now, a religion of which that worshipped the Maidens as Goddesses. But after Ozpin and his Inner Circle came about, they made certain to keep the Maidens in hiding and make sure that nobody ever remembered them.

But the shards of their forgotten past still remain.

Cardin glances down to the weak Emerald Sustrai on the floor, softly groaning in pain from the three slash marks across her curved side. There is so much blood right now, leaking down the side of the pew in long warm stringy streams of claret. But as he stares at her, flashing memories come back in his mind, seeing the footage of Penny being ripped apart, Coco being tricked by her in their fight with Yatsuhashi and Mercury. The time where Yang broke Mercury’s leg – or so everyone thought she did – because of her.

She is the reason Beacon fell, why so many good Huntsmen and Huntresses lost their lives and the rest fled into hiding to survive. He tightens his grip on his mace, feeling like he should kill her right now before she betrays them as well. “Why the hell are we even helping her after everything she has done?” Cardin questions with a deep snarl, staring straight at the green haired Huntress on the pew. Kassius stops rifling through the different medications and things he has come across inside of the cabinets of the Monk’s Quarters. They have always kept medical supplies inside, and by the looks of it there are still some inside that are in date. Meaning that the Church was still being used, perhaps five years ago when everything was going wrong.

It would not be crazy to assume, the world was falling apart and people were losing faith. Maybe that is what happened here, people were massacred by the Grimm because they sensed their dread, sorrow and grief. Nothing crueler than the Grimm, because they feed off negative emotions, meaning even after an attack, there is always the chance of a second starting because of recovery emotions.
Kassius looks back at Cardin with his amber eyes, staring straight at him through the opened up doorway. “What?” Kassius questions, seeing Cardin ready to club her to death with his massive mace.

“She caused the Battle of Beacon to start in the first place, so many people died because of her. Why are we helping her after what she did?” He snarls with anger, ready to kill him. Kassius narrows his eyes as he steps out from the Monk’s Quarters.

“I didn’t kill you after what I heard.” He reminds, crossing his arms, and Cardin stares at him.

“If I remember correctly I spared you.” Cardin states, remembering how he was the one that won that fight.

“Only because I didn’t let the monster inside me come out, if I did you wouldn’t be standing here right now.” Kassius explains as he walks round him and he crouches down beside Emerald, feeling her skin getting colder and colder. But there is nothing he can do for her until they clean and fix up her wound. He presses the back of his hand to her head, and she feels like a furnace – she has definitely gained a fever as well.

It is not looking good for Emerald right now.

“Come on...we need to find some meds for her.” Kassius explains, brushing past Cardin but then he shakes his head.

“Why is this so important to you?” Cardin questions, turning round as Kassius passes him. He stops, then turns to look at Winchester.

“What do you mean?” He questions.

“Saving her life? You know she is on the enemy’s side.” Cardin states, remembering how he was the one that won that fight.

“Saving her life? You know she is on the enemy’s side.” Cardin reminds. Kassius sighs because he knows the answer could cause issues between the two of them. But he deserves to know.

“Not anymore, I dunno if you haven’t noticed by she has been on the run for five years. And if Grimm are attacking her then she is no longer on Umbra’s side, or Salem’s.” Kassius explains, pointing outside to wherever Umbra could be. He could be watching them at this very second with his Crow Spies listening to every single word that they say.

“You’re not answering my question, Kassius.” Cardin states with narrowed eyes, Kassius sighs because he knows the answer could cause issues between the two of them. But he deserves to know.

“My sister would never forgive me, I’m not blind and not deaf – she loves Emerald and I want to get her back to her.” Kassius explains, and any other man would smile to see how kind and selfless Kassius is being. But Cardin catches on immediately, because of the three there was only one other girl excluding Emerald.

“Cinder? Cinder Fall is your goddamn sister?” Cardin yells with anger as he swings mace with fury to his side, walking towards Kassius who sighs, and rubbing his brow.

“That isn’t her real name – but yeah – she’s my younger twin sister.” Kassius explains, since the age gap between them is only a few weeks. Cardin bites his lip with anger, tensing up constantly at this revelation.

“She destroyed Beacon! How can you possibly side with the bitch?” Cardin yells.

“Hey! Watch your tone, Cardin. She has changed, she wants to atone for the things she has done and she is trying her damndest to make it right! Do not ever call her that again!” Kassius bellows, his
eyes glowing fiery orange for a second there, Hyde nearly took control and with their current situation as dire as it is right now, the last thing they need is to start fighting in a church with Emerald bleeding out.

“You weren’t there! You never saw the destruction I saw!” Cardin yells.

“I was at Haven! Of course I did! The attack was way worse there, casualties reached the thousands because of how far reaching the damn place is! There are still hundreds of dead bodies still undiscovered! Don’t tell me I don’t know what destruction looks like.” Kassius defends with anger in his voice, clenching his metal hand into a fist. Cardin shakes his head in disgust, nothing is getting into his thick skull. He turns and glares at Emerald, and he yells with fury.

“She needs to die!” He roars, swinging the mace downwards towards her head, but Kassius catches the mace with his metal arm and pulls it from his grasp, throwing it across the room before punching Cardin in the jaw with his other fist. Cardin howls, lunging forward and tackling Kassius to the ground, punching him in the face over and over again. Each punch causes Kassius’ rage to build and build. Cracks burn across his face as Hyde takes over and the Demonic Entity lets out a horrifying demented scream as he swings Kassius’ metal fist straight up and into Cardin’s jaw, throwing him into the air and crashing back down onto the ground.

Hyde rises back up, fists clenched and teeth gritted with snarling pants of breath, ready to start fighting. Cardin rises back up, looking almost as vicious as the entity that has taken over Kassius.

But...

They stop fighting, for they both notice something unnaturally chilling.

It is silent.

But not silence that normal people are used to, because they would still hear the rustles of leaves, the breeze of the wind or the creaks of wood of the building settling.

Even the clock tick.

But there is nothing, like someone just hit the mute button on the television. Hyde relinquishes control and Kassius shudders slightly as he feels the demonic soul retreat back into him. Cardin looks at Emerald and there are droplets of blood hanging where they have fallen, not going any further. The cracked scars on Kassius’ face heal up as his amber aura repairs the damage, then he turns to the clock behind them.

It has stopped at 6:00 am.

It was ticking earlier.

Time has just stopped around them, that is when they hear the caws of crows, ravens and jackdaws outside of the church at the entrance. Then the whistling manifests outside, the whistling of a very familiar tune.

"A grin as candid as children, as sweet as bee honey,"

"His voice kind and sharp, as the blade of a razor,"

"Brings you from elder to youth, within the blink of an eye."

"Wishes be granted, be it: love, riches or luck,"
"His face like a mirror, fear shall consume you,"

"Anger through truth, loss through acceptance."

"For the end of your journey, Death will come for you,"

"Charcoal Cities, come waiting for you,"

"The Soothsayer shall wait, for his voice will control you,"

"Torment and Control, till the moon will shatter..."

It’s him...

He is here.

Kassius and Cardin both run to the doors of the church and they push them open, they swing open but as they exit they jarringly jolt back to how they were. Like they are in a constant time loop, and they look around as they hear the whistling that manifests from beyond their universe, their reality. Crows, Ravens and Jackdaws – all with glowing red eyes and crystal beaks – stare straight at them from the trees and the roof of the church.

Then they turn, and see him sat on the tombstone of a grave with one leg crossed over the other and a smirk on his face. Pretty symbolic, him sitting on a Grave like that. “Having a cute little spat, are we?” Vir Nominis Umbra wonders as he stares at the two of them – yet neither seem to be in a joking mood.

“You knew we would end up here, didn’t you?” Kassius questions with narrowed amber eyes.

“Of course I did – made sure dear old Emerald Sustrai was in the area so then a Beowulf would attack her, giving her some pretty extreme wounds. You having such a warm heart, Mr Locke – I knew you would have to pick her up and carry her to any building you came across. But I doubt you ever noticed the crossroads, did you?” Vir Nominis Umbra wonders, and Kassius looks down to see that exactly, four roads crossing apart at the same point just where the Church is. Vir Nominis Umbra chuckles sinisterly as he sits on the head of the gravestone.

“All part of your plan.” Cardin scoffs, but Kassius crosses his arms as he stares at him.

“How exactly did you help us? Seemed like the White Fang were headed their way to the Traffickers long before you showed up.” Kassius questions with confusion.

“Indeed, but your escape? I made it possible, altering the future possibilities of how the battle could go. If I wished that shell could have gone straight into your cell and killed both of you. Time and future events are like the pages of a scrap book, can be altered whenever you wish. This is not the first time I have done this for you either.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains, Kassius raises his brow with curiosity.

“Uh-huh? When?” He inquires.

“When you were searching for the bodies of your team five years ago, I knew you lost something only one fair soul could ever bring back. I found Yang Xiao Long tending a campfire one night and guided her to find the same motel you found – you finding your beloved. I made it possible, and now I have helped you again – so I feel you may owe me something in return.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains with a smirk, but Kassius grits his teeth with anger, staring at Cardin.
Kassius was right, what have they gotten themselves into? “We haven’t agreed to anything yet, remember – we only agreed to meet you here. Something we unintentionally happened to stumble into as well.” Kassius reminds as he looks around at the graveyard of which Vir Nominis Umbra has found a seat upon one gravestone.

“The way you freed us by the way? Pretty effective reminder of what you’re capable of.” Cardin states, if anything he is complimenting the Soothsayer.

“That was the purpose of it.” Vir Nominis Umbra agrees with the firm nod of his head, lifting his head to stare at the clouds, the frozen raindrops by their heads and the lightning flash every present in the dark clouds. “Incidentally – I find it quite funny how no matter what Universe I come across, there are always souls there who have this inner compulsion to repay debts of gratitude.”

Kassius stares at the Soothsayer, weary of whatever it is he has planned, Vir Nominis Umbra is a master wordsmith and can catch anybody off guard with the way he says things. “Humans, Faunus – elves all races I’ve met.” Vir Nominis Umbra lists a few off the top of his head, even naming a race none of them have ever heard of – must have been a race of people from a now extinct universe. “You really must explain that to me, one day.”

Kassius ponders on the things he says, and no matter how many times he hears it – the power that this entity wields truly is beyond anybody’s comprehension. “As for the here and now – tell me, how did you manage with the White Fang and the Traffickers?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks them both, Kassius scratches the back of his neck as he answers him.

“Y’know I was kinda hoping for a less – dangerous escape. The White Fang and us aren’t exactly the greatest of buddies.” Kassius describes with a chuckle.

“Yet Mazen Ursus let you go – seems he has more honour than Corsac Albain or any other White Fang member I have seen.” Vir Nominis Umbra reminds with a smirk on his face, sounding like he actually admires the Bear Faunus.

“Still – some of those White Fang members are total lunatics.” Kassius describes, remembering the sight of seeing Kardas, Kaa, Arkaas and Anto decimating the Bandits in that coliseum in horrifically brutal ways. Bashing their heads until they caved in.

“Indeed – Mazen Ursus freed them from an Insane Asylum a few months ago before he began his attack on the Bank, before you captured him. Sometimes you need unpredictable madness to destroy your enemies.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains, perhaps speaking from experience in his own past. “However dear old Mazen Ursus and his madmen are not the focus of which I am here to discuss with you.”

“Oh yeah? And what is?” Kassius asks him.

“I have always enjoyed reading the stories of real people – true human or Faunus lives, because you know that none of it has been orchestrated by the minds of a deranged author in their own fantasy. True tales are just fascinating – and one comes to mind that I know will interest you.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains to Kassius with his hands on his lap.

He scowls at the Soothsayer, still listening because he knows he cannot even harm him – despite how much he wants him to pay for what happened to Taiyang. “It’s about a man – worse than most – a liar and a cheat with a mind like a palace. A man that refuses to pay his debts.” Vir Nominis Umbra describes to him, but Kassius just scoffs, not feeling intrigued in the slightest.

“Why do you think this will interest me? I have known plenty of liars and cheats in my life.” Kassius
states, but Umbra pushes his palms against the tombstone to stand up, and he approaches the two of them, his hands closing together – fingers touching.

“For he has wronged you as well – for many years. His name is Doctor Archer Merlot.” Vir Nominis Umbra reveals.

A chill runs through Kassius when hearing that name, the name that he also bears in the centre of his own – a middle name he never even knew he had in the first place. “Merlot? Isn’t that the dude Team R.W.B.Y and J.N.P.R met on their training mission? Crazy scientist, right?” Cardin curiously inquires.

“And Kassius Locke’s father, a man who preferred his wife would keep her Maiden Name opposed to being plagued by his own.” Vir Nominis Umbra adds, Cardin stares at Kassius with widened eyes, the surprises just keep coming and coming.

“What else don’t I know about you?” Cardin questions.

“That – is personal.” Kassius states to both of them, yet Umbra does not really seem to care about it. “What the hell did my father do to piss you off? Not like I give a damn, I only found out a few days ago.”

“Please, Kassius – you can lie to Cardin but you cannot lie to me. The little conversation you had with your father was none of my choosing, for he has learned information that he was never meant to uncover. And I know how your mind works, you believe in forgiveness ever since you spared Ilia Amitola from your own revenge. I know you want to help your father – but I am afraid that is not possible anymore.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains, able to understand the mind of Kassius Locke with ease – he knows everything about him.

“Then why the hell are you telling me this? If you do know as much about me as you claim then you know that I would never work for you – or even dare kill my father. I have been searching for him for years, and now that I know he has been sacrificing his own future to help our own, the least I owe the man is the chance to have a future of his own.” Kassius explains to him, getting a chuckle in response from Umbra.

“You are sweet, seems that Miss Xiao Long really has rubbed off on you. But as I said – Merlot’s story is coming to an end, however I cannot locate him.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains.

“Why?” Cardin questions.

“Before I tell you – there is something you should know about your father. Archer Merlot did wilfully and maliciously conspire with me for his own gain, not caring for your own future, Kassius. He made a deal with me and I bound the remnants of a destroyed son of mine as punishment for him, and as a way to keep Merlot in check. Do you want to know why he made a deal with me? Because he wanted to have power, money and everything else he ever wanted to stand above the rest of the world.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains as he walks towards him, but Kassius narrows his eyes.

“Yeah – and yet you can’t locate him. When I spoke with my father he never seemed like any of the things you pin him as. Who is to say that maybe your strength is waning?” Kassius wonders curiously, and Umbra chuckles at the little threat made towards him.

“Clearly you don’t like Kassius’ dad – what did he do to you?” Cardin wonders curiously, staying on topic despite Kassius’ defensive nature towards the father he hardly even knows.

“He betrayed my trust – went digging into the dregs of old memories to find a way to kill me.
Something I cannot allow now he has found something – and thus I have decided to remove him from the picture and replace him with new scientists. Ones that do not share his desire to remain moral.” Vir Nominis Umbra describes with a scoff, and Kassius remembers what Merlot told him about the test subjects. He never wanted them to the Faunus, that was all part of Jacques’s orders. And now they are trying to kill him anyway, no honour among liars it seems. “Now that our pact has reached its conclusion, he has hidden himself away in a location I cannot find. Shirking his obligation to pay the debt he made.”

“You want us to kill my father? If you think I’d agree then clearly you don’t know who you are talking to.” Kassius states with animosity present in his eyes.

“Of course I do not want you to kill your father. I do not ask you to anything – you are in luck. I am offering you the chance to save your father – from me.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains as he walks around the two of them.

The last time Kassius has ever felt this puzzled is trying to figure out why Yang was annoyed at him.

“Wait...what?”

“I know you would never cut down your father – and I am not here to turn you into my personal little proxies like I did with Neopolitan and Kannix Volantis. No, no, no – not at all. You see I have already provided you with a third ally, one who will be eternally grateful to you if you revive her to good health – and since she is in love with your sister. The opportunity to see her again is another piece of motivation.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains as he circles them with his hands always held closely together.

“Wait a minute – what are you saying?” Cardin questions in confusion.

“We both have similar desires right now – so I will aid you from time to time to locate your father. You will have to locate the Lost City of Arkhonex of course which will be a challenge in itself, however I do believe you already have another lead.” Vir Nominis Umbra says to him.

“Yeah? Where?” Kassius asks him as Vir Nominis Umbra stands ahead of them, he smirks and he pulls something out from one of his magical pouches. He turns and casually chucks a photograph to them.

“Catch.” He says, and Kassius catches the picture in his hand and his eyes widen, so do Cardin’s.

“Pyrrha’s Circlet...” Kassius mutters, then he remembers what he heard that Bandit mentioned before they got out of their cell.

“Have you heard about that Black Market Auction in the Fallingwater Estate on the far side of the Forest?” One of the Bandits asks.

“No, they have another going on?” He asks.

“Oh yeah, some really cool expensive stuff being sold there. Some old weapons, a Nikos Circlet from back in the day, a shield.”

“Fallingwater Estate...that’s nearby isn’t it?” Kassius mutters as he looks at the picture of her circlet where it is currently being held on Auction.

“The Arkhoni were fond of leaving hidden messages on their artefacts, such as locations and riddles. Like a little treasure hunt.” Umbra giggles as he rubs his hands together with excitement.

“Why the hell do you want us to do this? You have an entire army at your side.” Cardin questions
with confusion in his voice.

“Aye, that I do. However I do enjoy seeing horse races – and I like to bet on which ones will win first. The same thing goes here, I want to know whether my allies or my enemies will locate Archer first.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains with his hands held out with a smile on his face.

“Is that all this is to you, a game?” Kassius questions with anger in his eyes.

“Of course it is! After all this is all part of my plan – but make no mistake as a travelling merchant I have many wares on offer whenever you need them. For I can either be your worst nightmare or your greatest ally.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains as he looks out at the landscape that stretches out before their eyes.


“They could be simple things needed to surpass a problem – or they could be rewards. Such as a bottomless wine glass, perhaps a satchel where you can pull out whatever you dream of. Unending youth, mind faster than lightning!” Vir Nominis Umbra lists, his eyes turn to Cardin with a grin. “Romantic prowess to charm all womankind?” He asks him, something even Cardin could not resist.

“Sure sounds generous – and you freed us so then you can help us along the way? Not exactly what I was expecting of you. Sure you won’t want anything else in return?” Kassius questions, still expecting him to turn on them.

“Oh believe me – once our business is concluded we will return to the fun of being enemies. However do not think it will be easy for you, I still lead my armies and they will become problems for you. As you have learned – I like to see the conflict between your family of warriors against my alliance. But what do I expect from you? Just one thing – Honesty.” Vir Nominis Umbra answers with a cunning smirk on his face.

His honesty is admirable, telling them that this alliance is extremely temporary and that he will not keep the Acolytes and the Grimm at bay for them. He still wants to enjoy the sight of seeing them battle against his foes.

Then a new question comes to Kassius’ mind, one both he and Hyde would like to know the answer to. “What did you do for my father? Break him out of a prison too?” Kassius wonders.

“In a way. I remember that day quite well, a night just like tonight too – storm set in with lightning crackling the skies. Winds so harsh that could tear the clothes from your body in one gust. Merlot summoned me out of desperation – and his wishes I admit were selfless once. He wanted me to help his wife as best I could, but I refused to take the disease from her. So I gave her good fortune and a longer life, but the tumour would return. But as time went on, his demands grew more selfish by the day, wanting money, power and control over his business.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains.

“So you bound a monster to him?” Cardin questions.

“Watch it.” Kassius states with a snarl, defending the demon in him.

“The Ebony Berserker betrayed me, decided he wanted to become a benevolent spirit opposed to what I created him as. So I fractured his memory and bound the husk to you – his firstborn son. And assured the daughter would not fare any better – but he agreed anyway.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains, but Kassius has been thinking on this...and he actually understands.

“Yeah – to get you to trust him, think you have him wrapped around your finger.” Kassius chuckles as he stares into his brown eyes.
"Maybe, maybe not. The man is who he is today thanks only to me. Yet after everything he betrays me, shuns everything I did for him and enters a location where I cannot find him. Thus leaving me no choice but to use my armies to locate him personally – which is where I hope you can come in.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains.

“So you do want us to do this.” Kassius states.

“I never said I didn’t – however there is nothing refraining you from leaving now and going back to Beacon to your beautiful girlfriend. Of course – it is all your choice, speak with your sister, talk it over. She may have something very surprising to say.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains with a smirk on his face.

Kassius sighs, because despite how much he wants to be there for Yang, he also knows that his father as risk. “Say we agree – what do we do?” Kassius asks him.

“To start with – why don’t we go to Fallingwater Estate, see if we can get our hands on dear old Pyrrha Nikos’ circlet. After that? Then we will improvise.” Vir Nominis Umbra says to him with a smile, walking past him.

“How will we get in? Don’t you need invitations?” Kassius asks him.

“Indeed.” He answers, throwing seven invitations with blank spots for names for them. But there are only three of them right now and one is currently incapacitated.

“Seven? There’s three of us.” Cardin points out.

“For now – didn’t your girlfriend, Kassius, tell you of another team out there who may help you?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks him, and Kassius thinks back to that day. He sighs, not wanting others involved in this business.

“We’ll see.” Kassius states, looking right at him.

“That is all I ask.” Vir Nominis Umbra says with a smile. He turns and goes to walk away from them, but Kassius has one last statement.

“Where you off to now? Off to torment some other poor soul? Like Tai?” Kassius snarls, the Soothsayer turns and he smirks, holding his hand up.

“Perhaps.” He replies, snapping his fingers. The storm continues around them, rain falling hard and the lightning crackling above their heads. Umbra vanishes as soon as time resumes into a bunch of crows that caw, and the other Servants of Corvus rise into the sky, leaving the scene. Kassius presses his hand to his head, feeling stressed out.

“Damn it...” He sighs, walking inside of the church again, and when he looks at Emerald something really surprises him.

Her wounds have healed, three scars across her side and she has stabilised.

With one note left behind.

Good luck Kassius!

V.N.U
Mazen

The Traffickers have fallen for good this time, the ghostly remains of their home no longer carrying the Bandits that once held the slaves. Both Human and Faunus either freed or given the choice to join the White Fang, except for the Humans of course. They were only freed to find their own future. Something not all of the White Fang agree with at the moment, some of them pacing back and forth with rifles in their hands. Mazen stands tall as he looks to all the former slaves being tended to, Bunny Faunus having their ears be mended by some of the White Fang medics they have on the field.

Arkaas glides down towards Mazen and he extends his wings, decelerating before he lands on his metal legs. The metal talons scrape across the Adobe Floor as he approaches the new High Leader who has his arms behind his back. “Boss – all the Traffickers bar their leader are dead. He escaped.” Arkaas reports, but clearly Mazen already knows as he nods his head.

“I know – I saw him get away, nothing we could do. He used a portal to escape.” Mazen states, and Arkaas sighs.

“I’ve always hated portals.” Arkaas groans, but the quiet Mazen Ursus just walks forward to one of the slaves – a child by the looks of it. She has a cowl over her face, half of her face has been burned by the savages that held her here. He crouches down and he caresses her other cheek, looking at her.

“Hello, sweetheart. It’s okay, you don’t need to be afraid anymore – the Traffickers are gone for good this time.” Mazen assures, but the little girl still sniffs fearfully, hugging the teddy bear a White Fang had given her. Mazen points to his mask that he wears with his finger curiously. “Is it my mask? Is it frightening you?” He asks her.

She sniffs still, but that is not what scares her – Mazen however does not know that yet. “I’m afraid I cannot take it off – it is a little curse of mine. You see these?” He asks her, turning to the side and pointing to a few pipes connected to the mask and they feed into his armour that he wears. “I have had breathing issues for a very long time – of I take this off I could die. My old one was faulty but this one is much better.” Mazen chuckles, smiling behind his mask that he reveals to be very important to him.

The little girl yelps and looks away, hiding behind the blanket that has been wrapped around her, whimpering with fear. Mazen turns and sees what frightens her, and it all makes sense. It is nothing to do with the mask he wears, but the man behind him. Kardas – the Hyena Faunus – is viciously slashing a machete into the body of a dead Bandit over and over again with a deranged laugh behind his voice.

Mazen snarls, rising up and yelling with his deep and powerful voice. “Kardas!” He yells, and the Faunus stops with blood leaking down the once grey blade of his machete. “That’s enough.” He softly speaks, staring straight into the yellow eyes of the Faunus. Kardas growls, kicking the dead Bandit once more before he walks away from the body of the man. Mazen sighs – he clearly knows that keeping a bunch of Convicts under control is going to be difficult but he needs to be able to.

He turns to Arkaas who walks over to him with his bow in his hand, his bright feathered wings folded back behind him. “We are grateful for you freeing us from that prison – but you have to understand that sometimes you cannot control some people.” Arkaas reminds, Mazen stares at him with deep sigh.

“Of all the people arrested you are probably the most sane of them all – why the hell were you in
there?” Mazen inquires curiously, Arkaas sighs as he walks with the huge Bear Faunus, past the many Faunus that are being healed by the doctors that came with them.

“Lived in the Mistralian Mountains, until the Branwen Tribe came along and wiped out my people. I went after them, but they moved camp and I could never find them. So I started killing every human I came across – I got good at it.” He explains as he walks, almost like he enjoys it, something Mazen even comments on.

“You sound like you enjoy killing humans.” Mazen states with worry in his voice.

“I do – don’t you?” He asks him, so calmly that it answers Mazen’s initial query instantly about how he ended up there. He is so insane that it does not make him manic like the others, he is calm and accepted, and he finds joy in killing Humans.

“No – I don’t take joy in any of this. I just want there to be equality, but as long as Atlas keeps ruling the way it does, our people will always be treated like slaves.” Mazen growls with anger, directing the hatred of humanity most Faunus have onto the Atlesians entirely. Something Arkaas does not appear to agree with in any sense.

“Look around you, High Leader. Humanity has always wanted us to be their slaves, they all have to die.” Arkaas explains, but Mazen glares right at him with narrowed eyes behind his mask.

“Kelham is a Faunus.” He reminds, walking ahead of him with his fists constantly clenched.

“How did you know him?” Arkaas asks and he stops, turning to look at him. “Corsac mentioned you knew him, how so? Was he once part of the White Fang?” He curiously inquires.

“Once – he was an old friend of mine.” Mazen informs as he steps over the dead body of one of the Traffickers, whereas Arkaas just walks across his body, stepping on his chest before the floor.

“An old friend?” He questions.

“Yes – but his methods were so extreme that Ghira Belladonna excommunicated him from the White Fang, nearly did the same for Adam before Sienna Khan took over.” Mazen explains, remembering that day very vividly, the things that Kelham did would scare most people.

“Then he started the Traffickers?” Arkaas presumes.

“No – then he joined the Acolytes of Lien – but from what I heard Ortega also found his methods to be too extreme. So the same was done there as well – after that he decided to create his own little organisation. One that specialised in kidnapping people of any race and selling them to the highest bidder. It started as Prostitution and Work Labour, but eventually he broadened his horizons to add arenas to the collection. Guessing that is when he found this place.” Mazen explains as he looks around at the place with a sigh, disgusted at what he has become.

“Maybe extreme methods are best – to rid the world of humanity forever.” Arkaas suggests, constantly taking it back to wiping out mankind, an idea that nearly destroyed Adam Taurus.

“We are not wiping out an entire race.” Mazen repeats.

“Why? They would do the same to us.” Arkaas reminds.

“In the past, yes – but not anymore...not with the monsters at our door.” Mazen explains, but Arkaas scoffs.
“The Knights of Grimm? Please they are a myth.” He scoffs.

Mazen stops in his tracks, the dead silence from the huge man admittedly frightens the besotted fool. Mazen turns and glares at him through the glowing red slits in his helmet and he walks towards him, grabbing his shoulder. “I was at Menagerie when Fury attacked, when Ghira and Kali Belladonna lost their lives. I saw what one Knight was capable of, and now I know that there are stronger threats. Believe me when I say – that we have bigger threats than just humans.” Mazen assures, pushing him away, and walking ahead.

Arkaas remains still, shocked from what he told him. “Tell the rest of the forces we are preparing to move out, still many other locations were Faunus are being held.” Mazen orders as he walks up the stairs to look out at the landscape, determining where to go next.

“For the White Fang.” Arkaas agrees.

Mazen sighs, for there is part of him that wishes that maybe...just maybe...that footage could have been a lie.

Maybe Adam was right.

“Maybe...” He mutters softly to himself.

**Emerald**

*The nightmares of her past might never leave her.*

*Mercury stands before her very eyes with a smile, before the black blade of Ferrum Arctus suddenly protrudes through his chest so hard that it lifts him off the floor as Death thrusts him upwards. Feeling her heart sink she nearly collapsed to the floor with horror when seeing him die like that.*

*After everything that they have been through.*

*She ran.*

*Ran as fast and as far as she possibly could, with the Grimm converging on her constantly. Feeling her heart burning from exhaustion, she knew she had to fight them as they kept chasing her, the howls of the monsters of Grimm would never silence. She span round and swung her chained scythes across their heads, beheading the Grimm Beowulves behind her, killing them instantly. The ground explodes beneath her as a huge Deathstalker suddenly erupts beneath her, trying to grab onto her with its pincers.*

*As she flies up into the air from the eruption, her red eyes focus onto the body of a large Nevermore. Thinking quickly she launched one of her hooked scythes across the Sanctum and into the leg of the Nevermore, causing it to roar in pain, but it carried her off across the landscape, of destroyed buildings and cities that must be thousands of years old.*

*She held on for what must have been days until the hook slid from its chest, and she fell...* 

*Fell into the sea.*

She returns back to the land of the living with a gasp, her eyes bursting open, red irises darting
around with terror as she tries to figure out where she is. “Cinder?” She fearfully cries out, looking for her, only for her brother – Kassius Locke to gently press her down.

“Ssh, it’s okay...she’s fine.” Kassius whispers gently with an assuring voice, and she lies back down with a soft blanket wrapped around her and a pillow that they found so then she can be comfortable. “Just rest, you really need it.” Kassius says to her, she keeps looking around though with confusion.

“W-Where am I?” She stammers.

“A church, not really sure where. Somewhere in the Vacuo Wildlands.” Kassius answers, and she groans, pressing her hand to her head.

“Gods...wait...Kassius? What the hell are you...why are you?” She stammers, but Kassius presses his finger to her lips to stop her.

“Short version? We got captured by the Traffickers, an enemy who is on our side at the moment helped us out. Then we found you, limping lucidly in the forest with three claw marks.” Kassius describes as he pokes her dark skin on the curved side of her body, still wearing the same clothes she has always worn. She flinches and looks down, only seeing three scars. “Yeah – that enemy of ours I think healed you.” Kassius says.

“Who?” Emerald stammers.

“heard of Vir Nominis Umbra?” He asks her.

“No.” She replies.

“Oof, you’ve got a lot to catch up on.” Kassius chuckles as he scratches the back of his head awkwardly. Emerald slowly starts to sit up with a groan, feeling her head throbbing from dehydration. Kassius slides over a bottle of water that they collected, found the empty kids bottle in the office. It is full of rainwater, not the nicest but it will have to do. She takes a sip of the water and it quickly makes her feel better. “Well we can fill you in later – I still need to contact Sapphire about all this.” Kassius explains.

“Who?” Emerald inquires.

“Oh gods – Cinder.” He replies, since nobody bar him knows that unless he tells them. “She created a false identity because she never wanted to be known as the Locke Daughter that betrayed the family – not like there was much to betray in the first place.” He scoffs.

Emerald still looks utterly bewildered. “Cinder – is my little twin sister.” Kassius tells her and she sits there, pressing her palm to her head with a groan.

“Gods...I really need to figure out what is going on...” She groans.

“Well – I could help you out there if you want.” He begins as he sits back.

He begins to tell her the tale of everything that she has missed so far, she might know about the Knights of Grimm but she doesn’t know that the Volcanic Chain Isles were destroyed and they won for five years. She does not know about Umbra, or Horridus Morbus.

Adam.

Atlas.
Acolytes of Lien.

She has a big tale ahead of her.
Jaune

He walks across the dirt path that moves towards the old Estate of where he was born, taken a Bullhead all the way here from Beacon, leaving prints of his shoes behind in the dirt. Beside him walks Pyrrha, then behind him are the others. Ren, Nora, Ruby, Blake and Oscar – even though they are headed to where Jaune’s family lives, they still find themselves on edge. With the Knights Bannermen stalking the realm they have to be ready for absolutely anything. At the moment they do not seem to have their scent because they have not used a teleport to get here, but the presence of the Four could be enough to draw them closer.

It has been years since he has actually come back to this place, he has seen his parents on other occasions but never back at his home.

The Arc Estate.

Like the Nikos Family, the Arcs have a large home, however the Arcs is much larger and very different. It is more like a whole small town, but it feels so empty and abandoned. Houses and stables around them completely abandoned – there are not many Arcs left, only his family really. His Uncle and Aunt were both killed by Grimm not long after the death of Skyler Arc, and the threat of an attack is always close.

Nora walks past a stable and she looks at the tree beside where the horses were once kept, seeing something carved into the stump of the tree itself. She narrows her cyan eyes at what is there, and it is just two letters.

C and M

From what they have heard Jaune does not have any members in his family that have names beginning like that – unless it is Crocea Mors? Ren cannot help but eye the sword sheathed onto Jaune’s leg; there is something very important about the blade he uses. Kragen and Ozpin both have made this very clear, which is why they have come here. Not just so then Jaune can see his remaining family, but to learn about his heritage some more.

Ruby looks around before she turns straight to Jaune curiously as she brushes some of her hair from her eye. “Um...are you sure that they’re here? There are no horses here.” She asks him curiously, but Jaune answers with a pretty cold voice, not towards her but more like it is directed towards the family.

“They’re home...they’re always home.” Jaune assures as he keeps walking towards the Manor House, one that makes the Nikos Estate look tiny in comparison. It is made from concrete with lime plastering rendered across the flesh of the building. With golden paint across the pillars where the huge balcony above the two big doors stretching across – this clearly used to be a very wealthy place. However now it looks so overgrown, with huge weeds growing everywhere across the building, caressing the pillars and shrouding the windows. Lights still on inside, Jaune was right – someone is clearly home.

The question is who?
“Why are there so many houses?” Oscar curiously asks, and Jaune sighs.

“Our family used to be really wealthy many years ago, but now it is just my bloodline...everyone else either died or packed up and left. My parents are insistent of keeping it standing...for whatever reason.” He sighs, scratching the back of his head as he walks, tensing his arms. The others might not know it, but Pyrrha never did forget what Jaune told her about his parents. About how they never believed in him, never expected him to become a Huntsman. The cool autumn breeze flows through the land, past the empty swings that dangle from the branch of the large tree that stands beside it. The squeaking hinges of the swing creak back and forth.

Pyrrha stretches her hand out to Jaune’s holding it affectionately and he feels the pressure of her palm on his. “Are you okay?” She softly asks him, walking close to him. Jaune looks at her and there are signs of nervousness in his eyes, but not because of Pyrrha – because of his home for some reason.

“I – uh – I haven’t been back here since...Skyler died...and after seeing what I saw...when Umbra...” He stammers, still hearing her older sister’s screams of tormented agony as the Grimm devoured her alive in the back of his mind. The horrors committed by the False God will never leave him, and seeing what he did to her, the one he always looked up to...nearly broke him.

Pyrrha closes her eyes with sadness for her beloved, for she knows why he is struggling – his memories have been tarnished with nothing more than the depressing ones of his sister never returning home from a mission. Something Ruby can relate to all too well, just with her mother opposed to her sister. Blake’s cat ears flick up when she hears the flapping of Pigeon wings fluttering away from the trees – even birds have become intimidating for them now after seeing their enemy and his many forms. The Lord of the Wood as well, taking the same abilities as Umbra.

Jaune approaches the doors...but then he stops, and his eyes turn to the graveyard that they built for the fallen. He sighs as he walks towards it slowly with his hands at his side. “Jaune?” Blake asks him, but Ruby is no fool, none of them are – they know what he is going to look at. Jaune approaches the three graves in the small fenced off section, leaves blown over the surface of where they have made their empty graves for there was nothing to bury. They made two for Skyler, one by the pond where she would always visit...and one here at their home.

Skyler Arc

- Loving Daughter and Sister

Idas Arc

- Loving Uncle and Brother

Felicia Arc

- Loving Aunt

He crouches down by the graves and he sweeps the pile of wilted leaves from their surface, clearing them so then they never get buried and forgotten. They have not been touched in quite a while it seems, Jaune crouches by their graves with shallow eyes. Pyrrha stands beside him and she gently rests her hand on his shoulder, just being there for him. Nora and Ren do the same, standing and just merely being around their friend they care for so deeply. Nora looks up at Ren with a tiny smile, and she interlinks her fingers with his, squeezing onto his hand as she lovingly holds him.

Ruby hangs her head honourably as does Blake, whilst Oscar holds is hands behind his back, everyone remaining silent as they pay their respects. Jaune exhales a cold breath, white mist trailing
from parted lips as he lifts his head. “Okay...c’mon. Let’s go see them.” He sighs as he rises up and he walks away from the graves of his lost family members, approaching the front doors of his home, Ruby and the others behind him.

He holds up his hand and he clutches onto the metal handle that he slams against the thick wooden door three times. The echoing booms from each swing echo and reverberate through their bodies as they wait. But as they do this, they all notice the door is unlocked, so Jaune opens it with a sigh.

Like he has seen it all before.

He pushes the door open and he steps inside, faced with the sight of his father sat down in a large rocking chair with a mug of coffee on the arm of his chair. He sits forward and stares at his son, resembling the same features just with white hair instead of blonde. A bristly white beard around his mouth and a pair of old and experienced blue eyes. A scar across his right eyebrow that causes it to part slightly. His voice is deep and guttural, a bit like Qrow’s voice in fact, yet it still sounds a bit like Jaune’s voice. “Welcome home, son.”

The speech of his father almost sounds a bit resentful and Jaune stares right back at his father, a man of whom he has rarely seen after the death of his sister – it was mostly his other sisters he stayed in contact with. Jaune walks into the living room with his friends as he looks around at the place, only a few lights are actually on. “How long have you known that we were here?” Jaune asks him curiously, since he looks like he was waiting for him to knock on that door. His father chuckles at that.

“You’re not as stealthy as you like to believe you are, I saw you walking in through the front gates from here.” His comments as he crosses his arms where he sits. His name is Demetrius Arc, he was a Huntsman but he retired and took a job as a contractor – clearly that has not been going so well. Most of the power is off so then they can save the lien that they have left, after everything that has happened recently. Prices have gone through the roof by the corporations, especially in the Dust Trade – meaning that the new Dam built in Vale is the best source of electricity. Despite that it does not provide the greatest output in comparison to the Dust energised Power Stations.

“Well – it’s been a while.” Jaune sighs as he stands there, and Demetrius presses his hands to the arms of his chair as he rises back up.

“It has – five years...five years since you last came here, after Skyler died.” Demetrius reminds him and Jaune sighs, looking away from his father at the mere mention of his older sister who lost her life.

“I know...I’m...I’m sorry, but things have been...pretty hectic.” He sighs as he slumps his shoulders forward, then looking at Pyrrha, in which Demetrius does the same thing. He looks at her, then at the others in the house with him.

“I presume these are some of those friends you mentioned in your letter a couple of years ago?” Demetrius asks him curiously, and Jaune sighs awkwardly since Pyrrha is standing right next to him. He mentioned that Pyrrha died and how close he has to her, so this will be a hell of a thing to bring up. But before he can, another voice appears from the kitchen, with the smell of some meat being cooked in there.

“Honey? Who is it?” She calls, and Demetrius turns to the kitchen.

“Come see for yourself.” Demetrius replies, so she does so – the sound of plates being set down on the table echoes from that direction. Then they hear her slippers slapping across the wooden floor, towards the open archway between the living room and the dining room. She stands before them and
her eyes bulge from their sockets, freezing like a Deer in headlights, almost dropping the glass in her hand when she sees Jaune standing there, mouth agape.

“Hey...mom...it’s been a while...” Jaune nervously waves his hand to her, and she immediately sets the glass down and she walks towards him, instantly wrapping him up in a warm hug, tearfully laughing with happiness. Clearly his mother is happier to see him than his father – but Demetrius knows his son, and the fact he has not come back in five years and suddenly appears here now with his weapons and armour, along with multiple friends...that means he is not here for a family visit.

It is business.

She releases her son and she checks him over immediately, worried for anything that may have happened to him. “Are you hurt? What happened, you haven’t been injured have you?” She stammers, checking his armour and even round it to see a few cuts in his shirt but nothing extreme. Well nothing she can see – there is the whole thing of being stabbed in the chest by his own sword thanks to Kassius – and getting burned by lightning when he fought his possessed girlfriend...

Aaaaaand being tormented by a monstrously evil entity.

But apart from that he is fine.

“I’m fine...I’m fine mom, I mean I have collected my fair share of scars thanks to this line of work and...Everything that has happened...but...” He sighs as he presses his hand to his head, thinking on everyone they have lost. Even before Oobleck and Taiyang, Scarlet David and Sage, Professor Port, Ilia...

Don’t know if I should tell them yet, they have always wanted me to stay away from the Huntsmen Academies for some reason.

His mother quickly hugs him again, kissing his cheek affectionately for how she has missed him so, clearly his father has missed him too but he has every reason to be annoyed with him for how little he has actually come home to visit. His mother – Cassandra Arc – is much shorter than he husband, with a slim waist and long blonde hair like her older husband who used to have similarly coloured hair. The age gap between the parents is not very large, just she has aged better than the father since she does not appear to have any grey hairs yet and still looks pretty young considering the fact she is pushing fifty soon.

Cassandra looks to all his friends and a smile grows on her face with joy, she walks up to Ren and Nora first, her hand stretched out. “Hello, my name is Cassandra Arc – I am his mother, as you can probably tell.” She greets with a smile, looking at them all.

“Hello, I’m Nora Valkyrie.” She greets as she primly arches her arms in a curtsy pose, like a ballerina.

“Lie Ren.” Ren greets with the bow of his head.

“I’m Blake Belladonna.”

“Ruby Rose.”

“Hi there, I’m Oscar Pine.”

Then she turns to the red headed girlfriend of his who stammers before she clears her throat and she is about to speak – but Cassandra knows exactly who she is. “Pyrrha Nikos.” She softly gasps with disbelief in her large blue eyes, even Demetrius looks extremely shocked to see that they recognise
“Y-You know me?” She asks them curiously.

“Why of course – Jaune sent many letters about you before...well...before Beacon fell.” Cassandra explains to her with a smile on her face, Pyrrha looks at Jaune with a gentle and loving smile. “He thought the world of you.” She blushes and so does Jaune, unable to hide the love they have for one another.

“I thought...” Demetrius stammers as he looks at her, trying to find the words. “I thought you died during the Battle.”

Pyrrha lowers her head with a saddened expression, having to remember what it felt like to have an arrow shot through her and burned alive...it brings back bad memories – especially where she ended up afterwards. “Yes...but...well it’s a long story. In short I guess I can sum it up as our enemy brought me back, but I managed to break free from him.” Pyrrha explains, leaving the two parents speechlessly confused of what she means by that.

“Yeah first time hearing it is pretty crazy, but it’s the truth.” Nora assures as she scratches the back of her head.

Jaune stands there, sighing since he knows he never came here to reminisce, something his father swiftly catches onto.

“It is good to see you, son...but you come here with your friends and you are armed to the teeth – this cannot be for family matters, is it?” Demetrius presumes, wanting to get to the point as quickly as they can. Jaune sighs, since his father has always been the sharpest, able to see through the loving family emotions that his wife cannot see past.

“Look, Dad – we really need your help.” Jaune sighs as he steps forward towards his father, but that just seems to infuriate him.

“Oh there it is! You don’t show up for years, don’t ever turn up to help your family who were also grieving, and the one time you do it is for your own sake.” Demetrius snarls with anger as he paces back and forth in the living room, getting the others worried for Jaune’s sake. At the end of the day they do not know this man and they will defend Jaune if he even tries anything against him. Cassandra clutches onto her other hand nervously as Demetrius yells at their son.

“Dem...Honey, please.” She softly begs him, but clearly he does not seem to be as forgiving to their son as she is.

“No, why should we help him when he was never here when the family needed him?” Demetrius questions with anger in his voice.

But Jaune just keeps trying to get him to see reason. “Dad...” He grumbles, but Demetrius still doesn’t listen to him.

“You little sister gets picked on every day at school because of her condition, and where are you to help her when she looks up to you the most?” The questions with more anger in his voice, but Jaune gives in and he draws the blade of Crocea Mors, and he shows it to his father, showing the glyphs.

“Will you shut up and look?” Jaune demands as he holds the blade horizontally, revealing the glowing blue hieroglyphics across the old sword that he holds. He might know that this sword is from the time of the Arkhoni, but that does not mean he understands what that means exactly. The way Demetrius stares at the shimmering blue Arkhoni Hieroglyphics...there is recognition, something
that he and the Arc Family know of very well apparently. He steps back from the sword, and Jaune lowers the blade down to his scabbard, sliding it inside.

“Shit...” Demetrius sighs as he looks away from his son and he paces back and forth, whereas Cassandra looks terrified of those glyphs that shine across the Isomacium blade of Crocea Mors. They know what they mean, but perhaps there is more they know than they even realise.

“Shit? What does that mean?” Nora inquires curiously as she steps forward.

“It means it is time for you to know the truth, son.” He sighs, and Jaune stammers, looking at Pyrrha with confusion before looking to his father again.

“The truth? What the hell does that mean?” He fearfully questions as he stands there.

“There is something you must see...” Demetrius says as he turns and he grabs his internally fluffy coat and throws it over his shirted body, leather on the exterior. He walks towards the rear door past the kitchen and he opens it, revealing the long pathway through the main hall of the house. He stands by the door with his hand stretched outwards. “Come.”

They look at each other, then Jaune looks to his mother who also puts on a warm dressing gown over her body – since it is cold outside. “Where are we going?” Jaune inquires.

“The Graveyard – there is something there you must see.” Demetrius answers as Cassandra catches up to him, also standing in the doorway – so they decide to follow. The band of warriors leave the kitchen and they enter the large hall, where a large central staircase rises up the middle of the room, then splits off into two separate staircases. One heading right and the other left, onto the second floor above their heads that leads to the many other rooms. However this is not the way they are headed, they are headed to the next door, the one he opens up and lets them all walk through first.

He closes it, and walks with them, across the driveway and towards the large garden that is connected to a graveyard that has been here for many, many years. They can tell just by the moss and erosion on the gravestones left behind to honour the fallen. This is the Arc Graveyard – where the hundreds of Arc relatives have been buried, so then they can rest in the peaceful night, hearing the song of owls hooting and insects chirping. Ren looks at the many names on them, and the many different dates.

Some reach back hundreds of years, hell some are even in the thousands. So some of these graves belonged to the Arcs when Arkhonex was still around. This place is much older than they ever could have imagined. Some of the names have been eroded away over the years or have been smudged off by the rain that has fallen on them – yet they are still tended to by the Arcs that remain by their side. The two Arcs that walk in front of Jaune hold their hands, and he can hear the sound of his mother breathing with a tremble inside – she is afraid.

Jaune looks at Pyrrha, who still holds his hand too with a gentle smile on her face. “You okay?” She softly asks him.

“Yeah...didn’t expect this, honestly.” He admits as he keeps walking, Ruby behind him looks around as she walks, but as she walks she senses her mind beginning to burn as Torchwick forms beside her. She looks over to the graves and sees him sat on top of one them with one leg crossed over the other.

“So this is the blonde haired idiot’s home, huh? No wonder he never came back here – looks like a proper misery.” Roman scoffs, but Ruby ignores him, as best she can as she walks, keeping her eye focused on the friends that walk ahead of her, but the more she moves her Psychosis begins to eat away at her more and more.
She’s going to fail, something is going to go wrong.

Nothing is gonna go wrong, leave her alone.

She is confused, why is she confused?

Why are you confused, Ruby?

There’s nothing to be confused about.

She isn’t confused! Stop annoying her!

Ruby shakes her head slightly, and Oscar notices, looking at her and he holds her hand gently, and his presence has always calmed that flame that burns her constantly. She shudders, either from the cold or from the many voices that argue inside her head at all times. “Ruby...if this is getting worse we can get you some medication.” Oscar says to her, but Ruby shakes her head.

“It won’t work – not anymore.” She states, staring ahead as she ignores her own suffering as best as she can. Ahead of them, Nora looks around at the trees, fully expecting to see the Lord of the Wood watching her but she cannot see it there. All she sees are the trees and all she hears are the hoots of gentle owls in the branches. Ren looks at her and he puts his arm round her shoulders, holding her close before he kisses the top of her head.

“Are you okay, Nora?” He asks her with love present in his voice, Nora smiles as she buries her head further into his warmth.

“Better now.” She assures with a beaming smile on her face.

As Jaune walks, he feels Pyrrha’s hand slip from his after she notices something, and she freezes in place with a shocked pair of eyes. Jaune looks at his hand with confusion, before he looks at where she was. “Pyrrha?” He asks, but then he stops with a sigh and his eyes sink. The others stop and so do his parents, looking back to see Pyrrha standing there.

She stands at the foot of a gravestone.

She stares at the name inscribed on its marble surface.

Pyrrha Nikos

Age: 17

Loving friend

She stares at her own grave, something no soul should ever have to experience, staring at their own gravestone. Jaune approaches her, whilst the others look at the pair as they stand there. Pyrrha finds herself worrying her lip with the edge of tears coming from her soul, but she fights it as best as she can, cold breath retreating from her firm lips. “You...made a grave...for me?” She asks him as she turns to look at the man she loves, who stammers too.

“I...I never did come home after Beacon fell...couldn’t face it...but I wrote a letter to Mom and Dad. I told them about what happened...and what happened to you.” Jaune explains, and the tearful Pyrrha Nikos looks into his eyes. “I think they knew...how I felt about you, and I bet they figured out you felt the same way long before my dumb ass ever figured it out.” He chuckles, getting a light punch on the shoulder from Pyrrha as she giggles. “They said they made a grave for you...so I could...be there for you when I came home.” Jaune explains with a heavy and saddened sigh.
Even though she may be alive...the pain of the night has never left either of them.

And it never will.

Pyrrha holds his hand affectionately as she leans her head on his shoulder, closing her eyes as she stands in this moment with him. Finally she and he are together at last, but they can never truly be happy until they stop Vir Nominis Umbra – they will never be safe.

Otherwise there will be no grave left to remember them by.

She exhales, wiping a tear from her cheek as she stares at her grave, looking at Jaune then kissing him lovingly on the lips, and he returns the kiss as well, his arm round her waist. Cassandra tears up, finally seeing her baby boy with a woman he loves – and by the gods is she a beautiful one too. They break their tender kiss and they exhale, Pyrrha looking at him with a toothless smile. “C’mon.” She says to him with a smile, holding his hand as she pulls him away from her grave.

Time to move on from their past mistakes.

They follow Demetrius and Cassandra to wherever it is they want Jaune to see, so Jaune steps up to his father’s shoulder – feeling a bit guilty for never turning up. “Dad...I’m sorry...” He sadly says, and Demetrius looks at him as he continues. “...I should have come back here...but...after Skyler...then what happened to Pyrrha, spending the amount of time I did trying to find her...I just couldn’t face coming home.” Jaune sighs as he walks alongside his much bigger father. Demetrius looks down to his son, and he sighs.

“I know – you’re not a bad person, I was just...upset that I never got to see you. Only had to read letters from you.” He sighs as he walks, and Cassandra looks at him with a smile.

“You proved me wrong though.” Cassandra tells him, and he looks at her with a raised eyebrow.

“What about?” Jaune inquires.

“You didn’t move back home – you proved me wrong.” She says with a proud smile on her face, an expression he never expected from her since she never wanted him to go there more than her husband.

“But...you hate the Huntsmen Academies. You called them barbaric.” Jaune states as he looks at her.

“I know – and I stand by those words...but I will always support you not the Academies. You’re my baby boy – my only baby boy – you could never disappoint me.” She tells him, and it feels like a weight – no – a tumour has been removed from him, that has been eating away at him for years. Believing that his parents never believed in him for so long, only to find out they always supported him?

It makes it all seem worth it.

Finally they arrive at the location that Demetrius and Cassandra wanted them to come and see – it is a Tomb by the looks of it, one with a huge tombstone above it. It has a large stone statue atop the surface, carved by impressive stoneworkers that have forged a brave looking knight with a very familiar sword held in both hands, pressed into the ground. They have the exact same hieroglyphics that are on Crocea Mors.

Because it is Crocea Mors.

Demetrius extends his hand and he swipes his palm across the dust that has settled across the name of
the Tombstone, and he reveals the name of the person of which this tomb belongs to.

Vyrryk Arc

The man that Jaune saw in that dream after he was stabbed by Hyde at the end of the second Battle of Beacon. He walks towards it and he presses his hand to the stone with utter disbelief, that the man he saw in his dream has been here in his childhood memories this whole time. “I saw him...Vyrryk..in my dream.” He stammers as he looks to his friends since they know of this dream he had before waking up. Demetrius looks at Jaune and he places his hand on his shoulder.

“Jaune – draw Crocea Mors.” Demetrius advises, so he does as his father commands him to, drawing the blade in one perfect motion, the ring of the sword resonating through the air. The light from the Fractured Moon reflects off the perfectly forged blade, and he looks to his father. Cassandra crouches down and she blows the dust and the leaves from some sort of keystone on a chunk of marble that stands at the huge memoriam of the warrior. “Slot the blade of Crocea Mors into the keyhole.”

Jaune does so, turning the blade downwards and he slowly plunges the blade into the keystone, and it fits perfectly, all the way down to the hilt, and it locks into place. Everyone watches with anticipation of what will happen next. “Now what?” Jaune asks his father.

“Turn the blade ninety degrees clockwise.” Demetrius answers, and Jaune looks down to the hilt and he exhales. He grips the crossguard of the sword like he holds onto the handles of a wheel and he does that, with a bit of force it turns and locks in. A loud mechanical crunch erupts from within the mechanism before them and Jaune gasps, pulling the blade slowly from the Keystone as many pieces of stone begin to slowly shift before his very eyes. He steps back to stand beside Pyrrha and Ruby as they watch.

The ground opens up before them, huge chunks of stone sliding away underneath the ground, transforming like a mechanical marvel. Thousands of years old and it still works just as it would all those years ago. “Whoa...” Nora gasps with disbelief as she stares at the opening, where there is a staircase heading underground.

“Mom? Dad? What is this?” Jaune stammers with concern, and they both look at him.

“Your destiny.” Cassandra answers, as she and his father walk down the steps and into the crypt that has been built beneath their very heads. They all hang on the word that Cassandra used – for it has not brought them the best fortune in the past years – but they need to know what it is that they have been hiding for all these years. Jaune has so many questions rattling around in his mind.

Who is Vyrryk Arc and why is he so important?

How long have my parents known about this for?

Why are they only showing this now?

Why are they talking about Destiny?

He will not find any answers to his queries if he just stands there, so he follows his parents into the Cryptum that stands beneath them, everyone slowly following him down. Cobwebs dangle everywhere down here from the dusty stone architecture, but as they walk the low ceiling rises the further down they get, and as they turn round the curve in the stairs, it gets more and more dramatic.

Statues built into the walls with swords held in their hands, however these are not the same blades as Crocea Mors, these are older Arkhoni Blades, obviously did not serve them very well back in the day. The wind howls through the dark cave like system that has been built underneath the residency
It is a large circular room, one that looks like it used to be some kind of Safehouse back in the days of Arkhonex, it could have been on top of the ground once before time caused it to become buried. Seems the Arkhoni had measures for that as well, creating walls that could withstand the weight of the world shifting around it. But instead of a large round table in the centre of the room, there is another statue very similar to the last. Also of Vyrryk Arc with another person beside him with a bow in her hands with a pet Wolf at their side.

They look...

So similar to the people that stand on the fountain in the Middle of Beacon Academy, however the clothing is very different. Vyrryk wears a handmade suit of armour that is meant to look like it is made of Grimm – the helmet based off the skull of a Griffin for example and his gauntlets have the claws of an Ursa Major. Cassandra and Demetrius stand at the base of the statue with their hands behind their backs, once being merely parents it is like they have just become loyal Knights.

They have been waiting for this day.

“Mom? Dad...what is this?” Jaune asks them yet again, and finally they answer him.

“This is the next step for you, my son – our family has been waiting for your birth ever since the fall of the Last Empire. Because that Sword was built – for you.” Demetrius reveals, and Jaune’s eyes widen with utter disbelief as he stares at the blade.

“B-But...I saw Vyrryk using this sword in my dream.” He stammers.

“Yes, because he was the first to wield it, as every Arc with a Semblance has wielded it.” He explains to him.

“What do you mean?” Pyrrha inquires.

“Crocea Mors holds an ancient spell in it, one that is linked to the Isomacium it was forged out of.” Cassandra begins to explain, she still seems afraid but not for her own sake but for her son’s. As any mother should do. “You see the sword collects the semblances of the warriors that have used them, like an archive, and when the warrior dies their semblances and knowledge is passed into the sword.” She explains to him.

“What?” Ruby questions with confusion.

“But...why? Why is it meant for me?” He stammers.

“Any Arc is able to use the abilities of the sword however it can only be used a finite amount of times, unleashing the power of the Arc Heritage onto its foes. However it is believed that you may harness a gift that allows you to use our Heritage’s strength to a limitless amount of times.” Demetrius explains to his son who looks utterly shocked.

“You mean...my Semblance?” He asks with disbelief in his voice.

“Perhaps – we do not know the complete truth of what this means, but every Arc has been ordered to protect the sword and pass it down the family until you – Jaune Arc – would possess it.” Demetrius clarifies as he stands before him, turning to a panel on a pedestal and he presses his hand onto it. “You are searching for Arkhonex, aren’t you?” He asks.
“How did you know that?” Blake asks.

“Because the Blade has started to commune with Jaune, causing him to have visions of the past of our family name. All the way back to Vyrryk Arc.” Demetrius explains, whilst Cassandra stays quiet because of her concern for her son’s safety. The ground beside him opens, circular panels rotating round as a new pedestal rises up, and this is the most unexpected revelation of them all.

Sat on the Pedestal.

Is a Visionary Book, with the Arc Crescent imprinted on the cover, then it opens up with a handprint available the same size as Jaune’s. “That’s...a Visionary Book?” Ren questions with awe.

“Why – no – how have you got a Visionary Book?” Oscar also questions with shock in his voice.

“It has been hidden down here ever since Arkhonex and its Empire collapsed into Ruin, we have been keeping these secrets until this day. As much as I wish we could be a normal family living a normal life – we were ordered to wait until this day to have you read the Book.” Demetrius explains, turning to see his wife sniffing in upset as Jaune stands there.

“Mom? What’s wrong?” Jaune asks her.

“I...This is why I never wanted you to be a Huntsman...the weight put on your shoulders by dead men and women...it isn’t fair.” She sniffs as she rubs tears from her eyes, but Jaune walks over to her and he wraps his arms around her, calming her down.

“It’s okay, mom – I’m not carrying this burden alone...I have my friends...and I have my family.” He tells her gently as he holds her close, Demetrius smiles as he looks at his son caring for his mother – at least he still does love his family, proving him wrong. Jaune releases his mother and he caresses her shoulders, wiping a tear from her cheek. “And you know me – I’m stubborn as hell.” Jaune chuckles, making his mother giggle.

“Yes you are.” She laughs, also making his friends laugh too. Jaune turns to his father and he walks over to him with a sigh, holding the blade in his hands.

“I...Are you sure I am meant for this? Are you sure it’s me?” He asks his father, since he and him did not start this reunion off very well. Demetrius smiles, starting to understand why he has not been able to come home for the past five years – because he has been doing his duty as a Huntsman. Making him the perfect choice, and definitely the one that has been told of down the line.

“I’m certain.” Demetrius promises with a smile.

“Wait...how could they have known about Jaune? Arkhonex and its Empire...wasn’t it thousands of years ago?” Ruby inquires.

“I am not clear on the details, many of them have been lost over the years since then – but his name has always come up. And the family has made sure to only name him after the birth of a son that has been named. My father only told me after Jaune was born.” Demetrius explains to him, and they all seem to understand the logic.

“So then a parent doesn’t just name their kid Jaune, right?” Nora presumes.

“Precisely, the parents of the child must never know of the prophecy until the child is actually born.” He explains, which could explain why they have had so many children. So many daughters until they finally had a son, that happened to be Jaune Arc.
The Blonde Knight sets his eyes onto the Visionary Book, and he approaches it, hearing the whispers from the old magic used to create it calling out to him. “What is on this Book?” Jaune asks.

“I don’t know.” Demetrius replies, getting confused faces from them all. “Nobody has been able to access it before – it is meant for your eyes only.” Demetrius explains to him, and they all step back. He exhales, knowing he needs to see what is waiting for him on the other side of this book.

“Ohay...guess I’m going in.” Jaune exhales, looking at his mother, then his father – then his girlfriend. “Wish me luck.”

She smiles and she nods to him, Jaune turns and faces the page with the handprint waiting for him. Wearily he lifts the palm and exhales, then thrusts forward and presses his hand onto it. The magic plunges into his blood stream, forming the protective magical barrier around him as it feeds the memories into his mind.

Then...

Everything transforms before his very eyes, and it feels as if his body, mind and personality changes.

He becomes someone else in this memory, instead of watching it.

He becomes...

Vyrryk Arc.


Vyrryk

Green slopes of beauty bump across the landscape with a stunning expanse of sapphire Blue Ocean stretching out for as far as the eye can see. With flowers blooming, cloudless blue skies with the stunning sun in the sky and clean air – a young man aims down the sight of his bow and arrow. His finger aims right at a Deer that stands in the grass, looking around as it walks around, eating the grass at its hooves. He keeps the bowstring drawn as he aims the feathered arrow with his blue eye, blonde streaks of hair dangling over one eye.

He breathes slowly and carefully, before he releases the string and lets the arrow shoot towards the Deer.

But it misses, flying off into the distance and the Doe panics, fleeing from the area, disappearing down the slope of the hill to find its friends. The young man sighs with frustration, lowering the bow as he rises up, hearing the joyous laughter of a same-aged young woman beside him, giggling at his failure. Walking towards him, clad in a deep brown leather corset tied round her core and a hazel coloured undershirt woven from cloth, fully sleeved and forming a V-Neck, showing a small scar over her right breast from a knife that has been sewn up.

She has long wavy brown hair and stunning honey coloured irises inside seductive almond shaped eyes, and a beautiful smile with pearly white teeth. She has a single bronze metal bracer on her right arm with an Archer’s Glove that covers her three fingers for the use of the bowstring and she has the quiver strapped round her torso, hanging diagonally on her back. She has curves in her body of a super model and long elegant legs covered up in deep brown leather trousers with a Carver’s Knife attached to the belt with a coin pouch hooked onto it round her waist.
She continues to giggle at him as he stands up. “That was rubbish!” She giggles with a well-spoken accent, and he sighs.

“Alright, alright – it wasn’t that bad.” He claims as he rears back. The young man with blue eyes and blonde hair looks just like Jaune just with a different accent due to the times that they live in, and his clothes are very different. Like her he is not wearing a suit of armour, he wears cloth shirt with a pair of black trousers on, the only weapon he has with him is a single sword sat on the picnic blanket on the green grass with a few baskets with fruit and bread in it.

“That was one of the worst shots I have ever seen.” She scoffs as she grabs the bow from his hand and he gasps at how she just snatches it from him.

“My my, Claudia! I wouldn’t think a little stable-girl would be so daring.” He chuckles with a smirk, but her reply is just as cheeky.

“Oh, and I would have expected a Duke’s Son to be a better shot than that!” Claudia replies with a laugh in her voice, so he sucks his lips before he grabs Claudia and they both fall back onto the grass.

She lands on top of him with a smile on her face as she caresses his cheek. “Talk to a Lord like that?” He jokingly asks her, so she flirtatiously smirks at her lover.

“Oh no...You gonna arrest me?” She asks him, tilting her head curiously, and he chuckles.

“Maybe to my quarters? Who knows what could happen?” He flirts with a smile, and she giggles as she leans closer to his lips, closing her eyes.

“Mmm, I wouldn’t call that a punishment, milord.” She whispers before she kisses him affectionately on the lips. He reaches round her, moving his fingers through her brown hair as he kisses her, feeling her warm hands caressing his chest. She eventually takes a breath as she pants with a chuckle, every kiss they have ever shared is a breath taker.

She sighs as she lays with him, pressing her head to his. “I wish we could do this more often, Vyrryk.” She sighs, revealing him to be the legend that has statues everywhere of him. He caresses her brown hair as she lies there, and she looks up at him with a smile.

“So do I, but you know what this life is like...falling for a guy like me.” He sighs, and she sighs to, resting her head against his chest, holding his hand.

“I know – you have responsibilities being the son of a Duke.” She sighs, snuggling up to him, but then he looks at her and he caresses her cheek with his hand. She looks up at him with a smile.

“I still love you, Claudia – doesn’t matter who they marry me to. It’s just a contract.” He says to her, but she sighs since she holds onto him.

“Yeah but...I don’t want some other bitch to have her grubby mitts all over you.” Claudia says to him, and he chuckles as she says that.

“It would only be to make an heir – as long as my father doesn’t learn of us it will be fine.” He assures as he kisses her nose.

They both sit there on the field, listening to the tweeting birds and the sound of adorable fluffy Bumblebees flying around and pollinating the many flowers around the large field of grass before their eyes. “I could live here forever.” She says to him as she reaches over to the basket and picks a grape from the collection inside and she eats one of them. Claudia rarely even gets to eat fruits, it is
mostly some pieces of bread or just an apple, since she comes from a poor background and is a
stable-girl.

Vyrryk chuckles, a man who does not want the titles of which he has been bestowed. “Maybe we
could one day.” He suggests, but she just scoffs at the ridiculousness of the idea, so unlikely to
happen.

“Yeah like your father would ever allow you to run off with a stable-girl.” She comments, wisely
since she knows how the system works. But Jaune has very similar traits to Vyrryk that are not just
physical attributes – but also personality-wise. For Jaune also tends to be a bit of a rebel sometimes,
he does not always like running the way the world would want him to. And Vyrryk is no different,
when he wants to do something he will fight to get it – and his goal is to marry Claudia and be free
from his father’s eye.

“No really, one day we could be free from that place – build a home, get married – have a baby...or
two...or three...or...”

“Alright I’m not a brood mother.” She giggles as she rests her head on his chest as she lays there.

He looks off at the ocean as he caresses her long brown hair. “But really...some day? I want to run
away with you.” He whispers into her ear and she smiles, squeezing his hand.

“You best hold me to that.” She replies, standing up and she helps him up, pulling him up to his feet.
“But we do have duties...” She sighs with disappointment as she holds his hands.

“I know – I’ll see you later, okay?” He asks her.

“Later.” She agrees with a smile, kissing him firmly on the lips. The kiss feels like it could last for
eternity. When they break the kiss they close their eyes and gently press their heads together. Vyrryk
walks over to the now folded up blanket, and he holds it between his arm and his torso, carrying the
basket in the same hand. He approaches his horse and he hooks the handle onto the hook on the
saddle, along with the blanket. He thrusts his body up onto the saddle of the horse and he looks to
the woman he wishes to be his wife.

Claudia Barrett

They both ride off towards the city that stretches out for as far as the eye can see...

Arkhonex

The largest civilisation ever created by the people of Remnant, a city that almost took over an entire
continent and was filled with people. Once it was anyway, this was a time before chaos consumed
this beautiful place. But even the prettiest flowers can be poisonous, and Arkhonex was no
exception. They ride towards the walls and there are hanging corpses from Gallows outside,
warnings to any that would betray their laws that they held so dearly.

They both approach the gates as they sit on their horses, and the guardsman looks at the two of them.
“State your business.” The Guardsman demands.

“Returning home to Sunhelm Watch.” Vyrryk answers to the Guardsman.

“Name?” He asks.

“Vyrryk Arc.” He answers, and the guardsman looks at Claudia.
“And you, girl?” He asks her.

“Claudia Barrett.” She answers, both speaking clearly. He looks at them, and clearly they have both left the walls in the past quite a lot.

“Dangerous Creatures of Grimm left untamed out there, best be careful.” He advises, knowing that they are likely to go again.

“We’ll be sure to keep our eyes peeled.” Vyrryk assures, the Guardsman looks back and he calls out to the operatives of the gate.

“Open the gate!” He yells, and on cue the huge chains begin to rotate round, lifting the heavy Isomacium gate up so then the horses can make their entry through the walls. Unlike the city of Ephai, Arkhonex did have walls – which is most likely why it was an absolute bloodbath when it fell. Because as they ride in, they see what is for them a normality – creatures of Grimm being used under the spell created by the Witches of the Restless Marshlands to possess them to do their bidding.

Until it didn’t, and they all turned feral and attacked everything in sight.

There was approximately ten thousand Grimm within these walls.

The casualties were...astronomical...oceans of blood covering the streets and screams filled the air.

They both ride through the city, for in the centre there are incredible skyscrapers towering so high that they nearly pierce through the clouds. With people riding Nevermores like they are flying plains, there are also aircraft too, and vehicles. It is bizarre how their style seems mostly medieval, yet their technology seems to rival the technology available now. And the buildings are nothing like they are now, sturdy and able to withstand so much punishment.

Claudia and Vyrryk keep riding, right past the docks where Oscar would arrive at a few years later to first meet Vir Nominis Umbra and Cynthia Nikos. Their horses bray as they keep charging across the streets where people go about their business, prostitutes in the streets trying to woo potential customers, and criminals waiting to make their attacks. However they would never dare attack a Duke’s son, however Claudia is the one at risk.

But then again – she is deadlier than she looks, that knife and bow are not there for show – she knows how to use them. And Vyrryk knows how to use that sword he has on his back, unlike people nowadays that have them at their leg, people back in Arkhonex wore the scabbards on their backs like a quiver. The two of them ride past a pair of Boarbatusks being used like horses, pulling large carts with their bodies, grunting and snorting constantly as they move. Instead of glowing red they glow blue instead, due to the curse that possesses them.

The pair charge across a bridge, where young Aqua-Faunus swim around with their membranes that help them swim well – and unlike people nowadays, not only do they swim in rivers but they tend to swim completely unclothed. Something that is considered a crime nowadays – strange how the smallest things that are the norm in the past become illegal. Prostitution and Drug Trade was legal back in Arkhonex, mostly because the politicians enjoyed both.

However if two people of the same gender have sex? They would suffer the worst fates, such as torture, hanged drawn and quartered, fed to Grimm, hanged by the neck until dead – and many other worse things. Women were also not treated overly fairly in this time, not given rights to vote and were treated as lesser beings. Claudia has had to suffer with it for years, so did Starla Schnee – treated as sexual objects by the men or just as marital objects. She has had many men try and rape her in the past – those men lost their genitalia as a consequence.
However her relationship with Vyrryk is just as dangerous as what Krekras and Starla had, because cheating is considered a crime if you were female. The men are let off, but the women are punished – a cruel fate, one that was improved in the new world.

Even the prettiest flowers can be poisonous.

They both ride across the bridge, and eventually they arrive at the gates of the fortress inside of the city – the city is so large that there are forts and farmlands inside of it. The gates open up immediately for them because they can recognise his face a mile off. Their horses trot their way into the fort and they dismount, guiding them towards the stables where they live. Claudia stands there and she smiles to her lover, kissing him lovingly before he walks away from her, beginning her work as her Uncle approaches her.

He knows of their relationship but he stays quiet for both their sakes, because the father of Vyrryk?

Not an overly nice man, obsessed with his image.

“Hey there, darling.” He greets, and she smiles.

“Hey, dad.” She replies, taking a sponge and cleaning the horse that Vyrryk was riding.

“So...how did it go?” He asks her, and she fully knows what he is getting at. She looks at him with a smile as she flicks her hair over her shoulder.

“Pretty well – I mean Vyrryk is still a shit shot but hey, it is what it is, isn’t it?” She giggles as she cleans the hooves of the horse that sniffs her head. “Hey.” She whispers as she strokes the mane of the beautiful animal. She may not be from a powerful house like Vyrryk is, but she still enjoys her job. She loves Horses, finds them to be beautiful animals, far more honest than most people in the world, and far less dangerous too.

“Well I shan’t ask for details on why you took a bit longer to collect those grapes and get those pelts.” He chuckles, and she blushes, but he is not mad – in fact he admires her for her bravery to do this. But also worries about the dangers, again not of the man she loves but of his father. “Just be careful.”

“I am – and I love him, father...and he loves me, he said so.” She assures, and he smiles.

“I can tell he does – it is not him that worries me.” He says as he looks past her and then at the stairs that lead up to the main building in the fort, where they can see him. A large man with a lion pelt around his shoulders and narrowed eyes glaring right at her – he has known for a while but cannot act on it.

Not until he marries.

Vyrryk walks up the steps to his father, waiting to hear the scolding from him that is most likely coming very soon. He presses his palms upon the wooden balcony as he looks around. “Just come out and say it.” He sighs, ready for his words and they come very swiftly from his powerful voice.

His name is Ezekiel Arc – the father of Vyrryk Arc and a very powerful man, one who is completely focused on keeping his ego be at the top of the family name. He does not even believe in love, only in contracts formed from marriage – ones that bring in lots of coin and help build alliances in case of conflict arising against them. He has a bristly white beard and white hair with deep blue eyes, a common trait for the Arcs to have. “Why do you insist on sleeping around with that whore?” He snarls, getting a sharp glare from Vyrryk.
“Watch your mouth, father.” He snaps, getting a slow glare from his father who stares straight into his soul. “She may be a stable-girl but she is more than that.” He assures.

“I care not for what you think she is – I care for what she is. A stable-girl, with absolutely no relations of importance. A father who can hardly even read his own handwriting and a mother who has as much intelligence as a vegetable. Nothing to bring to the family, just eye candy and nothing more.” He states with a scowl, which angers him constantly.

“Why can’t you let me be happy?” Vyrryk questions.

“You can be happy – forget her and find somebody suitable to marry, there are countless beautiful young women out there with powerful families. Take the Schnees, I’ve heard that Starla Schnee has a cousin who is very shapely, has a powerful family too.” He suggests.

“The Schnees? Please, too uptight.” He scoffs, causing his father to bite his lip with frustration at his way of thinking.

“Alright, how about the Nikos Family?” He wonders.

“They have been our Bannermen for decades, you know as well as I do that it is stupid idea to try and morph them into the Arcs. They are smart.” Vyrryk states as he shrugs his shoulders, but his father only sees this as his attempts stay with Claudia.

“Well we have the Varr Skaal House visiting today, and I know that O’Donna has a stunning princess she wishes to marry someday. Blonde hair, brown eyes, very beautiful, I think her name is Yvette Varr Skaal – why not her?” He asks him, but he sighs as he shakes his head.

“There’s really no convincing you is there?” He asks him.

“No – because you must do what you house demands.” Ezekiel states, turning and walking away from him towards his house. He presses his hands to the railing with a sigh, looking across the fortress to see Claudia looking at him.

He sighs, feeling so defeated that he cannot just have what he wants. He reaches into his pocket and he stares at a small collection of markings of Higher Arkhoni, something that is not translates by the Visionary Book for some reason.

He stares at it and he sighs.

“Has to be something here...something that can help us get away from this place.” He sighs, clutching it tighter.

As he stands there, the landscape shatters and crumbles around him as the memory comes to an end as he looks at his hand clenched with those symbols engraved into the paper.

And then...

The memory fades away.

Jaune
The protective barrier throws him back, right into the arms of Pyrrha and Ruby who catch him, since the Visionary Books always seem to do that to the reader. He gasps and pants as he stands in their arms. “Shh, it’s okay...what did you see?” Pyrrha softly asks him as they let him sit down for a second, witnessing all those memories from a Visionary Book really can be draining for the user. Demetrius and Cassandra both crouch down as they listen to what Jaune has to say.

“I...I saw Vyrryk Arc, well no it’s...it’s like I was him, it was different. I wasn’t me but I could still remember everything that I saw. He was with this woman, a Stable-Girl called Claudia Barrett and he was struggling because he was in love with her. And didn’t want to marry any other higher class woman, just wanted her.” Jaune explains to them all, shaking it off, whereas Demetrius and Cassandra have absolutely no idea of what any of this means.

And whether this woman with the bow is indeed Claudia or not, it could be Yvette, he has not even seen her yet in the Visionary Book.

“Anything else?” Oscar asks him.

Then it hits him.

*The markings!*

“Get me a piece of paper and a pencil, I need to draw it while it’s still in my mind.” He stammers, so Oscar reaches into his pocket and luckily he has a piece of pen, whereas Blake pulls out a journal she has. She rips out a page and hands it to Jaune whilst Oscar gives him the pen. He quickly sketches what he saw in Vyrryk’s hand, it must be the reason he needed to see this, not just his past. Those symbols are important.

He sketches them quickly, then his genius mind activates, looking at the bracelet that the Architect made them. He holds his hand out and it activates, emitting the blue beam of light over the hieroglyphics he has drawn.

The database copies them and then forms the words before their very eyes so they can translate it.

It works extremely well, good old Architect and his crazy good technology.

*Chapel of Dawn’s Vengeance*

“Chapel of Dawn’s Vengeance? What does that mean?” Ren wonders as he looks at them – yet again Jaune’s parents are totally clueless.

But it is Oscar that puts it together, remembering some things from two words.

“Chapel...Dawn...wait a minute what was the name of that group that Kragen mentioned were causing chaos back in Arkhonex? Didn’t he call them the Congregation of Dawn?” Oscar asks them with curiosity, then Nora snaps her fingers with a smile and she nods her head.

“He damn did, didn’t he?” She agrees.

“Congregation of Dawn? They were these Religious Fanatics, right? Served Salem when she was created.” Ruby mutters as she walks back and forth.

“If the Vyrryk had markings to a Chapel that belonged to the Congregation of Dawn...then they are involved in all this...how?” Blake wonders as she bounces the ideas around her mind as Jaune stands up.
“That’s a damn good question.”
Moving On

Cinder

She stares at him, and the memories taste as fresh as they were when they happened, stood by the elevator that would head down to the vault. Ozpin stands at the other side of the room with both his hands resting atop the rounded crest of his cane, brown eyes staring straight at her as she stares right back. She does not trust him, none of them really trust him, but for good reason. He is not what would be considered the most trustworthy of individuals, especially when thinking about how much of a mystery he is. And the fact that he is a Knight of Grimm, the Knight of Vengeance and absolutely nobody knew.

Until Vir Nominis Umbra figured it out, and destroyed Beacon as a method to rid him, which failed nonetheless. She exhales as she stares at him with her one fully functional amber eye, one arm grasping onto her other arm. “Was it really seven years ago?” She asks him as they both stare at the elevator, no longer empty with smashed open doors when Pyrrha used the cubicle to shoot up there. However the memories of this elevator shaft, the vault that lies beneath them is still as strong as ever.

“It really was...” He sighs as he looks at the elevator, tapping his digits on the metal head of the cane. “Time flies, doesn’t it?” He chuckles, Cinder scoffs as she looks over at him.

“Ironic, coming from you.” She reminds, making the Professor chuckle.

“Hmm, funnily enough that was not intentional at all.” He assures, realising the fact he accidentally made a pun considering how Oscar knew him at the time. As the mysterious entity known as Time.

“Why did you never tell Oscar? I understand never telling us...but why not even him? You did share a mind, how come he never caught on?” She asks him, Ozpin nods his head, pacing around the room slowly with his cane being used like a walking stick.

“Well, I have learned that I can block certain memories from the host I am forced to bind my aura to. I chose Oscar because we shared similar goals...and once we were both very similar people. When I was a younger...better man.” Ozpin explains, thinking back to the time when he used to be Wymerus Ozymandius, the Captain of the Dauntless and later becoming the Knight of Vengeance because of Axzura Vex.


“No, it’s that I could not trust myself. The things I know and the truth of what I am is something that no boy should ever learn. I know things that the world would never want to understand...I learned my fair share from Vir Nominis Umbra.” He assures with the firm voice he speaks through.

Cinder leans against the wall and bends her knee and leg back, pressing the soul of her foot against the surface. She brushes her long black hair over her shoulder and she sighs with frustration. “By the gods, I really need to take a shower.” She sighs, trying her best to keep her hair from covering her face, since it doesn’t smell great and she has never really had the time to do so. Ozpin looks at her, and she is so much different compared to who she was when they fought down there. He smiles softly.

“I’m proud.” He says to her, she pauses and her eye widens with shock, looking at him with
confused disbelief.

“Huh? You’re...proud? Of what?” Cinder asks him, nervous.

“How you have changed, you fell down a dark path yet you clawed yourself out and back into the light. Very few have that kind of strength – hell it took me decades to break free from Umbra, you managed to do it in a few months. That is no simple feat.” He compliments with a smile as he stands there, looking over to her. She blushes slightly, even acts adorable...something nobody would expect from the once murderous and psychotic Cinder Fall.

“Well...I haven’t earned their respect yet, I don’t deserve it after everything I have done.” She sighs as she turns and walks towards the door, looking through the creaking open door where she can hear the Witches speaking with Glynda outside. Where Penny also stands there as she speaks. She sighs, no matter what she does she never feels like she has done enough to earn their respect, the sense of family they all feel.

“Have they demanded you leave yet?” Ozpin asks her curiously, standing in the same form and pose he always does. She raises a black brow and turns to look at him with confusion.

“What?” She questions.

“Have they demanded you leave, yet?” He asks her.

“Well...no...But they should.” She states.

“Why? Why should they shun you after everything you have done to atone for your sins?” Ozpin asks her as he walks towards her now, walking with his cane at his side, using it like a third leg. Cinder stammers when she turns to look at him with the inability to find an answer. She hears the voice of Penny and she turns to look at her through the crack in the door.

“Do you think we can make a cure?” Penny asks the Witches from outside, sounding so concerned for the safety of her friends.

“If we can get our hands on some Aphax Violet Flowers from the Embered Grove then I am certain of it – but the hard part is finding Arkhonex.” She explains with a heavy sigh. Cinder closes her eyes and turns to him, remembering the amount of souls that died during the Battle of Beacon because of her. The death of Penny, Pyrrha and countless other souls...even Roman.

“I have killed so many people, played a hand in all of this. Helped that monster get where he is now.” Cinder sadly states, pressing her head to the wall with frustration towards her past sins. Ozpin looks at her, the woman that was partially responsible for the Fall of Beacon nearly seven years ago now...and he has no animosity. Because he knows that she was merely a tool for Vir Nominis Umbra, just as Mercury was...and just as Salem is as well.

Just as he was.

“Cinder...no...Sapphire.” He speaks, her eye widens when hearing somebody other than Kassius actually call her by her real name. She turns and stares at the man behind her with shocked looks in her eye. “Your crimes are nothing compared to my own – I played a hand in destroying an empire that killed...billions. Not hundreds, not thousands...billions.” He explains, and the use of that number truly makes her shudder with understandable dread...but also feeling sorry for the man. “Believe me when I say, if I can come back from the horrors I have done, then so can you. You just have to accept your dark past, and decide how you will change the future.” He explains, walking over to her.

He reaches over and he pushes her black hair from her face and curling it over her shoulder then
looking at the dress she still wears that Salem made for her. “And to start? Stop wearing that dress – it is a constant reminder of what Salem did to you. If you want them to really feel you are with them...be like them. Don’t act as Cinder Fall – but as Sapphire Locke.” He advises with a smile on his face and she stammers as she stands there. But then, the dark memories of her past begin to fade away as she realises he is right.

“So...I just...be myself?” She asks him.

“I don’t see the harm in it, if you really want them to accept you. Forgiveness will come in time, but not just from you helping them. Interact with them, talk to them – nobody will ever get to know you if you don’t approach them first.” He states with the shrug of his shoulders. She turns and looks at the window, faintly seeing her own reflection and she sighs, knowing he is right.

“Okay...” She agrees with a smile, and he smiles back, patting her shoulder and walking past her. But before he leaves, she has one more thing to say.

“I’m sorry.” She apologises, and he stops to look at her.

“For what?” He asks.

“For kicking your ass.” She snarkily says with a cheeky grin, making him chuckle at her statement.

“Oh sweetheart – I was letting you win.” He chuckles, walking away from her, and after what they witnessed him do against Vir Nominis Umbra? He could make short work of a Fall Maiden who just learned how to use her powers.

She exhales, and she immediately turns towards the Dormitory Block...deciding to make the changes that she wishes to make. She walks out the door and towards the building, pushing the doors open and walking up the stairs, passing by the many other dorms that are now empty. She stops at her one, and she pushes it open to walk inside, and she closes it behind her. She approaches the mirror and stares at herself, and the first thing she does is take off her patch that covers her damaged eye.

She reveals her face to the mirror and she stares at the burns, the damage done to her eye but seeing it beginning to heal. She exhaled through her nose and reaches back to the rear of her dress, and she grips the zipper and slowly pulls it down, feeling it loosen around her slender athletic body. It falls from her, and she feels the air against her bare skin, staring at her shirtless physique...

But her eyes focus onto the scar above her breast, the one of Fury’s Handprint...and just seeing it sends flashes of haunting memories back to her mind. Her screams of horror as he dragged her across the hard grating floor and throwing her into her cell. The burning agony of the magma hot palm pressing against her skin, melting it and pulling it away to leave that terrible scar for the rest of her life. All because she told a lie to Salem, one of the worst things anybody could ever do.

She takes off the remaining clothes on her body and she walks towards the shower and she steps into the glass cubicle, looking up at the shower nozzle and she closes her eye as she turns the knob. Feeling the warm water falling onto her face and trickling across her body, across the scars she has collected in her life. And not just from working with Salem, but from before. She does not have the perfect physique many would expect from such a beautiful looking woman.

As she washes her hair and body, her thoughts always go to Emerald, wondering where she is in the world. Completely unaware that Kassius has actually found her and she is in fact alive and desperately looking for her as well. Things have changed in her life, now she actually wants to have someone...the love she sees around her between people.
Jaune and Pyrrha.

Oscar and Ruby.

Blake and Sun.

Kassius and Yang.

Neptune and Weiss.

Nora and Ren.

So many people around her have love in their hearts, and that is all she wants...is to know what that feeling is like. To be wanted, to feel the warmth of someone against you...she has never been one to shy away from one night stands in the past. She swings both ways after all, hell she even had a one night stand with Mercury once...but Emerald...something always drew them to each other.

Was it the looks?

Was it my voice?

Hell was it the way I acted?

She rubs her hands across her body, washing away her sins as she moves on, washing Cinder Fall away and digging the girl she used to be out from her soul. Eventually she ends her session in the shower, and with steam around her she dries herself off, feeling better and smelling better too. She wraps the towel round her naked body and walks towards the room again.

She exhales as she turns her eyes to her wardrobe and she reaches inside, taking out a black bra and clipping it on over her chest, then a pair of underwear and slipping them on too. Then she opens it to see a familiar costume, but she does not intend to wear it all this time.

It is the same costume she wore when she attended the Vytal Festival. She takes the light beige sleeveless jacket she wore and stares at it...it was the most normal she ever felt when wearing this outfit. However she will not be wearing the sarashi this time, but she will wear everything else. She takes the grey trousers she wore and she slides into them with ease, buckling the belt around her waist and they still fit like a charm, if not a bit looser. She picks up her fingerless gloves and also puts them on, flexing her digits as she looks at them.

Then her eyes focus onto a pair of black boots, not the same she used to wear but it is better than the heels. At least she won’t risk tripping over all the time unlike those glass monstrosities she used to wear. She ties them up and zips the sides up too so they fit nicely, buckling up straps too as they cover most of her calves anyway.

Now she takes out a black sleeveless crop top with a V-Necked section in the middle that she puts on over her chest and zips up the back, fitting comfortably. The black top has a few Mistraalian Bronze linings woven into it too, with a diamond shaped hole in the back that perfectly shows the tattoo on her back she got when using the Grimm Beetle to absorb Amber’s Fall Maiden power. A mark she will never lose, but has no choice but to live with, just as Ozpin has learned to accept what he is.

Finally she takes the beige sleeveless jacket of hers and she pulls it on, sitting it on her torso as she looks at herself. She has some skin revealing but...she has nothing to hide anymore, and never minded that. Her aura is strong and at the end of the day she knows she is a very attractive woman – why hide it? At least that is her way at looking at it, Sapphire Locke would have done the same thing, confident in who she is.
Finally she approaches her table where she sits down and begins to put on her makeup, something she has not done since the infiltration – but now she does it simply because she wants to. Spraying perfume on her person and taking a curler and making her hair take a wavy look, letting the left side of her hair hang over her shoulder and the rest down her back.

Finally...

She is finished.

A new Cinder Fall – or Sapphire Locke.

She will always refer to herself as Cinder, because that has become her identity and she responds to it easier than Sapphire. She has had to live with that name for quite a long time.

She steps outside after finishing up and the sun shines upon her, she looks around and sees Kragen standing there with Ozpin and Yenna. The three of them look at Cinder and they are completely taken aback to see how much she has changed. Wearing a whole new outfit, stylising her hair and clearly taken a shower. She looks like a completely different person, and she walks towards them. Yenna plants a hand on her hip as she sees her approach, looking at her outfit. “Well...this is different.” She says.

“I decided it was time for a change.” She says, looking at Ozpin and winking.

“You’re not wearing the patch.” Kragen points out, seeing the scars and her still healing eye.

“It was time – and besides...I’ve nothing to hide anymore.” She states with the shrug of her shoulders.

“You look good.” Yenna compliments, making Cinder smile sweetly to the compliment she was given, at least Yenna is starting to give Cinder a second chance. But as Cinder stands with them, a familiar voice calls out to her in her mind, sounding ghostly and so distant.

“Sapphire? Can you hear me?” The whispery voice of Kassius calls to her through the bond that they share, since he knows how to contact her. Anyone can do it but it takes immense concentration to establish a link to her – unless you have a strong bond. The three Arkhoni Survivors look at her with curiosity, noticing her eye darting around as she hears that voice.

“Cinder? What is it?” Yenna asks her.

“Kassius...He’s trying to contact me again.” Cinder tells them, and Kragen’s eyes widen since he remembers her doing this before at Menagerie to communicate with Glynda. Attempting to warn them in time about the true nature of Horridus Morbus, only it was too late and Brawnz ravaged poor May.

“Do it, connect with him. We’ll be able to see him like Glynda, right?” He asks her.

“Yeah, I’m able to take a fragile copy of their aura for a few seconds to talk to them wherever I am. Or anyone around me can.” Cinder explains, and then Yenna looks at Kragen.

“Shouldn’t we let Yang in on this? She will want to see him, to know he is okay? Give the girl some hope?” Yenna asks them, and they look at Cinder.

“Sure.” Cinder agrees.

The four of them approach the Amphitheatre where the Afflicted are being held and Yang lays there
in her bed, rolled over with her face staring at the wall. Cinder looks over at her and she speaks.
“Yang?” Cinder says, the blonde haired Huntress hears the voice of their old foe and now ally – maybe even friend – and she turns over, surprised to see her wearing new clothes and actually looking really clean and pretty.

“You look different, it suits you.” Yang compliments.

*I should dress up more often if I get this many compliments.*

“It’s Kassius...he’s contacting me...you’ll be able to see him and talk to him.” She assures, and her eyes widen and she nearly inhales her whole tongue from the gasp she made.

“What?” She breathlessly questions.

“My semblance, I can communicate with people by summoning a projection of their Astral Form to where we are. Good way to sending messages without being tapped by anybody.” She states, Yang springs upright and looks at her desperately.

“Please...I need to see if he is okay.” She stammers.

“Well...let’s find out.” Cinder says, as she closes her eyes and she begins to activate her semblance, feeling the bond she has with her brother connecting. Energy of aura flowing through her body and then casting out before her like a hologram...the sound of Yang gasping and standing up is enough proof to know that it has worked and she can see him. Kassius stands before her, and it is hopeful for them to see Kassius wearing his outfit again and with his hat back on.

“Sapphire? Oh thank the gods we’ve got a connection...wait...you changed outfits?” He quickly changes the subject with a surprised expression, she is gonna get that quite a lot apparently. She smiles with a short chuckle, lowering her head as she scratches the back of her neck.

“Well I was convinced.” She says to him, her eye glancing over to Ozpin who looks at Kassius, first time really meeting him. Yang gets up, weakly but Yenna helps her with her arm round the Spring Maiden’s shoulders. She looks up at Kassius and Cinder looks at her then at the oblivious Kassius Locke. “Hey bro? Look left for me.” She asks him, but then he looks to their right, and she rolls her eye with annoyance, making Yang giggle. “My left.” She corrects, then he looks left and his eyes widen and he gasps with relief.

“Oh by the gods...you’re okay.” He gasps, walking over to her, but obviously they cannot feel each other due to the fact it is just a holographic copy of his Astral Body. Yet she still reaches out to his hands, but hers just fade through his translucent ones.

“Hey you...been thinking about you a lot...I’m so happy you’re okay.” Yang sighs, desperately wanting to kiss him and hold onto him and never let go. But alas until he gets back to her that cannot really happen. But Kassius turns and then he stares straight into the brown eyes of Professor Ozpin, letting it really sink in to see that he is back and alive. He walks towards him and stares him down; with narrowed untrusting eyes since he does not believe him being back is a good thing by any means.

“So Sapphire wasn’t joking...you really are back?” Kassius states as he looks him up and down. “And you’re the Knight of Vengeance?”

“I am...I see Sapphire here has gotten you informed?” Ozpin presumes, standing in his memorable pose with both hands pressed atop his cane, and his head held high.

“More or less – Umbra won, right?” He sums up, and Kragen scratches the back of his head.
“Yeah...played us like a fiddle. But thanks to Ruby’s eyes Ozpin managed to hurt Umbra.” Kragen states, and Kassius turns back to the Professor with a shocked expression.

“How bad?” Kassius asks.

“Enough to piss him off and retreat...not before possessing and tormenting Ruby first though. She ran at first but we got her back.” Yenna answers. Cinder looks at Kassius, examining the difference in how he looked the last time they talked this way, and he was in...Gladiator Armour...not his outfit, and he never had his hat back.

“Kassius? Where are you?” She asks him, quickly getting onto the pressing matter. Kassius looks at her, and his heart palpitates hard, since the topic is one that makes him nervous just to think about.

“Well...talking about Umbra...he freed Cardin and I.” He reveals, and all of them react with shocked wide eyes, except for Ozpin – he knows Vir Nominis Umabra better than anyone at the end of the day. This is most likely something he does to get something he wants done without getting his hands dirty.

“What?” Yang fearfully asks him.

“We were in the cell and he showed up out of nowhere, just as he always does. We chatted and then we ended up making a deal to get out and meet with him at a Crossroads by a Church. We managed to get out of there by the skin of our teeth, the Traffickers are gone...wiped out.” Kassius explains to them all, and Yenna does not even look sorry for them. She was captured by them at one point after all, and the things that they did to her mean that they deserve everything they got.

“Good.” Yenna softly says.

“What happened?” Kragen asks him.

“The White Fang attacked, Mazen at the lead...and these new Elite White Fang soldiers he has? They are nothing like that team he had on Menagerie, they’re insane. Like total whack jobs, one of them is a Hyena Faunus and he is near Tyrian level crazy. Another is a snake Faunus, the other a Warthog and the other an Eagle. All of them are nuts.” Kassius describes, shuddering as he remembers what they did to the Traffickers when they attacked the place.

“By the gods...is he really sinking that low?” Yang questions with a strained voice, having to sit down.

“Well he let Cardin and I go, he clearly has changed a bit from when we arrested him. He does not want all of humanity extinct, he let all the prisoners who were human or did not want to join go free. He just wants Atlas destroyed.” Kassius explains as he stands before them in his ghostly Aura form.

“Maybe we did get through to him on some degree.” Kragen mutters.

“Do you think we can convince him to help us against Umbra?” Yenna asks.

“Even if we could, the rest of the Fang are fanatical lunatics like Corsac.” He tells them, and Yang clenches her hand into a fist with anger at the mere mention of his name...after how he stabbed Ruby in the back in Menagerie.

“Well...time will tell.” Kragen says as he leans against the edge of Neptune’s bed, the other Afflicted are all asleep right now. Luckily the Witches gave them some stabilising potions that work way better than the drugs ever did. No sweat at all, no pale skin...however the plague still spreads.
“So what did Umbra want? I know him, he would never let you go unless he expected you would do something in return for him.” Ozpin asks, and he is not far from the truth.

“He offered me a deal – we go after my father, Merlot...still coming to terms with that...and he said he will aid us when necessary. He said he wouldn’t get the Acolytes and Grimm off our backs, but why would he? He gave us our first clue.” He states, and he reaches into his pocket and shows the photograph of Pyrrha’s circlet. All of them recognise it, but none recognise it better than Cinder whose eyes widen with regretful disbelief.

“That’s...” Yang begins.

“Pyrrha’s circlet.” Cinder finishes, remembering how she held it in her palm after burning her body to ashes on Beacon Tower at the end of the Fall.

“Yes, we found out it is on auction at a nearby Manor protected by the Acolytes called the Fallingwater Estate. Black Market Auction, he even left us suits...and some dresses.” He says, getting a snort from Yang.

“Dresses?” Yang giggles, that is when he breaks the news to Cinder, looking right at her.

“Sapphire...that is where the really good news for you comes.” He reveals and she raises a brow.

“We found Emerald.” He reveals and she gasps, eye widening with shock and awe, stepping back with her mouth agape. Heart skipping a beat and eye nearly leaking wet with emotions rampaging through her. “She was injured, attacked by a Beowulf but Umbra seems to have secured her. She’s asleep right now...she’s agreed to help us.” Kassius explains, but then he sighs, looking at Yang. “I just want to see you.” He says to her.

“No...it’s a good idea. Then we will have two teams searching for clues to find Arkhonex. We can keep each other updated.” Yang explains as she takes a seat, Kassius looks at her with concern, crouching down.

“I...I just need to know you’re okay. I hate leaving you like this.” He states, reaching out to her cheek to caress it with his hand but neither feel a thing.

“It’s okay, Kas...the Witches are being good to us...and the potions they make have been great...I mean we still hurt but we can actually move around better.” Yang explains to him with a smile. He smiles back, admiring her courage so much.

“I wish I could be as brave as you.” He lovingly says to her.

“You are...just not as stylish about it.” She jokes.

“Ha-Ha.” He jokingly replies, getting up and looking at Cinder, still coming to grasps that she is alive.

“W-Where has she been?” She stammers.

“Not sure, she was a bit confused when we found her. But she has been on the run for a while, she said she managed to use her weapons to catch a flight on a Nevermore to get out of Salem’s Sanctum and fell in the water, washed up on the beach. She didn’t say much else.” Kassius explains to her, and Cinder smiles.

“Always a way out...she’d always say that.” She says with a smile, remembering Emerald’s quotes so well.
Yenna looks at Kassius, since she heard him mention he has a plan. “So just the three of you are gonna bid on her Circlet? You’ll be going up against rich businessmen, you won’t stand a chance.” Yenna reminds, since she is right too, they do not have the money. Kassius scoffs.

“Who said anything about buying it?” He asks her, then she pauses. Cinder chuckles, looking at Yenna.

“Emerald is a master-thief, best in the business.” She states with a smile.

“It won’t be easy, three people? You’ll need backup.” Yenna states.

“Don’t worry…I have an idea of who to call. Once the C.C.T gets back online.” He sighs.

“It should be soon, Acolytes and Jacques won’t be able to distribute weapons and dust without it. But be careful, they will be hunting us on there.” Ozpin reminds.

“Don’t worry – we’re professionals.” Kassius holds out his hands with a smile, but none of them seem to believe that with the deadpans. Even Yang deadpans him, he looks at her and he slumps his shoulders. “C’mon? I’m professional, right?”

“If professional entails walking into a wall thinking it was a door, then yes.” Yang answers with a grin, and Kassius groans.

“You gonna keep bringing that up for the rest of my life?” He asks her.

“Of course.” Yang replies with a grin.

Ozpin nods his head and taps his cane. “Well...we shan’t keep you any longer...try and contact us after you have the circlet, okay?” Ozpin asks him, and despite the fact he does not trust the Professor, he still nods.

“You got it.” Kassius assures.

“Kas?” Cinder speaks, and he looks at her. “Tell...tell Em...tell her she owes me a drink.” Cinder demands, and he smirks.

“She’ll want to give ya more than that.” He winks and Cinder blushes awkwardly. Kassius looks at Yang and she smiles.

“I love you.” Kassius promises.

“I love you too...now go on...be a dapper hero for us.” She requests.

He tilts his hat to them with a smirk. “Please...look who you’re talking to.” Kassius replies with a chuckle, then his Astral Form fades away and Cinder deactivates her semblance. She sighs...both in exhaustion and relief to know that Emerald is alive...it gives her some hope of finally having someone to love.

“He surely is a character.” Ozpin chuckles, immediately admiring him.

“Yes he is.” Yang lovingly agrees, relieved to see him okay.

Jaune
A storm has set in over the Kingdom of Vale as the night draws closer to midnight, a storm that must also be at Beacon too. The rumbling of thunder and the distant flickering of lightning stuns the skies. Thick layers of cloud where the raindrops fall, strong winds but not howling.

Inside however it is warm, leaving the sanctum of which the family of warriors were shown, with the knowledge bestowed upon Jaune. Lights shining through the diamond marked windows, the rainwater pattering against the panes and the wood.

The rich smell of spaghetti Bolognese fills the air in the dining room as Jaune helps his mother carry the plates into the room where his father and the rest of his friends are sat down. They look over to see him approaching with an apron on and with his sword and shield resting with theirs in the corner. “Mrs Arc, you really shouldn’t have.” Blake politely says to Cassandra as she approaches her with a plate of spaghetti, setting it down at her place, eyes widening with delight from how lovely it smells.

“Please, it is my pleasure. I was preparing spaghetti anyway, we were hoping to have the rest of the daughters round...but sadly they couldn’t make it. So I guess I should thank you...I’m not buying tonnes of ingredients for nothing.” She laughs, making them chuckle too, and Blake picks up her knife and fork as she begins to eat with the others. Jaune approaches Pyrrha and places her dinner down before her.

“Madam.” He cheekily speaks to her with a wink, and she smiles with a little giggle.

“That you, my knight.” She sweetly replies to him, a smile beaming so bright it warms his heart. She looks out the window to see the trickling of rainwater down the window outside, hearing the very faint rumbling of the thunder.

“Hey mom, where’s Alyssa?” Jaune asks Cassandra.

“She stayed round her friend’s house for the past few days, she should be back home soon.” She tells him with a smile, excited to see her reaction of her big brother being at home.

“Hopefully she won’t wander off again.” Ruby hopes as she looks at her plate set down before her eyes, the steam filled with the scent of delight from the Bolognese sauce sat on the strands of pasta.

“Ooh we gave her a stern talking to about that. She was lucky you were there to save her...not sure why you were there though. She said you seemed upset.” Demetrius points out as he sticks his fork into his pasta, whilst Ruby pauses and closes her eye as she thinks on that terrible night. The one where she lost her father and a part of her died there too after what Vir Nominis Umbra did. Oscar looks at her and he gently caresses her knee with his hand, looking to Jaune’s father.

“That night...some bad things happened that night. Lost a lot of good people.” He tells them, and they clearly would rather not pester them on the details of what happened. Demetrius nods his head, understanding that kind of pain since he was a Huntsman once too – so he knows exactly what loss feels like. But they know it just as well, and perhaps more than he could know from what they have lost recently.

“Well – either way, I thank you for saving my daughter’s life. Those thugs got what they deserved.” Demetrius assures with a smile, nodding to Ruby and she looks at him with a small smile. She does not feel proud for killing those men, however nothing stopped her from doing so either...but it is not an alien thing. She cut a man’s head off when they were in Mistral five years ago just to get past him, he was a Mercenary but still a man. Yet nobody shudders at remembering when she did that.
She has never been an innocent soul...she just...never thought she would take as many lives as she had, and feel hardly anything when doing it. It is just the memories of doing so, the questions that will never be answered.

Luckily her tormented mind is pushed away from her memories as Nora squeaks with joy when her spaghetti is delivered to her by Cassandra, clapping her hands together and bouncing in her seat. Whereas Ren is as polite as ever, gently taking it from Cassandra’s mitten covered hands. “Thank you.” He says to her with a smile.

“Tuck in.” Cassandra says to them as she takes her seat and starts to tuck in.

Deep rumbling of thunder echoes across the estate as they eat, the crackling of the fireplace in the dining room keeping them warm and the occasion creak from the house settling in the storm. “Good thing we got inside when we did. That storm came out of nowhere.” Oscar comments as he listens to it outside before eating some of his spaghetti.

“I know, and without the C.C.T there was no warning. Gods forbid a tornado or a hurricane hitting with it down.” Cassandra worries.

“I’m sure they are doing everything they can.” Demetrius assures, holding her hand with a smile.

“I hope so – things have been hectic lately.” She sighs.

“That’s one word for it.” Blake chuckles as she thinks on the things that happened, the invasion of Atlas, the Fall of Vacuo, Horridus Morbus and the infection of Menagerie. So much has happened and fallen apart, even the White Fang are crumbling after the murder of Sienna Khan. Either they don’t know or do not believe it, because if they did believe that footage then they would have never let her enter their home where their child sleeps. Pyrrha smiles as she comes up with a conversation starter – something she has always wanted to know, as his girlfriend Cassandra would definitely be happy to answer her question.

“So...Mrs Arc...any memorable stories of Jaune, when he was little?” She curiously asks, and Jaune groans, his head falling forward as his mother giggles.

“Oh where to begin? He has always been quite the entertaining little baby, haven’t you?” She asks him with a smile, and he groans again.

“Please be merciful...I’ll never hear the end of it.” Jaune groans.

“We need to hear this, Jaune.” Ruby giggles, finally smiling again. He sighs as he sits back in his chair and he sets his fork down.

“I was interested in what it was, I crawled in and then my sister closed the door behind me.” Jaune explains, but very briefly.
“Interested? I had to pick you up and carry you out of that damned machine like six times.” Cassandra reminds and he nods his head.

“Yeah...yeah you did.” He sighs, scratching the back of his head awkwardly. Pyrrha giggles with pure happiness at these kinds of story, and Jaune raises his eyebrows. “Oh come on, I was five.”

“Aw...” Pyrrha coos with a precious smile.

He smiles back but then looks to his mother to reply with another story. “Oh yeah, then how about when Nylah managed to set the kitchen on fire when she was trying to make pancakes?” Jaune asks her, and Demetrius groans as he pictures those memories as they come flying right back into his head like a frying pan.

“That took so long to clean up.” He sighs, looking at the gas cookers in the kitchen where it happened. Ren looks utterly befuddled – as the master of cooking pancakes – that is something he has never realised was even possible.

“How?” Ren inquires, making Nora giggle.

“She somehow managed to knock over vegetable oil underneath the frying pan and ignited a fire. Nearly burned the whole house down if Jaune didn’t catch it.” Demetrius explains, able to see the flames now and the panicked yells of Nylah as she tried to put out the flames.

“See, you can be observant! When you’re...not in a washing machine.” Ruby teases, and he sighs.

“You gonna start bringing that up all the time?” He asks her.

“Mhm.” She replies.

“Awesome.” Jaune sarcastically sighs as he eats a meatball covered in Bolognese sauce.

“You were always a very eventful little child, Jaune. Unpredictable at every turn.” Cassandra remarks, thinking about his time at school. “Determined too, never gave up.”

“Well...dunno about that one.” He says, thinking back to the early days when he trained with Pyrrha on the rooftops.

“You have always been stubborn when it came to doing something, and you would never give in if you put your mind to something.” Demetrius chuckles, but Jaune sighs, still thinking of the times of how frustrated Pyrrha must have gotten when trying to help him.

“Well I wasn’t great at it in the beginning...I mean Pyrrha you must have been ripping your hair out over me from how annoying I was.” He chuckles, but she shakes her head with a smile.

“No...I always had faith in you, I knew you would get better. And here you are.” She says with a smile, and he chuckles softly.

“I still haven’t unlocked my semblance...but...from what I saw and what you told me down there...” He says as he looks at his father. “I just hope I am worth it.”

“Of course you are.” Cassandra says with a smile.

“We’ll always have your back, pal.” Oscar assures with a smile, and Jaune smiles back.

“Thanks guys.” He says with a smile, he may have always had a loving family – but he has never truly felt like he could be himself as he could around all of them.
As they eat, Cassandra keeps looking at Pyrrha every few seconds then she leans over to her husband’s ear and she whispers something to him. Pyrrha notices pretty fast, dabbing her mouth with a napkin to remove the sauce, and as the two of them recline from each other they look straight at her. “Miss Nikos...I would like to ask you something...” Cassandra begins, so Pyrrha sets her cutlery down with her full attention directed to them.

“Of course.” She politely obliges.

“Jaune told us...well he wrote to us about it when he was looking for you...about...the Onyx Phantom?” She asks her, and her heart stammers a second when hearing that name, Jaune pauses and looks at his mother with worry in his eyes for what she will ask next.

_It is not part of her anymore..._

_Don’t ask her that._

“Did you ever go back home?” She asks her, and that was the last thing he expected her to ask Pyrrha, so much so that even Pyrrha was taken aback from the unexpected question.

“Um...I did...but at the time it felt so alien to me.” Pyrrha answers, and Cassandra nods her head.

“How much do you remember now, if you don’t mind me asking?” Cassandra asks her curiously.

“Pretty much everything...a few things a blurry, but I remember everything else.” Pyrrha answers.

Cassandra looks at Demetrius and he nods with a smile. As Cassandra draws a breath to speak, the door opens up and they see Alyssa stepping in with her bag dripping wet with a coat on. “I’m h- home.” She stammers, still struggling with her stutter that she struggles with all the time. A voice that Ruby recognises very quickly, and she gets ready for her gasp to see her standing there, she looks down to where her badge should be and it still has not been clipped on. She still has left it back in her dorm room – she might never wear it again because of how she feels...of not being worthy to wear it.

“Alyssa! Finally got home, did Karen get stuck in traffic bringing you home because of the storm?” She asks her curiously.

“Yeah, st-storm made it pretty diff-dif-dif-difficult.” She stammers as she sets her bag down by the fireplace so it can dry, along with her coat. Cassandra has a smile on her face as she waits to see her reaction to seeing Jaune visiting home.

“Honey?” Cassandra softly speaks.

“Yeah?” She replies.

“Come see who came round to visit.” She says to her.

“Who?” Alyssa asks as she walks round the corner and she gasps with her eyes wide and mouth agape, seeing her big brother standing before her with a smile. “Jaune!” She squeals with happiness, running up to him. He crouches down and catches her in a hug, holding her close and tight.

“Hey there, little one. Staying out of trouble like I asked?” He asks her.

“Trying.” She cutely responds into his shoulder. She looks over his shoulder and she gasps when seeing Pyrrha and Ruby there.

“It’s her! You found her!” She squeaks with happiness when seeing Ruby there.
“Uh-Huh, totally easy to find too.” He sarcastically says as he looks at her, getting a narrowed eye from Ruby.

“Y’know you went missing for a while too, Jaune.” Nora reminds with crossed arms, never forgetting that time after Ruby and Oscar were taken and he lured the Knights and Grimm away from Ruby after losing her eye. Not like it mattered since Death and Tyrian grabbed her anyway and took her to Salem.

Only for Tyrian to die later on, suffering for his sins.

“Yeah, yeah.” Jaune bats away as he talks to his little sister. Cassandra turns back to Pyrrha and she stands up and picks up her umbrella.

“Pyrrha...come with me, please...”

**Pyrrha**

The two of them walk out into the night from the house, Pyrrha with a warm coat around her armoured body and so does Cassandra. She holds the umbrella above their heads to shield the rain from landing on their hair, walking towards one of the houses – it has the lights on for some reason. “Um...where are you taking me?” Pyrrha inquires, Cassandra stops and looks at her with a smile.

“You really are beautiful you know? I always wanted Jaune to find someone like you...he always struggled when it came to talking to girls. The poor boy would always over think it and end up messing it up. What did he do that made you like him?” She curiously asks her. Pyrrha smiles, complimented by the gentle words from Cassandra.

“Well...I’m a Nikos, I have lived a life of everyone looking up to me...so much that nobody thought that they were worth me. I became isolated by my fame...but Jaune? He treated me as any other girl...and that really struck a chord in me...that and...well he’s cute.” She admits with a shy smile, blushing at his mother.

“Well...I thank you...and I am sorry for what happened to you in the Battle of Beacon...but you are back now. And that is why I want you to see someone.” She says, walking towards the door of the house.

She knocks her fist against it, and they wait a moment, Pyrrha feels extensively nervous as she stands there.

Then the door opens.

Her eyes widen from who it is, for she looks so similar to herself just older...tears in her emerald eyes as she stares straight at her daughter. Thara Nikos, the mother that she never got to see after she broke free from the Onyx Phantom’s control. Cassandra steps aside as she lets the mother and daughter reunite. “P-Pyrrha? My baby girl?” She breaks down into tears, wrapping her arms around her daughter and she does the same.

Tears of joy stream down their faces in the rain, not even caring about the cold, Cassandra smiles with happiness to finally see Thara smile again. She turns to see everyone standing outside, and Jaune walks towards her with Alyssa at his side. “You...took her in?” He asks her with disbelief, since the last time he saw her was after they left to Beacon when they saved Ruby from the Volcanic
“Your father and I went to the refugee camp to offer shelter and homes to people who lost theirs. Since our estate is large enough to house them. Thara was one of them, and when we figured out who she was...and who her daughter was to you. We had to take her in...she may as well be family to us.” Cassandra states with a smile on her face.

“What about the other refugees?” Jaune asks her.

“Gone, in the years they all moved on, thanked us for everything we did for them and they earned enough money to buy new houses. We now use this place for that purpose, sheltering those who need it. In times like this? There needs to be more people doing it.” She states with a smile, carrying the soul of the Arcs through and through.

Charity and Kindness.

“Thank you...I didn’t even know she was still alive.” Jaune says with a smile, seeing the two of them still hugging.

“Well...we all deserve a few bits of happy news. I don’t know what happened to all of you, who it was you lost...and I won’t ask. I just wanted there to be some more smiles in your life.” Cassandra kindly says.

“I love you, mom.” He sniffs, wrapping his arms around his mother. Pyrrha looks back to Cassandra and she does the same.

“Thank you...I...” She cannot even form sentences, but Cassandra presses her finger to Pyrrha’s lip to shush her.

“You needn’t say a word, honey...Thara is welcome to stay here indefinitely. We never asked a word of her yet she has helped so much. And we will continue to aid people as best we can.” She assures.

“You’re good people...I knew there was another reason I loved you, Jaune.” She sniffs, immediately holding him and kissing him firmly on the lips. He kisses her back and the tear eyed Thara Nikos smiles as she wipes the tears from her eyes. Just happy to see her baby girl again. Alyssa smiles as she looks at them, then Jaune crouches down to her.

Saddened that he has to tell her this. “As much as we want to...we have to go...” He sighs.

“Already?” She sadly coos.

“I know...but believe it or not I actually have responsibilities now.” Jaune chuckles, getting a confused look from her.

“You?” She asks him and he gasps, making Pyrrha laugh softly, before turning to her mother again.

“Fancy words, little one...I will tickle you till you topple.” He warns, but she giggles in defeat, burying her head in his chest as she hugs him. He caresses her hair affectionately with his hand.

“When will you be b-back?” She asks him, stuttering slightly.

“Soon – I know Pyrrha will want to.” She says.

“You are welcome to come by whenever you want. I understand why you need to go...after what
you learned you need to report to Ozpin, don’t you?” Cassandra presumes. Jaune looks up at Pyrrha...

He smiles.

“Y’know what? I think we can stay a bit longer.” He admits, not just for her sake but also to spend more time with his family.

“You can?” Alyssa gasps.

“I’m sure Oz won’t mind.” Jaune states with a smile. Thara stays close to her daughter, following them as they return to the house, to continue to catch up.

Spend time as a family again.

While they still can.

**Kassius**

Morning have come in Vacuo, the sun beginning to rise into the sky at last.

The Vytal Huntsman is sat down on the chair whilst Emerald is sketching something behind them on a large piece of paper that they found. Laid out on the pews are the suits and dresses that they found, provided by Vir Nominis Umbra most likely for the Auction they are about to enter. Cardin sighs as he watches Emerald, admittedly not overly fond of having her on the same team as them. “Are you sure we can trust her?” He asks Kassius.

“Look we saved her life, we could have left her in the forest but we didn’t. We carried her all the way over here. And she wants to get back to my sister, so...” Kassius explains as he rubs his mount and face with his metal hand.

“Gods don’t get me started on the fact that Cinder Fall is your frickin sister.” Cardin scoffs.

“Look she is not the monster you think she is.” Kassius defends.

“Think? She destroyed Beacon.” He reminds.

“I know...and you slaughtered your team.” He reminds, Cardin glares at him and he snarls, clenching his hand into a fist when he says that.

“Don’t compare me to her.” He snarls.

“What I’m saying is that you are trying to redeem yourself...so is my sister. And she has been doing a great job so far.” Kassius explains, but before their conversation can go any further the three of them all hear an identical sound three times at once. A beeping sound resounding from their scrolls in their pockets.

They pull them out and are surprised by what is on their screen.

_*Cross Continental Transmit Service now operational._

*Sorry for the inconvenience.*
He looks at them all and it has the same message, Kassius chuckles. “Damn...Oz was right.” He chuckles as he remembers what Ozpin said when he spoke to Cinder about the C.C.T being down. “Looks like Jacques has reactivated the network to distribute arms across the Kingdoms.” Kassius states.

“Well we can use it to our advantage.” Cardin states, but Kassius shakes his head.

“Not too much, wouldn’t put it past Jacques to have spies watching the network for names of interest. Like us.” He states.

“You can call those friends of yours.” Cardin states and Kassius gives him a look for a brief second before sighing.

“Yeah...well...first of all let’s talk about a plan.” He states as he stands up and walks over to Emerald. “Em, have you finished the layout?” He asks her.

“As best as I can, I last went there a few years ago. Stole Mistraalian Empress Jewels, got a good bounty off them. Not like it mattered though, the damned Acolytes raided my home and took all the money. Bastards.” She snarls as she steps away from the large piece of paper that they will take with them to change the plan on the fly.

“So, what’re we thinking?” Cardin asks.

“Well the auction is always held in the main hall – meaning most people will be there. But there will be armed guards and waiters all over the place anyway. We will have to play it stealthily, no civilian casualties.” Emerald explains, and Cardin scoffs.

“Coming from you? Wow.” He chuckles with disbelief.

“Cardin.” Kassius sighs.

“Look, I am not gonna double cross you.” She assures.

“You’re a thief, it’s in your blood. And besides why should we trust you? You basically killed Penny.” He reminds.

“What choice did I have? Fail and be killed by Salem? Or worse, Umbra?” She asks him curiously. “Mercury already met that fate.”

“Still.” He sighs.

“What would I gain from betraying you?” She asks him, and he cannot find an answer. “You saved me, and Cinder is on your side now. Meaning I’m with you too.” She assures, leaning forward to the large layout before them.

“So how are we gonna steal it?” Kassius asks curiously, he has never done work like this.

“How would I do it? We split up into two teams, one team...largest team...stays in the ball room. Keeps an eye on the crowd and for any changes and keeps the other informed. The smaller team is the infiltration team, and we get here – the power room.” She explains as she pokes the mark she has written as \textit{electrical}.

“Cut the power?” Kassius presumes.

“Yep, grab the circlet in the dark.” Emerald states.
“Won’t there be an emergency generator?” Cardin asks.

“Yeah.” Emerald nods.

“So we’ll only have a few seconds of darkness?” He adds.

“Three seconds – easy peasy. I’ve handled worse odds.” Emerald assures with a smirk on her face.

“Well I guess we are lucky here, we do have the best thief in the business.” Kassius chuckles as he pats Emerald on the back.

“When they notice that the crown is gone shit will go down.” Cardin states.

“I know, after that we improvise.” Emerald states.

“Cool, I like the sound of that.” Kassius grins, loving the idea of playing something by ear. He walks over to the suit and he covers it up so it does not get covered in dirt on the way there. He then slides that and the other suits and beautiful dresses into the bag. “We put these on when we get there.”

“Good idea, don’t want them looking dirty. When we get out what then?” Emerald asks.

“We’ll see, Umbra seems to believe this circlet has a secret on it.” Kassius states.

“Well...gonna make the call?” Cardin asks him, Kassius nods as he opens his scroll and searches through his contacts.

“I just hope they’re nearby.”

Cinder

In the dark rain...

Cinder is sat down underneath a shelter with her dress sat on her lap, staring at it with her amber eyes admiring every single thread that has been woven to make it look like shards of glass. Her amber eye stares down at it with a sigh as she holds it in her hands, turning when she senses a second Maiden approaching her. Yenna walks towards her with the rain drenching her black hair but she does not even seem to care about it. “Memories...some are dreams...others nightmares.” She says to her, and she sighs.

“Yeah, ain’t that the truth?” Cinder scoffs, Yenna leans against the side of the shelter with her arms crossed.

“I had a feeling you conjured the storm, did you know we can inadvertently change the weather with our emotions? And from this storm...you’re either upset or angry. So what’s up?” She asks her curiously, and Cinder sighs as she looks up at her.

“I wore this dress for so long...I never realised it was a punishment. Salem branded me...humiliated me...and I accepted it...” She sighs as she stares at the dress. “I never realised how weak I was being...until just now.” She sighs, shaking her head, and closing her eyes.

“I was wrong about you.” Yenna admits, Cinder looks at her with confusion.
“Huh?” She asks her.

“You didn’t kill Amber for power or for fun...you may have thought you did at the time...but you did it because you were scared. Salem threatened you to do it, didn’t she?” Yenna presumes and she sighs.

“She said I have to make myself worthy...or I am just a pawn that can be sacrificed.” She states, remembering what the evil woman said all those years ago. Yenna stared at the dress that was made for her, black and cruel looking – yet still a beautiful looking dress.

“Then why do you still have it?” She asks her.

“I don’t know...I guess I got used to wallowing away in self-pity.” She states. Yenna raises a brow with her question.

“And what now?” She asks her.

Cinder looks at her and stands up, walking to the edge of the cliff and the ocean that crashes against the rocks beneath. She holds the dress over the edge as she answers. “I’m done hiding...time to fight.” She states, releasing the dress and letting the wind carry it away from her. The black dress fades away from her vision, disappearing into the dark of night and falling into the sea.

A weight is lifted from her when she let that thing go and she exhales with relief, feeling the cold rain falling and trickling across her body.

Then...the rain begins to stop slowly and the wind calms down.

Yenna smiles. “Come on...get some rest.” Yenna requests and she exhales with a shaky breath.

“Yeah...I’m ready now.” She states, following Yenna. Finally feeling free of her past mistakes.

Free of Salem.

Free of Cinder Fall.
The Fallingwater Estate Heist - Pt. 1

Kassius

Twelve hours later…

They have arrived at the location, luckily it is not that difficult to find, since there are tarmac roads across the desert that plenty of cars and horses travel across. After some waiting at a bus stop, one finally arrived. Not many people on it since Vacuo is practically abandoned now, but luckily there are still lots of little areas across the Kingdom still populated with people. Multiple villages and large towns, but with Vacuo completely invaded by the Grimm Horde, it has caused the Kingdom to collapse into disarray.

But they cannot fix that now, all they can hope for now is to get into Fallingwater Estate and steal Pyrrha’s Circlet from the Auction before some other rich criminal gets their greasy hands all over it. Stood on the edge of a cliff are Kassius and Cardin, with Kassius on the lower area and staring at the map that Emerald managed to draw. Luckily just by looking at the shape of the huge manor, it has not changed much, but they could have moved things around.

But as she told them, trying to steal from the storage area is suicide, the amount of security in there makes it impossible to get inside incognito.

Even for her too.

The Mansion is gigantic, with four guard towers stationed around it armed with four Acolytes of Lien Snipers, they have really made their security tighter in hiring them. Especially when it comes down to who they are being funded by, this could also lead to a confrontation. On the heavily rendered concrete walls are four bannered flags – all four of them are each individual Kingdoms. Vale, Mistral, Vacuo and Atlas are all imprinted on the fabric, the wind letting them flutter. At the car park there are lots and lots of criminals arriving at the auction to see what they can purchase from the archive of valuables.

Above Kassius is Cardin with a pair of binoculars in his hands, analysing the situation from up top, watching everything that moves down there. From the many soldiers that pace around with rifles in their hands and wearing the black and red suits with golden accents that they wore when in disguise back in Mistral five years ago. Also, some of them are wearing red tinted glasses, with hats on their heads too. Just like the thugs that Junior had packed in his nightclub when Yang was searching for clues.

As Kassius fiddles with the map to find a good way in he looks up at Cardin above him. “See anything yet?” He asks him curiously, staring at him with sapphire blue eyes. Many forget that he has learned the ability to change his eye colour on command by simply using his aura to manifest a different colour. Managed to get him by many situations in the past, why not now?

“Nothing more than a lot of scumbags dressed up for the party.” Cardin scoffs, before a doubt enters his mind, tilting the binoculars to his left slightly as he peers down at Kassius. “And…no sign from Emerald yet.” He reminds, and Kassius just ignores his comment as he flicks the paper to straighten it out from the wind that blew across it.

“There’s still plenty of time, she probably got held up.” He defends, looking down at the map. He
traces his metal finger across the yellowish paper that Emerald found to sketch this map on. He follows the outer section to where he can pinpoint a way inside without raising any suspicions by the guards. He looks across the carpark to see the point of which that has left him so curious – across small area of woodland by the right side of the manor and the waterfall’s edge where the manor has been built is a window at the very top.

That is where they are waiting for Emerald to give the signal. “Why are we waiting on her again? She has access, after all. You managed to make some perfectly believable I.Ds too that can trick their scanners.” Cardin questions, a good question too.

“So, we don’t arouse suspicion, if we all enter as a big group out of nowhere it blows our cover. I had to make our cover stories as different as possible, so you and I need to act like we just met. If we all enter at the same time chatting like we have known each other for a few days, they could suspect us of attempting a heist. These guys are very, very paranoid, remember?” He explains to Cardin, looking up at him with his now blue eyes shrouding his amber ones.

“Yeah, are you sure that just by changing your eye colour it will trick the scanners – and the guards? Didn’t you say that the Acolytes of Lien have been fighting against you for five years now? They’ll probably remember you.” Cardin states, but he shakes his head.

“Trust me, these Mercenaries are not the same soldiers. I’ve seen them before, they are just thugs used as guards. Yang whooped their asses when Junior hired a bunch of them to guard his Nightclub years ago.” Kassius explains as he waits for the right moment, folding up the map after memorising the path to where Emerald should be waiting for them. Cardin sighs, scratching the wig on his head that he has been forced to wear, a black wig with slightly windswept hair.

“Gods…how do people wear these things? They itch like hell.” He groans with frustration. “Even a wig will be enough?”

“Emerald has always said that the simplest disguises are sometimes the best. And hey, do you really think our chances would be better if we waltzed in like a bunch of Bank Robbers with masks on?” He questions with a raised eyebrow, so Cardin tilts his head in agreement, unable to disagree with his logic there.

“Fair enough.” He admits, as he hops down from the upper rock that he has been knelt down on, watching the place with those binoculars. Cardin cracks his shoulders then he straightens the sleeves of his suit as he stands there, waiting for the signal of when to go in at the right time. “Remind me, what’s my cover name again?” Cardin inquires.

“You’re name is Jonathan Crimsie, you are a weapons dealer from Vacuo. Stick by that and you’ll be fine, I even made sure you have some little reports in there. Emerald is more helpful at this stuff than I realised, I’m just more creative than her.” He chuckles, taking the binoculars from his hand.

“And you and Emerald?” He asks him curiously.

“Me? My name is Alistair Crane, I’m a drug lord from Mistral who wants to try my luck on the auctions. Emerald is a Prostitute Distributor.” Kassius answers, getting a shocked look from Cardin at the profession she has.

“What happened to being on her side?” He questions.

“It was her idea, not mine. She chose the name. Alison Thame. She said she’s used that one plenty of times and gotten away unscathed.” Kassius explains with the shrug of his shoulders, and Cardin exhales as he bounces on the spot, thinking of things pretty much constantly. Cardin sighs as he
looks across the area to see what appears to be the storage room, able to see some Acolytes hauling a few crates inside.

“Shame we can’t get inside…imagine what goods they got tucked away in there.” Cardin wishes as he stares at the building, practically drooling with anticipation. Kassius raises a brow in confusion as he looks at Cardin.

“Let’s…y’know…focus on Pyrrha’s circlet, yeah?” He asks him, and Cardin chuckles.

“I dunno, you sure you don’t wanna pick something up for the pretty girlfriend?” He teases with the bump of his elbow onto Kassius. Locke chuckles, shaking his head as he walks towards the road and path that leads towards the carpark.

“Funny…but c’mon let’s just keep it simple, yeah?” Kassius requests as he looks back at him, but Cardin sighs as he starts to follow him.

“Yeah, simple!” He scoffs, and Kassius rolls his fake blue eyes as he turns to Cardin walking up to him. “It’d be a whole lot simpler if Emerald weren’t here.” Kassius sighs, seeing that Cardin still has his reservations about working alongside one of their old enemies, unable to forget the hand she played in the destruction of their academy.

“Cardin…” He sighs, but Cardin stretches his arms out towards the Manor.

“We could be inside already.” He scoffs.

“Not cleanly.” Kassius reminds as he walks ahead of Cardin, but stops when he hears no footsteps behind him, looking back with a sigh.

“Have you even thought of a backup plan in case Emerald…oh I dunno…gets cold feet?” He wonders curiously, but Kassius shakes his head.

“It’s Emerald, she would never turn down a heist.” Kassius reminds.

“Or if she got recognised? I doubt a brown wig will be enough to sway the guards with the bounty on her head. Much less mine.” He reminds, since Kassius in fact has no bounty on his head at the moment. But those two do because of their past decisions and what they have done in their lives.

“Emerald knows this place like the back of her hand, we would never stand a chance without her. Trust me, I have had my fair share of odd jobs in my life, but nothing like a heist.” Kassius explains, they really might be one of the most underprepared teams of all time with how they are approaching this situation.

Cardin bites his lip as he bounces his hand up and down slightly, filled with worry right now. Kassius sighs as he pinches the bridge of his nose, shaking his head as he speaks through his hand.

“Alright fine…go ahead, say it.” Kassius prepares, knowing exactly where he is gonna go with this conversation, with her being a master thief and the lack of trust he has on her. He finally cracks, waving his hands slightly as he speaks.

“What if she steals the circlet for herself?” Cardin questions, one that Kassius answers swiftly.

“Not in a million years.” Kassius replies.

“You said it yourself! Emerald Sustrai, this is the same Emerald we’re talking about here, right?” Cardin asks him as he walks up to Kassius with his finger pointing right at him.
“Look I know she double-crossed you guys in the past, I get that…but not us.” Kassius reminds, but he shakes his head and points straight at him.

“Not. Your. Sister.” He reminds with stern eyes, and Kassius sighs as he walks away from Cardin, sick of people never giving his sister a second chance. But at the same time, he can understand why, he was never at Beacon, he never felt the stabbing pain of a betrayal that happened that day.

“Look I know she had a hand in what happened.” Kassius says as he stands up, but Cardin steps back with a scoff.

“Biggest understatement I have ever heard.” He scoffs, she did manipulate both Yang and Pyrrha with her semblance, she may as well have been the one to open the doors and let the riot in. Kassius walks up to him as he speaks, trying to calm this situation down as best he can.

“But I trust her, okay? She helped save Oscar and tried to save Ruby when they were captured.” Kassius reminds, and Cardin sighs, closing his eyes as he stands tall. He nods his head, since Kassius gave him some details on what poor Ruby had to endure and the damage that it has had to her personality since then. Kassius taps Cardin’s shoulder with his hand to get him to look at him. “I just need you to trust her too.” He asks him, shrugging his shoulders, and Cardin sighs when he scratches the back of his neck.

“Fine…fine…this is gonna be a real awkward day.” He sighs as he stands with Kassius. The two of them remain in eyeshot of that window as they wait for some kind of signal from Emerald.

“She will come through for us…eventually.” He sighs as he looks at the window constantly. Cardin looks at him and they both wait.

A glint of light shines across Kassius’ eye and he flinches from it, so bright he nearly fell over from the aura of the reflection. He shields the setting sun with his hand as he sees the window, and the faint silhouette of Emerald turning a mirror to reflect the sun’s rays in their direction over and over again so then they see her.

She’s in, and gave the signal as she said she would.

“There, we’re up. See? Trust.” Kassius states as he pats Cardin’s chest with his hand. Cardin sighs before he buttons his jacket up.

“Try not to get too drunk.” He reminds, walking ahead of him, and Kassius chuckles as he follows him.

“I will be keeping an eye on your blood alcohol levels, by the way.” Hyde assures inside Kassius’ head. Subconsciously, Kassius replies the only way he could ever reply to that.

“You’re not my mother.” He states, as they walk down the road towards the carpark and the entrance where the Acolytes of Lien are waiting for them.

The bass can be heard from all the way over here as they approach, lights luminating from within and through the windows, seeing a few people dancing by the windows. Seems that this is not only an Auction but also a nightclub at the same time. But then again, the Auction has not started yet, so they also provide a place for the guests to enjoy themselves whilst they wait. Some waiters arrive in their blue uniforms and with a feather on their ear, something very unique as uniforms go.

Kassius and Cardin both approach the entrance where the soldiers are standing there with scanners, looking nowhere near as professional as the Military Outfit that they are used to. These guys are merely low-cost thugs hired for simple jobs, jobs that the mafias in the Kingdoms like to utilize their
skills for. Unless they need proper security or forces, that is when they turn to the highly militarised soldiers in the company. They all have red swords sheathed however they are nothing like the ones that both Adam and Raven have used.

Their swords are known as Blood-Blades, swords that are melded to the auras of its user, and thus their semblances are bound too. Which is why Adam’s semblance was tied to the blade, however the semblance does not fade away and it cannot be removed. Meaning that sword will have the previous owner’s semblance forever unless it is destroyed, and even if it is repaired the semblance is still present within it. Meaning Raven must have either inherited her sword, or killed a man for it. After all she is a Branwen, her semblance relies on her good luck, opposed to her brother’s poor luck.

Kassius and Cardin get in line as they wait, looking at the thugs that scan them and their invites, invites that they luckily have on person. There is also another man there, one they do not recognise — he looks like the owner of the place with a white suit, white tie and white trousers. The dark-skinned man likes white apparently, since even his socks and shoes are tied. Hyde chuckles in the back of Kassius’ mind as he looks at his style. “What a colourful style.” Hyde jokes, making Kassius chortle as he looks at him again.

Cardin leans over to Kassius’ ear and he whispers discretely. “You sure that spray Emerald got her hands on will work?” Cardin asks him, and for once Kassius knows for certain that it will.

“Don’t worry, I’ve used it before. It links to our false identities, so their scanners will say we are the not imitators.” Kassius assures. The spray that she got her hands on is filled with Nano-Technology, it smells like either deodorant or perfume but the technology inside it creates a false D.N.A. A strand that the scanners will accept. Emerald knows her dealers and they have some extremely impressive equipment for these kinds of jobs.

Not cheap though, good thing they split the costs evenly.

The thugs nod to the guests and they walk up to the owner of the place, shaking his hand. But as they stand there, they feel their small earpieces activate and they hear Emerald speaking through it in a soft voice. “You guys good?” She asks them.

“Yeah, about to walk in.” Kassius replies.

“Who’s the dude in white?” Cardin asks her.

“His name is Solomon Karadin, he is a Drug Lord that has been ruling Vacuo’s Crime Ring for years. He always hosts these events, that’s why I gave us some pretty illegal jobs and cool names.” She explains with the sound of a smile in her voice. Kassius looks past them to the dark-skinned man that shakes the hands of the guests that are allowed through.

“Solomon Karadin…I recognise that name…I didn’t he massacre some Council Agents once because they entered his turf?” Kassius asks her in a whispery voice.

“Yeah, you don’t mess with him.” She advises.

“And we’re about to rob from him?” Cardin asks her.

“Well as long as he never realises we were here, it will all be fine, won’t it?” She says to them, before she ends the call. Clearly, she has her eyes on them, because now they are the ones being scanned. The thug aims the scanner at his face and it moves across his face, identifying his name onto the screen of the device.

**ALISTAIR CRANE**
The thug lowers the scanner then he holds his hand out to him. “May I see your invitation, Mr Crane?” He asks him and Kassius nods his head, reaching into his breast pocket and pulling the ticket out and handing it to him. The thug holds it and looks at him before looking at the picture again. The Mercenary nods his head and hands the ticket to one of the girls standing here. The girl is young and appears to be a Faunus with goat horns, wearing quite a revealing dress as well. Clearly this place has some strippers dancing here as well, meaning that this once is responsible for the tickets. “Alright, you’re good – c’mon though.” The Mercenary says as he nods his head and steps aside, and Cardin is up next.

As Cardin gets identified by the Mercenary, Kassius approaches the Drug Lord, keeping his wits about him in order to not get detected. However, he has always been good at staying calm under high pressure situations. He has been in worse situations at the end of the day, this will be no problem. Solomon smiles as he nods his head and extends his hand to Kassius, and he accepts the handshake. “Pleasure to meet you, Mr Crane. Always a fine day when a young man like yourself joins our trade.” He prides with a smile, and Kassius chuckles.

Wanting to punch this criminal in the jaw so badly.

But he keeps his cool. “Pleasure is all mine, Mr Karadin.” Kassius bows his head with an honourable smile.

“I read some of the records about you, heard about that skirmish you were involved in a few years back with the Valerian Police. Tough fight, especially for an eighteen-year-old to handle. I’m impressed.” Karadin applauds with his voice, the accent he has is very similar to that of Kelham. A sharp and rather vicious voice that sounds like it is about to pounce on you at any moment. But that is the natural accent of most people in Vacuo, or at least from the Deserts.

Kassius plays along with the lie, extremely well too.

“Yeah, lost my arm in the process though.” Kassius states as he takes his glove off his metal hand and waves the five metal digits to him.

“I noticed, hell of a thing to pick up. Most likely why you have been doing so well for yourself though, nobody will mess with a man with a cybernetic arm.” He chuckles, and Kassius chuckles in return.

“Well, let’s hope so.” He replies, and Karadin nods his head.

“Well, enjoy your stay, Mr Crane.” He bows and steps aside, and Kassius does the same, walking past him and entering the building. As he walks away he hears Karadin speaking to Cardin, but he too is a good talker. Always has been a good one when it comes down to talking his way through problems. This will be no problem for him, so Kassius walks inside, and he feels the beat of the music in his bones as he looks around the air-conditioned building. The music roars through the gigantic speakers attached to the pillars and walls, many folk and strippers dancing to the electronic music in the air.

As he walks through, he can hear Hyde in the back of his head sounding somewhat disgusted by the music. “What kind of music is this? Aw it’s not that club crap, is it?” He questions with repulsion in his voice, subconsciously Kassius responds to him.
“You have a taste in music?” Kassius asks him in his head.

“Well yeah, I’ve been stuck in your head for so long I kinda have to.” Hyde replies, making Kassius chuckle as they walk towards the spiralling staircase on the right side of the room, the same side that he identified when they planned this mission out.

“You excited to meet our other teammates?” Kassius asks him, Hyde pauses, and he can actually feel the concern.

“Are you? I mean… I remember you saying you never wanted to lead a team again.” Hyde reminds, worried for his host’s safety. However, it is no longer about him being his host, he is no longer a parasite, he is a brother. Kassius sighs as he walks, remembering the faces and voices of his team.

Vetra…

Draven…

Rajah…

They will never stop haunting him. “Yeah… I guess maybe I should be a bit more worried.” He sighs, walking up the concrete steps that curve round. He looks down to see Cardin walking along and chatting to some of the guests here. He has always been quite good at speaking to people and blending in… even if he was a bully back in school. But he is doing fine, better than Kassius maybe since Kassius has not said a word to anyone yet.

Kassius walks across the balcony where there are some more strippers, the main site of which the strippers dance is in the main lobby. With a huge circular bar in the middle and glistening chandeliers, the only thing to make the neon display any prettier is a bunch of nearly naked sexy girls dancing. Kassius has never really been one for Strip clubs however he could never fault the dancers, the strength and skill they must have to dance like that… he would watch them just to admire the art than the beauty. “I don’t get strip clubs… it’s like going to a buffet but you can’t eat anything.” Hyde describes, and Kassius chuckles.

“That might be the best comparison I’ve ever heard.” He chuckles, and Hyde chuckles in his head too.

“I try my best.” He says, Kassius walks past one of the strippers and she strokes her finger across his arm tenderly.

“Wanna lap dance, honey? I’ll give you half price.” She woos, and Kassius chuckles, in awe at the amount of attention he has gotten recently.

“I’m fine thank you, but keep up the good work.” He says to her. Kassius cannot help but notice that this stripper is also a Faunus… in fact not one of them has not been a Faunus. Not only that, but just under the pants around her waist is a brand that has been scarred onto her…

The Traffickers.

He looks away from the pretty Faunus Girl and he sighs as he walks away. “How can a Faunus treat his own kind like that?” Kassius questions with a snarl in his head, everything he has been saying is in his thoughts… avoiding the attention.

“We should’ve killed him.” Hyde states, and Kassius sighs because he wishes that they could have for what he has done. But they never got a chance, and now he has escaped and ended up god knows where. As if Kelham knew the Traffickers would not last forever… he must have a safehouse
somewhere prepared for that very day.

Kassius keeps walking, seeing a criminal here with one of the Faunus Slave Dancers on his lap, dancing away as the criminal caresses her body. Kassius walks past him and towards the door that is closed. He looks back, then he opens the door when he sees Cardin following, nodding to him all the way over there.

The music softens, and he looks around as the door closes behind him, he steps inside and sees Emerald standing at the edge of the room by the window. She wears the dress that she has been provided with by Vir Nominis Umbra – the entity has good taste, that much is good about him. She wears a stunning green dress that would match her green hair, if she were not wearing a brown-haired wig right now to help conceal her identity. She has always been using her aura to disguise her eyes too, making them look brown instead of red. The dress looks almost scale-like, glistening in the light with her legs showing through the parting in the heel length skirt, with glass heels on.

Seems she cannot help but take after Cinder in many ways. “Kassius.” She greets with the firm nod of the head, then the sound of another voice hums away in the darkness. He turns to see her, only her bare legs and heels showing in the sunlight and the long bronze skirt hanging over her knees can be seen from the shadows. Kassius looks at her and he cannot help but smile as he approaches her.

“Coco?” He asks, then she speaks.

“I hate auctions... wanna know why?” She asks him, and Kassius chuckles with a smile as he approaches her. She reaches over to the lamp beside her and she pulls the string to turn it on. “They don’t let a girl wear sunglasses indoors.” She sighs with a smile, laughing as she stands up.

It’s Coco Adel.

“It’s been a while, Coco.” Kassius says to her with arms out to her and she laughs in return as she walks up to him.

“Too long, buddy.” She replies, hugging him. She always did say that they could count on her for help at any time. They showed up without question to help rescue Ruby from the Volcanic Chain Isles, and now they are back to help Kassius with his own problems. She pats his back, and she looks so different without her normal gear on. She wears, yet another provided by Umbra, a stunning bronze dress that shows off her left shoulder and arm whereas there is a small elbow length bronze sleeve on her right. The dress covers her body splendidly and she has done her hair differently too – she has let her hair grow out a bit more than it was before. The caramel edges to her locks still remain but they just a little longer now, not as long as Yang’s but longer than they were in the past.

And as always, the sweet smell of caramel scented perfume.

How they have missed her.

He looks past her to see Velvet emerging from round the balcony with a gasp and a smile on her beautiful face, basically skipping to her friend. “Kassius!” She gleefully squeaks, wrapping her arms round him and kicking her also bare legs. Kassius catches onto her then lets her go, she backs up and still acts like the timid little bunny she has always been.

Her dress too is very beautiful as well, with most of her back displayed down to her waist and no sleeves, it is her torso it covers. Seems Umbra is not one to show too much of their bodies off but still give them nice looking clothes to wear at such a public occasion, because none of the women have any clothes that show off cleavage. Nice of him, strange that he decided to make that choice, since he likes to use Lust a lot. Velvet’s dress has accents of scarlet red amongst the creamy colour it mostly
has, and she has curled her hair into a wavy form. Really brings out her brown eyes.

Coco and Velvet have answered the call, but no sign of Yatsuhashi and Fox. “Great to see you two again.” Then the door opens behind them and he turns. “Oh yeah…I told you about our fifth member, right?” Kassius asks him as Cardin steps around the corner and he looks at the two of them. Coco and Velvet stare at Cardin, and Velvet shrinks into her shoulders fearfully of her old bully.

“Hey…Coco…Velvet.” He awkwardly greets as Kassius steps aside. When Cardin approaches Coco immediately stands between him and Velvet…but clearly, she is holding her anger back from him.

“By the gods…nearly seven years…” She says as she stares at him…and she cannot help but feel a little sad for him, because he looks so broken and defeated in comparison to the well-kept dickhead that they remembered. His hair is so much longer, and he has grown a beard. Cardin nods his head, both Coco and Velvet can see his guilt in his violet eyes as he stands there.

“Yep.” He says to her, so Coco swallows up her hate and she offers her hand to him.

“Good to see you still alive, Cardin.” She says, how dark the times have become that someone has to say that to an old acquaintance…tis the time they live in now. Where people die pretty much all the time. Cardin holds her hand and shakes it, nodding his head and looking at Velvet.

“Mhm.” Cardin replies to her, and luckily Kassius is the one to break up the awkward reunion.

“Well, why don’t we try and catch up after we get Pyrrha’s circlet back?” Kassius asks them, that’s when Emerald breaks it to him with a sigh.

“Yeah…about that.” Emerald says, and the two guys raise their brows.

“What – What about that?” Cardin inquires nervously as he looks at Kassius.

“It hasn’t been sold already has it?” Kassius worryingly asks him.

“No, no…just it seems that this place has changed a bit since I was last here. C’mon let me show ya.” Emerald says as she walks towards the door and opens it, they all follow the thief out there and they approach the empty table, taking their seats to not seem suspicious. They sit down, and they follow Emerald’s eyes. “Look…the cables on the ceiling? They aren’t going the same way I remember, they must have moved the power room.” Emerald states as she turns to Kassius and Cardin sighs.

“Damn…that just made things a whole lot more difficult.” Cardin says.

“That’s not the only issue, look at the display down there.” Emerald adds as she drinks some of the red wine that she bought. Kassius looks at the pedestals that display multiple artefacts…and one of them is Pyrrha’s Circlet. His eyes widen when he sees that thing there, since it was not meant to be shown off until midnight. It has only just gone nine o’clock at night, the sun has only nearly just fallen behind the horizon. The light starting to fade away into the dark of night.

“Pyrrha’s circlet.” Kassius mutters.

“It would take a big pile of lien to move the lot order like that.” Coco states as she leans her arm against the railing.

“Well there must be some way we can get to it.” Velvet says.
“Hmm…” Kassius ponders, thinking on the ideas he has in his mind, and luckily, he has an ideas when he follows the wires with his eyes. The cables can be followed if discretely. “Okay… plan stays the same. We need the power to go out for a few seconds so then Emerald can grab it. Only two of us should go after the power…” Kassius explains, looking to the team he has put together. He looks at Velvet, she is sneaky, as sneaky as a rabbit after all. “Velvet, I want you with me on this.” Kassius asks her.

“You got it.” Velvet assures with the nod of her head.

“The rest of us?” Coco asks.

“Keep an eye on everything here, let us know if anything happens.” Kassius explains, then he looks at Emerald.

“And I’ll take it when the lights go out?” She presumes.

“Yes.” Kassius assures.

“Sounds good.” Cardin nods as they all stand up, and Coco picks up her glass of wine too, and she walks ahead of them.

“Alright then… Velvet go with Kassius, follow that wire. We’ll hold the fort.” Coco assures.

Coco

She walks down the steps into the main lobby, with Cardin and Emerald at her side as she looks around the large expanse of guests from gods know how many horrendous acts committed. From Drug Traders to Smugglers to Murders and Thieves, there are so many people that could be locked up in here… they could fill an entire prison. Surrounded by enemies, yet they cannot lay a finger on a single one. Because here they are the ones that are out of place, out of the ordinary. They would not stand a chance, Huntsmen and Huntress or not, they would fall all the same.

Coco slides her bronze painted nails across the railing as her large dark brown eyes scale the environment, not only is she searching for potential problems in the area, but she is also checking for ways out when it all goes to hell. As she makes her way down, Cardin and Emerald follow her, and the green haired Huntress walks up beside Coco. She flicks her long brown her from her eyes and looks at the Fashionista Huntress at her shoulder. “So… uh… there’s no hard feelings between us, right? After our fight in the Vytal Festival?” Emerald asks her as they walk into the lobby, but Coco stops and gives her a pretty stern stare.

She has not forgotten either, she is just keeping her emotions in check to get the job done. Her concerns really are only for Kassius and Velvet because they are her friends, Emerald and Cardin on the other hand? Cardin tormented one of her best friends for months and months, whereas Emerald played a major hand in the destruction of Beacon Academy and the deaths of many people.

How she wants to break their jaws right now for what they did.

But…

She keeps her cool and she just says one word. “Later.” She assures, walking ahead of Emerald and she sighs, making her way towards her position. A group of people talking nearest to the stand of
collector’s items at the Auctioneers Stage. As Coco walks, she turns and looks at Cardin who looks around, trying to start conversation.

“So…where’re Yatsuhashi and Fox? I didn’t see them here.” He says, since when they left the bag of four outfits at the agreed spot for their arrival, there were also two suits for those two. Perfectly designed for them. Coco stares at Cardin and she sighs, walking to his ear and speaking softly.

“We’ll talk about that after all this is done…” She says, and Cardin raises a brow with concern.

“Huh? Why?” He asks in a worried voice. Coco pauses and her brown eyes dance round to where he stands, and she exhales through her nostrils.

“We didn’t just agree to help Kassius, it has half the reason…” She hints as she walks away from Cardin and he struggles to piece together what she means. But her tone is all he needed to know, it means that Yatsuhashi and Fox are either dead or are in big trouble, trouble she intends to save them from by helping Kassius. They must have similar goals in mind, goals she has yet to inform them of.

Cardin sighs and he walks away from Coco as she stands there, and she keeps moving through the crowd, politely squeezing past one of the men standing there as she approaches the open space and she plants her hand on her hip as she looks across the area. Content with her location yet concerned with the people on the team for very good reasons, however she is forcing the thoughts from her mind.

Who knows?

Maybe they have changed, Kassius is a trustworthy friend and he has never misjudged someone. Ever since what happened with Ilia Amitola at least, hopefully they are on our side.

But if he lays a finger on Velvet…

I’ll kill him.

Suddenly she feels a barrel press against her spine and she jolts as her eyes widen, hearing a familiar voice behind her. “Hands in the air, Huntress.” The young woman demands with a pretty harsh sounding – yet annoying – voice. She turns around and sees her standing behind her, with short black hair and pale green eyes, highlighted by heavy red makeup. She wears a red strapless dress with black lining.

Her accessories include large red and white feathers above her left ear, black fur hanging off her shoulders and held at the front by a dark grey chain, red gloves, a black bow tied around her waist, and long red boots with very high stiletto heels. A smirk forms on her face as she stares at Coco. “Hi, Coco.” She greets with a wink, and Coco grins back as she turns around and looks right at her.

“Hello Militia Malachite, always a pleasure.” She greets with a smile on her face.

“Yeah, only this time, I undid the strap.” She says as she holds her fingers in the shape of a pistol at her. Coco reaches back when she feels her dress loosen a little, then realises that she just undid a strap and Coco chuckles as she does it back up.

“Well I guess I should be sad that we’re not somewhere more private.” Coco says with a chuckle, and Militia lowers her hand as she stands there. “Strange to see you outside your Acolyte Fatigues.” She says to her and Militia looks at her dress and she nods.

“Yeah, I miss the old days when I could just strut about as a teen and wear this thing. But when the Boss says we need to wear proper uniforms, you do as the admiral asks.” Militia explains with a sigh
as she crosses her arms, eyeing Coco up and down as she stares at her curvaceous body. “Looking good by the way.” She compliments, and Coco returns the favour.

“Not so bad yourself.”

Militia smiles, and she steps back, looking around at the place with a heavy sigh. Coco is no fool, if one of the Malachite Twins is here then that means that the other is here…and so is Junior. Somewhere he is in here, it was lucky of Kassius and Yang to come across him when they were not there on the hunt for Ilia. That feels like it was so many years ago, but that also means that there is a person here that will recognise Kassius on site.

However, at the moment, it all seems calm with Militia being here. “I feel so out of place here, can’t tell you how good it feels to see a familiar face around here. Even if you did mistake me with my sister.” She reminds with the tilt of her head and a grin on her face.

“Oh, you don’t seriously still hate me for that, do you?” Coco asks her with the rising of her brow. Militia scoffs as she looks around, but then she starts to walk towards the bar.

“I was on my way to the bar; can I get you something?” She asks her.

“Sure, I’ll have a nice red wine.” She replies with a smirk, and Militia snaps her fingers with a wink.

“I’ll be right back.” She assures as she walks towards the circular bar in the centre of the lobby. Coco crosses her arms and narrows her brown eyes, she may have a pretty interesting past with the Malachite Twins, but she is no fool. Them being here is trouble, serious trouble too.

“Guys? You catch that?” Coco asks into her earpiece.

**Kassius**

Velvet keeps her eyes on the ceiling as they follow the wires round, as the two of them keep moving through the halls towards some stairs that look like they are heading into the Wine Cellars and the Kitchens. As Kassius walks alongside her he replies to Coco on the other end. “Yep, sounds like that chick is getting you a drink.” Kassius says to her, before Coco sighs awkwardly.

“Yeah…Militia Malachite is getting me a drink.” She informs, and Kassius slows down when he recognises that name.

“Malachite…wait aren’t those two twins that worked for Junior? Yang fought them once when searching for Raven.” Kassius remembers, he never did forget hearing that story when they were catching up in that Motel after finally reuniting after all those years.

“Yeah, and they have gotten pretty high up in the ranks with Junior since then.” Coco adds, and Kassius curiously ponders over what he heard.

“Uh…Coco…what was that about her sister and her undoing your dress?” Kassius inquires, and Coco chortles, but Velvet groans.

“Please don’t encourage her.” She groans.

“Well…the Malachite Twins and I have a rather…interesting…relationship.” Coco replies as they
keep following the cables on the ceiling.

“Relationship?” Kassius inquires.

“Mhm.” Coco hums deliciously, but Velvet shudders.

“Please stop.” She begs, but Kassius being the curious one that she is keeps digging deeper.

“Please go on.” Kassius requests, so Coco provides as asked.

“So, when I met Melanie it was on a mission…and it’s possible we…got a little…sexy one night.” She describes. “She was wild.”

“Stop.” Velvet begs.

“Go on.” Kassius and Hyde both ask at the same time.

“A few nights later though, I ended up with Melanie again and we had sex again…except…it was Militia…and I got the two of them mixed up. It wasn’t long until they both figured it out…I wasn’t against a threesome though.” She admits, and Velvet just pulls her earpiece out.

“Stop it!” Velvet squeaks with disgust, shuddering. “I hate that story.”

Coco laughs on the other end. “I’m sorry little bunny, you know you’re my favourite.” She assures, and Kassius looks over to Velvet.

“She says you’re her favourite.” Kassius tells her and Velvet sighs sarcastically.

“Oh, that’s just a weight off my shoulders.” She jokes as she keeps walking towards the stairs. Kassius chuckles as he walks towards the stairs as well.

“So…back on subject at hand…if they are here then Junior can’t be far behind. Which can’t be good at all.” He sighs as he looks around, and Velvet stops to look back at him.

“Why?” She innocently asks him.

“Because I almost sawed his head in half.” Kassius answers, remembering when they attacked him when he was trying to get revenge on Ilia by killing her. How long ago all that seems now.

“W-Why?” She asks.

“Short version? I was blinded by vengeance and he helped my old enemy get away, and he knew where she was. He wasn’t helping fast enough, so I…sped things up.” Kassius explains, however that is not how things really went down. Sure, that is how it ended, but that was not the why behind the threat he made to the Boss’ life. Velvet is smart, and she does not pry on the story, at least until he decides it is best to tell her.

“Yeah, he’ll definitely remember you…Well he must be down here, I guess we should hope he ends up chatting with me. I’ve always been on pretty good terms with his men.” Coco states.

“Sounds like it.” Kassius chuckles. “Never realised you were into girls.”

“Well…I swing both ways. Whether you have a third limb or not, as long as it’s fun.” She giggles and Kassius rolls his eyes and shakes his head as he keeps moving.

“Alright, well it looks like the power room is through the Wine Cellars. We’ll keep you informed.”
Kassius states. “Keep us updated if you can.” Kassius says as they approach the large wooden door.

“I’ll try.” Coco assures, then she and him end their conversation and stand by the door with Velvet.

“You ready?” He asks her.

“Yeah…let’s do this.” She says, opening the door and moving in.
The Fallingwater Estate Heist - Pt. 2

Velvet

She brushes her palm across her long brown hair to see where they are after closing the door behind herself and Kassius. She looks around, walking and sighing when she hears her heels making such a loud sound. She reaches down to them and slips them off her feet, the picking up some quieter worker shoes. The feeling is not as nice as the heels but at least they are stealthier for her small feet. Kassius walks inside and he looks around, whereas the Bunny Faunus can hear more than she can see.

The occasional squeak from a mouse in the cellars get her attention, hearing some running around the stone floor. She gasps in disgust, the low level of hygiene in here is utterly appalling. Apparently even the richest people in the world still do not have the best hygiene, which means that the Kitchen could be even worse. Kassius walks with his head staring up at the ceiling, nearly walking into a wall at one point. “So, what are the odds that the new power room is gonna be on the other side of the complex?” Kassius wonders curiously with Velvet behind him, she sighs as she reaches back and ties her hair into a ponytail to get it out of her eyes.

“Please don’t jinx us, knowing our luck it’ll be on the other side of the Kingdom.” She scoffs, making Kassius chuckle as they keep moving through the area, but as they walk inside they see that the lights aren’t working properly. None of them are working in fact, total darkness has gone and claimed the entire Wine Cellar that they are inside.

“Perfect, no lights…don’t suppose you brought a flashlight?” Kassius wonders, but then Velvet has an idea as she reaches into her dress, since it has two pockets at her midriff. She reaches in and pulls out her scroll, flicking it open and pressing the flashlight button – the light that luminates from the lens is not powerful but it is better than nothing. “Oh yeah, forgot those things have flashlights in them.” Kassius chuckles as he walks ahead of her and Velvet keeps the flashlight on as she walks beside him, her large eyes examining the many kegs of wine in here.

“These kegs…I recognise the brand. It’s from Menagerie.” Velvet deduces, sliding her finger across the dust on the wooden hide of the huge cylinders inside of the dark cellar. Multiple bottles of the same brand stacked on the shelves to be used by the countless guests at the estate right now.

“Well…knowing who these guys are…I doubt they paid for it.” Kassius sighs, still remembering the poor Faunus Slaves sold to the owners of this place by the Traffickers. No honour among criminals, no matter how they do business they will buy anything from each other for their own reasons. Whether it be practical or pleasurable.

“My people rarely had any trade, but the wine distilled in the Vineyards of Menagerie were double the value of any Mistralian one.” She states with disgust, able to smell the beautiful aroma around them as they walk.

“What makes it so different?” He asks her curiously.

“The grapes and fruits used there, since the temperatures are so tropical they are sweeter than normal. I think it has something to do with the desert heat too, and the risk of sandstorms always made it worth more since entire Vineyards could end up buried.” Velvet explains, surprising Kassius at her deep knowledge of wine, sounding like she is some kind of Wine Connoisseur.
“Didn’t think you knew so much about Wine.” He states, looking at her as they walk, she shrugs her shoulders as she walks.

“My mom and dad used to be Vineyard Owners…” She explains, and his eyes start to sink when he hears the use of past tense language.

“Used to be?” He asks her.

“They passed away a few months ago this year…got sick.” She explains, and Kassius feels his heart start to hurt with the dread of realising that they could have been infected with Horridus Morbus. So, he has to ask her the question without spreading that dread.

“Were they in Menagerie?” Kassius asks her, she looks at him and thankfully shakes her head.

“No, they started a new Vineyard a few years ago in Vale. The old one on Menagerie was buried in a Sandstorm and they lost all the profits. So, they took all they learned and moved to Vale. Managed to buy some security, they both just died in their sleep. Caught Ghost’s Fever. Never felt it, never even realised it until the end…I got my closure and they got theirs. Worse ways for it to go.” She states, and it really makes Kassius feel better knowing that her parents were not in Vacuo or Menagerie when the Horridus Morbus plague was unleashed…especially if she does not even know about the true threat of the plague.

Kassius looks at her, now curious of what that life must have been like. “What was it like? Growing up on a Vineyard? All that wine around…surely you tried some, right?” He curiously asks her, and she giggles at his curious comment.

“No, no…I was a very good girl. Never did touch the wine when it was being made, I rarely drink anyway. I’m silly when I’m drunk.” She shyly admits as she walks with him and Kassius chuckles.

“I’m stupid when I’m drunk, once got so drunk I thought I forgot where my glass was when I was holding it.” Kassius explains with a laugh, faintly remembering that night when he, Sun and Qrow challenged each other to a drinking competition on Yang’s twenty-first birthday. It didn’t really end well for them. “One of the worst hangovers I’ve ever had was that night.” He chuckles when faintly remembering that night, mostly the throbbing headache though…that was the worst of it.

“So, do I…was Yang forgiving?” Velvet curiously inquires, and Kassius chuckles.

“She was…to me anyway. Qrow on the other hand? Not so much.” Kassius chuckles, remembering how she only checked to make sure he was still breathing by shoving his sleeping body on the floor with her foot. Then asking him if he was alive, the groan was enough then she told him to shut up.

“He was a bit of an enabler.” Velvet chuckles as she follows him, Kassius chuckles too.

“Yeah…that’s why we love him though.” He admits, as he walks further into the Wine Cellar, looking around the huge room filled with alcohol. Velvet stares at everything they have, and it disgusts her, her kind and generous mind has always hated when the rich always keep so much from the poor folk he need it more than they do.

“They must have enough food in here to feed a small town.” She states, moving past a crate of expensive wine bottles just sat on the floor with some mice crawling around them, squeaking away. She is not afraid of mice, in fact she finds them quite cute, it is more the fact they are in the Wine Cellar. Meaning they could be in the Kitchens too.

“Or many small towns.” He adds, moving towards what appears to be an open way through the darkness…only for a big keg to block their path. They both deadpan the keg, as if that would give it
a brain and convince it to move out of their way.

“Brilliant.” She sighs sarcastically as she stares at it with her pretty brown eyes narrowed. Kassius looks at the cask and curiosity enters his system like the alcoholic fumes that hang in the air from all the fermented grapes inside this cellar. He grabs onto the handles and realises it has wheels, meaning that they can be moved around.

“Oh cool, look out I can move it.” Kassius informs as he drags the cask back slightly, but as he does it he looks back at Velvet with some concern on his mind. “So, should we be worried that Coco is chatting up Militia Malachite? Yang told me about her and her sister, those two can kick some serious ass if they put their minds to it.” Kassius states, he fully trusts Coco to do the right thing, but it has been a long time since any of them spoke to one of the Malachite sisters. Who knows if they have grown intelligent from the last time that Yang thought them, opposed to just being huntresses swayed from the path of justice.

“Oh, don’t worry about Coco, if anyone can talk her way out of something, it’s her.” She assures with a smile, keeping the light in front of Kassius so then he can see what he is doing. He pulls the cask back, hauling it with the strength of his cybernetic arm to move it with ease in comparison to how an average individual would move it.

He takes the large keg filled with wine – from the label inscribed on the metal plaque – it is Eastern Kuanan flavoured Wine. The very smell of it funnels up Kassius’ nose as he pulls the large structure back from their path, getting it out of their way and shoving it in the corner. He stands back with a slight stumble in his step, felling a bit drunk already. “Whoa…starting to get a bit drunk off all the fumes in here.” He chuckles as he looks at Velvet. She softly giggles at the state he is currently in as he walks around in there with a bit of a trip in his step.

“Well at least Coco’s driving.” Velvet reminds…unaware she is drinking too right now. The best choice to drive would most likely be Cardin, that is if he is not off his face right now. The two of them keep walking ahead through the dark and dry cellar, looking for the way through, whilst still following the cables and junction boxes. Then finally they find a closed steel door with the glowing red fire exit symbol above it.

“Yes! A way out.” He says, but before he opens the door, Velvet’s hand grabs onto his and stops him. “What?” He asks her.

“It’s a fire exit, we open that, and we’ll blow it. Alarms everywhere.” She states, and Kassius looks over to see the alarms that are rigged to the door as soon as it is opened. A good system, if a fire is spotted all the person inside would need to do is open the door and the alarm would go off, warning everyone immediately. But in their case right now, one of these doors is the last thing they’d want.

“Crap.” He sighs, stepping away from the door and crossing his arms, tapping his thumb on his lip as he looks around the area. His eyes track the cables and they go through that point, meaning that they must connect to some power pylons outside on its way to the Power Room. But then an idea hits him like a train, he gasps, and his blue tinted fake irises focus onto a grate into a vent. The Kitchens are literally right next to them, meaning they could infiltrate through the kitchen and get outside. The Kitchens are linked to a garage designed for delivery trucks to get in and drop off new ingredients for the food being served.

That’s their way out.

It can help them get around and to the pylons outside, follow them and then they are at the power room. “Got an idea, Velvet I’ll boost you up.” Kassius says as he jogs over to the vent cover above his head and he crouches down with his hands held together to act as a platform. She exhales as she
stands there, bouncing on her toes, eying his hands and then the grate above him.

“Okay.” She agrees, she moves towards him at a good pace, jumping onto his hand. He throws her up with force, giving her the boost, exactly what she needed to launch up and catch the grate. She holds on and smacks against the wall slightly, pressing her palm against it and sighs with relief that it did not raise any alarms. She holds on and she taps the different version of her bag that she has underneath her dress, explain the small bulge on her backside. Some would just think that is her shape and that she has a big butt, however it is just a bag hidden there.

She has gotten some looks down there, just not suspicious ones. She taps it and forms a holographic screwdriver in her hand, since she is a mimic she can summon the weapons and tools on command, and clearly, she has stored some of them in different boxes. Perhaps tools in a smaller bag and the weapons in the box.

She takes the screwdriver and she goes to undo them…but they are the wrong screws for this screwdriver. She sighs with annoyance, deforming the screwdriver and searching through in her mind to find the right one. She forms another, and thankfully this one can safely undo the screws. Kassius stands beneath her, looking around to make sure that no guards are entering, but as he stands there he hears the door open and their eyes widen. She gasps just as she gets the grate off. “Get in!” He whispers to her, taking cover in the shadows, ducking down behind a box, luckily his black blazer is enough camouflage in the darkness.

He peers round to see an Acolyte of Lien Mercenary walking into the cellar with his flashlight turned on, looking around as he whistles. He is not here for them at all, he is looking for a pick-me-up, that is not on the menu right now. Seems even Mercenaries are thieves too, crouching down and picking up one of the expensive bottles. “Oh yeah.” He chuckles as he walks out and closes the door behind him.

Kassius scoffs and he stands tall again, looking in that direction. “Drunken idiot.” He shakes his head as he walks over to where Velvet just was. He sees her cute little face appear from the shadows behind the grate and her hands grip it.

“Are you okay?” She softly asks him, sounding like she is always concerned at all times. Kassius gives her the okay with his thumb as he backs up to clamber up the side of the wall to get up to her. He is bigger and stronger than her after all, she is just nimbler and stealthier.

As a little bunny would be.

“Yeah, idiot just wanted to steal a bottle of wine.” Kassius scoffs as he looks over at where he saw him.

“Bit desperate.” Velvet giggles.

“Isn’t he just?” He agrees, Velvet takes the grate off and she crawls back with it slide inside. Kassius rushes forward and jumps, clambering up the wall by scraping his shoe across the brickwork, thrusting upwards slightly. He catches onto the edge and Velvet holds onto his arm yet rough hand, some calluses on his palm from how much he has fought with Lash Equinox…or has beaten enemies to death when he had to.

Something everyone forgets about Kassius, he does not shy away from killing. He is not a hero, heroes will try not to kill – he doesn’t care. If you are against him then he will kill you if you challenge him, that much was certain back at the Coliseum he was captured and held in. Velvet helps pull him into the vent, and he manages to fit in, not as quietly as Velvet did. She is small, whereas he is broad. “Vent was bigger when I looked at it.” Kassius strains as he struggles to fit. He takes the
The two of them crawl ahead, Velvet in front and Kassius behind. They both keep at the same pace, and Velvet looks back at him. “Sorry if my dress...shows anything.” She nervously tells him since she has been in a dress for all of this at the moment. Kassius chuckles, she has nothing to fear, he has self-control.

“Don’t worry, I wouldn’t dare. I’d hate to imagine what Yang would do to me if I did.” He jokes with a chuckle, and Velvet softly giggles too.

“O-Okay.” She giggles, crawling ahead of him, Kassius scratches his five o’clock shadow as he listens through the shaft and they finally get through to see a vent grate. It is right next to Kassius and he peers through when Velvet passes by it, seeing some chefs working inside. A delightful aroma enters their noses as they stare at the many different foods being cooked, from mouth-watering stir fries to bubbling cauldrons of soups in another area of the room. Nearly entire cows being roasted and shredded down, served onto large plates that are taken out by the waiters to the buffet.

They treat their guests well here.

Kassius peers through and focuses onto the door that begins to open into the garage, and one of the trucks reverses back slowly to deliver some more supplies to them. One of the chefs leaves the soup bubbling for a bit as he stare at the many different foods being cooked, from mouth-watering stir fries to bubbling cauldrons of soups in another area of the room. Nearly entire cows being roasted and shredded down, served onto large plates that are taken out by the waiters to the buffet.

And Kassius’ eyes widen.

“How are things going in here?” The voice of Hei Xiong speaks, easily recognisable with his black and red suit with golden accents imprinted on it. And as always one of the Malachite Twins at his side, this time it is Melanie opposed to Militia who is with him right now. Kassius scratches his stubble with an awkward sigh, of all the people who could be here…the one that would recognise Kassius instantly is here.

“Going well, sir. Just about to get the next course in as we speak.” The Head Chef answers, and Junior rubs his hands together with a smile.

“Very good, if there is anything me and my men can do for you, don’t be afraid to ask.” He says to them, he has never really been a threatening man. For a Crime Boss he is actually extremely tame, then again…compared to Vir Nominis Umbra? He is like a child playing with a gun, he has no idea what he is involved in.

“Junior…” Kassius softly growls with anger, since if anyone could blow their cover it would be him. He really got a good look of Kassius’ face when he nearly sawed his skull in half when searching for Ilia five years ago.

“Is he the guy you…nearly killed?” Velvet innocently asks him with concerned eyes, and he nods with a scowl.

“He’s leaving, let’s get in there and knock out the guards.” Kassius states, but she stops him with her hands pressed to his chest, looking him in the eyes. He looks at her and he raises a brow at her.

“Maybe we don’t have to hurt them?” She asks him gently.

“What?” He questions.
“My semblance, I’ve learned how to summon copies of other things. Like this.” She says as she forms a holographic bouncy ball in her delicate hand. Kassius looks at the ball and then at her, still confused of what she is getting at.

“I don’t get it. How does that help us get in there without getting spotted?” He asks her, both speaking in a softly spoken voice. She rolls her eyes playfully as she touches his chin gently and turns his head, pointing with her finger extended from the ball grip and pointing at a corner.

“I throw it in there and it bounces around like crazy for a minute. Long enough for us to get in while they’re panicking over a crazy ball.” She explains, and Kassius chuckles softly at the idea of a bunch of guys desperately trying to stop a bouncy ball from smashing up the place.

“Alright…let’s hope your plan works.” Kassius says, feeling it would be easier to knock them out…but maybe she is right…maybe violence is not always the answer. She waits for the perfect opportunity, when none of them are looking their way. She carefully takes off the grate and gently sets it down beside her leg, holding the bouncy ball. She peers round to the corner where there are tonnes of pans and plates.

_Sorry_

She flicks her wrist and launches the ball towards that area, and with a squeaky impact it bounces up into the ceiling, then down in the ground…and the panicking chefs are met by a frenzy of bounces confined in the corner, bouncing off one of their faces. Kassius and Velvet both hop down, Kassius politely catching her like the gentleman he is. They both crouch down to avoid detection from the chefs. “Is it a ghost?” One of them wails.

“A ghost? God no, it’s a ball! Just catch it!” The Head Chef yells, slipping over with a yell as he falls on his back. “Ouch.”

Kassius chuckles, and Hyde in the back of his head comments on her genius. “That is the evillest thing I’ve ever seen…I think I am starting to fall in love with this girl.” He chuckles, and Kassius rolls his eyes, whispering to Velvet’s ears.

“I think Hyde is starting to like you.” Kassius informs, and she blushes, moving up carefully, using the many workstations as cover to prevent detection from the many panicking chefs.

“This is a workplace! Stop being an asshole bouncy ball!” One of the chefs yell, the things these chefs are yelling are utterly hilarious. Kassius and Velvet both get outside, and she giggles beside him, barely able to contain her laughter beside him.

“Well…that might be the most ridiculous distraction since Operation Smartass.” Kassius tells her, walking round the building to find the pylons that lead all the way to the power room. However, the building is on the edge of the waterfall and right beneath it is the lobby that they were just inside of. Meaning they need to be extremely careful.

They both start to shimmy across and Velvet looks at Kassius curiously.

“Operation Smartass?” She asks him with a quizzical look on her face.

“Basically, I go full smartass on people to distract THEEEEEM!” Kassius suddenly screams as his foot slips on a loose rock, plummeting off the edge of the cliff and waterfall. Velvet gasps and reaches out for him.

“Kassius!” She screams.
Inside of the Lobby however…

Coco speaks to Militia and she looks past Militia to see Kassius falling down the other side of the window with a muffled scream. “aaaAaaaahhh!” Coco bulge from their sockets gasps and accidentally inhales some of her wine, nearly choking on it. Militia’s eyes burst open and she catches Coco, patting her on the back.

“You alright?” She asks her, as Coco coughs on the drink she just choked on.

“Yup…wrong hole.” She replies, pulling it off perfectly.

“Not the first time you said that, I bet.” Militia jokes.

“Ah-Ha!” Coco laughs, despite the fact her heart just started racing when thinking Kassius just fell to his death. Until relief hits her from her discretely placed earpiece.

“I’m…okay!” Kassius assures, for he is actually hanging onto the edge of the cliff face with his metal hand, dangling off the edge by just a rock he managed to cling onto. Aura or not that fall would kill him. The water from the waterfall patters across his face as he starts to climb up, Velvet peering from above as she tries to help him. He reaches up and grabs onto another piece of rock to get further up, without his swords he cannot use them like picks to get across it easier. So, his hands will have to do, hauling his heavy body up as best as he can, getting closer and closer to Velvet who watches from above, her hand stretched out constantly as he gets closer.

He crawls past the window, away from the view of the guests inside, peering in to see Coco moving with Militia to keep her from seeing Kassius on the other side. The look she gives him is all with her eyes, demanding that he gets a shift on. He jumps up and grabs onto another open piece of rock that is getting looser and looser with every second he hangs off it. So, he swings off and grabs onto a vine that hangs from above, climbing up as quickly as he can before it starts to break. The vine tears, and he jumps, latching onto yet another rock he found, this one not as loose as the other.

He hauls himself up further and further, before finally being able to reach up to Velvet who grabs onto his arm and pulls him up. He stumbles and presses his hands onto the wall with shocked eyes at how close that was. She immediately starts to check him over, making sure he isn’t hurt – being as caring as ever. “Are you okay?” She nervously asks him, but he pats her arm with a smile, hugging her for helping him.

“That…was too close.” He says to her.

“Yeah it was, don’t try something like that again.” She requests.

“Eh, no promises.” Kassius shrugs, shuffling across again with her…but this time she keeps her hand close to him to make sure he does not slip.

Coco

Despite the event that nearly caused her to choke to death on wine – the fanciest way to die – she has managed to pull off the moment perfectly to not raise suspicion. Militia laughs with her glass between her fingers. “How the hell did Fox survive that?” She asks her with disbelief.

“No idea, the bastard has always managed to survive the strangest things. But he managed to stop the
“And what about the gnome?” She asks.

“You know what? I suspect he stole it.” She admits, making Militia chuckle as she stands there, taking another sip from her glass. Coco does the same and looks past Militia to see Emerald and Cardin both managing their end, Emerald still staying near the pedestals, in a conversation with a bunch of criminals. Whereas Cardin has multiple girls around him, seems he is enjoying himself at least. He might be the most believable person in here right now because he looks like he is actually enjoying himself.

She then looks back to Militia and she backs up slightly as she crosses one leg over the other. “So, any interesting stories with the Acolytes?” She asks the Assassin curiously, and Militia glances over to her and she shrugs her shoulders.

“Just the same old crap. Killing a bunch of people for lien, preferred the old days with Junior honestly.” She states with a sigh.

“Is he here? Haven’t seen him.” Coco asks her.

“Well, he’s here, my sister’s with him right now. Damned Admiral’s been running him around like crazy recently, after that Xiao Long Girl and her boyfriend kicked his ass again. Guy really needs to get out this business.” She states with a sigh, sipping some more of her wine, but then she straightens herself like a soldier would.

“Wow…Coco Adel, didn’t expect to see you here.” A familiar voice speaks behind her, Coco raises her brow and turns round to see him stood behind her with a smile on his face. With pushed to the side white hair with a cowlick and his sharp blue eyes staring right at her brown irises. Wearing an expensive suit with one arm held behind his back – she knows exactly who this is.

“Whitley Schnee.” Coco greets, accepting his outstretched hand and shaking it, clearly he seems to be a bit of a fan of her from how he actually approached her and did not sound intimidating at all. “To what do I owe the pleasure?” She asks him curiously, inside she is exploding and desperately wanting the conversation here to end as fast as possible. Because she has lost feed to the voices of Velvet and Kassius right now…it could be Whitley…he could know.

“You? Please I should be honouring you, I remember seeing the battles you fought in the Vytal Festival. I mean I am not a huge fan of the Huntsmen Academies but who would I be if I turned down some good entertainment. You fought well.” He compliments with a smile, a glass of bourbon in his hand, just like his father.

“What if this…Vir Nominis Umbra dude…warned him we’d be here?

What if this all is a trap?

She ignores her thoughts for now but stays ready, they do not have their weapons but that does not mean that cannot take down the soldiers and take their weapons. “Indeed, heard Emerald Sustrai was responsible, messed with people’s heads correct?” He asks her curiously.

“Yeah, did the same to Pyrrha and Yang.” She says to them with a soft yet saddened smile, acting like she has no idea of what happened to them.
“Have you heard any news from Yang Xiao Long? Or any of your old friends?” He asks her curiously, sounding like he is concerned for her and her friends… but Coco is not an idiot. He is testing her, figuring out what side she is on right now. Coco sighs, and she shakes her head.

“Eight years and I’ve heard nothing from them… they could be dead for all I know. But I’ve no idea.” She states with a sad smile.

“You’re team? They’re okay, aren’t they?” Whitley asks her, and she stares at him, fighting the urge to break his nose…and she manages it.

“Yeah… they’re fine. I mean they don’t know I’m here… rather keep it that way. One of us has to break the rules, right?” She scoffs and Whitley chuckles as he looks at the many people standing in here. Who knows what their crimes have been over the years?

“Why are you here, in fact? Doesn’t strike me as your kind of party.” Whitley asks her with curiosity. Coco chuckles as she covers the side of her mouth jokingly.

“Would you believe me if I said the taxi took me to the wrong place?” She jokes and Whitley chuckles. “No… I heard there was this really valuable chess piece here, one of the ones that Ozpin actually used for the Initiation Process. When Beacon fell a bunch of scavengers got some stuff, and that chess piece is worth a few million. I know some guys, and I want to get my guys some comfy homes instead of some shitty apartments in Vale.” She explains, must have had that planned, and it is true too – there is indeed one of those chess pieces here on auction. Not on display at the moment but it will be eventually tonight.

“How selfless of you, and what would you get out of this?” He asks her.

“Please, you think I won’t get myself a fancy house too?” She chuckles.

“How much could that chess piece possibly be worth?” Militia questions with disbelief.

“Well they are selling it here for around 4 million. Before that though I started collecting shares wherever I could, became an investor. Really got up there with the money, gave as much as I could to my team without raising suspicion. Selling that bad boy? Would help them out a whole lot. And get me the house I want – it’s worth like six million lien, can you believe that?” She chuckles as she speaks, and Whitley nods his head. “What about you? Got your eyes on anything particular?” She asks him.

“Perhaps there is… recommend anything for me?” Whitley asks her, stepping forward and Coco chuckles.

“Yeah, like I’d wanna bid against him!” She chuckles, making both of them chuckle in the process. She then looks across the room then points to Pyrrha’s Circlet, acting like that is the first time she has noticed it. “Correct me if I’m wrong though… isn’t that Pyrrha Nikos’ circlet?”

Whitley looks at it and he nods his head. “Yes, I think it is… surprised you wouldn’t wanna buy it… you know, for memorial sakes.” He states with the shrug of his shoulders, also acting like he doesn’t know that Pyrrha is alive now.

Coco shakes her head as she looks at the circlet, acting extremely well too. “Nah… too much bad memories from looking at it. Feel like it would just be… wasted with me, you know? Shame she died, such a nice and pretty girl.” She compliments with a smile.

“That she was.” Whitley agrees, nodding his head.
“So, I heard you now run your father’s business, right?” She asks him.

“My business now.” He answers, still living by that lie that he was the one running the business the whole time when his father disappeared. “But yes, that is now my day job.” He agrees with a sickening smile.

“Ho-Ho that is one helluva day job. I bet you’d be able to buy everything they’ve got on show tonight.” She says to him.

“Well sure…but what’d be the point in that? These days I’m looking for the…good stuff…big scores.” He states as he smiles, then their attention gets caught by the voice of the owner – Solomon Karadin. He stands behind the many pedestals with the artefacts on show for the Black-Market Guests to make their bids on. He holds out his hands and speaks into the microphone as the music begins to die down.

“Good Evening everyone! What a pleasant evening it is outside.” He says with a theatrical voice, Coco crosses her arms and scoffs.

“A pleasant evening of which I feel celebrates the sacrifices we have made to make sure the balance of Remnant remains the same. People in the world these days expect the simplest of things – adventure, entertainment, love – but they never notice how fragile the world really is. They only have to worry about simple luxuries, because people like all of us are the ones that keep the world spinning, do the dirty work that the lesser are too afraid to commit. This gathering is for us – in celebration for our deeds that keep the people filled with brand new experiences. Let there always be a market for the things we do.” He speaks, concluding his speech with his hands held out to the many people who applaud him.

Coco rolls her eyes. “Guy seems a bit full of himself.” She scoffs. Whitley looks at her and he narrows his eyes, suspicion welling in them. “I know when I’m a third wheel, you two have fun tonight.” She says as she tries to get out the conversation and as far from Whitley as she can so then she can get away from the jammer on him.

But Whitley suddenly grabs onto her shoulder to stop her. “One more thing, Coco.” He says, she turns, and he releases her as she faces him. He stares at her and all of a sudden, his personality has taken an unexpected turn. “How’d you find out about it?” He asks her, she raises one of her brows with confusion.

“It? What it are we talking about here, Whitley? The Chess Piece? It was on the internet, not that hard to find you know.” She states with the shrug of her shoulders, Whitley smacks the glass from her hand and she barely even reacts, just stares at her hand then glares at him with anger.

“Cut the bullshit, Adel!” He yells, Solomon pauses, and he stares at Whitley causing a scene, a few gasps rise from the crowd and all eyes are upon them. However, it is all on Whitley, not on Coco…if anything she is more like the victim. “Now I don’t know what you’re up to, but I know you’re lying. But I promise you if anything happens to that Nikos Circlet, you will end up six feet under.” He snarls, until the voice of Solomon rises from the microphone.

“I believe you’ve had enough to drink, sir.” He speaks, giving him his one warning, then Whitley glances up to the many Acolytes of Lien soldiers standing on the higher balcony. It’s clear they are paid by Whitley, not Karadin, because they are not aiming their rifles at him. However, he does not order a shootout, he seems to aim to do things the clean way as best he can, so he nods his head.
“My apologies.” He accepts, wiping the wine from Coco’s nice dress, then he narrows his eyes at her. “You get my point, right?” He asks her, and Coco lowers the hand that was holding the glass.

Coco just nods her head. “Lovely to see you.” She says to him, turning and walking away from him, wiping the wine from her arm with a glare in her eyes. As she gets further the crackling grows and grows, hearing Kassius and Velvet trying to call her.


“It’s fine, Velvet…but we got a problem.” She states.

Kassius

“What is it? We’ve just gotten to the control panel for the power. What kind of problem are we talking about?” Kassius asks as he approaches the gate of which that blocks them from getting to the power controls, whilst Velvet starts searching around for something to break the lock.

“Whitley Schnee is here.” She tells him and Kassius’ eyes widen.

“Aw shit…” He sighs with anger, not only will he recognise Emerald off the bat, but he also has enough money to buy the entire estate and not lose a night’s sleep.

“Aw shit, indeed, Kas. And the bidding has started, so whatever we’re gonna do we better do it fast.” Emerald recommends, still standing as close to the pedestal as she can, with her head down to not get his attention. A wig and an iris colour change are not going to be enough to trick him, he knows what she looks like and he could recognise her a mile away. Cardin paces back and forth, acting all serious now that the bidding has started, all the girls away from him.

“If you’re gonna cut the power now’s a good time to do it, buddy.” Cardin recommends, ready for a fight too.

“We’re gonna need a minute.” Kassius says to them as he looks at Velvet, but she still hasn’t found anything, so now he helps by rummaging through some more boxes inside of the building.

“We don’t have a minute, Kassius.” Coco warns.

“Well buy us some time.” Kassius replies.

“How? You expect me to just whip my dress off and run on the stage nude?” Coco questions, one that little makes Kassius furrow his brow at how weird that was.

“I mean I wouldn’t be against it.” Cardin jokes.

“Oh, suck a cock, Winchester.” Coco replies.

“I dunno, outbid him or something.” Kassius suggests.

“With what? He’s a Schnee!” Coco reminds as she stands there, heart pounding with every second that passes by. “The little shit has already put on two hundred thousand lien.”

Velvet furrows her brow too. “Coco, we’re stealing it.” She reminds.
“What if he calls my bluff?” Coco asks.

“He won’t.” Kassius promises.

“I wouldn’t be so sure; the bastard saw right through my lies. I think he knows I’m up to something, if I dare raise my hand bullets’ll start flying.” Coco explains.

“Then…Emerald or Cardin, one of you guys or both of you try.” Kassius says.

“He knows me, Kassius.” Emerald states.

“You don’t have to say, just hold the racket.” He states, Emerald rotates her racket with the number on it and has a holographic screen on it with the current price of the circlet. She nods her head.

“Okay…” She agrees.

“Same, be less suspicious.” Cardin agrees.

“Just buy us some time, we’ll be in soon.” Kassius assures, looking over to Velvet after shoving the box under the table since he found nothing inside. “Anything?”

“Nothing over here.” She states. “Can’t you use your arm?”

“No, too much force the sensors would sense it as a bomb. A crowbar would be best, not too forceful.” Kassius says as he walks over to another box, rummaging through everything shoved inside. From hammers to circuitry components and other bits of scrap left inside. He sighs, shoving it in there too for there’s nothing in it.

Velvet reaches down into one of the boxes and she feels something…and a wild idea hits her when she pulls her hand out to see a bunch of magnets attached to her arm. She gasps, looking at the detector and she stares at Kassius. “I’ve got an idea!” She cheers, throwing one of the magnets to him. He turns, and it just gets sucked onto his metal arm, he stares at it, since he has taken the blazer off and shows off his metal arm to the world. And the magnet stuck on him.

“That’s just rude.” Kassius says to her.

“Oh shush. Look, put the magnets on the sensor. The magnetic energy will distort its systems for some time.” She explains, putting her two magnets onto the sensor. It starts to flicker as it sits there, but when Kassius rips the one off his arm and puts it on the sensor, it shuts off temporarily.

Meaning now he can use the breaching punch with his Cybernetic Arm. “This is gonna be loud.” He warns, pulling his arm back, Velvet covers her large ears that bend down with her hands. A deep mechanical thrum builds up in the arm, and he swings it with all his might into the lock, the pistons smashing the lock apart into a hundred pieces, door swinging open. “Good idea.” He chuckles, since the alarm doesn’t get set off.

“I have my moments.” She giggles, following him in. Kassius presses his finger to his earpiece to contact them.

“Alright guys, power’s going off. How you doing?” He asks them.

“One second.” Cardin chuckles, also hearing Emerald laughing too. What they haven’t realised is that they have been having fun with annoying Whitley right now. Choosing totally random sizes of money to bid by, getting him angrier and angrier.
“Bid now at Five Hundred Thousand Lien.” He hears the voice of Solomon over the earpiece and he chuckles.

“Gods, how annoyed is he?” Kassius asks.

“He’s fuming.” Coco chuckles. “This is more satisfying than I realised.”

But then Whitley rolls his eyes and holds his racket up. “One Million Lien!” He yells, and people in the room gasp. “C’mon let’s finish this.” He states, and Solomon stares at him and then nods.

“Thank you…are there any other bids?” Solomon wonders, Whitley can’t help but turn when he senses Coco about to raise her racket. But then she smirks and lowers it.

“All yours.” She assures.

“Thank the gods.” He sighs with relief.

“Okay then…let’s ruin this scrawny little shit’s evening.” She says to them with a smirk on her face.

Kassius hits the switch.

“I shall sell this crown for one million lien.” He says.

The lights suddenly vanish, and Whitley looks around with concern, Junior too starts to look around. “Don’t worry, everyone – backup power will be on in just a minute.” He assures. Until Whitley notices when the lights come back on seconds afterwards…

The crown is gone, and his eyes widen with disbelief, spinning round to see Coco gone.

As are Cardin and Emerald.

“Damn it…after them! Kill them!” Whitley bellows, the Malachite Twins nod as they both turn and walk away into the shadows and Junior cracks his knuckles as Whitley throws his racket on the ground in fury.

Then the alarms blare.
The Vytal Survivor lands down from above, slamming his knee into the tarmac and gravel beneath his boots. He looks up and catches Velvet as she jumps down, steadying her recovery. After checking if she was okay, he presses his finger to the earpiece on his person, patching back into the comm link with the others. “Emerald? Tell me you got Pyrrha’s Circlert?” Kassius questions with immense concern in his voice. Her voice comes through the other end, giving him satisfaction. “Got it right here…damn how does the chick wear this thing twenty-four-seven? Doesn’t look comfortable at all.” She scoffs on the other end of the radio link. Kassius looks ahead as Velvet proceeds forward, keeping low to the ground and silent in every step taken. She hides in the bushes as she listens carefully with her large ears.

“Well we’ve definitely kicked the beehive down here. The Acolytes of Lien are securing the whole complex, car park has been completely taken over. Nobody’s leaving, we can’t get out that way. It’s suicide.” Coco explains to them, Kassius sighs with frustration since that was all he had hoped on staying natural. That they could just steal one of the cars and speed their way out of the scene.

“Shit…any ideas?” Kassius asks them as he catches up with Velvet.

“Hmm…I’ve got something. Everyone meet with me in the Hanger, underneath the Ballroom, where the Waterfall is.” She describes to them, Kassius looks at Velvet with confused curiosity, something the others must feel as well.

“Uhh…gonna fill us in?” Cardin asks her.

“You’ll see, I have a plan.” She assures, before cutting off, and Kassius pulls his finger from his ear as he crouches down beside Velvet, peering through the grass and round the concrete archway.

“Kassius…” She softly whispers to him, he turns and looks at her through the bushes.

“Yeah?” He replies.

“Are you sure we can trust her? I mean…she did help cause the Fall of Beacon.” She reminds with a gently spoken voice. Kassius looks at her through the blades of green grass, and he sighs.

“Well…if she does betray us, then we’ll kill her. But I think she may be genuine…she wants to get back to my sister after all. We’re her best ticket to that.” Kassius states, Velvet glances at him with concern, she is not foolish, she can quickly deduce who his sister must be just from who Velvet was in league with when they were enemies once. Meaning Cinder must be his sister, and he her brother – however he has never given her a reason to distrust him before…and that won’t change now.

“Okay.” She agrees with a small smile on her pretty face. Kassius moves forward through the bushes and rises up, pressing his back against the concrete wall. He peers round the edge slowly, staring with his now amber eyes, disguises are unnecessary now, the guards know that they are being robbed.

The courtyard is clear, so Kassius takes the chance to move forward. As he walks across the courtyard his eyes widen when he hears a collection of male voices emerging from the building
directly ahead. In a hushed voice he calls to Velvet following him. “Get to cover! Try not to get spotted!” He tells her, rolling across the ground and into some bushes, whereas Velvet crouches down beside some crates of wine prepared to be load into the cellar that they were just inside of. The fumes starting to wear off on her body now.

She uses her semblance, conjuring a holographic screwdriver, it is not a knife, but it will do. She grasps it tight in her hand, whereas Kassius just as his metal arm and other arm to use. Luckily though, he is much stronger than Velvet is, meaning he could take them down with his bare hands.

The doors open wide with a bang, and a group of five Acolytes of Lien Mercenary Thugs step out, one with a cigarette chewed in his mouth, holding a pump action shotgun in his hands. Clearly these soldiers are not even trusted with the higher end technology and weaponry either, because not only wearing normal clothing with no armour. But the weaponry is damn near primitive, using old-fashioned bullets instead of dust rounds. The shotgunninger pumps the weapon, launching a spent shell from the dispenser as he looks around.

He has had to fire that already, they have heard a few gunshots lately. “How the hell did someone manage to take that frickin circlet, man? I was watching the pedestals the whole time!” A young man yells, he cannot be much older than seventeen, as he kicks a cardboard box across the floor, venting his frustration. Until the ringleader elbows the back of his head and he grunts in pain.

“Snap out of it, dickwad! We’ve got a job to do, find the thieves and kill them. And make sure none of these damn Black-Market dealers get in our way.” He explains as he rests his shotgun on his arm, removing the cigarette from his mouth and throwing it down onto the floor. With his black leather boot, he stamps the flame out, killing the cigarette swiftly. The shotgun falls pump first onto his palm as he looks around. “Spread out! Check this area, make sure it’s clear.” He orders as he walks ahead.

Kassius peers through the bushes to where Velvet hides, seeing her taking cover behind the crates, her large eyes peering right to him as well. She can handle herself, she is probably in a better position than he is when it comes down to being stealthy. She is small and part bunny after all, so he watches the soldiers as they pace around. One of the thugs sighs as he stands by the bush, about to unzip his pants so then he can urinate into the bush. Kassius furrows his brow and deadpans with annoyance.

Why do I always get the shitty spot?

“Hey boys! Did ya’ll see some of those Faunus Girls in there? Pretty hot, weren’t they? Was thinking of taking one out back later…see if I can get lucky.” He chuckles, but one of the thugs shakes his head.

“Good luck, pal. Those girls will break your nose long before you even try and caress their hair.” One of them warns.

“What? How do you know that?” He asks in return.

“Take it from experience, still have a nasty lump right here from when I tried that. Those girls can look after themselves.” The Thug states as he walks around, submachine gun in hand as he approaches the crates of which that Velvet is hiding behind. The pissing brute looks back at him.

“You talking about the girls with Junior too?” He asks him, and he sighs.

“No, that was Robert. Sure, he had sex with one of them…but then she killed him a few seconds afterwards.” He states, sending a chill down the spines of the two hunters, neither of them realised how deranged the Malachite Twins really are.
“Well they call them the Mantis Sisters for a reason, I guess. Nobody survives a one-night stand with either. Unless you’re quick.” He chuckles, meaning either Coco was fast to get out of there – twice – or she fought them off and escaped…twice.

As if Coco could not possibly surprise them any further.

Kassius waits for the perfect moment, the guy is just about to urinate, and the guards have all looked away from them…and there is no conversation going on. He suddenly erupts from the shrubbery of vegetation, and slams his metal fist right into the face of the soldier, knocking him out instantly. He catches the boy and drags him into the bushes, quickly twisting his neck forcefully to snap the spine.

He has never believed in leaving his enemies alive to wake up…as he said…he is no hero.

He leaves the cold corpse of the soldier in the bushes as he waits for the right moment to emerge, whereas Velvet across the courtyard from him reaches to the seventeen-year-old and she wraps her arm around his neck and mouth to starve him of oxygen just enough so then he falls unconscious. She releases the body and keeps him hidden in the shadows for now since nobody can see him.

Three Thugs remain with their senses sharp as they walk around, and pretty quick they snap onto the fact that two of them are missing. “Rodriguez? Dan!” One of the thugs calls out with concern in his voice as he raises his heavy pistol up, one that fires high calibre rounds at his targets. Kassius suddenly erupts from the bushes and he gasps, his eyes widen as the Huntsman sprints towards him.

He sidesteps as he sprints to dodge the bullets flying his way, before dropping to the ground and swiping his metal arm across the legs of the soldier, knocking him over. He rises up and pounds his human fist directly into the thug’s gut. The impact causes his legs to kick up and he gasps in agony, wincing in pain as he presses his palms to his stomach. Kassius’ eyes widen when the voice of Hyde in the back of his head calls out. “Watch yourself!” Hyde roars, and he spins round to see the soldier aiming down the sights of his rifle.

“Game’s over shit-face!” The thug yells, until from out of nowhere Velvet springs up and jumps onto his back, slamming the holographic screwdriver right into the rifle so then it jams up. He pulls the trigger and the mechanism fires the bullet right into the screwdriver, rupturing the internal mechanisms of the rifle to the point of creating a small explosion. Throwing shards of metal everywhere, slashing across his face at one point.

Kassius ducks down when Hyde warns him again. “Stop staring at Velvet and keep your eyes peeled! Still that other guy behind you!” Hyde yells.

“Stop backseat strategizing my ass!” Kassius replies to him aloud.

“Why, it helps doesn’t it?” Hyde scoffs, Kassius glares at the ringleader with the shotgun who fires it right at him. The shrapnel nearly hits him until he ducked down into the bushes again, disappearing from his sight. Back with Velvet though, she holds onto his back as he stumbles around, until the idiot finally uses his brain and reaches back, grabbing Velvet by her ear. She cries out in pain, as he throws her from her back, but as Velvet lands she summons a wrench in her hand and throws the holographic tool directly into his leg so hard it makes him fall to that knee. He grunts in pain as Velvet runs at him.

She jumps up and kneels him in the face, bringing him down to his back, resting both knees on his chest, the thug looks at her and smirks. “Hey there, sweetheart. Aren’t you gorgeous, wanna fool arou-” Velvet smashes her fist into his mouth before he can finish his disgusting comment, rising up after knocking him out. She turns and gasps when seeing the Shotgunner aiming the barrel directly at her. He fires at her and she rolls out the way, but some of the shrapnel shards slice through the skirt
of her dress, cutting and ruining it as she rolls behind cover.

She rises back up as she picks up the pistol from the Thug she just took out, but she does not even get the chance to fire it. Because Kassius suddenly grabs the shotgun with his cybernetic hand and crushes the barrel with force, taking the shotgun and pulling it straight from his hands. Kassius holds it like a baseball bat and winds it back, swinging the stock straight into the Thug’s face, so hard that it explodes upon contact into shards of wood, dropping the knocked-out guard to the ground.

Kassius pants as he stares at him, before looking at the knife on his person, he calmly crouches down and pulls the knife from its sheath, and he goes to stab it into the heart of the soldier. Until Velvet’s smooth hand catches his arm and he turns with a fiery glare, staring at her with a hint of Hyde in his amber irises. “What are you doing?” She questions with shock.

“Finishing the job.” He answers as he thrusts forward, so she uses her other hand to pull him up. She stares at him with narrowed eyes and shakes her head.

“No. We do not just take lives for no reason.” She states.

“What if he wakes up and shoots one of us later?” He questions with a scoff.

“Then we take him down then, but if we kill them for nothing then we are just as bad as they are.” She states, but Kassius has always had a very black and white way of looking at things. Perhaps a side effect of having a Demon residing in the back of his mind for his entire life. Kassius narrows his eyes, and he just pulls his arm from her hands, staring at her as he drops the knife and walks past her, towards the doors of which that the thugs came from.

Kassius says absolutely nothing on the matter, just keeping his senses sharp…but Velvet would be lying if she had claimed she was not afraid of Kassius just then.

It was very different to the sarcastic man she has come to know.

But she follows him none the less, struggling to walk in her damaged dress and skirt, Kassius turns when she starts grunting in frustration. She takes her dress and forcefully tears the skirt off, round her knees so then it no longer gets in the way. The dress looks like it was really expensive, yet she ripped it so effortlessly.

Kassius chuckles. “I like her.” Hyde chuckles in the back of Kassius’ head.

“Yeah well, if you manage to get a Human Body someday, maybe you can ask her out on a date.” He states, devoted to Yang.

“Who knows, maybe that day will come.” Hyde says, hopefully, and still in his head Kassius even agrees with him, but not for reasons out of selfishness.

“Let’s hope huh…maybe then you can have some adventures of your own instead of needing me for them.” Kassius says to him.

“Well…doesn’t mean I wouldn’t trade this for anything, brother.” He says, Kassius can even feel the warm smile that Hyde had given him.

He has come a long way from a pain in the ass monster in the back of his head to what he is now. Wouldn’t even believe them to be the same person.

The two Hunters press on, walking out towards the bridge that heads over the waterfall and they
both stare at it.

That is indeed the same waterfall of which Emerald was talking about, so Kassius raises them on comms.

“This is Kas – how are you guys doing?” Kassius asks them, hearing gunfire on the other end and Coco’s voice on the other side.

“Oh, just perfectly!” Coco sarcastically replies, only then to they start to hear the distant gunshots.

Coco

Bullets whoosh over their heads at great speeds over her head, with one of the tables flipped over and using it as cover. A stray bullet zooms over head and clips the wooden surface of the table, throwing splinters everywhere. She grits her teeth, grasping the submachine gun close to her chest as she waits for the right opportunity to fire. She might have aura on her side but that does not mean she wants to waste any of it. She looks over at Cardin and Emerald, Cardin taking cover behind a pillar and Emerald behind the bar.

Emerald rises up and fires her pistol with precise shots at the thugs, nailing one of them in the chest, a loud pained yell erupting from his lungs as he crashes down to the ground. “Just, just perfectly Kassius.” She continues, pressing her fingers to the earpiece on her. The gunfire recedes over her, so she bends round the side of the table and aims down the iron sights of the small firearm in her hands, blasting a short-controlled burst of five bullets into an Acolyte of Lien’s torso, blood smearing all over the pillar behind him as he slides down to the floor with a weak groan.

“What’s happening, we can hear the gunfire from here!” Velvet fearfully asks her and Coco retreats back behind the table when she spots one of the soldiers aiming at her and firing with a blinding muzzle flash. She just avoids the fire shot at her, fracturing parts of the table.

“We’re pinned down in a dining room near the Ball Room. Trying to get to that Hanger Emerald was talking about.” Coco answers, Cardin suddenly rushes forward, and he rolls behind cover, grabbing onto a fire axe on the wall where he shot the glass out beforehand. He swings it round and throws the axe straight into the ribs of one of the soldiers, killing him instantly, his dead corpse thrown onto the floor with a crash.

Blood trickles from his split ribs as he passes on, and he scoops up an Assault Rifle on the ground, exchanging one magazine for another, cocking the mechanism to load it up. He turns around the corner to fire some bullets into the other soldiers that are blocking their escape, until a bullet suddenly comes flying through a window with a crash, slicing through his arm.

Cardin roars in pain, recoiling and taking cover behind the pillar again as a loud crack echoes from outside. Then a second shot hits the pillar, blowing chunks of expensive marble from the pillar, plumes of thick smoke filling the air.

“Cardin! You good?” Coco calls out to him, he snarls as uses his aura to regenerate the damage in his arm, the blood still staining his damaged white shirt.

“Yeah, bastard just grazed me.” He states.

“What happened?” Kassius nervously asks her.
“Sniper! Eastern tower, he’s got us pinned down and these soldiers really aren’t helping our situation here.” She states, ducking down from a few more bullets sent flying her way.

“We’ll take him out, just don’t die.” Kassius orders, Coco scoffs.

“Oh sure, not like I had plans on dying right now or anything.” She sarcastically says.

“We’ll be with you soon! Just hold them off.” Velvet begs them, and Coco nods as she smirks, vaulting over the table and rolling towards one of the pillars like Cardin has.

“Don’t you worry about us! Just get rid of that sniper!” Coco orders, reaching round to fire a few rounds at them, some of the bullets cut clean through the clothes and blows the hat off one of their heads. Until her eyes widen when she sees him jumping down from above with a Missile Launcher in his hand.

“Well look what we have here everyone, more Huntresses getting their noses in things they shouldn’t.” Junior snarls as he fires the missile at Coco, she readies herself and leaps through the air, corkscrewing round as she narrowly dodges the missile that explodes into one of the windows. Shards of glass thrown everywhere in a fiery explosion, Coco lands and stares through her long brown hair with a smirk.

“I was complaining about not having my gun…but now it’s getting interesting.” She giggles playfully, rushing towards Junior. Emerald gasps, her eyes widening as she sprints at him with nothing but her fists since she dropped her gun.

“Coco!” Emerald yells.

Junior stops towards her and he spins the rocket launcher round and swings it straight at her like a gold club, but she drops down and punches right up his crotch, releasing a high-pitched squeal of pain as he recoils with a bounce from that dirty punch she delivered. She runs and then jumps onto his back. “What? Don’t like getting your butt whooped by a girl? Wouldn’t be the first time, would it?” She questions, but Junior snarls with fury as he reaches up and grabs her, throwing her across the Ball Room, sliding along the smooth marble floor.

He also drops the missile launcher then pushes his sleeves up, cracking his neck. “I’ve learned a few things since I fought that blonde-haired gal.” He assures, raising his fists and Coco smirks as she does the same.

“Let’s see, big boy.” Coco challenges with a grin, whilst Cardin aims his rifle at the soldiers as does Emerald. Coco sprints towards Junior and dodges his fist swung towards her face, narrowly avoiding him, then thrusting her arm forward into his lower abdomen. He grunts in pain, hunching forward until he spirals round and smacks his other forearm across her cheek, knocking her across the floor. She rolls but gets back up fast, still with a smile.

“Should never have come here, Huntress.” He snarls with anger.

“I beg to differ – been a while since I had a good fight.”

**Kassius**

“Damn it, we need to keep moving. C’mon!” Kassius tells Velvet as he takes his hand from his ear
and he advances forward, picking up the one-handed submachine gun one of the thugs was holding that they took down. He rushes towards the large courtyard of which more soldiers emerge, some rappelling down from the rooftop, lowering down before them. One of them lands down and he aims his machine gun at them.

“There they are! Take ‘em out!” The ringleader yells, pulling the trigger back and unleashing a carnage of bullets their way. Kassius returns fire as he runs to cover, ducking down as he strafes over his head. Kassius quickly moves behind cover whilst Velvet sprints through the darkness with her head low, picking up a single fire rifle left behind by a soldier and aiming down the sights at one of them.

She is not afraid – however – to take a life when necessary. She only hesitates when they are either unarmed or do not need to be killed.

She pulls the trigger and fires the bullet right into the side of the soldier’s head, a bright display of blood and brain matter splattering all over the wall, his head snapping to the side and his scream silenced swiftly. He falls to the floor with a meaty and crunchy thud, and she ducks down as one of the soldiers fires his double-barrelled shotgun her way. Kassius vaults over cover and slams both his feet into the ribs of a soldier stood on the other side, he grunts as he staggers back, Kassius swiftly turns and he pulls the knife he found on that soldier out…picking it up earlier…and stabbing it right into the throat of the thug.

He snarls with choking gasps as he staggers back, gallons of bright red blood gushing out from his neck as he collapses to the ground, Kassius walks past the dying thug without a second look, lifting the submachine gun with one hand, firing a burst of bullets towards the others. The bullets spray apart, rupturing the concrete in the walls and splintering wood open as he rushes towards the enemy. One of them fires his pistol at Kassius but he lifts his cybernetic forearm up to stop the bullets, the hardened projectiles bounce off the strong metal and his aura with ease.

Kassius fires the submachine gun and the rest of the bullets in the magazine shred the clothes and his torso, bringing the man to the ground. “Behind you!” Hyde warns, Kassius catches the machete that a Mercenary Thug was swinging at the back of his head with his metal hand, pressing his thumb against the cold steel blade to snap it in half with a metallic twang. Kassius then smacks the soldier across the face with the submachine gun before throwing it into the side of another’s head, making him collapse but not get knocked out. Kassius rips the snapped machete from the hand of the soldier then rams it into the thug’s gut, making him gasp. He then knees the hilt, pushing it further into his stomach. The thug lets out a blood curdling screech of agony before Kassius takes his metal hand away then punches him in the back of the head so hard his skull crashes into the floor.

A thug stares at him and picks up a box, throwing it straight at him. “Watch out!” Hyde warns, his second eye in the sky, even giving him alert senses to turn in time. He catches the box and returns it to sender, throwing it so hard into the thug that it shatters, sending shards of wine coated glass into his face, making him scream in agony.

Velvet sprints past him and she jumps, grabbing onto a loose rope from a support cable, swinging towards another thug, slamming both her feet into his chest, knocking him over. She lands on top of him, twisting back and slamming her fist into his face. Her long ears perk up and she rolls out of the way after hearing the clink of a gun aiming at her, then the almost deafening boom of the gun blasting towards her.

The bullet fractures against across the cobblestone floor then she picks up a pistol and fires it straight at the soldier, the bullet flies across the air and punctures through his head, exploding out the other side. Feeling such guilt for the kill she closes her eyes with a saddened sigh, however she snaps out
of it when the last thug swings a baseball bat towards her head. She ducks down from the swing, then thrusts her body up into his lower abdomen to push him back. Then she performs a graceful backflip that kicks right up his jaw, knocking him to the ground.

She flicks her head back to get the hair from her eyes, hearing a gunshot from Kassius as he finishes off the last of the awake or living thugs. She flinches from the gunshot, and Kassius does not even change his expression, just drops the pistol onto the floor. He turns towards the doors that lead to the ball room, and also the Dining Hall that they are currently pinned down inside of.

They both walk inside, and they look around, hearing the alarms blaring across the Estate, the many Thugs searching for them. And the sound of some kind of aircraft, one that is getting closer and closer. So, they both get down as it slowly patrols the parking lot where they initially set their escape plan. An Acolyte of Lien Gunship hovers overhead with bright searchlights shining all over the place, searching for their targets.

“Everyone! Please follow our instructions in an orderly manner! We will find the thieves shortly.” The pilot of the aircraft orders, huge with multiple heavy armaments loaded onto the wings and a high calibre dust charged machine gun under the cockpit on a swivel. This might be the most expensive piece of equipment these thugs have at their disposal. Even then, it is nowhere near as high tech as the ones the primary military force have…this one actually has some rust on it.

Even more proof that the Thugs are literally just hired guns.

Kassius and Velvet both peer down to see someone having a heated argument with some of the Mercenaries down there. As they focus their sights….they realise that it is Solomon Karadin, and he does not sound very happy. “Why the hell are you escorting me from my own estate? This is my home!” Solomon bellows with fury as he pushes the hand of the thug off him.

“Sir, I’m gonna have to ask you to join the rest of the guests please.” The Mercenary requests in a calmly spoken voice. Velvet gasps, looking at one of the black cars to see that Whitley is inside of it with his eyes glaring at the Drug Lord.

“Whitley…” She whispers.

“Guests? I hired you grunts! Find the thieves already, I will be in my office!” He yells, but the soldier grabs him and pulls him back.

“No sir, you will stay here. As you have been commanded.” The thug states and he chuckles.

“Commanded? My pay check commands you and I am paying you lot a fortune!” He yells, but one of the thugs chuckles at his stupidity. “Oh yeah, what’s so funny?”

“Well the thing is, Karadin…you’ve been outbid.” He states, and Karadin raises a brow.

“By whom?” He questions.

“By me.” Whitley answers as he stands up and emerges from his car with his hand behind his back as always. Solomon glares at him and he chuckles, shaking his head as he approaches.

“You boy? Your father funds me, just imagine what would happen if I told him abou-”

Suddenly Whitley draws his other arm and fires a bullet from his chromed pistol, blowing his head out, blood everywhere and on the jacket of one of the soldiers who gasps with shock from how unexpected that was. None of them saw that coming…not even Kassius or Velvet. Karadin’s head recoils back with blood trickling down from his head as he collapses to the ground.
Whitley lowers the smoking gun with a grin on his unexpectedly deranged face. “Father…isn’t here.” He states with a smile, and one of the thugs stammers with fear.

“Are you out of your goddamn mind?” He yells at Whitley until Whitley presses the hot smoking barrel of his pistol against the cranium of the scared thug.

“Wanna find out? No? Then find my crown!” He yells with fury in his voice, pushing the gun against his head to get him to move. The two soldiers both run off from him to do their jobs, whereas Whitley straightens his tie and walks towards the car and sits down, closing the door as the car drives off.

“Bastard’s going crazy…the power and the money is getting to his head.” Kassius whispers.

“Coward doesn’t even stay to see the job finished.” Velvet says in disgust.

“Wouldn’t think Weiss is his sister, would you?” Kassius asks her.

“I know…she was lucky she had her sister. Otherwise she would be just like him. C’mon…it’s just this way.” Velvet says as they walk towards the next door that leads towards a study.

He just…shot him…a major Drug Dealer…because he annoyed him?

Whitley’s getting more dangerous by the day, I’m starting to wonder if even Jacques knows about his insanity growing.

They just left his body there too…

So much for a legacy, huh Karadin?

Kassius approaches the doors to that study and he looks at Velvet. “You ready?” He asks her, and she nods her head. Kassius twists the doorknob and opens the door, meeting their eyes with widened ones of his own.

“Shit.”

The other Malachite Twin – Melanie Malachite – is here, and she grabs Kassius and pulls him into the room, before kicking Velvet in the chest. She screams, falling over the railing and Kassius’ eyes widen when she falls. “Velvet!” Kassius screams, only for Melanie to close the door and lock it tight, turning to him with a sinister smile on her face.

“All to myself…” She whispers as she walks towards him, he turns and reaches to the pistol he had but she stamps her heel down onto his wrist to keep him there. “Uh-Uh…I don’t think so, honey…so you’re the handsome boyfriend that blonde bitch has in her bed, huh? Don’t blame her…maybe I could get a kiss huh?” She wonders, suddenly pressing her lips to him with a disturbingly pleasurable moan, one that angers Kassius.

He punches her straight in the chest with his cybernetic fist, causing her to hit the ceiling then bounce off the table. “Why do I keep getting weird attention from women lately?” Kassius questions with confusion as he stands up, pressing his metal palm against his knee as he rises back up.

“Who knows? Maybe you and I could have some fun tonight? Wanna press me up against the wall and make sweet, sweet love to me?” She asks him, but as she speaks Kassius groans as he finds the world feeling heavier and heavier. Melanie begins to transform before his very eyes.

The young woman with long black hair and pale green eyes, highlighted by heavy cyan makeup…
begins to change. She wears a white, strapless dress with cyan lining.

Her accessories include a large white flower hairpin above her left ear, a white feather scarf, a silver pad with cyan and red feathers on her left shoulder, white gloves, a small silver bracer over the glove on her left arm, a bow in the centre of the top-most part of her bodice, a silver chained belt, cyan wings on the lower back, and long white boots with blades at the heels.

However, as she changes, the black hair glows yellow and becomes long and puffy. Stunning lilac eyes form, and firm glossed lips from, with her body growing slightly in many areas. Now she is wearing a tan jacket with orange lining and gold edging, unzipped halfway to show an orange crop top. The coat has darker brown short sleeves, a thick collar that completely encircles her neck, and two long detachable gold-trimmed rectangular tails. She also wears fitted black pants, and her hair has been let down again like her original outfit.

Around her hips and over the tails of her coat is a brown belt, which has two pieces of dark brown material trimmed in gold attached to it. The first covers from her left hip to the back of the belt and is folded over the belt, and the second is attached from the right hip and almost around to the other piece of material. She wears knee high brown boots with gold caps on the heel and toe, with the heel cap attaching to a gold strap across the front of her ankle, and a gold zipper on the upper half of the front of the boots. A single small buckled strap is on the upper outside of her boots, and a purple bandana tied around her left knee. A pair of black fingerless gloves with long brown cuffs reaching to mid forearm complete the outfit.

He knows every piece of her body like the back of his hand as she knows his…and he cannot her.

"Hallucinogenic…lip stick…damn it…" Kassius stammers as he staggers, feeling everything moving like he is underwater somehow.

"Aw…you look confused Kassius. Want me to help you?" She asks him playfully as she walks towards him…

He can barely even stand, and he can’t even bring himself to swing at her…he loves her too much, he could rarely ever spar with her too much because he could never hurt her. Melania punches him straight in the face, knocking him into a bookshelf and she pins him up against it, gazing into his eyes. “Undo my zipper…you want to, don’t you?” She whispers seductively.

“Kassius! Snap out of it! It isn’t Yang!” Hyde yells in the back of his mind.

“I…I know…But I…I can’t…” He says as he tries to push her away from him, but he can’t. Melanie now gets a bit more serious.

“Give me the Circlet…and I’ll let you do whatever you want to me.” She whispers.

“Anything…huh?” He asks her with a chuckle, she then bites his lip sexually to try and make him give in so then she can take him out. That is what this style of hallucination is used for…once the target tries to sleep with the user, the holder of the poison will be able to do anything to them. Mostly it is used to get individuals to sleep with the poisoner, on people currently in relationships. But it can also be used to kill too, when they are in a paralysed state.

Scary stuff.

But Hyde however…is not affected by it, and he can see through the hallucination. “Then what about…this?” Kassius asks, when suddenly his eyes ignite into a fiery display of orange, then Hyde slams Kassius’ head into the face of Melanie extremely hard. She grunts and staggers back from
Hyde as he clenches both fists, not taking full Berserk Control like he has in the past, but just enough to control his body when under this hallucination. Whilst Kassius still see Yang and is still in his drugged state, Hyde can move perfectly fine.

“The hell? That isn’t possible.” Melanie snarls with anger as she holds her fists up, and her heels extend the blades out.

“Oh darling, you’ve no idea of what’s possible.” Hyde assures with a smirk, pacing back and forth, and Melanie suddenly rushes towards Hyde, swinging her fist at him. Hyde dodges the swing and counters, kicking her in the chest before leaping towards her. He tackles her and grabs onto her, rising up to pin her against the wall. “What you asked for, right?” Hyde chuckles with a challenging smirk.

Melanie grits her teeth, suddenly slashing her heel across the side of Kassius’ leg, making Hyde snarl in pain, until she pushes him back, jumping up and kicking him in the chest. She rushes forward and kicks him repeatedly, slashing the blades on the back of her heels over and over again, cutting across his aura with anger. Hyde snarls as he starts to recover, blocking her strikes with his forearms, batting them aside as she keeps attacking him every chance he gets.

She jumps and kicks him up the jaw as she backflips, landing on the ground right in front of him. She dashes forward, and she punches him in the head, twirling like a dancer as she kicks him right in the crotch. “Oof, you bitch! That’s dirty!” Hyde yells, grabbing her by the hair to return the favour by fighting dirty himself. He pulls her forward then pummels her down into the ground with full force, nearly knocking her out.

She slides across the ground but gets back up fast, grabbing a book and throwing it at him. Hyde catches the book and looks at it curiously. “Hmm…gripping.” He chuckles, and then he groans. “Oh no…Yang’s starting to rub off on me.” He says with a sigh, just before the heel of Melanie stabs through the book, ruining it. He gasps, and his eyes widen with utter disbelief. “I didn’t finish reading that!” He yells with anger.

With her heel stuck in the book, Hyde roars as he throws both her and the book at the window with full force. Melanie screams as she backflips, landing on the ground right in front of him. She slides across the ground but gets back up fast, grabbing a book and throwing it at him. Hyde catches the book and looks at it curiously. “Hmm…gripping.” He chuckles, and then he groans. “Oh no…Yang’s starting to rub off on me.” He says with a sigh, just before the heel of Melanie stabs through the book, ruining it. He gasps, and his eyes widen with utter disbelief. “I didn’t finish reading that!” He yells with anger.

With her heel stuck in the book, Hyde roars as he throws both her and the book at the window with full force. Melanie screams as she plummets off the edge, but she takes her heel off and stabs the blade into the cliff, using it to not fall to her death. Velvet…hanging on for dear life…has been climbing towards that window the whole time. “Kassius!” She calls out, Hyde peers over and reaches out.

Another example of how much he has grown, old Hyde never would have done this.

“Up you get!” Hyde says, Velvet curiously raises a brow at Hyde in control. Luckily, they all know, they have known him for a few years now. She catches his metal hand as he pulls her up.

“Thanks, Hyde…where’s Kassius?” She asks him.

“Melanie, used a hallucinogenic in her lipstick, kissed him. He kept seeing Yang instead of her, but I didn’t get affected. So, I decided to take over…” Hyde explains with the shrug of his shoulders.

“Oh…okay.” She shyly says to him with the nod of her head.

“I think it may have worn off now, letting him take over.” Hyde assures, then the fiery irises fade away and his normal Amber Eyes return.

“Whoa…that was…trippy.” Kassius grunts, making Velvet giggle softly.

“Good to see you and Hyde are doing better.” She says to him.
“Well…we’ve both had a few revelations lately.” He sighs, scratching the back of his neck.

“What do you mean?” She asks, since he has not informed them on Merlot or the fact he is one of Umbra’s Demons.

“Long story, I'll fill you all in when we get the hell out of here and somewhere safe. Come on…I’ve got an idea of how to get inside of room they’re in from here.” Kassius explains, Velvet raises a brow.

“Um…how?” She asks.

He points through the window at the zipline outside. “That zipline, it heads towards the building we need to get to. I cut the line and we can swing right into the window.” Kassius explains, and Velvet shudders fearfully, afraid of heights after all.

“Um…okay…how do you mean to cut it?” She asks him softly. He looks down to the pistol on the floor.

“Well…more like shoot it I guess.” He states.

“Oh…okay.” She says.

“C’mon, let’s go.” Kassius says to her and she smiles.

“Right behind you, Tarzan.” She says to him.

The two of them advance forward, running towards the balcony of which they can grapple onto so then they can swing towards the dining room where they are currently pinned down in. The gunfire may be muffled by thick concrete walls and paned windows, but the flashes are worthy sign enough of their current position. Kassius reaches up and grabs onto the cable with his metal hand, putting his arm around Velvet’s small body. She holds onto him tight and he turns his eyes to the cable behind him. “Hold on tight.” Kassius advises, pulling the trigger, the loud crack of the gunshot explodes from the barrel, launching said bullet directly into the cable as they both jump, holding onto the cable as it carries them.

Weight becomes no small object anymore as nothing, but a seemingly bottomless plummet falls before them, obscured by the mist of the waterfall that crashes down into the land beneath them. Kassius swings across the land, Velvet can’t help but let out a scream of terror from the drop beneath them, whereas Kassius sounds like he is loving every second of it. “Whoo-hoo! Brace yourself. Velv!” He yells as they both crash straight into the window with a loud sharp shattering bang, throwing their bodies inside the Dining Hall, rolling across the marble floor and luckily right into cover.

Emerald gasps as she turns to see the two of them suddenly bursting through the window like that. “Kassius? Velvet? The hell are you doing?” She questions with confusion, loading the last spare magazine she happened to pick up.

“Uh…you know…improvising.” He answers, aiming his pistol at the enemies and firing at them, only for the soldiers to duck down behind cover one last time. One of the thugs charges round, flanking their position as he aims the shotgun, it’s long leather sling dancing with each movement made, pulling the trigger. The burst of smoke launches hot shards of shell fragments towards them, but Kassius just avoided it by ducking behind the table flipped over.

“Dunno about you guys, but I think I’m done with this auction, huh?” Cardin asks them sarcastically, making Kassius chuckle.
“Yeah, tell me about it.” He agrees, vaulting across the table to kick the soldier in the head, making him stagger back. Kassius fires his pistol swiftly, expending the rest of his ammunition to kill him. Kassius kicks the thug again, launching his body back and the man releases his shotgun. Kassius catches onto it and fires it at the others, clipping one of their shoulders.

“Kassius, look out!” Velvet screams, his eyes widen, and he turns, seeing one of the thugs picking up the rocket launcher that Junior was using, pulling the trigger and blasting a missile towards him.

“Shit!” Kassius exclaims, the missile exploding into the pillar right next to him, the shockwave carries him up and slides across the floor with a groan. He wipes the dust from his body and flees from the scene. As he runs, he focuses his attention on Coco, watching as she battles against Junior on her own, with just her fists.

She ducks down to avoid the huge man’s fist swung at her, she worms round and punches him right in the flank, getting a grunt of pain from him. Then she follows with a series of fast and hard blows to his abdomen, before upper cutting him to get him back. He snarls, staring at the thug holding his Missile Launcher, ripping it from his hands. “Gimme that!” He roars, pushing him away and firing it towards her, blasting a multitude of missiles – approximately six – that target onto her.

She gasps, jumping and cartwheeling back from him, now he changes the rules all of a sudden. “Rude.” She states with disgust, turning with a gasp when a soldier swings his red blade at her head, but she moves aside, punching him right in the throat. He chokes from the sudden hit then she swings her foot directly upwards – in between his legs. He lets out the highest pitched scream she has ever heard, nearly deafening her ears. She does not even need to finish him off, because he collapses from that hit alone. “Grow a pair.” She jokes, and Velvet groans.

“Please no puns until we get in the escape vehicle please!” Velvet begs, until Cardin chuckles with Kassius. “Don’t encourage her!”

“Sorry, it’s too good!” Cardin laughs, punching the last soldier in front of him in the face so hard it snapped his glasses and shattered the red lenses. The soldier falls to the floor with a heavy thud, and Cardin smiles as he walks towards Junior with the others. Junior snarls, transforming his rocket launcher into its huge baton form, spinning it through his fingers. “Aw what’s wrong, big man? Outnumbered?” He challenges.

Junior smirks. “Anything but.”

Suddenly Militia jumps down from above and slashes her claws across his aura covered back, Cardin yells in pain as the attack throws his body towards Junior. The huge mob boss smashes his baton across Cardin’s face and he crashes into the many racks of booze at the bar. Spilling it all over Emerald’s head and dress, she deadpans at him with a sigh. “Sorry.” Cardin groans. He grabs onto the bar to pull himself back up, glaring at them, then seeing Melanie climbing up and jumping through the window, standing beside their leader. “Not cool.”

“This won’t go the same way as it did with your girlfriend…” He states, and Kassius chuckles.

“No…more like before when I nearly sawed your head in half. Remember that?” He asks him, and he snarls at him.

“All too well.” He replies with a deep growling voice, preparing for a battle as the two Malachite Twin Sisters stand beside him, Militia with her claws at the ready and Melanie with her bladed heels sharpened too.

“Well – I’ll give you this one chance then. Let us leave and this doesn’t get violent,” Kassius
suggests.

“Ha! I don’t think so pal. You shouldn’t have killed a whole tonne of my men. You’re not leaving this place alive.” He states with a snarl.

“We’ll see.” Kassius replies, aiming his shotgun suddenly at him and pulling the trigger, the deafening crack launches shards of shrapnel towards him but he spins his rocket launcher baton through his fingers to deflect the shards, sprinting towards him. He jumps up in the air with a bellow as he slams the bat down at him. The rounded end smashes the shotgun from his grasp, shattering it into a hundred small pieces. Chunks of metal slide across the floor along with splinters of wood.

“Not nice.” Kassius tells him, until Junior swings the bat into his chest so hard that Kassius slams right into the wall with enough force to send cracks. He groans in pain as he falls from it. “Okay… he’s done some training since we last met.” Kassius assumes, but he attacks once again, but this time he rolls out the way and returns the favour with a hard punch to his side with his metal fist, throwing him into one of the pillars.

Kassius jumps and pins him against the wall, but Junior headbutts him aggressively, before kicking him in the chest and swinging right at his head with the bat. Kassius stops the bat with his metal palm and stares up at him. “I’ll kill that blonde bitch myself for what she did.” He snarls, and Kassius scoffs.

“We do my enemies think threatening my girlfriend is a good idea?” He questions with a sigh, ripping the baton from his grasp and smashing it across Junior’s face this time.

In the centre of the room Militia and Melanie both charge towards the rest of the team, Militia slashes her claws across each other, sparks dance from the sharpened blades as she jumps and slashes them both towards Emerald and Coco. Emerald jumps back whereas Coco ducks down then swings her fist up the jaw of the Mercenary, making her recoil back. Emerald then jumps and kicks her in the face. Militia slides down and under the legs of Coco, slicing the red blades across her legs to knock her down to the ground. Emerald swings at the Merc but Militia kicks her in the chest, before stabbing both blades towards Coco. Her eyes widen, and she catches the blades in her hands.

Coco stares into the eyes of Militia with gritted teeth. “Give up, Coco…and you’ll live.” Militia assures with a snarl, but Coco smirks with a chuckle.

“Me? Give up?” She scoffs, she then wraps her legs round Militia’s neck then twists her body round, pushing her off her chest and landing on her feet. Militia crashes into the ground and as she slides she stabs the claws into the ground to stop. “You should know…I like being on top.” She flirts with a wink.

Melanie behind them kicks Velvet in the cheek hard and she yelps in pain as Melanie keeps kicking over and over again, slicing across her aura before knocking her down to the ground. She draws a knife hidden under her skirt and she presses it to her neck to cut open her throat. But Cardin – of all people – tackles her and they both crash across the ground, she reaches back and grabs her by the hair, throwing the lightweight warrior into one of the pillars. She crashes against it and hits the floor with a groan.

Cardin extends his hand to Velvet to help her up, hesitantly she accepts, and he pulls her up to her feet. “You alright?” He asks her.

“I’m fine.” She responds in a pretty despondent tone. Melanie rises back to her feet and she paces back and forth, loud clicks from her heels echo loudly as she stands there.

“You think you can take me down?” She challenges and Cardin scoffs.
“If you think I’m a gentleman and won’t hit a girl, you’re sorely mistaken.” He warns, giving Velvet the chills for a moment, a few memories from her school life with him bullying her all the time for being a Faunus. However now is not the time to reminisce about old memories, they have a fight to win.

“Man…aren’t you the brave one?” She replies with a grin, unexpectedly lunging forward at great speed, spiralling round and kicking downwards onto the top of Cardin’s head – if his aura was not up the blade would have stabbed through the top of his skull and killed him. He staggers back then blocks the next attacks with his forearms, orange aura flashing from each strike made by the mercenary. Melanie jumps, and she bounces off the pillar beside them, wrapping her legs round his neck and punching him twice in the head. As he reaches for her she connects the blades together with her legs, then forces down, throwing him into the pillar. He crashes against it and groans in pain.

Melanie turns and meets the fist from the lovely and sweet Velvet Scarlatina, she may be kind and adorable but packs one hell of a right hook. The Malachite Sister recoils back, then swipes round to do a roundhouse kick, one dodges by Velvet, who bends her ears instinctively to avoid the bladed heel. She stops the second kick from Melanie with her arm, then punches right into the sternum of Melanie. Melanie staggers back and Cardin sprints at her, jumping and performing a powerful dropkick, one that sends her into Junior.

Junior flinches slightly from the young woman thrown her way, right into the fist of Kassius which knocks him down to the ground. He groans with annoyance, until his eyes widen as Kassius roars, bringing his fist downwards with force. Junior pushes away just in time, causing the ground to crack and burst from the force of a cybernetically enhanced arm crashing into the ground like that. He picks his baton up with both hands, channelling force into it as he slams it towards Kassius.

Kassius stops the baton against with his arm, the mechanical joints growl as they charge up, a blast of energy erupts from the impact that cracks the windows. The Vytal Huntsman thrusts his knee up into the chest of the Mercenary before he grabs him by the neck and slams his skull into the side of the pillar, breaking his aura finally. Junior groans as he collapses and Kassius draws the pistol he has on him the whole time, aiming it at his head.

Junior sits back and he rests his head against the pillar with a sigh, like he has given up. “Go on then…do it…” He sighs as he stares down the barrel pointed at his head. Kassius never hesitates, yet something stops him as he narrows his amber eyes at him. “What are you waiting for? I know you’re not a normal Huntsman like your girlfriend…you take life with ease. What’s stopping you now?” He questions with confusion in his eyes.

Kassius’ hand does not shake like most would if they were scared of taking a life, perhaps maybe he wants to spare him this time. Of his own free will, not with someone else getting in the way. “Think about what side you’re on, Junior. This conflict is gonna end soon, and only one side is gonna be left standing.” He explains.

“That’s…what war is.” He coughs.

“Normally…but the one side that will stand is us. Because if Umbra wins…there won’t be anything left to stand on.” He explains, lowering the pistol and dropping it in front of him. “I hope you make the right decision, Hei Xiong.” He states with a sigh.

Junior glances over to see the Malachite Sisters getting beaten, Cardin grabs Melanie and pins her down against the ground, her aura getting knocked out and the same goes for Militia, knocked down by Coco. He sighs, pressing his fingers to his ear to contact the sisters. “Stand down…let them go…” He sighs, closing his eyes.
“What? We can…beat them.” Militia weakly coughs, he shakes his head though.

“That’s an order.” He reminds and they both sigh, giving up and the heroes step away from them. Kassius turns and walks away from Junior, but Hei sits forward with a cough. “Take the left staircase…” He advises and Kassius stops with a raised brow.


“Quickest path to the ship…you’ll have thirty seconds before the Gunship clocks on. Go.” He advises with a sigh, Kassius stares at them and his scowl fades.

“Sorry.” He tells him, and Junior raises a brow.

“Why?” He asks.

“For nearly sawing your head off.” Kassius remarks with a small smile and he chuckles.

“Well…y’know how it is…life is full of experiences.” He chuckles and Kassius nods to him. “Sorry about your team…I don’t know if you did kill that girl…but I just hope you helped them rest.”

Kassius stands there and his eyes close sadly, because in the end he held Ilia as she died after being stabbed to death by Tyrian. He has never forgotten what she did for them, helping convince all those White Fang to fight alongside them. “She helped us.” He tells him and Junior just nods, able to tell that she must be gone.

“Go.” He tells him again, and Kassius nods, walking back to his team.

“C’mom, let’s get to this ship. I hope one of us can fly.” Kassius says, since he remembers what happened last time he tried to fly an aircraft…it ended in a fiery explosion and the Spectre on their asses.

“Sure.” Emerald replies and they look at her suspiciously.

“You do know right?” Coco asks as they start running down the stairs that Junior advised them to take, towards what appears to be the doors to a hanger. They can hear the crashing waterfall from here.

“It’ll be fine!” Emerald promises as the doors burst open and they stare at the many ships still landed inside. Some Atlesian, some Mistralian and others have so much rust on them that they must be here from Vacuo itself.

“That’s not a yes!” Cardin yells.

“It’s not a no!” Emerald reminds and they all sigh with concern. Emerald examines the ships then a smile forms on her face as she gasps, pointing at an impressive aircraft landed inside the Hanger hidden by the Waterfall. “There! The Peregrine!” She calls out, Kassius stares at it and he notices the colour scheme.

Black with white on it. “Isn’t that Karadin’s?” Kassius inquires.

“Uh-huh, and I’ve always wanted to fly this thing!” Emerald giggles playfully as she sprints towards it. Inside of it however is one pilot, listening to a song that the students from Beacon would know all too well. A song known as “Shine”.

“Baby, it's time to make up your mind
I think that tonight is when our stars align
Honey, it’s time to leave the doubt behind”

As a loud thud hits behind him he raises a brow and slowly starts to take one earphone out, gasping with fear.

“*Take my hand cause you and I are gonna shine*”

Kassius, Emerald, Coco and Velvet stand before him, and Cardin jumps down from above, crossing his arms with a smirk. He holds his hands up in defeat and fear of the Huntsmen and Huntresses who stand before him. They all walk towards him but Kassius picks him up by the neck and throws him out the doors just before they close. “Later.” Kassius concedes with a smirk.

Emerald sits herself in the cockpit and she smirks as she starts to prime the engines, and Cardin looks at the many weapons on this thing. “Is this thing used for combat?” He asks her.

“Oh yeah, seen it in action. This will come in big handy!” Emerald smirks, sounding like she is in this for the long run.

As long as she can keep the Peregrine.

She presses the right button then the lights all activate at once and the engines thrum to life, a huge smile forms on her face and she cheers. “Yeah-ha!” She laughs, fisting the air over and over again, happiest they have ever seen her, actually.

“Alright, I hope you’ve got a solid plan for us.” Kassius chuckles.

“Oh, trust me…I’ve got a plan.” She assures, then the thrusters lift the Peregrine up in the air, the landing gear folds away as they all take their seats and strap themselves in, well accept for Kassius. “I’d take a seat if I were you, Kassius.” She advises.

“Yeah, whatever.” He scoffs with a smirk.

“Okay.” She chuckles, holding onto the throttle and pushing it forward with force, the afterburners suddenly blast and the soldier outside takes cover just in time before he could be turned to dust. The forces push them all into their seats, but Kassius gets thrown straight to the back of the ship and against the door, screaming at the top of his lungs whilst Emerald grins.

The Peregrine shoots through the waterfall then dives down it, following the water so fast that it looks like the water is falling upwards now. She then pulls up before falling into the trees below, dodging them and spinning the ship, causing Kassius to fall constantly, hitting almost everything. Then an alarm blares in the systems, and Coco spots it with widened eyes. “Uh…Emerald…that Gunship Junior mentioned is right on time.” She warns, as the Gunship dives down behind them, firing missiles straight at them.

She turns to one of the switches and flips it, bursting white hot flares from one of the compartments, causing the missiles to go haywire and explode into them. The Gunship continues to chase them until she flies straight towards one of the tall stone formations inside of the marshland beneath them. The Peregrine waits for the last minute before taking off upwards into the sky, causing the Gunship to crash straight into it in a fiery display of flames and smoke.

The Peregrine flies off into the distance, and Kassius hits the floor with a groan, headed to where they left their outfits and weapons, before searching for the nearest place to land.
Cardin

Hours later…

The sun is beginning to rise now, and Coco has managed to locate the booze that Karadin had stored inside of here. They have also managed to find their clothing, leaving it folded up in the corner alongside their weapons. They could not risk bringing them in for this mission, would have never gotten in otherwise.

Inside of Karadin’s old ship is a table as well, much bigger than it looked honestly, not exactly a leisure ship but has enough space for them all to sleep the night where they have landed. Velvet is asleep, and Emerald is leant against the wall with her arms crossed. Kassius, Cardin and Coco are all sat at the table…

…with Pyrrha’s Circlet slap-bang in the centre of it.

Kassius sets his glass of gin down and he picks it up after clearing his throat, recovering from being attacked by G-Forces. He picks the circlet up and holds it in his hands. “This thing had better be worth it.” He states as he looks around to find the inscriptions that Kragen had spoken about.

“So, what’re we looking for on this thing?” Coco asks him curiously.

“Well, a friend of ours – Kragen – he said that the Arkhoni would have left some sort of message on here, engraved in the metal. Just gotta…ah-ha!” Kassius cheers as he traces his finger across the faint hieroglyphics engraved in the metal, so faint that Pyrrha most likely never even noticed it.

“No shit, seriously?” Cardin chuckles.

“Yep…okay…Architect buddy, this better work.” He sighs, as he puts the bracelet on that he manufactured for them. He turns his wrist so then his hand bends down out the way, then the beam of blue light shines upon the highlighted area. It loads up a holographic screen before their very eyes, loading up the translation of the ancient glyphs.

They appear.

“Find our land of Birth…and you shall find the secrets you seek…in the land of great destruction.”

That’s it.

“Uh…I don’t get it.” Cardin stumbles as he stares at it, none of them do as they stare at it. Coco shakes her head with confusion.

“Maybe it’s a part of a poem?” Coco wonders.

“Well if Ren was here we could ask him.” Kassius sighs as he scratches his brown hair.

“Hmm…whatever it is, it’s meant for a Nikos who knows a lot about her family’s past.” Emerald states as she looks at the message.

“Pyrrha doesn’t know much, most of her past has been hidden or lost. Hell, even Jaune doesn’t know much about the history of his family name.” Kassius states with the shrug of his shoulders, meaning this little riddle is getting harder and harder to understand.
“Okay then…so birth place…answers and…destruction? We need to find a ruin in a place that was destroyed? How can we possibly find something that old that is still around?” Cardin questions with confusion, but Kassius’ eyes widen when he has an epiphany.

“Vytal…” He stammers with disbelief, they all look at him with confusion.

“Huh?” Coco inquires.

“The Island of Vytal…” He repeats as he stands up and paces around.

“What’s on the Island of Vytal?” Coco asks him again.

“Well think about it, the Great War ended there, and the final battle there was the worst one in recorded history. Nearly tore the island apart and almost destroyed the Kingdoms.” Kassius explains, remembering the many history lessons with the late Doctor Oobleck.

“Huh…” Cardin chuckles, but Emerald walks over and she looks confused still.

“So, what could be there, then? Island’s not that big, odds are that whatever ruin we’re looking for is underwater. Nobody has ever built anything there because of how small it is.” She explains, but he shakes his head.

“There was a small settlement, I was only a baby when my sister and I were raised there.” Kassius explains, their eyes widen.

“You were raised on Vytal?” Emerald questions.

“Yeah, they were trying to build another Academy at the town, but it was demolished from a massive Grimm attack. Was nearly eaten by some Grimm myself.” He admits, shuddering at the memory of when that Grimm Terror Bird attacked him, nearly tore him to shreds in fact. He rubs his back as he feels the many scars from that things claws.

“Wait, you mean the Grimm attacked out of nowhere?” Cardin asks him curiously.

“Yeah, literally like that as well. Everyone was fine.” Kassius states…that’s when even he starts to notice it is strange.

They are drawn to negativity and there was not much, if anything most people were hopeful. Only him and his sister felt negative over the death of their mother, but even then, that would not be enough to trigger the attack of that size. “Sounds like Salem could have sent them…they could have found something.” Coco states as she circles the rim of her glass with her finger.

They all sit there silently, since it is a longshot. “Well…if there isn’t anything there…we keep thinking. This thing is fast, and we can refill at nearby ports if we need to.” Emerald explains and Kassius nods his head, exhaling. “What’s wrong?”

“Going back there…it’ll be pretty…scary I guess.” He sighs, able to hear the sounds that the Terror Bird made when it tried to devour him alive. He sets the circlet back down on the table and he walks towards the door to the outside world. “Gonna take a breather.” He says as he walks outside, and Emerald follows him out.

Cardin sighs as he sits there, turning to the glass of gin and he picks it up, pouring some into his glass, he then goes to do the same for Coco.

But her hand blocks the top of the glass, he looks at her and sees the stern scowl on her face. He
pauses and sets it down, picking his glass up. “Something on your mind, Coco?” He asks her, knowing what she’s gonna say already.

She sighs. “Look… I know it couldn’t have been easy… being held prisoner by the Traffickers. And I’m sorry… I really am. But don’t think I’ve forgotten.” She reminds, her brown eyes staring sternly right into his, he sets his glass down and nods.

“I didn’t expect that you would.” Cardin replies. She leans forward and presses her arms to the table, not wearing her sunglasses yet either… meaning she is serious.

“I’m gonna make this extremely clear, Cardin. So, you listen up.” She states, and he stays silent. “That girl over there?” She asks him, pointing at Velvet asleep in the corner. “She is the kindest person I have ever met, and when I found out what you were doing to her all those years ago… well I was gonna kill you. But didn’t because she begged me not to, for my own sake.” She explains.

Cardin remains silent, a changed man but the guilt will never fade. “I’ll work with you, but I promise you… if you lay a finger on her… say anything cruel to her. And I’ll break your fucking jaw. You got that?” She asks him with a soft spoken yet chilling voice, Cardin stares at her and he sighs.

“I’m not that guy anymore.” He assures.

“Then show that to me, by atoning.” She states, and he nods. Picking up his glass and the bottle, offering it to her. She takes it and fills her glass up. He keeps his held up to clink to hers.

“Crystal clear.” He assures with an actually kind smile. They clink the glasses together and both drink the alcohol in them.

Kassius and Emerald both walk inside and Kassius looks at them.

“So? What’s the deal?” Coco asks them.

“We’re going to Vytal… and pray to god that we find something.”
That thought has been recurring in his head as of late, long before leaving his home with his friends. With his shirt off, not only can he see how much his body has changed since he first started at beacon…but the things he has also collected along the way. Thanks to muscle building lessons with Sun and Kassius he is much bigger than he used to be, with a six pack and defined pecks and arms. However, his body carries shards of memory on it as well, the three slash marks across his stomach when the Beowulf attacked him during the Battle of Mistral, before it fell to her control. The electrical burns from the tower on the Volcanic Chain Islands…

…the stab wound from Hyde, using Crocea Mors against him.

He does not hold it against the Demon, because he was not in his right mind, he was being manipulated by Vir Nominis Umbra, channelling some kind of old nature back into him. As Jaune looks at his body, he touches the bandage around his healing wound and he slowly…yet carefully…pulls it off, looking at the mark of which that has been left behind. He winces, gritting his teeth as he stares at the stab wound that his aura has been working hard to repair the damage of. Blood once stained these bandages, sticky hot claret covering their white soft structure.

But now the new ones do not have a speck on them, his aura worked fast, Ruby is still struggling with her wound she suffered from Corsac at times. Wincing and limping, however his has already completely healed back to normal. Leaving nothing more than a scar behind.

This has happened before for him, not only after his beating from Cardin in Forever Fall but also after he was hit by the lightning strike after fighting Pyrrha. He does have some slash marks from her, but they have started to fade as well, but the lightning scars are permanent.

Jaune turns to his side and he lifts his arm to cast his shadow away from the markings, to see the scars. Until the bathroom door opens and he sees Pyrrha about to walk inside, both of them gasp and spin round, eyes meeting. “Oh!” They both gasp when seeing each other, Pyrrha still wearing her armour of course. Jaune’s is in the corner though, with his folded up Pumpkin Pete’s hoodie and the rest of his armour pieces.

Pyrrha nervously stammers as she looks at him, undeniably admiring his physique…he has changed a lot since the days training at Beacon.

For the better too.

“I – uh – I’ll wait outside…” She stammers, but Jaune shakes his head, getting more comfortable around her in situations like this. At the end of the day they know they love each other so they might as well stop beating around the bush about it.

“It’s okay.” He assures with a soft-spoken voice, reaching out and holding her smaller and firm to the touch hand. She looks back at him and she can’t help but smile right back at him, walking into the bathroom with him and closing the door behind him. She looks at his chest…at first admiring the pecks and the six-pack, but then her eyes focus onto the scars he has collected. She gasps, her eyes
widening when she notices some she never saw before, like the Beowulf slash.

“When…when did that happen?” She nervously asks him with widened eyes. He looks at the slashes across his belly, they were pretty deep too, he was lucky that the Beowulf had not disembowelled him. He chuckles as he prods his belly, no wobble in it like there used to be in the past.

“Beowulf. Happened just before Ruby…lost her eye.” Jaune explains, still shuddering over that horrifying memory of when he saw that arrow darting towards her face, nearly killing her instantly if she had not turned to petals.

She may have lost her eye.

But that is a worthy sacrifice in comparison to losing her life.

Pyrrha steps forward and she gently moves her fingers across the scars, feeling the bumps of which where the lashes have formed. Jaune feels his heart hammer with attraction towards her, butterflies dancing in his ribs. “It must have hurt…” She softly says to him with a saddened voice, he chuckles nervously…no matter how much time he will spend with her, even when they are both in a relationship, she will always make him nervous.

But never uncomfortable.

“It did…but with Ruby hurt on the ground, with her aura down I tried to get her out unscathed. Death put a stop to that though.” He sighs, remembering it all so vividly, the whistle the arrow, the wet thud of the blood-soaked arrow clattering on the ground behind her. The amount of blood leaking from her head where the arrow slashed her eye open…it still makes him sick to picture that memory.

“Don’t blame yourself.” She softly says to him as she takes her hands away from his scars, and he sighs.

“She trusted me…if I had…gotten her out of there…maybe…” He sighs, shutting his eyes and lowering his head with a heavy sigh. Pyrrha shakes her head, caressing his cheek with her hand as she looks into his blue eyes.

“It was Blackridge…not you, not Ruby…and not fate. It was just Blackridge, and nothing else.” She states, and he sighs, kissing her hand lovingly as he holds her hand with his. He then looks down at his side and he chuckles.

“I was…just looking at some of my memories here. Sometimes happens after a shower…never forget this one.” He says with a nervous laugh as he lifts up his right arm to reveal the lightning burn scars across the right side of his flank, wrapping round his back, covering his right shoulder blade and his lower spine. Once purplish bruises have now become incredible scars that actually look like lightning, or the roots of a tree splayed out across his canvass of skin.

Pyrrha lets out a stuttered gasp, remembering that fight barely, since the Onyx Phantom had total control over everything she was doing. Everything she said, all the hateful things…the ways in which she tried to kill him. It would have broken her if she was the one to end his life, but luckily for both of them, and unluckily for the Phantom and Fear, that did not happen. “I…I’ve had nightmares of our fight on that tower…I was so scared…that I was gonna…kill you.” She sniffles with glassy eyes.

He smiles as she caresses the burn scars on his body where the lightning hit, which miraculously healed in time for him to get off his butt and fight with them in the final moments of the attack.
Still their greatest victory.

They retrieved three relics for the price of one.

And one of them Ozpin has on him right now, and probably will always have on his person. Unless if Vir Nominis Umbra attacks him and tears it from his staff. Jaune gently caresses her cheek with his thumb, lifting her head up with it so her eyes meet his. “I’m here…you don’t need to worry.” He assures, ironically both of them have worries about very similar things, blaming themselves for things that they cannot control.

Might be one of the many things that made them fall in love.

Pyrrha looks at him, then her eyes pan down to her chest, and she begins to undo the straps of her armour. His heart begins to pound nervously, and he stammers shyly. “W-What’re you doing?” He stammers.

“Don’t worry…I just wanted you to see.” She assures with her soft-spoken regal toned voice, she takes the plates apart and sets them down on the toilet seat. She shows him her beautiful body, one unfortunately carrying a bandage around her waist like Jaune, where her wound is still rather bruised unlike his. Her aura is not as strong as hers, and its pool is nowhere near as deep.

She has a few other scars as well, some small ones on her arms, one just above her waist…then he sees ones on her left, and they are so similar.

Lightning burn scars.

She has the same thing, scarred lightning bolt burns on her torso, except these ones are in a different place, she turns around, and she holds her ponytail so then he can see it. The burns start on the back of her neck, unexpectedly beautiful crackled burns that spread outwards like rivers, down and round her neck towards her right shoulder. It moves down and then unlike Jaune it meets the front of her body, down and just above her chest, where the roots of scars start to fade. Jaune also notices that on her back they seem to split off as well, creating a beautiful display of marks of lightning down her spine.

He does the same as she did with him, feeling the scars on her firm soft skin, running his finger down her back, touching the clip of her red bra strap. She shivers but not in disgust or fear…more so from anticipation…longing.

She looks at him over her shoulder, releasing her red ponytail, gazing into his eyes and he returns it. She creeps closer and he mirrors her, reaching to her cheek, his fingers piercing through her soft red hair. A smile breaks through her face, small but bright with her white teeth. She reaches round and holds onto the back of his neck, pulling herself closer.

Their lips touch, feeling one another’s breath into their mouths, sharing a very affectionate kiss, closing their eyes as they share this moment together. He moves his arm round her and he holds her close, tension about to break like a rope. They break for a breath then go again.

“Jaune? Pyrrha? You guys ready?” Nora calls, they pause and sigh with disappointment, pressing their heads together with a nervous giggle.

“Y-Yes, Nora! Just a second.” She calls to her, burying her head into her boyfriend’s shoulder as she laughs.

“Alright! See you in a minute, love-birds!” Nora cheekily calls back, Pyrrha lifts her head from Jaune’s bare shoulder with a smile.
“Well…that was interesting.” Jaune chuckles and she giggles again, resting her head against the warmth of his chest again, closing her eyes as she listens to his heartbeat. The two of them have felt that sexual tension growing and growing for ages now…sooner or later it’s gonna break.

They can only hope, it will be in private.

And nowhere Nora could possibly catch them in the act by accident, otherwise they will never hear the end of it.

A few minutes later they both get their armour back on and also have gotten their deodorant or cologne on…not like they need it, it is highly unlikely the Grimm, Acolytes, White Fang or the Knights’ Bannermen are going to sniff them before attacking. But old habits do tend to die hard, so perhaps it would be best to not break those habits. They both walk down the hall of the dormitory, looking out the window to see some of the damage from the Battle against Vir Nominis Umbra still scars the Academy in different places.

Everyone is stood outside, ready to move.

It would be easier to say who is not going, Glynda is not present and neither is Hazel. For both of them are staying to help the Afflicted ones. The others not leaving include the Witches and the Undertaker, for they and Raven’s men are all staying as well. Raven on the other hand is coming with them this time, wanting to take her mind off the death of her fiancé. She stands there with her brother, alongside Kragen, the Architect, Ruby, Oscar, Blake, Winter, Nora, Ren, Penny and Cinder.

And...Ozpin.

He stands tall with his staff in his hand currently in cane form as they wait for Pyrrha and Jaune to arrive. They walk down the steps to arrive at their position, weapons sheathed properly, and Jaune looks right at the Knight of Vengeance…still can’t believe he is a Knight of Grimm…after everything he said about not knowing what they were?

It’s like lying is encoded in his D.N.A.

“I see we are all here.” Ozpin says as he looks at them all, Qrow with his hand on his hip, raising a brow at the couple.

“You have a problem showing up on time?” Qrow asks, also teasing due to the smirk on his face, until Yenna approaches from behind with her hand on her hip, copying him.

“D’you have a problem minding your own business?” She swiftly retorts, making Nora giggle at seeing Qrow getting totally kicked like that. Winter snorts as well at that, whereas Qrow just exhales with a defeated sigh.

“Guess not.” He admits, Yenna walks past Qrow and winks at the two of them, making Pyrrha blush. They might have wanted to do what Qrow was hinting at but unfortunately their duty got in the way. Yenna stands beside her husband and she smiles at him, he smiles back with a firm nod, Ruby glances at Kragen and cannot help but notice that some of his grey hairs are actually beginning to darken around her. Seems that her magic is starting to bring him back to his youth after all…it will be really weird to see what he looks like as a younger man opposed to being an old wise man.

Doubt his wisdom shall fade though.

“So then, what’s the plan, Professor?” Ren asks Ozpin, straight to the point just like Blake always has been.
“Thank you for asking, Lie Ren. We are fortunate to have a choice in how to proceed here.” He begins, getting a quizzical look from the Faunus Huntress.

“What do you mean?” She inquires.

“It means that we have two possible ways of reaching the Chapel of Dawn’s Vengeance. Thanks to the information provided by Mr Arc on your visit to your family, we have the chance of finding yet another Visionary Book. One that could help us understand where Arkhonex is hidden. Clearly Vyrryk Arc must be leading you to Arkhonex for some reason, Mr Arc.” Ozpin explains as he paces back and forth, using his cane as naturally as he always had…despite the fact that he clearly does not require it, being dead and all.

“Any idea on what Vyrryk hopes we’ll find?” Raven asks curiously, and Ozpin shrugs his shoulders.

“Uncertain, could be weapon against Salem…or hopefully against Vir Nominis Umbra. But at the end of the day he knew that we would have to find it, since the cloaking dome is still up due to our satellites…we will have to follow in his footsteps. Which…are linked to the Congregation of Dawn.” Ozpin explains.

“Who are they? I remember Kragen mentioned them in the past, but it’s been a while.” Oscar requests as he holds his arms behind his back, and Ozpin nods.

“I can elaborate on them more when we arrive, however what I can briefly introduce here…is that they were a Religious Cult. One we later on learned had started worshipping a False God – Vir Nominis Umbra.” Ozpin explains to them all, and Nora’s eyes widen with a gasp at hearing this.

“Wait…so even Arkhonex had problems with other people like we do with the Acolytes of Lien and Jacques?” Nora questions.

“Precisely, however Umbra’s methods change every single time. Even the Knights of Grimm are unique for this Universe, the bastard is creative.” Ozpin explains, the idea of that just makes them shudder on its own.

“What happened?” Jaune asks, Ozpin looks at him and he sighs, lowering his head…almost with shame.

“It would be better…if I show you.” He states with extreme honesty in his tones, and Pyrrha cannot help but hold his hand.

“So, what are our two options?” Winter asks Ozpin, he nods his head and he rests both hands atop the cane.

“The fastest course of action would be for us to teleport our way here. Luckily, we have three people capable of Teleportation. Myself, the Architect and Raven.” Ozpin explains to them; however, they all know what the threat stands with them if they choose to open a portal.

“But that will draw the Knights’ Bannermen in.” Qrow states, and Raven shudders after remembering what they did to some of her bandits a few months ago. They slaughtered them when she was following Yenna’s trail.

“We can take them, there’s more of us this time and we will be prepared.” Raven states, and Penny nods her head.

“I’m combat ready!” She cheers as she raises her fists and bounces on the spot, making Ruby smile to see her still being the adorable Penny Polendina she has always been. Even after learning that
Penny is actually the daughter of Admiral Darren Ortega.

“As adorable as that might be, the risk still stands.” Cinder says, not in the hopes of killing the mood but by staying on topic, her bare arms crossed. All of them are surprised but somewhat happy to see her finally shed that dreaded dress made by Salem…now she really does seem to feel like one of them.

“And the second option?” Ruby asks Ozpin.

Ozpin turns and points with his cane at the landed Prowler on the courtyard, its wings folded up but that can fold out with the flick of a switch. It can carry all of them and move fast. “We take the Prowler.” Ozpin answers.

“Less chance of Bannerman Detection…but it will take much longer to get there. And time is something we are running short on.” Kragen states, looking up at the sky where the Fractured Moon watches, getting worse and worse with every day. Soon…perhaps in a month or two it will be completely broken apart. And when it is destroyed, the Cataclysmic Event shall begin. Umbra will unleash everything he has upon Remnant until nothing is left standing at the end of it.

“Can we do both?” Jaune suggests getting a curious look from everyone.

“What do you propose?” Yenna asks him as she leans round her husband to see him, Jaune exhales and he steps forward.

“Can we take the Prowler and then one of you opens a Portal large enough to get the Prowler through? It’s stealth drive could help us land undetected…and it’s as we’ve been thinking. We don’t have time, once we find a clue we need to step on it immediately. We can’t keep coming back to Beacon for pit stops.” Jaune explains, and they all stand there as they curiously think if that is a viable plan. It makes sense, because he is right, they cannot waste any more time.

Yang, Weiss, Sun and Neptune have not got infinite seconds to live, even with the Witches medicating them with their potions and such. And with the moon in the shape it currently is in?

They have to spend every second wisely.

“Is that possible?” The Architect inquires, since his portals are designed by Technology, not Magic…they can only open up a certain width and height. But Ozpin and Raven on the other hand?

Raven looks at them and she exhales nervously. “I have been able to get entire carriages of loot from convoys through entire portals to minimise our chances of detection.” Raven gravely admits as she lowers her head, showing guilt as well for her crimes in the past. But none of them judge her, at the end of the day judgement is the last thing they should have on their minds.

“So, if Raven can open a portal that large, we can get there faster and maybe even undetected.” Jaune explains to them, and Ozpin scratches the back of his head.

“It will be risky; the Bannerman could still show up to investigate the disturbance. One of the Knights could be there.” He explains, and a few of them smirk.

“Not our first rodeo.” Qrow assures as he cracks his neck with a smirk on his face, crossing his arms, and Ozpin chuckles as he turns and paces ahead as he thinks. He exhales through his nostrils as he looks around, he then turns and looks to them all.

“You always have been a strategist, Mr Arc.” Ozpin compliments and Jaune chuckles, nodding his head…however he does not take that as a compliment. He is not a fool, and he knows that he is not a
man to be trusted right now. Not until he tells them more, about what drives him…and what he has
done. “This is what we will do, take the Prowler and Raven shall open a portal to get us there fast.
Be on guard, and not just for the Bannermen. The Congregation have been known to lay traps in
their own temples, ones only their people would see.” Ozpin explains, he walks ahead, but Ruby
stops him with her voice.

“Ohpin.” She speaks, and he stops, surprised by her not even mentioning the fact he is a Professor…

“Yes, Miss Rose?” He replies, seeing her stern glare pointed right at his brown eyes.

“We’ll fight with you…but I wanna make one thing clear. If you want us to trust you…then stop
lying. No more, because if you had told us about our real enemy all along, prepared us for the real
threat and maybe we’d have a chance.” Ruby demands, and Ozpin stares right back.

It saddens him.

He remembers the sweet girl that scoffed all those cookies down in ten seconds when they first
met…and now…she is cynical…and a killer. He looks to them all and they all share that same
distrust. “Would you believe me if I said I agree?” Ozpin inquires curiously, and Ruby narrows her
eyes.

She is not playing games.

He exhales again. “Okay…understood, Miss Rose. However, I should warn you, the things I have
done in my life…as a Knight of Vengeance…you may never be able to forgive me for them.” He
warns, and it sends chills up their spine.

But from what they have seen of the Knights, that is expected.

“Tell us the truth and we will trust you, deal?” Ruby asks him, extending her hand to shake his.
Ozpin looks at her hand, then at her face. He inhales through his nostrils then he nods, holding her
hand and shaking it.

“Deal.” He agrees, nodding.

Salem

The silence of the Sanctum is something Ruby could never get used to when she was captured here,
yet Salem seems she has grown so accustomed to it that she looks like she is inside of a normal house
somewhere.

There is no wind, and the Grimm that are born beneath her in the barren expanse of the Sanctum are
so far that their roars cannot be heard. She sits in her lonely throne with her finger tapping against the
surface of her dark table, listening to the rhythm forged from her long black nail attached to her
finger. There is a hint of loneliness in her red eyes as she sits there, she has always been used to her
minions returning with news, or in Watts’ case he would always stay around and provide reports.
Either from his Little Birds or from his lab, but out of all of them he was the only one that would be
happy to sit down and have a chat with Salem.

She misses that Doctor, because he was honest.
As she sighs, she hears the sound of footsteps behind her, she lifts her head slowly and slightly looks over her shoulder to the dark corner of which he emerges from. With his hands behind his back and what appears to be a slight skip in his step, Vir Nominis Umbra emerges with that ever-present grin on his face. “Poor, poor Salem…no Tyrian, no Watts, no Hazel…no Cinder…all alone.” Vir Nominis Umbra chuckles at her as he emerges, she snarls, and she clenches her hand into a fist.

“Come here to gloat, or to actually give me something to do?” Salem snarls, cringing at his presence until she snaps her gaze back at him, he presses his hand on his heart and his eyes widen.

“Oh…I’m sorry…what did you do before you lost them or when you were in charge?” Vir Nominis Umbra questions her curiously…in which her response is another glare, sitting back and sighing.

“You put me in this throne to control the Grimm, it was the promise you made me. But why do you keep me here like a prisoner?” Salem questions, Vir Nominis Umbra shrugs his shoulders.

“You asked me for power after what Ozpin did to you…I mean obviously you expected to rule the world, conquering Kingdom by Kingdom…but at the end of the day that is not your purpose.” He explains, his hands coming together once more as he looks at her, standing beside her thrown. She turns and stares right into his fake brown eyes, narrowing her eyelids.

“Then – may I ask – what is your purpose?” She grills, and Vir Nominis Umbra pauses, staring right back with intensity. But then he loosens up and he exhales, walking away from her and down to the other end of the table where he pulls one of the chairs out and he sits down, leaning back and resting his legs on the table, crossing them over. He looks at her with a smile, and she raises one of her eyebrows.

“Want something to eat? I want something to eat, one sec.” Vir Nominis Umbra says, clapping his hands together twice, then suddenly out of thin air, literally from a puff of smoke…a huge banquet of food forms before them both across the huge table. Hundreds of silver plates and cutlery with huge hunks of meat, vegetables and fruit with glasses of red and white whine scattered at all the desks. The aroma that this sets off admittedly even tempts Salem, whereas Vir Nominis Umbra reaches over, and he rips a Turkey Leg off and he bites into it. “Oh, wow…delicacy.” He chuckles as he speaks with an open mouth, making the decent mannered Salem actually roll her eyes.

“Why are you even eating? You don’t need to, do you?” Salem questions, when in his presence she becomes just as confused as Ruby or the other students would be at certain things that the ancients do. Vir Nominis Umbra looks at her and he wipes some of the grease from his artificial lips, shrugging again.

“No…doesn’t mean I can’t turn down tasty food.” Vir Nominis Umbra says with a smirk…if Pyrrha were here and saw all this food being wasted after he conjured it out of thin air like that…

The amount of innocent starving families…even children…that could eat that and survive…

And he just conjures it because he wanted to eat something tasty.

“But why?” Salem questions, and he smirks, holding his hands out.

“Why not?” He replies with a smile, until Salem has enough and gestures to him.

“Get your legs off my table, please.” She requests in a defeated, almost motherly tone. He raises a brow, before he slowly uncrosses them and takes them from the surface of her table and putting them back underneath the table where they should belong. “You also didn’t answer my question.” She adds.
“I know, and I will not. End of the day, it is none of your business.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains briefly as he stares straight at her, the Queen of the Grimm backs down, knowing it is not something she wants to challenge him on. She may be lethal and ruthless but is nothing against him…her powers were granted by his hand at the end of the day as well.

No master teaches their apprentice everything, lest the apprentice attempts to cut off loose ends.

Silence follows between the two of them, interrupted by the odd sound of Umbra eating some pieces of food. Salem’s eye gets caught by a piece of food on the table, she reaches over and sighs, picking up the piece of jerky and as she chews on the end, swallowing the ripped off chunk. “So…what next?” She asks him, and Vir Nominis Umbra glances over at her to answer her question.

“What have your little birds turned up?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks her, she stops, hearing herself asking Watts that in the back of her mind. She squeezes her eyes shut, pushing her grief back…since she did not even know he needed help. He died in an accident, from Fury exploding beneath him and his own madness took him over in the end.

Neptune might have gotten his revenge for his parents, but Salem lost a close friend.

Tis a matter of perspective.

Salem thinks back to what she has seen through the eyes of the Seers, all linked to the Grimm hivemind of everything that they have turned up from the remnants of Arkhonex. “They’ve been searching the city for days now and still have not turned up anything suspicious. I’ll give it to the man, Merlot knows how to hide.” Salem explains, sounding impressed, something shared by Vir Nominis Umbra.

“Indeed, I guess we should have expected this. He managed to disappear from Ozpin’s radar twice, who’s the say he cannot repeat it?” He chuckles, throwing the bone out the window for the Grimm below to feast on. Salem listens to the creatures that roar as they attack the remnants of the creature that he fed off, most people would be disturbed by the sounds that the Grimm make…

But Salem?

Not even a shudder, or a flinch. She just smiles to the sound of them, her children living and doing as they are designed. But when she looks to Vir Nominis Umbra again, her emotions return back to their negative selves, narrowing her eyes at him. But before Salem can speak again, the doors open up and they both turn to see the Seer approaching, whispering softly as it floats towards Salem’s side. It passes by Vir Nominis Umbra and he watches it with a sinister smirk, able to understand what it is saying just as Salem can.

The Seer hovers beside her, the glowing orange orb inside the black glass dome pulsating softly as it looks at her. She leans forward as she pushes some of her white spidery hair back where it should be. She looks at Umbra and she clasps her hands together, resting her elbows against the surface of her table. “We have detected a portal opening from Beacon and opening in the Mountains of Mistral.” Salem states as she stares at him.

Umbra smirks. “And so, it begins, I will send word to Vazquez immediately. He will arrive with some friends.” Vir Nominis Umbra assures with a cruel smirk on his face. The Seer remains at her side and then he stands up.

“Good…what are they looking for though? The only thing worth noting in those mountains…in that region at least…is the Chapel of Vengeance and Dawn.” Salem explains, confused of the value of an ancient Congregation of Dawn Church Building in the mountains. As Vir Nominis Umbra stands up
he stops, and he turns to Salem.

“The Son of Arc – he is searching for the secrets of Vyrryk, and to learn the truth of Crocea Mors.” Vir Nominis Umbra answers…he knows exactly what they are doing, meaning his eyes and ears have been watching them without anybody even realising.

Salem’s eyes widen. “If he unlocks that power…he will stand to be a major threat to us.” She states with a worried voice, but Umbra scoffs, shaking his head. “Do you not remember the power his great grandfather wielded with that blade?”

“Yes…and he fell all the same.” He states with a smirk, turning and walking towards the door, he is about to leave until he rests his palm against the wooden door. He looks over his shoulder at her and speaks with strong words. “We all have our duties.”

“Duty…you spoke of purpose…then what is mine?” She asks him curiously as he raises her brow. Vir Nominis Umbra turns to her with his arms behind his back.

“You are my Executioner, to bring the wrath of a clock ticking upon the world. A privilege for only the sacred few.” He states with a smile on his face, but Salem stares right into his eyes.

“When you were here last, you took my throne…why did you not reclaim it?” Salem asks him, and he chuckles.

“I may be a nasty prick, Salem…but do not doubt the fact I have some common decency in me. The first time was to remind you who is in charge now, however I would never take the throne of a Queen. For I am no King, no Emperor or Pharaoh. And besides…I never said you have lost power, because you have just as much as you did before. Perhaps more…when the time comes you will find your destiny…this I promise.” Vir Nominis Umbra assures with the sound of actual care in his voice as he looks back at her.

Salem stares at him then at her throne, feeling it around her. “So…I do not have to stay here anymore?” She asks him, and he smirks.

“No…now? You are the General of our army, riding in on the horse…” Then the roar of the Grimm Dragon suddenly roars from outside, landing outside and staring at her with a saddle loaded onto the back of its spine. She stands up and then she looks at him. “…Or the Dragon.” Vir Nominis Umbra concludes with a smirk, turning to walk away.

Salem pushes her hands against her throne and she clenches her hands into fists, as suddenly black and red energy surrounds the chairs…the bone that once forged them. They all shatter into a thousand pieces and the chunks of bone float over to her and forge a suit of armour around her body. Fusing together with sharp shoulder plates, vambraces…And a crest on her forehead that her black stone sends red energy into it, the armour encasing around her, summoned at the moment.

As Vir Nominis Umbra walks away, he softly speaks.

“Find you purpose, my dear…do not live without it.”

Jaune
The wind howls in the icy cold mountain range of Mistral, coated with snowy caps and the calls of Eagles echoing for miles, pruning their feathers with their beaks in the tall green trees. Adapted to survive in the icy cold climate the animals have grown to be large and have thick skin with lots of fat, fur or feathers. But so, have the Grimm, some have been known to be buried in the avalanches due to herds of Goliaths marching on the mountain passes. The Eagle Mother tends to her chicks, all of them desperately squeaking for the food she has collected, a dead rabbit she drops down for them to eat.

The large eagle walks along on its huge nest, resting down, looking out at the stunning view, as a bright red flash of light illuminates the face of the animal. Emerging from the portal is the Prowler, shooting at great speeds, over the treeline with a roar. Inside of the Stealth Craft, the team hold on tight, and Raven collapses with a groan, caught by the arms of her brother. “I’ve gotcha, sis!” Qrow assures as he helps her sit down, she wipes the sweat from her brow with a gasp, feeling her muscles aching constantly, like she has just had to lift a thousand tonne boulder with her bare hands.

“That was…a lot easier when I was younger.” She chuckles sarcastically as she lays there. Ruby looks at Raven and chuckles.

“Was it harder than childbirth?” She curiously asks, Raven’s eyes widen with horror as she gasps.

“By the gods…no…nothing hurts more than that.” She shudders at the memory of giving birth to baby Yang that day. Might have been one of the best days but also the most painful experience she has ever known, until the love of her life was snatched away by a monster right in front of her.

The Architect looks around at the mountains and he actually looks shocked as his plates over his visor rise up, Ren looks at him with concern. “Architect?” He asks him.

“I…didn’t expect there to be mountains…this was once…a field. Hills that would stretch out forever…this all happened in a thousand years?” He questions.

“Surely that can’t be possible…” Blake states with shock in her voice, staring at them, and Ozpin stands behind the two seats controlling the incredible aircraft. He exhales out his nose as he stares at a certain mountain, one that looks like the jaws of a crocodile, two jagged peaks rising through the clouds, and inside of it, nearly invisible to the eye…is a structure, one that has somehow survived all these years despite a mountain forming around it.

“It would be impossible, unless you had the Relic of Creation. It can create more than just life, it is responsible for creating everything physical you touch. And more.” Ozpin explains, pointing to the hidden Chapel inside of the mountains at the base, perfectly hidden away. Their eyes widen when they see it there.

“H-How the hell…did that building not collapse?” Jaune questions in awe.

“Because the Congregation must have taken high end Arkhoni Shield reinforcing technology, ones that are woven into the structure and the more stress atop it makes it stronger. Meaning that place is indestructible.” He explains.

“Unless the core of the shield shuts off.” Kragen adds, and they all shudder.

“Unless the core shuts off.” Ozpin agrees with a sigh, he gently grasps the back of the Architect’s chair and he leans down to where his ear would be. “Take us in, through the front.” Ozpin says, and he nods, flying towards the Chapel of Vengeance and Dawn. The Prowler soars across the mountains, through the clouds and cutting through the air with its knife-like wings.
It approaches the flattest area of which the mountain has on that level, decelerating and exiting its normal flight mode and into Vertical Landing and Take-Off. The thrusters help guide it towards the ground, landing gear folding out from underneath the body and the wings, setting down just around the corner of the Chapel. The rear ramp door folds out and Ruby is the first to emerge from the vessel with Jaune at her side, feeling the ice-cold weather against their skin. Foggy breath leaving their breath.

Nora shivers, rubbing her shoulders as she huddles closely to Ren. “Brr…should’ve brought something fluffy, Renny.” She softly coos, and he smiles.

“Want me to hug you close?” He asks her, she beams at him and he rolls his eyes with a smile, wrapping his arms round her waist and kissing her neck lovingly.

“Ooh…Wasn’t expecting that.” She whispers to him as she looks up at him.

“Couldn’t resist.” Ren admits with the shrug of his shoulders.

“Come now, we need to get inside of this place before the Knights’ Bannermen find us.” Ozpin ushers as he holds his cane in his hand, being the first to walk up the rocks. Ruby glances at Oscar and they both sigh, neither sure if they really can trust him or not. A lie is easier to craft and hold onto than the truth. They all follow him towards the mountain pass which leads to the Chapel.

Perfectly left behind, perhaps the sinister Congregation did have some hopes for people to find them here. As they make their way up, Cinder moves up the steps of stone, noticing Kragen catching up to her shoulder, looking at her. She looks at him and he chuckles, getting her attention. “What’s up?” She softly asks him.

“It still gets me…I never would have thought you were related to Kassius when we first met.” He states, making her smile gently as she walks alongside him.

“He was smart, funny thing eye colour. All it takes some time.” Cinder states as she hops across a gap in the pass, everyone else is smart enough to do so as well, tripping there would be a very bad way…and long way…to die. Stones fall however, taking minutes before they actually hit something on the way down.

“Strange though, Kassius has brown hair and you have black. Which side do you favour? Mother or Father?” He asks her.

“Mother, I think Merlot had brown hair once.” Cinder answers, and Kragen nods his head, learning so much with her.

“Interesting…do you remember much of her? Your mother?” He inquires, and Cinder thinks back to their childhood.

“Yeah…not many years though. I remember she was beautiful though.” Cinder admits, Kragen looks at her and he can see that she definitely has picked up after her mother.

“Well, I can definitely tell now you’ve picked her traits up.” Kragen states, Cinder blushes immediately as she looks away, making him chuckle at how much she has changed in comparison to when they were enemies five years ago. “It’s good to see you talking to people more, you were always very quiet after the Volcanic Chain Isles.” He states.

“Well…I’ve made many bad deeds against these people.” Kragen states.

“These People are you family now, whether you like it or not.” He chuckles, and Cinder nods her
“I know…I just hope everyone can forgive me for what I did. Reg did…he didn’t have to take me in, but he did.” Cinder explains, never forgetting the old Farmer that saved her after she thought she killed Kassius in the Emerald Forest five years prior.

“And that changed your way of looking at things?” Kragen asks.

“That and learning my brother was alive…yeah.” Cinder answers.

“Well, I’m glad you did. We’re going to need you.” He states as he walks with her.

“I’m not like Jaune, or Pyrrha or Ruby or Oscar. I don’t have some mystical gift like they do, I’m just a Maiden.” Cinder explains, making him laugh, walking backwards and holding his arms out.

“And I am just an old git!” He laughs, and she shakes her head with a smile.

“You know what I mean.” She says.

“I do…but they have been kept alive this long for a reason, hell Pyrrha came back.” Kragen states.

“But why?” She asks with confusion, and Kragen smiles.

“I don’t know.” He says. “Strange isn’t it, I’m a couple thousand years old and I have no idea.” He says with a laugh in his voice.

“That’s all everything tells us – Not a clue – so how are we meant to beat Umbra if we don’t even know where the chinks in the armour are?” She asks him.

“I ask myself that all the time, but I don’t think we are supposed to just be told that…we must find it. Remember what we are fighting for.” Kragen explains, then he stops with her as they stand at the edge of the stunning Mountain Pass, mountains stretching out for miles…and perhaps all formed from the Relic of Creation. “I’m not fighting so then some politicians can decide what the next war shall be.” He states, and Cinder raises a brow.

“Then what are you fighting for?” Cinder asks him.

“The light, Cinder.” He answers, hardening his stare. “The Darkness has always been our enemy, we have feared it ever since we are children…and now it seeks to kill us. I believe…that is what Vir Nominis Umbra is.” Kragen explains.

“But the sun always falls.” Cinder states, and Kragen smiles.

“The enemy will always find us…our job is to make sure we fight hard, to not give into that fear. We will not find joy in this war of ours…but we can give people a chance. A chance to right the wrongs they have made in their lives and atone.” Kragen explains, and Cinder ponders as she stands there, her long black hair dancing in the wind.

“Like I did…because of Reg and Kassius.” She says. “Never too late to come back.”

“Maybe we don’t need to understand any more than that…maybe that’s all we need.” Kragen says with a supportive smile and Cinder nods.

“Yeah…maybe it’s enough.” She agrees, smiling back to the man and they both catch up to the others about to reach the front door of the Chapel.
Ozpin approaches the doors before his very eyes, ones that have stayed closed for thousands of years, ever since the fall of Arkhonex. Ruby jumps up the rocks with Winter behind her, staring at the door. “Great…another door. Kragen, you think what you did on that door at the Library will work?” Winter asks him, remembering their adventure into Vacuo to find that Visionary Book hidden there…the one Ozpin burned.

“No, that won’t work. The Silver Eyed Warriors were a sworn enemy of the Congregation of Dawn, Vir Nominis Umbra demanded them to slaughter every single one. It is why there are few of them left, so many bloodlines were severed by the Congregation and their Culling.” Ozpin explains, and Ruby looks down at the floor sadly. Kragen sighs as he taps his Isomacium Cane against the ground with both hands.

“I’ve lost many good friends because of the Congregation and their beliefs.” Kragen says with a sombre tone, one lightened by his beautiful wife who presses her hand on his shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze.

“So…how do we get inside? Just break the door down?” Qrow asks Ozpin with the shrug of his shoulders, expecting that to be a stupid idea. But Ozpin turns to him with a pretty sarcastic tone of voice on.

“Well…Yes.” Ozpin answers, suddenly spiralling his cane through his fingers, the Relic of Knowledge glowing bright green and forming his staff with chunks of metal from the ground beneath them, forming the cogs. He slams the head of the staff, stabbing it more like, and a powerful pulse of magical energy explodes into the stone architecture. The pulse cracks the stone like heat inside of cold glass or rock, causing it to break. The door shatters, throwing chunks of rubble inside of the building, Ozpin rises back up and shrinks the staff back down into its cane form, his hands atop it as he calmly enters.

“Well…that was totally discrete.” Ruby sarcastically says, getting a response from Ozpin inside.

“Like your infiltration on Torchwick’s hideout at Mountain Glenn?” Ozpin wonders, making Jaune snort. Ruby raises a brow and gasps as she follows the Professor.

“The ground collapsed beneath me!” She defends, walking inside, and Oscar looks confused.

“Huh?” Oscar asks.

“Basically, Team R.W.B.Y failed a mission because they were too noisy.” Qrow adds, unable to resist, getting a slap on the back of the head from Winter. “Ow!”

Blake, being as defensive as ever for her team, plants her hands on her hips and shakes her head around, sassily as she speaks. “Ex-cuse me, we did not fail. We saved Vale.” Blake reminds as they all start to enter, bickering as always…even with the fate of the universe at stake. Oscar chuckles as he walks inside with them.

“I’m so glad I met you guys.” He says with a smile, looking at Penny.

“It has been nice to get to know you all as well.” She sweetly says as she follows them as well, walking inside. The interior of the Chapel…is unlike any Chapel they have ever seen before, it is more like a Tomb. Statues constructed inside a long wide hallway of stone, webs everywhere from where spiders have made their home and the scuttling of gods know how many critters underneath them right now. Raven and Yenna walk side by side as they examine every inch of this place.

“Y’know…you’d think the Arkhoni would have places that didn’t look so…morbid.” Raven
comments as she runs her finger across a dusty stone brick, until her hand gets slapped by the Architect’s.

“They stole my designs, thank you very much.” The Architect informs, probably smirking inside that metal head of his since he made Raven Branwen jump out of her skin. Yenna looks at Raven, who has recoiled with bulging red eyes, looking over at Yenna who chuckles at her.

“Come on, Branwen. Let’s not get too far behind.” Yenna says, not realising she has just stepped on something. The plate of stone beneath her foot suddenly sinks and her violet eyes widen when she hears something mechanical moving. She rolls out of the way just in time, as a huge metal spike abruptly erupts from the shifting plates of stone, almost impaling her. She glares at it with gritted teeth and burning purple flames around her large eyes. Then the giant spike slowly recedes back under the floor.

Everyone shivers from the cold of the mountains, and from the fear of these traps being everywhere. “Alright everyone, keep your eyes open. These traps could be anywhere.” Qrow advises as he draws his sword, just in case he needs to use it against traps.

Because the whole time they have been here the Knights Bannermen have not even attacked… meaning…something is off.

“I don’t like this.” Cinder softly says as she walks ahead of Team J.N.P.R, they all look at her with narrowed eyes.

“What?” Jaune asks her.

“The Knights Bannermen would have shown up by now…what’s keeping them?” Cinder questions, and Nora shrugs.

“Maybe they showed up where the portal opened, a few miles away.” Nora suggests, but Pyrrha, Jaune and Cinder both know the truth.

“He’s not that stupid.” Pyrrha states from experience, walking with Miló and Akoúo drawn and at the ready, every single step that she takes echoes through the huge temple that they stand within. Kragen and the Architect activate their eyes, either the Architect’s flashlight or Kragen’s silver light he can call upon. An ability Ruby has not learned how to master as of yet. As they keep moving that come across one more door, one that does not require a certain key to get in.

Or a pulse of magic to shatter.

“We can open this one, Qrow give me a hand!” The Architect calls, and Qrow gladly obliges, walking over and grabbing onto the door. They both pull onto the edge of which they could actually fit their fingers into. Straining as they pull with either muscle of metal, eventually the door’s mechanism shifts and rolls, pulling the door out of their way and into the wall. The Architect and Qrow both gasp…but with distrust.

“The Book…” Qrow stammers with disbelief.

“What?” Jaune questions as he walks forward, seeing the pedestal in the centre of the room, practically hanging out there. He looks at Pyrrha and she looks just as worried as him. But he can hear the whispers, it is not a hallucination of one…it is calling out to him. “How come…it’s so close to the entrance?” Jaune questions.

“This is concerning…everyone be ready for anything.” Ozpin advises as Jaune approaches the book. He holds his hand up and the book opens up, the many pages flicking open and landing on the print
for him to see the memories. Hesitantly he looks at his loving girlfriend and his team.

“Be careful.” Pyrrha begs him.

“Always.” Jaune assures, slowly pressing his hand against it.

Suddenly from above, Kannix lands down from above and he cracks the ground with his heavy boots, instantly slashing his blade directly at Kragen who stops it with his cane, falling to the ground as he holds him back, staring at his mad silver eyes. “Kragen!” Ruby screams, only for Neo to kick her right in the jaw, slamming her against the ground, drawing her umbrella blade, spinning it through her fingers with a furious and vengeful scowl.

“Jaune!” Pyrrha screams with terror as he looks forward to see Fear standing right behind the book with a smirk on his face.

“Sweet Dreams.” Fear whispers as he waves goodbye.

“No!” Jaune yells, until the book blasts the magical energy into his body that encases him in the protective field of magical energy…sending him into the memory.

Whilst everyone else gets ambushed by the enemy.

It was another trap.
The echoes of time race through his mind as he witnesses the memories of his ancestor, the Chapel shattering and fading away from around him to construct his surroundings of his grandfather. A small bedroom inside of his home, but not the building of which that he lives personally...because he practically never goes there unless his father calls him. His young body, fresh with only a few small scars from blades he has battled against his foes in the past. Mostly Bandits that have tried to rob or kill him when defending the odd noble attempting to travel the old lands of the Arkhoni Empire.

However, the freshest of these scars was not given by a bandit, something else...something far more sinister indeed. With a bed sheet covering his unclothed body, the love of his life sleeps up against him with her arm around him. He opens his eyes slowly as the sunlight shines through the window and across the fair skin. The fireplace by the bed that they have shared has gone out, smoke rising up into the sky from the walled fortress of the Arc Family. Claudia softly moans as she starts to awaken too, her large closed eyes slowly beginning to open as she looks at him with a smile. She caresses his cheek gently with a little giggle in her pleasant voice. “Morning, you…” She whispers, crawling up to kiss him on the lips, in which he holds her close, feeling her warmth against his own.

Their kiss lasts a few seconds before they break, but staying close together, breathing into each other's mouths. “Hey you…” He replies as he rummages his hand in her thick brown hair. She strokes her other hand around his chest, delicate digits caressing each section of his abs.

“You always seem to get better with every night, y’know.” She says to him with a smile, huddled up close to him, gazing lovingly into his eyes.

“Well…I always aim to please.” He assures before he kisses her again, and she kisses him back, moaning into one another. But as they share their love...the voice of his father echoes into his mind, how the Dynasty-Driven Man is determined to make sure that he marries someone from another power family to increase their strength. He knows as well that Claudia could be executed if he does not do as his cruel father says. They hold one another close, heartbeats practically joined in unison.

She sighs, knowing that is why he seems so lethargic...her energy has never stifled him, so it must be his father on his mind. “What are we doing, Claudia?” He asks her softly, and she looks at him with a shameful smile...not of him but of herself.

“I’m sorry…” She apologises, but then he shakes his head.

“You have got absolutely nothing to apologise for...we should have run away when we could’ve.” He says to her, and she giggles.

“And what? Romantically live in a collage on the edge of land where nobody could find us? Join up with the City of Ephai to escape the cruelty of Arkhonex?” She asks him curiously as she runs her finger around his chest as she looks in his eyes, feeling his hand stroking her back.

“I wouldn’t be against it…” He admits, jolting when she suddenly presses her hands against his chest and pushes him down, sitting atop him with the sheets still over their naked bodies. She leans down towards him, still with her hand stroking his cheek and chin.
“Now you listen to me…I won’t endanger your life for what I want, okay? I will always love you…you know that…but I also know that we cannot escape your father. Ezekiel would hunt us down if we ran and he would find us…probably butcher me or turn me into a voiceless Slave like he did to my sister.” Claudia explains, showing the heartbreaking truth to what loving the wrong person can do to someone…to a woman specifically. “And I know that…if I died because of our love…you would do something stupid.” Claudia states and he looks away, not wanting to imagine her death on his conscience, until she makes him look at her again.

She leans down to him and moves her hand up into his, holding him tight as she gazes at him. “I thought about it…and I wanna do it.” She says to him, and he raises a brow.

“What?” He asks her.

“Marry her…have a kid with her…maybe even fall in love with her…” She says, stammering when she thinks of that possibility…of losing the man she loves so much. He reaches up to her cheek and caresses her smooth face.

“I won’t…it doesn’t matter who he pairs me with, I will _always_ love you.” He promises with a smile, and she smiles back, holding onto his hand lovingly.

“And what if…Yvette falls for you?” She asks him nervously, he shakes his head.

“It will not matter.” He promises.

“Even if she is more beautiful than me?” She asks him.

“As if there is a woman on the planet more beautiful than you.” He scoffs, and she laughs with a beautiful giggle, pressing her head down into the pillow by his head. She kisses his neck affectionately. Still atop him as she rises back up.

“Sweet-talker…” She whispers, pulling him up so then they are on the same level.

“Been told I’m good at that.” He whispers back as he kisses her, wrapping one arm around her back as he lifts her up then throws her down onto the bed with him atop. She gasps as she holds on tight…but before they can even begin…they hear a heavy pounding knock on the door. They both sigh with disappointment, Vyrryk looks back and calls. “Yes?” He groans, hearing the guard respond outside.

“Sir, the Varr Skaal family have arrived. Your father wants you to be by his side for when they enter.” The guard states, he squeezes his eyes shut and sighs, looking at the love of his life in his arms. She smiles and nods her head, completely supportive of him no matter what…even if it means helping him prepare for a marriage she is not the bridge to. He nods his head, looking back to the locked door.

“Okay…tell him I will be there in a few minutes.” Vyrryk states to the guard and the guard pounds his foot as a positive response, marching off. He sighs, looking back to the woman he wishes to marry due to love, and he smiles awkwardly. “I’m sorry…I really am.” He apologises, but she stops his lips with her finger.

“Stop apologising…you know I will always support you…my love.” She says to him in a soft-spoken voice. “Anyway, you have a mission today, don’t you?” She asks him curiously, he continues to caress her cheek with his thumb as he nods.

“Yeah…got to go and have a chat with one of the Fathers of the Congregation of Dawn about some of their actions. Hopefully negotiations will go well.” He says with a smile and she smiles back,
pulling herself up to kiss him, hooking her arm round his neck and shoulders, and when they break she exhales.

“Well…at least I got have sex with you one more time before you get burned.” She jokes, and he scoffs, rolling his eyes as he rises up from her, throwing his legs off the bed and standing up.

“At least you did, if you want I’ll let you throw the torch.” He jokes with a smile, she shakes her head as she gets up from the bed as well, both of then comfortable around each other to walk completely naked to their clothes on the floor. He picks up his cloth shirt and hide trousers and he pulls them on, tying them together on his body, with his armour in the corner. She crouches down to her brown clothes on the floor, picking the corset up and she stands in front of her grimy mirror.

“Please…too boring for my tastes. I’d rather the methods where I get to see all of you, so I get to do what I like with you.” She giggles with a smile, making him chuckle.

He reaches down to his armour and he picks it up. “Hey…in all seriousness though…the idea of running away…would you want to start up your own Faction? Have a fortress somewhere beyond the walls of the city?” He asks her curiously, and she pauses, looking back at him with surprised eyes as she struggles to tie her corset up herself. He walks over, and he helps, gently doing so, so then she does not bust a rib in the process. Luckily unlike the dresses most Ladies need to wear in rich families, it is not very tight and does not need to show off how pretty they are underneath. It is simple protection from the elements with some padding to protect her from the horses.

Or worse.

He also picks her brush up and starts to brush her hair thoroughly since she trusts him to do so. She looks at him in the reflection, still pondering on his question. “I dunno…I mean I’d like to but…I don’t know if I would be capable of running a place like that.” She explains, and he chuckles.

“You wouldn’t run it alone, you’d have me, and we’d have plenty of advisers by our side.” Vyrryk explains, and she smiles, looking back at him with a smile.

“We’d be Barons…” He softly smiles as she caresses his cheek.

“My Baroness.” He jokingly bows, getting a playful slap on the chest.

“Oh stop.” She giggles, making him chuckle and smile just to hear her happy. “But…maybe yeah…just doubt we would be able to start anything like that. Your father would never let us get close to defying him.” She explains with a heavily disappointed sigh, one he copies.

“I know.” He says, finishing up with her brown hair, she turns and playfully curtsies in her worn and torn clothes that she uses to clean and tend to horses in. “Like a Princess.” He comments, making her blush, before being her constant comedic self.

“Oh, Prince Vyrryk! Do save me from thou foul drink thus fool had giveth me!” She plays as she theatrically faints into his arms, hanging her head over the edge of his arm. He chuckles as he looks at her, seeing her still acting like the young girl he fell in love with all those years ago, someone who just treated him as a person.

Ironic…considering how his ancestor did the same for a certain Nikos Girl.

She looks at him with a smile before standing back up and she pats his shoulder before kissing him lovingly. “Go on…I’ll go tend to your future wife’s horse.” She jokes, and he presses his tongue against the inside of his own cheek, raising a brow.
“Wow…really? Gonna pull that one on me?” He asks her.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” She adorably apologises as she walks over to the door and pushes it open, looking around as she walks towards the stables. Vyrryk walks outside with his hand shielding the blistering sun from harming his blue eyes. He walks across the Hold towards the main building where his father always stands, his eyes constantly patrolling on his son with stern judgement. Vyrryk returns the same glare, walking up the steps towards him as he holds his sword in his hands, pressing it downwards against the ground and returning back to his stoic pose in his Knight Armour.

With the Varr Skaal about to enter, Ezekiel glances at him to speak. “I thought I told you to leave the Stable Girl behind.” He states.

“And I thought I told you to go fu-”

“Boy, I am warning you. I will not allow you to jeopardise this potential marriage, Yvette Varr Skaal is a better woman than you could possibly deserve. Be grateful.” He snarls, but Vyrryk narrows his blue eyes at him with resentment, the two of them have never seen eye-to-eye because of how different they are to each other.

“I am happy with Claudia.” He states.

“I don’t give a damn, you will never support your family name by marrying a stable girl of a pathetic name. She is just a peasant, nothing more.” He snarls, and Vyrryk clenches his hand into a fist as he glares at him. Then as he turns he sees another Knight walking over with his hand clutching a large Warhammer, smirking as he towers above him.

“Vyrryk.” He greets with a deeper voice, yet Vyrryk carries that hatred in his eyes continuously.

“Constantine.” Vyrryk replies, and Constantine scoffs at him as he looks to his father beside him.

“Seems my brother is a disappointment yet again, father?” Always grovelling to Ezekiel, a knight that has no care whatsoever, only seeks the admiration of his father. But Vyrryk has no love for him as he shows none to his father, because he is a bully…and has caught him watching the woman he loves with disturbing levels of concentration. Ezekiel does not even look at his eldest son, just staring ahead. “You know you should really listen to father, that Stable Girl might be pretty but so are many poisonous flowers. She could be a witch, should burn her at the stake.” He states, clearly trying to rile his younger brother up.

And it works, as he suddenly draws his sword and presses it to his brother’s throat, and he gasps with fear, backing up from Vyrryk who glares into his eyes. “Shut. Up. Because I won’t hesitate in cutting you open.” He warns, and Constantine whimpers as he stares to his father.

“Father? He attacked me!” He cries out pathetically, whilst Ezekiel just stares ahead.

Disappointed his eldest is a pathetic coward.

Disappointed his youngest does not follow his commands.

“Father!” Constantine screams, only to be met with the backhand of his father, smacking him across the face so hard it nearly knocks him on the ground. Ezekiel stares at him with glaring blue eyes as Vyrryk lowers his blade and presses it against the damp wood – showing no smugness at all, or even feeling the urge.

“Enough! I will not let the two of you ruin this! You lost your chance for this day when you decided to rape that prostitute and giving yourself an infection. I should have had you killed for that crime.”
Ezekiel snarls, and Constantine whimpers on the ground, then he picks up his hammer and throws it onto his chest, causing him to yelp. “Now get up.” He growls with gritted teeth, and Constantine slowly rises back up with pathetic tears in his eyes.

Kept alive only because he is his son, not because he loves him and forgives him…no…his crime is unforgivable in the eyes of the Arcs. No matter how selfish Ezekiel may be, he has his standards.

He will never rape and would disown any son who did commit the horrific crime.

And he would never betray his own family.

To him family means everything, but not through love…by status.

Constantine rises up, and somehow his shorter brother looks bigger than he does as he shrivels up beside his father. With the mother nowhere to be seen, Jaune watching can clearly tell that his ancient Grandmother must have passed away, and due to the scorch marks on the ground inside of the fortress…it looks like there was a plague. One Claudia was lucky enough to survive along with most of the people here, however it is likely that it was not so lucky for the others.

Then…

Finally…

The Gates open, and the horses ride inside with a few carriages as well, and Vyrryk raises a brow when he sees who the Varr Skaal are, since he has never met them before. They are all Faunus, a Tribe from the island of Menagerie…or at least the Island that would become Menagerie in the future. The leader of them is a Middle-Aged Tiger Faunus, known as O’Donna with her husband at her side, a large Bull Faunus with his hands on the reigns. She is a very good-looking woman with amber eyes and a very delicate way of moving.

The Varr Skaal are treated as Royalty for the Faunus on Menagerie, a Queen and King rule together, her husband Dakken controls their military whereas she handles the financial and societal elements of the Varr Skaal. And sat inside of the carriage is the woman he is meant to marry, a very…very…beautiful young Faunus Woman with long platinum blonde hair with Caucasian Feline ears protruding from out the top. Like her mother she wears a dress, once with a corset sewn tight to show how well endowed she is with her shapely figure and her stunning face.

Vyrryk looks at Claudia who waits at the stables…and somehow in comparison she is still nothing in comparison to the beauty of his true love. But…even she seems to agree with him…there are worse women to be forced into marriage with. The horses meet with the Stable Hands, and Claudia strokes the mane of one of the beautiful animals. She looks ahead to see the carriage moving into the centre of the market of Sunhelm Watch.

O’Donna jumps of the carriage with her husband doing the same, walking ahead of her with a smile on his face and a booming laugh whilst his wife helps her daughter out from the carriage. “Ezekiel! My friend, how it has been a long time.” He chuckles as he holds his arms out to him, and Ezekiel smiles to him.

“Dakken Varr Skaal, how long has it been?” He asks him as he walks down the steps, his sons following him, Vyrryk remaining as proper as he always has. But Constantine being as shrivelled and pathetic as ever.

“Hmm…I think it is five years today, isn’t it? Battle at the Sky Haven during the Bloody Epoch?” He asks, naming places and battles that Jaune and the others would have no knowledge of, for the
records of the ancients have been lost after the destruction of Arkhonex. Ezekiel nods his head as he remembers that battle well, and since it only really came to an end recently, it could be the reason behind the spread of the plague that killed so many.

Not Horridus Morbus, but there are still other diseases outside of the one that seems to turn people into Grimm Thralls.

“Yes, hard fight if my memory serves me well.” Ezekiel remarks, and Dakken chuckles.

“Indeed, it was, a good one though. Collected my fair share of scars that day.” He states.

“Yes, you did, surprised you did not fall that day from the amount of spears that hit you.” Ezekiel chuckles, creating the same reaction from his Faunus friend. He rolls his shoulder with a grunt before rubbing that same spot.

“Still get some aching pains from the one that landed in my back.” He chuckles as he looks at him, then looking past him to see Constantine and Vyrryk Arc behind him, his eyes firstly falling to the youngest brother. Causing the older brother to grit his teeth discretely and glare at his brother.

“Ah, you must be Vyrryk Arc. A shame you can’t be here for the whole day.” He says with a saddened voice, at least they have been informed that he has a mission today, but as long as they are informed it is not seen as poor duty of the son. Something else that Constantine has done, disappearing from a greeting to find the nearest whorehouse to buy some girls with, until the one time he got too drunk.

Committed an unforgivable crime and was permanently infected from it.

Vyrryk extends his hand and shakes the much larger hand of Dakken’s. “A deep regret, sir… however the Congregation of Dawn have been a bit of problem these days as you may have noticed. Hopefully negotiations will go well, and they will stay off Arkhoni owned land.” Vyrryk explains to them, O’Donna approaches and she smiles, hearing that someone is actually looking into the Fanatics and their brutal actions.

“What an honourable mission, son…I’ve seen too many good people be tortured or killed for simply putting their faith in something different to their own.” O’Donna says with a smile, and Vyrryk looks at their daughter…now he actually has a better look at her. Constantine is also enraptured by her beauty, with almost glowing platinum blonde hair and stunningly large amber eyes. Her skin is perfect as well, not a blemish on her with a dress that is almost white, with golden scales engraved into it in places. She also wears what appear to be crystalline heels as well.

A very…very beautiful young woman.

He bows his head respectfully to her, showing the proper mannerisms of a Knight, keeping his sword still and his heart beating normally. Claudia watches from the stables as she tends to the horses. “Miss Varr Skaal.” He greets respectfully, and she nervously smiles to him, curtseying him.

“Ser Vyrryk Arc.” She replies, even her voice is tender and sweet, just like Claudia’s. It hurts because despite how loyal he is to Claudia, part of him feels bad for not wanting to be with such a stunning woman.

“Vyrryk Arc, this is my daughter – Yvette Varr Skaal. She has agreed to the bonds of marriage with you, and she will be staying here for this week for you to decide.” O’Donna explains to him, surprising the Arc son to hear that they are actually giving him a choice in the matter, they are better parents than Ezekiel is…and from the look both of them give his father it seems they both agree on
“It is your choice as well, after all.” Dakken states with a smile.

“Thank you, Mrs Varr Skaal...when I return from my mission we will be sure to talk on this matter.” He assures, and Ezekiel gives him a glance, one that clearly states that he is demanding that he just marries her and puts a child in her.

“You are an honourable man, Vyrryk. If you do choose my daughter...I would be proud to marry my daughter off to someone like you.” O'Donna kindly speaks, before glaring at Ezekiel and narrowing her eyes. “Someone honourable.”

Ezekiel does not show it, but he is furious, feeling like his son is getting the glory when he is not...

Vyrryk turns when he hears one of his Knights approaching him. “Ser, it’s time.” He says to him, and Vyrryk nods to him.

“Well, as much as I would love to stay and get to know you.” Vyrryk says as he looks at the young and nervous Yvette, she smiles softly at him. “I’m afraid I have some pesky Fanatics to chat with.” He tells them, creating a wave of laughter at his humour, everyone steps aside and lets him move out with his men. Yvette watches him go as he nods to Claudia, and she nods right back.

His Knight Partner vaults up onto the saddle of the horse and he does the same, detaching his sword and attaching it to the clip on the saddle. He exhales with relief, free from the nerve-racking experience of meeting new people...including a woman he is supposed to marry. His Knight friend looks at him and he chuckles. “For an arranged marriage ser? You’re damn lucky.”

They both chuckle at that, since Yvette truly is a stunning woman to look at and even to listen to. “C’mon, let’s get to the Dauntless.” He states, as he flicks the reigns on the horse. “Yah!” He exclaims and the Horse brays, riding off with his partner towards the City of Arkhonex, specifically to the docks. The Horses run fast, the rhythmic beat of their hooves is kike music to their ears as they keep moving. Passing by many signs or notice boards of missing people, the Grimm have claimed many souls in the wildlands.

However, with them under their control they are no real threat.

For now.

The gates from the large open expanse of field opens up, since Arkhonex is made up of multiple walled off districts, some contain cities and others contain large amounts of Farmland. Unlike Ephai which was once a completely open city, one that seems extremely different in fact to what Arkhonex was like. Sapphire blue skies stretch out over their heads with the scent of sunflowers in the air, poison to those with hay fever. The two knights pass into the city and the air thickens with smog from the many factories working hard around them, with ships docking on the oily oceans.

As they ride through an advanced dust powered aircraft roars overhead, no matter how many times the heroes look back at Arkhonex they never seem to get used to the strange combination of times. From Medieval Castles to Victorian Cities combined with Atlesian or Valerian architecture and technology...or perhaps beyond that level. As they ride through they finally come across the Harbour...

One very similar to what Oscar went to.

He slows his horse down and he hops off, holding the reigns as he walks the horse towards one of the ships – the Dauntless. But then he stops with a smile as he turns to see a young woman with red
hair and silver eyes speaking with some customers at her Blacksmith’s Forge. Her father working on the forge whilst she just sells the blades to people, since she has always been more of a people person. He walks towards her and he holds his horse at his side. “Hey Cynthia!” He calls, and she gasps, turning to see him.

This must have been before Oscar arrived here because she does not seem so crazy about someone in her life.

Especially after he lied to her about sleeping with her with that potion he gave her…thanks to Umbra.

“Vyrryk!” She cheers, running over to him and wrapping her arms around him. He jolts from the impact, nearly falling over. “I missed you!” She squeaks with happiness, she has always been one to act younger than her age after all.

“Yeah sorry I haven’t been around for a while…complicated stuff happening back home.” He tells her, she raises her brow curiously.

“What do you mean?” She asks him.

“Arranged marriages…” He sighs, and she covers her mouth with shock, she clearly knows a fair bit about him.

“What about Claudia?” She inquires in a worried voice, he sighs and shakes his head.

“We’re figuring it out…I love her, but my father wants nothing to do with her.” He states, Cynthia scoffs.

“It’s none of his business.” She states as she shakes her head.

“I wish he saw it that way, bastard is only interested in fulfilling his Dynasty.” Vyrryk says to her, quoting his father with his fingers like they are quotation marks.

“Well…if you ever need a better blade or to fix the one you have then our store is always open.” Cynthia assures with a smile, as she turns and walks back to her store to speak with a new customer that has just arrived. “Hello! And Welcome to the Cynthia’s Workshop!” She cheers, and he sighs, the Knight walks up to him as he looks at the young woman selling her father’s things.

“She’s a Nikos, isn’t she?” He asks Vyrryk.

“Yeah, her family own this District. Not a Fortress like the Arcs…more like the Schnees y’know?” He explains to the Knight and he nods his head.

“Makes sense, they are the powerhouses in Arkhonex.” He states, turning with his horse to approach the Dauntless behind them. Vyrryk does the same as he walks away from Cynthia’s workshop and towards the ship…however the cargo bay is closed, meaning they cannot enter. Vyrryk rolls his eyes before he yells.

“Wymerus! You’re not blackout drunk, again are you?” He calls, in return hearing a booming laugh from above, seeing him walking to the edge of the ship.

“Ha-Ha! Vyrryk! Good to finally see you!” He cheers as he vaults over the edge and drops down, landing down at the bottom with a boom, his armour softening the fall. He extends his hand with his Mace on his back to shake Vyrryk’s hand.
“Been to long, old friend.” Vyrryk chuckles as he pats his armoured back with his gauntlet during the hug.

As Jaune watches the memories…

It hits him.

Ozpin and his ancestor were once old friends.

And he was not consumed by revenge here for what happened to his family thanks to Axzura… meaning this could have been mere days before it all went wrong. Before the Volcanic Chain Islands…before Vir Nominis Umbra.

Before the Knights of Grimm.

The younger Ozpin – once known as Wymerus Ozymandius – nods to his best friend. “No matter how long we spend apart you are still a dapper looking guy, aren’t you?” He laughs as he pats the side of his face as a friend would.

“Seems to be going around lately, with the arranged marriage and all that shit.” Vyrryk sighs and Wymerus raises a brow at him.

“Oof, had a feeling it’d be rough. How’s Claudia handling that?” Wymerus inquires curiously as he walks over to the hull of his ship, the same one that was beached on the Islands many years ago. These things might look old and slow, but they are anything but, they can move at great speeds when they really want to. Meaning that if things go well today he could be back home at Sunhelm Watch before midnight tomorrow.

“Honestly? Better than I am…hell we’ve even been thinking about taking you on, you know on that offer you made us?” Vyrryk asks him, revealing just how close these two friends really once were.

“Offer’s still open, buddy.” Ozpin assures as the side of the hull unlocks and slides open, a bridge extending from within so then they and their horses can get aboard the ship safely. Vyrryk chuckles, scratching the back of his neck as he stands there.

“Well…I dunno…my father is watching our every move with Yvette Varr Skaal here…I feel bad for her too.” He explains with a saddened voice.

“Varr Skaal? By the gods man…if you didn’t love Claudia you would be crazy to say no to her. She is nicknamed the Angel Faunus for a reason.” He states as he helps guide their horses inside of the ship, and the Knight chuckles as well.

“I wouldn’t say no to her.” He says.

“Well maybe you can get her to fall in love with you.” Vyrryk says with the pat on the Knight’s back, tying the reigns onto the pieces of wood to secure them. The Horses are happy enough, got other horses to keep them company and plenty of hay to be fed and water. The three of them trek up the stairs to the main deck, through the cabins and finally up to the top. Stood there are many crew members but no Silver Eyed Warriors here, just three other individuals.

A beautiful woman with long white hair and stunning blue eyes with a Huntress’ corset and cloak around her body, and a bow and arrow on her back and quiver in the same place. A man a few years older with a spear in his hand with a hood up and yellow eyes…and finally a Vanguard with an Isomacium Sword in his grasp with jet black hair. Vyrryk knows their names…and so does Jaune.
Both names.

“Krekras! Starla! Rylen!” Vyrryk cheers as he goes to embrace with them, but as Jaune looks at these memories… he names them differently.

Death

Loss

And Fear

And at Vyrryk’s shoulder… Vengeance.

His ancestor was a friend of the Knights of Grimm before Vir Nominis Umbra corrupted their souls with the curse that turned them into his soldiers. Vyrryk hugs each of them as they all stand there, looking at Starla and chuckling. “Did you hear about my arranged marriage too?” He asks her.

“We all have.” She assures.

“Well funnily enough… my saint of a father tried to convince me to marry… you.” He states as he points at Starla and she raises her brow with disbelief.

“He… does realise I am married, right?” Starla asks, and Vyrryk chuckles.

“No idea with that man.” He says as he walks up the stairs to the Captain’s wheel, not noticing the look Starla and Krekras give each other… the fact they have been having an affair for the past few years. Starla’s eyes sink with guilt as she walks away from Krekras and he looks no different.

“So… what do you expect we will find at that Chapel? Bunch of non-believers lynched?” Rylen asks them curiously.

“Gods… I’d hate to find out.” He states with a heavy sigh.

“I guess we’ll find out.” Vyrryk states, as the Dauntless activates the thrusters powered by dust under the water, and it turns around from the dock, sending large waves crashing against the walls. Then the Dauntless sets sail, leaving the harbour of Arkhonex.

Off to the lands of Mistral… across the ocean from them…

Claudia

Unexpectedly for Jaune, the memories shift to a different person… to Claudia Barrett’s.

Despite her gifted beauty she has always had to do the dirty work, for so long it has simply become a way of life for her. Cleaning the horses, polishing the shoes, being the maid for the lords and ladies to eat the warm tasty delicacies whilst she would just eat the leftovers in the backroom. Not a glamorous life to live… but she is alive, and that is all that counts for her. She is crouched down by one of the horses, cleaning its hoof off of mud, scraping some lumps of it out with a blade she has on her.

But as she does so, she hears a bunch of other workers walking up behind her, she rolls her eyes as she hears them approach, recognising their voices. “You seriously doing this again?” Claudia huffs,
rolling her eyes and blowing a breath out from her partially parted lips to flick her hair from her eyes a bit. The men are fat, not healthy-looking men by any means. She stands up and rolls her eyes when he speaks once more.

“Bitch you humiliated me.” The man grunts as he clenches his fists tightly. He has three other hulking men with him, but they do not seem as bothered as he is about whatever it is that happened.

“You tried to get it on with me, I have a say in the matter, buddy. Want to have a girl who’ll do what you want, just take some coins and go to the Brothel.” She states with the shrug of her shoulders, turning to tend to the horse.

“Hey! We’re not finished here!” The man yells as he turns her round, grabbing her shoulder. As she spins round she punches him square in the face, then three times in his abdomen at great speeds, then right up his jaw, knocking him back on his arse. She looks down at him and cracks her neck.

“I think we are.” Claudia turns her attention to the two guys with him. “What about you two?” She asks them, they both just sigh and walk away, towards the tavern to get sloshed again. The man, with mud covering half his face groans as he starts to get up. She sighs, her good side returning as she crouches down and pulls a cloth out, wiping the sludge from his face. “I know you’re mad that your wife ended it with you for another guy…but that doesn’t give you the right to just try and sleep with any girl you see. Got it?” She asks him, able to read people expertly well.

“How…How do you know about her?” He questions, and she shrugs.

“Call it woman’s intuition.” Claudia says to him, and he sighs, getting up and walking away, but before he does he looks back at her.

“I’m sorry.” He apologises, she bats it aside and shakes her head.

“It’s alright…just remember next time, okay?” She asks him, and he nods, walking ahead. She exhales with a heavy sigh, throwing the dirty cloth into the corner as she sighs, scraping some of the thick mud from her boots.

“Hi there.” The soft and calm voice of Yvette appears next to her, causing Claudia to gasp and nearly scream, jumping out of her skin, staggering back. She looks at Yvette and sighs with relief, not expecting it to be her. She points at her with her thick gloves on that she wears for cleaning the horses and their shoes.

“Shouldn’t scare people like that.” Claudia chuckles as she points at Yvette, walking over to one of the horses as she wipes some of the mud from its mane. Yvette, as innocent as ever jolts as she realises that she did bad…acting quite a lot like a certain Polendina in fact.

“Oh! I’m so sorry.” She apologises as she covers her mouth with shock, just making Claudia smile.

“It’s okay, how can I help you?” She asks her as she picks up a brush and straightens out the mane of the horse.

“Um…I’m Yvette.” She introduces herself, and Claudia smiles…deeply wanting to tell her of her relationship with her potential future husband. But she holds it back and offers her hand…her gloved hand. Her eyes widen when she sees how much mud is on the glove, immediately pulling them off to throw them in the basket where they stay.

“Oops, sorry. I’m Claudia, Claudia Barrett.” Claudia replies, shaking her hand with a smile. She plants her hand on her hip as she looks at the Stable Girl.
“How come someone as pretty as you is working on Horses?” Yvette inquires curiously, and Claudia shrugs.

“Come from a poor family, we came here because they were looking for labourers. I work the horses, clean people’s shoes, work the bar sometimes. My job just keeps going.” Claudia explains, and Yvette looks almost concerned by this information.

“My goodness…where I come from nobody does that.” She says to her, Yvette’s ears jolting at the idea of it. “I mean we have similar things there…brothels and such, but women mainly work with finances, taverns and restaurants. Or other well-paid jobs…we don’t really have peasants.” Yvette explains, it all sounds like it is of an alien world.

All of this to Jaune sounds like it is from an Alien world…brothels and slaves are not a custom ever seen on Remnant these days anymore. Made illegal, doesn’t stop them from existing though, they are just rarer than they are back in Arkhonex. “Well…lucky you.” She says as she walks back to the horse.

“Wow…is that a Stallion?” She asks her, and Claudia raises a brow in curiosity.

“You know your horses.” Claudia catches on.

“Oh yes…beautiful animals…more honest than Faunus and Humans I find.” She says as she looks at the horse, so Claudia kindly holds the reigns of the horse and gently pulls her over to Yvette so then she can stroke the mane and pat the nose of the beautiful animal. “She’s gorgeous…” She softly smiles as she caresses the long hairs on its neck.

But then something seems to change on Yvette’s face, looking at Claudia almost guiltily. “Um…Claudia?” She softly asks her.

“Hmm?” Claudia replies.

“You and Ser Arc…are you and him…together?” She inquires, and her eyes widen when she hears the question.

“H-How do you…” She stammers, but Yvette smiles with her hand raised.

“It’s okay…I know how you feel…well…someone I care for does, at least.” Yvette reveals to her and Claudia’s eyes widen.

“Wait…you also have someone you love back home?” She asks her.

“Yes, you see my parents love us together…he is a good man…but he is of a poor family. But by marrying Vyrryk…we could form an alliance that could help our people. We do not have much clean water on Menagerie, but Arkhonex can provide it to our people. As long as we provide the wines we produce.” She explains to Claudia, Jaune is surprised by the fact that the memory has translated the old name of Menagerie into what he recognises. Whereas Claudia just looks completely and utterly shocked by this revelation.

Yet relieved…

“I’m…sorry.” She apologises. “But…you know that you will have to have children with him if you do marry.” She reminds, and she nods.

“I know…and that is the saddest part. Because I may never be allowed to have a baby with the man I love with all my heart. Because it could be illegitimate and be hunted down.” She explains.
Claudia stands there, and she sighs. “What kind of a pair are we?” She asks her and they both smile.

**Vyrryk**

Hours later…

The soon-to-be Knights of Grimm and Vyrryk Arc ride across the fields of the land that would one day become the Mountains of Mistral. Huge hills, waves almost of emerald green stretching out for as far as the eye can see. They all look around as they see it before their very eyes…

The temple built at the top of a village that has been completely consumed by the infamous Congregation of Dawn. As they ride in, their banner has been splayed out on every single wall inside of the village in the middle of nowhere. A village most likely buried underneath hundreds of thousands of tonnes of rock and soil. The people all have the same symbol branded on them in different places…the sun rising from the darkness…or setting into it. Either way it is unclear which it is meant to be.

The people here…all of them are wearing crimson and black robes with the symbol imprinted in yellow in the centre.

Vyrryk looks at the market and there are children also with the same symbol, everyone silently watching them as they enter the village. But the most unsettling thing is a bronze statue built directly in the centre of the village, of a man with a sinister smirk with his hands splayed out with the weak suffering beneath him.

None of which.

Are Human.

Every single body screaming beneath the man is a Faunus, desperately trying to crawl away from the monster. Vyrryk narrows his eyes with disgust at this terrible shrine, one that really makes them worried. “Be on guard, looks like the Congregation have really taken this land over.” Wymerus advises, and Krekras presses his gauntleted hand against the pommel of his sword until their horses stop.

At the mouth of the Chapel, built with a tall spire where the sun shines brightest. They all dismount their horses and watch the civilians whom glare at them like they are staring at monsters that have been unleashed upon their world. Emerging from the Chapel is an old man with his hands held behind his back and an expressionless look on his face as he approaches them. “Is it just me or has this village been waiting for us?” Rylen whispers as he holds his spear tight.

“Welcome, Knights of Arkhonex.” The Father greets with his arms held out, finally smiling.

“You knew we were coming?” Vyrryk questions curiously, glaring at the father.

“Of course, the Omens spoke of it.” He replies.

“Omens?” Starla asks him with a raised brow.

“They spoke that four wise warriors would come greet us on the beginning of Salvation!” The Father preaches with his hands up in the air as the many acolytes bow down to him. Krekras glances at the
many people and he exhalles through his nostrils.

“What the hell is this?” Krekras questions, then the Father gestures to some Followers from around the corner, then…

They hear the terrified screams.

“Please! Help us! We don’t want to die!” A woman wails as the Acolytes drag the people by their hair towards three other Acolytes carrying what appear to be…

Stakes…

They hammer them down into the ground and get the rope ready, only know have they noticed the carts with dry logs being pulled in as well, dumped underneath the tall wooden stakes. Krekras’ eyes widen, and he immediately goes to draw his blade…until some kind of unseen force freezes him. He grunts in pain, then looks at the others to see none of them are moving either, straining like him.

Vyrryk glares at the father to see his eyes are glowing red.

And that something is restraining them from moving, a sinister smirk forms on the face of the Father as they cannot even fight against the force. “No! Stop!” Starla begs desperately, seeing that the people are all Faunus, being tied to the stakes as a man with a torch approaches with a smile on his face.

“No!” Rylen roars.

“Don’t do this!” Wymerus begs.

Vyrryk strains as hard as he can to fight against the dark force that restrains all movement in his muscles, staring at the Father again who smirks cruelly at him. Then he speaks once more. “The path to Salvation shall be bloody, but our god shall guide us as he has granted me this strength! The power to see through the filth that is before you all!” The Father preaches with his hands held above his head.

“I have a daughter! Don’t do this!” The woman begs.

“These vermin before you…an amalgamation of life itself, something that should not exist. They must all be perished once and for all if we are to reach the same enlightenment as myself.” The Father explains, sounding more insane with every word that leaves his mouth.

“How does this help you reach Enlightenment, huh? By murdering innocents?” Vyrryk yells with fury in his voice.

“For it is in the passing of the Devil’s Creations that we shall rise into the light! We will become more powerful than the creatures before you! Do not sob for their pain, for it will give us strength!” The Father preaches, taking the torch from the hand of one of the Acolytes beside him.

“Don’t do this! We wanted to negotiate peace! Please!” Vyrryk screams desperately as he fights against it.

“Peace will be brought upon the world…when the creatures of this world are burned away forever. And the impure are washed away!” The Congregation of Dawn Father drops the torch past the screeching Faunus trying to break free. As soon as the torch hits the wood it ignites into a raging fire, and their screams turn from terror to pure agony.
The Knights remain restrained…unable to look away.

Hearing their desperate wails.

The horrific stench of burning flesh.

Tears trickle from Starla’s eyes…

Revenge forms in Wymerus’ heart.

Fear forms inside of Rylen for what this could bring.

And Krekras wishes to bring death upon these monsters.

Whereas only one thing forms in the heart of Vyrryk.

The urge to break free…

And protect the Varr Skaal from these monsters.

Jaune knows what he has just witnessed.

The beginning of the end for Arkhonex…

It all began here.
Chapel Clash

Jaune

Thousands of years of knowledge flowing straight into his mind, the mind of anyone, is likely to cause problems. Jaune collapses to the ground as the magical aura from the Visionary Book courses through him like electricity, inflicting a very similar sensation, a buzzing feeling or a biting pain over various areas of his body. Head pounding, he cannot stop the desperation to press his hand against the side of his head, hearing the whispering voices of the people of Arkhonex in his mind.

“They’re coming!” A young Arkhoni female voice cried out desperately, roars of the Grimm echoing in his mind along with the wails of civilians and a baby.

“Get them inside!” The voice of Vyrryk yelled, and as Jaune lifts his head his bleary eyes focus ahead of him, unable to see things clearly. The memories of his ancestor and his own vision being morphed together into one. Vyrryk stands at the gates of the Fortress that he saw in his dream, Crocea Mors in his grasp, slashing it across the throat of a Beowulf that lunged at him. Black smoke and embers erupt from its body as it fades away, roaring with fury. He reaches down to a civilian at his side, pulling her up to her feet.

“This…this is it! The end times!” A Knight screamed with terror as Jaune stands up, stumbling around as he stares at the memories, hearing the screeches of Nevermores over his head, blacking out the sun with their sheer numbers as they dive down and decimate the Humans and Faunus.

“Steel yourselves, men! We must get the survivors to the ships, we must send them to the safe zone, the Grimm will not find them through the smog!” Vyrryk yells as he slams the shield of the sword straight across the face of a Creep which lunged straight at him, only to stab the sword right down the top of its head. But behind him is a huge Beringel, bellowing as it leaps towards him from behind to slam both fists down at him…

Until a mace smashed it right out of the air, knocking it across the ground. Jaune groans as he stares at the shattered memories before his very eyes, and it is none other than Vyrryk’s fallen brother – Constantine. “Vyrryk! Are you sure they can’t follow?” He asks him with concern as he draws his gun and fires it right at the head of the Beringel, sending a strong dust projectile burning through its glowing red eye. He spins his mace through his fingers and smirks, looking back to his brother.

Things clearly changed between them from when Jaune saw them, for they were literally at each other’s throats. Vyrryk turns to his brother and speaks, after seeing both of them so young it is quite saddening to see them here, both with grey hairs and wrinkles and scars. The War for Arkhonex, for Remnant at this point…it must have lasted for decades before the final days. Arkhonex probably is an old memory by now, but this must have led to the civilisation that would later become what it is now.

Before the Great War as well.

“It will work, I trust her – Yvette knew what she was talking about!” Vyrryk explains as he stops a fireball from a Manticore that lands down in front of them, roaring savagely with a huge Sphynx gliding overhead, screeching as it summons more Grimm to their location.

“I hope so…because it looks like Vir Nominis Umbra is throwing everything at us. They must really
want that sword destroyed.” Constantine states as he stares at Crocea Mors, and Vyrryk chuckles with a smirk.

“Good, I hope they are scared. Because we need to keep it protected. Need to make sure it is on that boat, but the civilians are more important.” Vyrryk explains, Jaune’s eyes wide with disbelief as he stares at them, seeing how different they are. Something big must have been unveiled in this time that he has not seen yet. But as he watches, Vyrryk stares right at Jaune and he storms towards him. “Knight! I need you to find my wife and son! Get them to the ship! Go!” Vyrryk yells as he reaches out and grabs Jaune.

Only for his hand to decay into a chilling spectral skeletal hand with rotten skin and flesh hanging from the bones, and the undead grasp squeezes around his throat, lifting him off the ground with ease. Jaune gasps with disbelief as he stares right into Vyrryk’s eyes as they deform from blue to gold, the skin on his face peeling away and forming into the face of Rylen Vazquez…the Knight of Fear. He smirks sinisterly at Jaune, his curse causing him to be the most sadistic of them all.

Jaune grabs onto the undead arm of Rylen Vazquez, struggling as he chokes, gasping for air. “He tried, and he failed, appears fate deems to repeat the cycle!” Rylen bellows, swinging round and throwing Jaune straight through the pedestal that the Visionary Book once stood. A powerful magical pulse suddenly erupts from where the book once floated, the shockwave pushing Jaune across the floor, but Fear is not even fazed by it. He just walks towards Jaune and spins his huge Scythe through his fingers. “C’mon, Arc! Show me what you’re made of!” Rylen yells as he slashes straight at him with full force.

Jaune reaches down to the hilt of Crocea Mors, pulling it and his scabbard out as fast as he can, clicking the lever inside of the hilt to transform the blade. The shield shifts around the sword’s blade, extending into the thick and serrated blade of the Bastard Sword. He slams it with all his might into the curved blade of Formido Falcem, the impact creating a resounding metallic bang which throws glowing embers of golden light bouncing from the metal. Fear grits his deformed teeth as he stares into the eyes of Jaune Arc, whose blue eyes have now stopped blowing so bright and the magical energy has been released from his body. Fear chuckles sinisterly as he towers over Jaune, forcing him down to the ground with the strength in his body. “You’ve got heart, I admire that.” Rylen states with a smirk on his face, and Jaune grits his teeth right back, straining as he remembers what he saw in the vision from the Book.

“Like you admired Vyrryk? Before you betrayed him?” Jaune snarls with anger, sparking some fury inside of the Knight of Fear, his eyes crackling with yellow furor as he grits his teeth and his right eye twitches violently.

“Betrayed?” He bellows, voice turning demonic as he drags the curved edge of his scythe down the long blade of Crocea Mors, swinging it back round and hitting the blunt side of the scythe across Jaune’s face, knocking him onto the ground with a bang. He crashes down into the ground with a groan, spitting some blood from his mouth as Fear walks towards him, his aura repairing the damage. “Do you think we chose this curse? We betrayed ourselves!” Fear yells as he takes Formido Falcem and goes to stab it down into Jaune’s back to finish him off. Jaune spirals round, deflecting the huge Battle Scythe before spinning again and slicing him across his stomach of leathery skin and dead muscle. He snarls as he recoils from that attack, pressing his hand to the bleeding wound where maggots and insects fall from within his dead bones.

Fear hisses a roar of anger as he takes his scythe and spirals it round with his arms and hands perfectly moving the huge weapon with hard and fast strikes, but ones that Jaune has learned to deflect. He pulls his shield from the scabbard after clicking the lever again to deactivate its Bastard Sword form, so then he can use the shield and the sword. He backs up constantly, walking over the
remnants of the Visionary Book that detonated after he was thrown into it by the Knight of Fear. Every strike from the black curved blade of Formido Falcem bursts sparks off the engraved blade of Crocea Mors. But as the Knight slashes at him over and over again with tremendous speed, his sapphire irises widen with terror after seeing the toxin forming inside of his wrist, bones shifting so then he can blast the hallucinogenic into his system.

Jaune ducks down and raises the shield, and Fear unleashes the nightmare gas into the shield, the thick cloud of dark green gas ripples across his shield, then Jaune rushes forward, slamming the metal brawn of his shield into the ribs of the Knight, swinging it again across the side of his head to get him to stumble. Jaune swiftly follows up with a heavy swing with the sword, slashing him right across his face, causing the Knight of Fear to fall to one knee. He chuckles as he remains down there, Jaune walking towards him to attack again. “You fight well, Jaune Arc, you have improved.” He compliments, until the wings that are wrapped around his body like a poncho suddenly extend and reveal the damage done to his body.

Fear kicks him in the chest, then slams him onto the ground as he lands on him, swinging his wings to jump high above him to pin him to the floor. Cracks spread across the ancient Congregation of Dawn architectural floor. Jaune looks up at Rylen as he draws his crossbow hidden on his leg, aiming the bolt at his head with a smirk. “But you’re not a Vanguard yet.” He states, about to pull the trigger.

“Get. Off. My. Friend!” Nora suddenly screams, Fear’s golden eyes widen from her voice and he turns, only to be met by the force of Magnhild. The impact creates one hell of metallic boom as it cracks against the side of his head, throwing him straight through the wall and the mountain itself. The stone and old concrete shatters like glass from the impact and he flies out, until his wings extend and his whole body transforms, bones snapping and muscles shifting into the form of the Giant Undead Bat. It screeches nightmarishly as it circles round, Fear most likely licking his wounds and preparing for a second attack as he always does.

Nora reaches down and grabs Jaune’s hand, pulling him up to his feet with ease, nearly causing him to fall over in the process actually. “Are you okay?” Nora asks him with concern and Jaune chuckles, rolling his shoulder as it makes a cracking sound.

“Yep…feeling good.” He groans, since as soon as he got out of the Visionary Book he was grabbed by the neck by Rylen Vazquez, not exactly the warmest welcoming party.

“Well that’s fantastic, because it seems the Bannermen knew we were coming. That guy Kannix Volantis is here with Neo!” Nora yells, just as she mentions the Bannermen a portal opens up behind them, Far more violent and unstable than that of Raven’s, black with crackles of black and red lightning flashing from within, like a literal tear in the fabric of reality itself. Emerging from the portal are more Knights’ Bannermen soldiers, drawing their swords, axes and some even raising rifles from other times.

“Well…I guess they wouldn’t go easy on us, would they?” He questions, and as he stares at the Knights’ Bannermen he sees Akoúo fly right past his head and into the armoured head of one of the Bannermen, causing it to stagger with a demonic grunt. He turns and smiles as he sees Pyrrha running to his side, and Ren with her.

“Been a while, huh, Team J.N.P.R?” Nora asks them all with a smile. Pyrrha and Ren smile as they look at Nora, for it really does feel like old times.

“So…what’s the plan Jaune?” Pyrrha asks the love of her life. Jaune smirks as he draws his sword and shield, holding the shield forward and the blade past it, pointed towards the Bannermen.
“Team Attacks…Arkos and Flower Power remember?” Jaune asks them with a smile.

“We really need to change that name.” Ren groans, whilst Nora giggles.

“Let’s get baking!” Nora squeaks with joy and Jaune groans, shaking his head.

“Not that kind of flower!” Jaune reminds, just as he did during the Vytal Festival. They all look ahead after realising they are arguing in the middle of a fight, seeing a Knights’ Bannerman scratching its head awkwardly. “Ah whatever, let’s kick their asses.” Jaune states with the shrug of his shoulders and roll of his eyes, Nora laughs devilishly.

“Works for me! Yee-haw!” Nora squeals as she and the rest of her team charge towards the Spectral Warriors.

Ruby

She spirals Crescent Rose through her fingers as the burning bright projectile screams towards her, detonating into a bright fiery explosion which causes her to stumble back from the shockwave. Crackling flames and swirling jet-black smoke courses across the curved blade of her impressive weapon as she stumbles away from the enemy. Neo rushes towards her with great speed, jumping forward to kick Ruby in the jaw, making her stumble again. The silent antagonist, lands on both feet and with her Umbrella she smacks it across Ruby’s face with force. Ruby staggers as the pink weapon cracks the side of her head, and she snarls, aiming down the scope of her sniper rifle to fire a bullet straight at her.

Neo grins manically as the bullet impacts her, only for her body to shatter away into nothing more than an illusion. Ruby gasps, her silver eye widening too late at the realisation that Neo just tricked her again, and she spins round to meet the heel that clatters her in the head. The crashing bang slices the skin on her forehead open, causing some blood to drip down and into her hair. The thick crimson blood sticks to her hair, red aura forming and crackling around the wound to repair the damage. As she falls to her knees in pain, letting her aura repair the damage, she senses the burning sensation in the back of her mind as Torchwick crouches down in front of her with a smirk. “You know you can’t beat her, Ruby. She was trained by the best of the best, y’know.” He states with a smirk on his face, until Neo rushes towards her with no realisation that the love she lost is actually in Ruby’s mind right now. As Ruby looks forward, her Psychosis seems to return, screaming voices yelling at her constantly.

“Get out of the way!”

“She’s coming!”

“She’s going to kill you!”

Neo jumps straight at Ruby again, drawing the sword hidden within her Umbrella to stab right at Ruby…the Silver Eyed Girl has no intention to die today. She dashes out of the way of her blade’s path, and Neo scrapes the blade across the floor with a stunned expression in her pink and brown eyes, looking around excessively. Until the swirling tornado of Red Petals fly straight towards her, with a screech echoing from within until she forms again, slicing Crescent Rose across Neo, slicing through her pinkish brown aura, knocking her over. Neo rolls across the floor before managing to
jump up during her tumble and landing on her feet like a cat. Neo runs her fingers through the dust as she slides, immediately aiming her Umbrella that has been customised to work like Melodic Cudgel that Torchwick used to use before being eaten,

Ruby’s eyes widen so she rolls out of the way, a large fiery explosion detonating behind her when the projectile meets the concrete and stone wall behind her. Throwing smouldering debris across the ground, Ruby grits her teeth as she stares through her long and gorgeous black and red hair. Neo stands tall, long pink and brown blowing in the wind that travels through the hole in the mountain where Fear was slammed through, his screeching Bat Form still heard. Neo sprints towards Ruby and the Silver Eyed Huntress mirrors her, running right at her enemy, spinning through the air like a cyclone as she slashes at Neo. The almost untouchable woman jumps and corkscrews through her attacks, being clipped by a few but are not enough to knock her out the air.

Neo grabs her by the throat, tackling her out of the air and slamming her into the ground, dragging her head through the dust and pinning her again the ground, gritting her teeth with fury at her enemy. “I…Did…Not kill him! You are serving the monsters that did, can’t you see that?” Ruby struggles as she grabs onto the forearm of the small yet deadly assassin. Neo begins to throttle her enemy to shut her up, squeezing both hands against her throat, causing Ruby to gasp for air, struggling to breathe.

Oscar suddenly blasts into Neo from behind, tackling her and throwing her into one of the statues with all his might, gained much more strength over the years than he did back in Salem’s Sanctum. Immediately worried for his girlfriend’s welfare he turns to her with worried hazel coloured eyes, crouching down and holding her hand, caressing her cheek as he helps her back up. “Ruby, are you okay?” He asks her with a really worried voice, wiping the dirt form her cheek and the leftover blood. She nods her head as she gives him a thumbs up.

“Mhm.” She answers with a cough, getting her wind back as she grabs onto Crescent Rose almost instinctively. Blake finally takes down the last Knights Bannerman that was attacking her so then she could get to Ruby, running over and looking at her.

“Are you alright?” She asks her.

“Yep.” Ruby answers as she nods her head, then Qrow walks over as well with his sword in both hands.

“Ruby, are you –”

“Gods, is there an echo? Yes, I’m fine.” Ruby sarcastically replies to her uncle, scraping her scythe across the ground and up not her hands, ready for Neo as she rises back to her feet. She grits her teeth with anger as she draws two knives from inside her coat that she wears, ones that have serrated edges and also with dust loaded into them. Neo then sheds her coat that she wears, one that is white and red like Romans used to be, revealing her combat corset she wears with tightly worn cargo trousers. She has multiple knives sheathed on her legs, ready for usage as she holsters her Umbrella.

“She can’t take all of us on at once.” Blake states with confidence, something Ruby does not share because she knows Neopolitan, and that she is not a force to be reckoned with.

“Don’t underestimate her, she is faster and smarter than she looks.” Ruby advises as she readies herself, hardening her aura again after repairing the damage done to her skin from her previous fight with the short Assassin. Neo spins her knives through her fingers as she narrows those pretty eyes of hers.

“Be on guard, we still have other enemies in here, they could attack us as well.” Qrow warns, until Neo suddenly sprints towards them at full speed, dashing out of the way of Gambol Shroud’s bullet,
immediately slicing cross-ways at Blake. The Faunus Huntress leaps back, leaving her shadow behind as she flips through the air and lands on her feet. Qrow slashes his sword at her but Neo holds the much larger blade at bay with her dagger. She kicks Qrow in the leg to bring him down to one knee which allows her to twirl round like a ballerina and kick him in the head with the back of her heel.

Her eyes are constantly fixed on Ruby, desperately trying to kill her for what happened to Roman. She cartwheels aside when Qrow snarls and transforms his sword into its Scythe form, slashing it right at her head, leaving a trail of red aura streaking behind his attack, then he swings it round and slams it downwards at her. She shatters away like a mirror, just avoiding that attack that sent fissures spreading across the ground. He gasps as she appears right next to him with a smirk and a wink, kicking him in the jaw and pushing him down to the ground. She throws one of her knives at him but then Time suddenly stops, and she is completely unaware of Oscar’s true semblance.

Oscar runs and catches the blade, throwing it right back at her, before resuming time again. The knife slams into her aura protected chest, so hard it creates a bang and a shockwave that blows the dust aside. She slides across the ground before Oscar suddenly grabs Neo by the throat and drags her across the ground before slamming her into one of the walls, using all his strength to do so. Fury forms in his muscles and flows through his veins, gritting his teeth as he clenches his hands into fists as he punches Neo in the face over and over again, her head cracking against the stone behind her over and over, breaking the wall apart with every hit. “STAY! AWAY! FROM! RUBY!” Oscar bellows as crackling shards of time form in his fist, slamming it right into her face with all his might. Time explodes against her face, causing the wall to explode, and the statue that was engraved centuries ago bursts like glass, toppling over and crushing into the ground right next to them. The ground cracks and crumbles beneath their feet as a chasm opens up beneath them, causing them both to fall into the lower levels. Oscar yells with shock as the knife plummets, before drawing Traveller’s Atrocity and stabbing the blade directly into the walls, holding on for dear life as he looks down at the almost endless chasm beneath them. “By the gods…” He gasps, seeing what lies beneath them.

Practically an ocean of bones, ones that have been left behind here ever since Arkhonex, some look like they have been formed into the rocks of the mountain…this is inside of the mountain as well. There are old houses crushed here as well…if there are skeletons inside of these mountains… towns…does that mean that there were people still living here when the Congregation of Dawn used the Relic of Creation to hide their secrets by forming a Mountain Range? If that is what happened… then they truly are more relentless than they ever expected.

As Oscar stares at the horrifying thoughts buried beneath him, Neo rises back up and snarls with anger as she draws her Umbrella and aims the barrel at him, pulling the trigger. The missile screeches towards him and his eyes widen with shock, and he slows time down just enough to jump down from the wall before it explodes. He then lands right behind her, and the missile explodes right behind him, throwing shards of stone and concrete everywhere, crashing into the bones and old buildings. Oscar slashes Traveller’s Atrocity straight at Neo but she catches the blade in her own, staring into his eyes with hatred. She immediately kicks him in the chest and goes to slash him across the face, but he dashes away and fires the revolver built inside the blade at her.

She shatters, using her Illusionist Semblance as much as he uses time, both of them managing to trick one another over and over again. She suddenly leaps at him from behind, then he slows time down just at the right moment as she went to stab him in the neck with both blades. He uppercuts her with his fist, that combined with time being slowed down, the impact of his punch throws her high in the air and she grunts.

Ruby and Blake suddenly return as the Silver Eyed Warrior tackles Neo and crashes down into the
bones with her, both of them sliding through the thousands of ancients that were buried alive inside of a mountain. The bones rattle and roll around them, but Neo swiftly gets back up and sprints through the bones towards Ruby, only for Blake to yell and swing towards her with Gambol Shroud’s grappling hook attached to a piece of wall above them. She swings and slams both her feet into Neo’s chest, smashing her into the pile of bones. As Blake lands and goes to attack her, Neo dodges her Katana and punches Blake in her lower abdomen, before flipping backwards into a cartwheel that kicks her up the jaw. Blake falls into the bones and groans, then she fires her umbrella straight at Ruby, the projectile explodes against her chest, knocking her over.

Neo jumps and lands on Ruby, slashing her sword straight at her throat but Ruby stops her serrated edge with the curved blade of Crescent Rose, staring into each other’s eyes.

**Ozpin**

Despite his attempt to protect his daughter, as soon as Oscar and Neo fell into the Chasm of Bones beneath them, the Knights’ Bannermen attacked him. Multiple spectral Knights yell as they slash and swing their weapons at him, attacks he can defend against, but they are keeping him from helping his daughter against Neo. However, they do have Oscar, and he is a powerhouse in his own way thanks to his unbelievably powerful and useful semblance.

Ozpin however, has been fighting alongside Raven, Yenna, Cinder, Kragen, Winter and Penny, with the Architect providing covering fire. Most of them have been taking on the Knights’ Bannermen, however with Kannix also in the field it means that they have another foe to face. Penny slashes her many blades across the bodies of six Knights’ Bannermen, causing them to collapse into themselves and fade back into the realm that they came from in the first place. Amongst them, Yenna presses her hand against the floor and she summons the roots inside of the mountain, some massive tree roots grow, and they erupt through the concrete, crushing the Knights’ Bannermen fighting them.

Ozpin slows time around him and he sprints forward, taking his staff as he has formed his new Knight of Vengeance form, the Spirit of Time. Every strike made from that staff kills the Bannermen, shattering their armour plating and killing them instantly. He stops past the five that he just killed whilst Raven drives her blade into the skull of one of the soldiers, staring through the eye holes of her helmet, immediately ripping that red blade out and sheathing it, changing blade into that of wind. She simply slashes it at the three that jump towards her, but they all get blown away, right into the sights of the Architect. He picks them off one at a time with ease in the air, glowing blue bolts of dust projectiles burning through their armoured spectral forms.

Each one releases a pained roar of agony as their armour collapses and bends into the singularity of energy formed within their bodies as they are pulled back into the Charred Forest. Bones shattering, and their souls being vanquished temporarily. Whilst they battle against the Knights’ Bannermen, Kragen stares through the fight at Kannix Volantis, the apprentice he failed staring into his eyes with his silver eyes. The deranged smirk on the Spectre’s face never shows to the wise Silver Eyed Warrior, just vengeance and anger consumes him as his blade extends and fire dust ignites across the steel and from the cannon built into the same arm. His hook blade folds out from his hand that transforms as well as they battle.

Kragen exhales, desperately wanting to fix the mistake he made thousands of years ago…but this is no wound that can be healed…not by words and not even physically. The boy he once knew is dead forever.
Kannix Volantis has become the Spectre.

“Please, Kannix…I can help you…” Kragen begs, but Kannix grits his teeth with hatred towards the old man.

“The only solace I will ever have in this violent life…is in yours ending.” Kannix states, and Kragen sighs with defeat, turning to see Cinder standing beside him and Ozpin getting ready to fight.

“If that is your wish.” He says with a heavy sigh, then Kannix suddenly leaps forward and fires his cannon three times at them, blasting powerful shells of explosive dust towards them. Cinder gasps and she uses her magical Fall Maiden abilities to cast a protective field of energy for a few seconds, which gets broken from the third explosion. Kannix shifts his hook round and his fist forms, punching the Fall Maiden right in the jaw with full force. She grunts, sliding across the floor with dust covering her face.

Kragen spins his Isomacium Staff through his fingers and stops the blade that Kannix slams down towards him, creating a metallic bang from the impact, one that sends sparks bouncing off his face and the vibrations reverberate in his hands. Kannix glares into his eyes with hatred, silver energy leaking out from them like smoke from a flame. “You left me there to suffer, I will spare you that pain by killing you now!” Kannix roars as he charges up his cannon to fire at Kragen’s head. Kragen widens his eyes and he spins his staff round and ducks, just dodging the shell launched past his head and exploding into the ceiling above. Chunks of rock start falling from above them as the Chapel begins to collapse, getting weaker and weaker with every explosion set off inside of this structure.

Ozpin rushes forward and he slams his Staff forward into Kannix, the magical energy from the Relic of Knowledge pushing him back, and the Spectre slams his hook blade into the ground to stop himself from rolling away from his enemies. He glares up at them with gritted teeth, firing his cannon into the ground behind him as he jumps, thrusting forward and stabbing the blade into Ozpin’s cog-comprised shoulder, pinning him against the wall as he stares into his eyes. “Not bad, Ozpin…but you’re gonna have to try better than that!” Kannix snarls, and Ozpin chuckles.

“Alright.” He agrees, suddenly forming multiple magical signs over his shoulders that spin round like glyphs, unleashing multiple beams of solar light that burns against his thin aura, slamming him back into the ground. Then he uses his magic to levitate the rubble and trap him in it. “Had enough?” He asks him, and Kannix scoffs.

“Let’s find out.” He replies with a wink, aiming his cannon through the debris at Ozpin and firing, just as Ozpin realised it was too late to use his semblance to stop time. He fires, and the shell explodes against his chest and he crashes straight through the doors of which they entered this place in. He falls, before coming face to face with the Knight of Fear that screeches towards him. Ozpin grunts as Fear slams his Bat talons into his chest and pins him to the wall, his form transforming before his very eyes, his head folding out from his shoulder blades as the wings wrap around his humanoid form. His long nails extending and his hood hanging low over his golden eyes.

“Oz…” Fear greets with a maniacal grin on his face.

Pinned against the mountain with nothing but a drop beneath him that would most certainly kill him now that he is free from Umbra’s infinite death curse the others are bound to. But that does not mean that he cannot use his aura to create new abilities, at least that is what he learned how to do, to summon magical powers with his aura alone…and with the help of the Relic of Knowledge. Ozpin stares into those glowing gold eyes and he scowls as the cogs roll away so then they can actually speak, face-to-face, not helmet to face. “Rylen.” Ozpin greets, and the Knight of Fear chuckles.

“Crazy isn’t it? How after all these years of separation and we all still call each other by our names?”
He chuckles, and Ozpin smirks.

“I still remember who you used to be, Rylen.” He reminds, remembering the good man that loved to perform to audiences...so long as they paid.

“Rylen Vazquez is dead, Ozymandias...just as Wymerus is.” Fear reminds with narrowed Golden Eyes, but Ozpin still seems to try with a chuckle.

“He doesn’t have to be.” He states. Fear stares at him and it is clear that the Knight actually seemed to consider his words, but then the curse mist have forced him back into this entity that he has become.

“Sorry, old pal...no can do.” He states.

“Then...we settle this the old-fashioned way?” Ozpin asks him, and he chuckles.

“At least the good things stay the same.” He chuckles, as he draws Formido Falcem and he goes to slash across his face. Unexpectedly lightning crashes down between them and Fear retreats back, using his huge Bat wings that resemble that of an Archangel to stay in flight. Then he stares directly at Ozpin, seeing the two crackling electrical wings extending from his armoured body. The cogs roll over and connect together over his face, the visors glowing bright green as his armour activates.

“Just like old times.” He states, as he spins his staff through his fingers and smacks it against the rocks, and the relic emerges to pick up the rocks and extract the metal from them, forming the Mace he once used to wield and was cursed by once. He swings his electrical wings and he swings his mace towards the Knight of Fear who smirks with excitement. Rylen is no match against Ozpin, however that does not mean he will not give it his all to try and beat him alone. He slashes Formido Falcem upwards and catches the mace in an epic impact, one that blows the clouds apart from the mountains and they stare into each other’s eyes.

Gold Vs. Green.

Ozymandias Vs. Vazquez.

Rylen swings round and slashes up Ozpin’s chest, sparks bursting out from the impact that throws them all sky high. The sparks fade away into the air, but Ozpin does not even seem fazed, taking his mace and throwing it at the Knight. Fear’s eyes widen with shock as the mace clatters into his chest and blows him into the side of the mountain, blowing pieces of rock down the side of the surface, causing a small avalanche in the process. He crashes down into the snow and he spirals the scythe through his fingers as he keeps his eyes focused on the Knight of Vengeance that lands in front of him, wings splayed out still.

“We were brothers once.” Ozpin states.

“Now we’re enemies.” Rylen replies, leaping towards him with a demonic roar, slashing his scythe at him with force.

**Jaune**

He roars with the fury of an entire family at his back, grabbing a Knights’ Bannerman by the shoulder and pushing his own shoulder forward, stabbing the long blade of Crocea Mors forward
into the ribs of the Bannerman. The entity groans in pain as it collapses away, then he raises his shield to stop the bullets sprayed from another from their own universe. The machine gun clearly being Atlesian, another poor soul consumed and converted into one of Vir Nominis Umbra’s pawns in his evil game. As Jaune stands there, Ren throws Stormflower and the bladed automatic pistol spins and slashes across the face of the Spectre, blowing its head apart and returning to his hand. He slides under the sword of one of the others that attacks him, and he uses his vast knowledge both in Aura and skill to take it down without wasting a single bullet. Just as he did to the King Taijitu he punches the entity in the side of the head so hard that it sends a shockwave through the cranium, blowing its head to pieces.

“Look out, Renny!” Nora squeals as a Bannerman jumps down from above with a spear, only to get smashed to pieces by Nora’s massive hammer. The metallic boom from the impact makes the poor Bannerman shatter like a pane of glass, sent back whence it came. As always with the Valkyrie Huntress she laughs as if she is playing a game, turning as the metal plates shift round into its grenade launcher form, firing one into the bigger Knight that swings its huge Battle Hammer at Pyrrha.

Not like the Invincible Girl needed her help, for she takes on the rest of the Bannermen by herself, sprinting at the five and jumping towards one, throwing Milo hard and fast, the Xiphos sword stabbing straight through the armour plating and into its heart. As she rolls over the dying Bannerman she uses her polarity to pull Milo back into her hand, slashing it through the hand of an enemy that swings its mace at her but misses in the process, and loses its gauntleted hand. She lifts the next up with her polarity, crushing the metal with ease, forming it into the size of a beachball, throwing it into the armless one. Finally, she takes Akoúo and throws it towards the last two, bouncing it between their heads. She sprints and jumps up, landing on the upper chest of the Bannerman as she stabs the Xiphos form of her sword into its sternum, killing it. Finally, she uses her polarity and catches the spear that the last threw at her and launches it right back.

Everyone stares at Pyrrha with awe. “You are…just so badass.” Nora compliments with a smile and Pyrrha gorgeously reflects her face, shyly giggling.

“You are all just as impressive.” She replies, getting a chuckle of disbelief from them all.

Their joking session ends when they see Penny get thrown across the battleground from Kannix, slamming against the wall with a grunt. “Ow…” She groans as she slowly gets back up.

“Penny!” Nora calls as she runs up to her, and she waves to them with an exhausted voice.

“Sal-u-tations…” She sighs rather weakly as she presses her hand to her dented face.

“What’s going on? Is anyone else hurt? Are you hurt?” Pyrrha asks her in a worried voice, checking her over for any major damage to her systems. Luckily nothing seems to be out of order apart from some dents and a few scratches in her skin. But luckily her body has auto-healing machinery inside of her. So that will get sorted out immediately, even with the aura protecting her too.

“Well…the Spectre and Neo…aren’t giving up…and Ozpin and Fear are fighting it out down there.” Penny explains as she points at the snowy caps of the mountains that they are around. They can see the flashes and hear the yells from the distance all the way from here, so they help her get back up, and she summons her swords to rise back up as they approach the two enemies. Ren sprints towards Neo who fights with Ruby, and he jumps, tackling her into the ground, both of them tumbling over. Neo kicks him in the chest hard, so hard he flies up and crashes into the ceiling, then falling onto his chest with a grunt. He rises back up and throws Stormflower at her, but then she catches it, looking at him almost flirtatiously.
She sticks her tongue out playfully and winks, before throwing it straight back, he dodges, and it stabs into the wall right by his head. Nora screeches with fury as she jumps at her and slams the hammer into the ground at her feet, the explosion throwing her up into the air. “Don’t flirt with my man!” She screeches, as Neo floats up in the air, she whacks the hammer against Neo’s chest so hard that it throws her against one of the statues, cracking the helmet of the statue. As Neo gets back up slowly, she looks up to see Cinder staring down at her with merciful eyes.

“Stop this, Neo…I know you’re angry about what happened to Roman, trust me I know. I miss his wit at times as well…but you are fighting on the wrong side.” She states, and Neo stares up at Cinder’s eye and the Fall Maiden actually gasps from what she sees in her eyes…there is understanding…and agreement in them. Even if she could speak she would not need to, the eyes are all she needed to know.

Neo knows she is on the wrong side…but she cannot live without Roman…she loved him…and will not stop until the one responsible for his death meets the same death.

She and Kannix Volantis are the same…both souls driven by one thing.

Revenge.

Neo remains on her knees, head held low as Cinder stands before her, and Ruby glares at her…with viciousness in her eye. However, Kannix has not fallen to his knees yet, for his semblance and his rage does not allow him to. He slashes his hook blade across the white hair of Winter Schnee who yells with anger, performing a perfect backflip that knocks him back and he staggers away, only to fire a powerful shot from his cannon that hits her in the chest. She crashes against the wall and groans, her blue aura shimmering after that hit. Kannix sprints towards her to finish the job with a grin on his face, until roots suddenly wrap round his arm and he snarls with anger, glaring at Yenna behind him. He rips his arm free and aims his cannon at Winter, until Qrow jumps down from his Crow form to deflect the impact with Harbinger.

He rushes forward and spirals his scythe round at awesome speeds, moving at the speed of a motion blur at this point, hacking his aura down with every single strike. He ducks down and avoids the slash from his fire coated sword, only to be kicked in the back of the leg by Qrow. His gift…and curse…to bring misfortune to others is working on him right now.

Kannix snarls, as he spins round and catches Qrow’s sword with his hook and twists his arm round, Qrow grunts in pain as he feels his arm get restrained. Kannix then fires his cannon into his side three times, the impact knocking him onto the ground. His eyes widen as he turns to see Ruby firing Crescent Rose behind her, screaming with fury as she slashes straight at him. He ignites the flames inside of his cannon and unleashes it towards her. She dashes round the flames and kicks him in the back of the head. That is until Blake swings round and kicks him in the side, slamming him to the ground.

He presses his hands against the ground to get back up but Oscar zooms towards him and punches him in the face, knocking a tooth out and blood on the floor. Pyrrha launches her shield at his head, but he keeps getting back up, his aura repairing every wound that they inflict. Kragen walks towards him and he slams his staff against his head with great speed, smacking both ends against his knee and the back of his leg to keep him down…until Kannix’s eyes begin to glow brighter and brighter.

Jaune’s eyes widen and he raises his shield, Pyrrha doing the same whilst the two Maidens form protective barriers of magic around their allies, defending them from the silver eyed attack. Kannix roars with fury as he thunderously unleashes the solar light from his eyes, burning through the ceiling.
and walls, before he meets the eyes of Kragen. The old Silver Eyed Warrior returns the favour, blasting the silver light right into his own gaze, silver light melting and pouring onto the ground, burning everything. As this battle of the gaze continues, Oscar takes his chance when slowing down time, running past the beams of light, to uppercut Kannix, knocking him back on the ground.

“Keep the bastard on the ground!” Qrow yells. Yenna’s violet eyes ignite as she summons the roots again, as they erupt through the ground and wrap around his arms.

During all this…Neo has not moved an inch.

Kannix however does not accept defeat, blasting flames from his cannon to burn the roots off, ripping them from his body, but as soon as he rises back up, Nora slams her hammer into his chest, smashing him against the wall and Ren throws Stormflower and it stabs into his shoulder. He grunts in pain as the Kuroyurian Huntsmen sprints towards him, jumping towards him. Kannix reaches up and catches him by the neck, ripping Stormflower from his shoulder and stabbing it into his own shoulder with a roar. Ren screams in agony as his aura attempts to heal the damage, and Nora’s eyes widen. “Ren!” She screams, firing a grenade that explodes against Kannix and the relentless Assassin releases Ren to the floor.

Ren rips his pistol from his shoulder, blood squirting out and hot pain beating in his shoulder.

Qrow glares at him and narrows his eyes. Qrow sprints towards Kannix with Harbinger transforming back into its Scythe form, with an idea hitting him.

He slashes up his chest and knocks him back, before stabbing him right in the chest, creating a roar of agony from Kannix. He falls to his knees, weakened and bleeding on the floor from the blade that has been stabbed into him. But as soon as Qrow removes that blade from his gut his aura is going to regenerate that damage.

His semblance…to convert pain into aura, meaning he can repair every hit dealt to him. “Can’t regenerate if I don’t take my blade out.” He snarls, and Kannix spits out blood onto his boots and glares into his eyes with hatred.

“Fuck you…Branwen…” He snarls, Raven walks round him and presses her Odachi Blade against his throat, staring into his silver eyes with his red ones.

“That’s rude.” She reminds, and he hisses.

“Yeah? Well…at least I didn’t have something to lose like you honey…” He whispers with a smirk, hinting at the death of the love of her life. Raven glares right into his eyes sinisterly, really trying to not cut his head off right now. “…yeah…I heard, Raven. Dear old Taiyang bit the bullet that night, didn’t he? Well…I guess I should say…I hope he is suffering right now in the Charred Forest.” He challenges, and she snarls, about to slit his throat, until Kragen walks towards her.

“Don’t!” He begs, and she glares at him.

“Don’t?” Raven questions, but the desperate old Silver Eyed Master walks over to her and he presses his hands to her shoulders.

“If you kill him, you will end up just like him. Determined to bring suffering to all who wrong him…as I did.” Kragen explains as he looks at her, desperately trying to keep her from making a big mistake. But as he remains on his knees and coughs up more blood, glaring at Kragen with that claret covering his mouth.

“I didn’t know you were still alive, you were dragged off. I searched for you, spent decades looking everywhere for you.” Kragen states with tears in his eyes, but Kannix shakes his head with anger and resentment filling those silver irises. Hatred they have never really seen, they have seen hate before…but this is a hate that can never be cured. A hate that will never be taken away, something that he will die with.

“You can’t change anything, old man.” Kannix snarls viciously at him, like a rabid dog.

“L-Let me try.” He begs, but nothing gets through.

“I told you…Kannix is gone…now? The only thing that fixes this is with you dead.” He snarls, and Kragen sighs with defeat in his voice.

“I do not want you to die.” Kragen states, and Kannix scoffs.

“Well…I don’t think I will today…because you all don’t have the guts to do what is necessary.” He states as he looks at them all, before his eyes fall onto Ruby and he smirks. “Well...unless she lets loose. Maybe if she did earlier her daddy’d still be alive.” He states with a wink and she grits her teeth, aiming Crescent Rose at his head. He chuckles menacingly, not even afraid of the weapon pressed against his forehead.

“Don’t say his name.” She snarls.

“Tai…Yang.” He whispers, pressing his head against the barrel, sending flashing images of Vir Nominis Umbra into her mind, and how she is the one that killed Nolan with that shot…she shudders and staggers away from the Spectre on his knees. He smirks as he remains at their mercy…even with Harbinger wedged in his stomach…he still has them at his mercy. “Soooo…what are we gonna do now?” He asks them all with a smirk, the Architect stares at him and he exhales, and Cinder looks at Neo, just wanting her to walk away.

“How did you know we were coming here?” Qrow sternfully questions, pushing Harbinger further into his stomach, and he snarls in pain. Blood pours out constantly from the huge hole in his body where the massive sword has been lodged in him. His growling pain turns to a sinister laugh, looking into his eyes with a smirk.

“You think he didn’t know? He knows your every move before you even make it…every thought he knows it…every kiss he sees it…every dream? He’s in it.” He assures with a sinister smile on his face as the blood runs down from his mouth, they are not stupid, he is talking about Vir Nominis Umbra.

“Why?” Qrow questions with a snarl and he chuckles with a smirk, coughing up blood.

“More…entertaining I guess…” He states with a smirk, and Yenna scowls at him as she forms a sword in her hand…knowing that he must have something up his sleeve. “But…it’s not Umbra you should be watching. He has been honest with you, but has Oz? Do you even know about the things he has done?” Kannix questions.

“It doesn’t matter.” Jaune states as he stares at him, and Kannix glares at Jaune and snarls, never forgetting that he cut his arm off the first time before Summer did it as well.

“I think it does…if you really think you can trust him…then you’re dumber than I thought you were.”

Kannix chuckles as he looks at them. “You’re regret not killing me when you had the chance…because I am gonna kill the people you love one day. That’s a promise.” He assures with a grin on
his face. Qrow’s eyes widen when he realises, and the others still never noticed he just pointed the barrel of his cannon at his chest.

“Crap!” Qrow exclaims, then he fires, blasting a powerful shot into Qrow that sends him flying and into the wall with smoke trailing from his chest, causing his aura to crackle. Kannix presses his hands to the sword in his stomach and he pulls it out, roaring in agony as he feels the burning sensation of flesh tearing. The pain forms the aura around his body, already rebuilding the damage done to his body as he gets up with a limp. Cinder, looking away from Neo gets swiped over by her leg, knocking the Fall Maiden over.

“If you can’t do what it takes, then you will die like the rest of them!” Kannix roars, as he retreats with Neo at his side, firing back at them with his cannon, sending powerful shells their way. Ruby and Blake both sprint towards the Assassins to try and stop them with Penny following them. She spins her blades round to build up the glowing green kinetic energy, then blasting the thick green beam of energy their way. But they both jump off the edge, as a ship catches them with the cockpit open, closing up after they land inside with the autopilot on. The Airship blasts the afterburners as it soars away from their view, even with Ruby firing her sniper rifle repeatedly at its hull but to no avail. She grits her teeth with anger as they get away yet again, letting out a scream of anger.

“Goddamn it! They keep getting away! We should have killed them both!” She yells, getting a scared expression on Blake’s face…on all their faces.

“Ruby…” Blake softly says as she reaches out to her, Cinder might agree that they should be colder but…to hear her say that…it cut deep. Ruby is starting to become what Cinder let herself become many years ago.

“No! You heard what he said! That was the best opportunity we ever had! We could have killed Kannix right there! And Neo! We could have cut two heads off and saved more lives in the process!” Ruby yells at Blake, frightening her as she steps away from Ruby…seeing something in her eyes.

“Ruby…calm down…” Blake begs, and Ruby glares at her with her irises glowing fiercely, about to unleash the power of her silver eyes on her friend. Her muscles tense and her teeth gritted together, and a look of anger that none of them have seen before. She squeezes her eyes shut and storms off from them to cool off and Oscar walks over to Blake, looking at Ruby.

“She’s getting worse, Oscar.” Qrow tells him, and he looks back at her father.

“I know…she needs time.” Oscar states.

“She needs help, have you heard her at night? I’ve heard her talking to herself more often, telling all these voices to stop. Yang told you and she came out about it a few years ago…about her Psychosis. If it is back…she needs to take her medication again.” Qrow explains as he walks over to Oscar, looking at the dark corner where Ruby has crouched down to cover her eyes.

“I know, Qrow…but…she won’t take it. She is too focused on stopping Umbra…” Oscar explains, Qrow unexpectedly grabs Oscar by the shoulders and stares right into his eyes.

“You are her boyfriend. Convince her.” He demands with a quiet voice, going fatherly mode on Oscar. Oscar exhales through his nose and nods his head.

“I hope whatever was in that Visionary Book was worth it.” Winter states as she rolls her shoulder, but as they look around Jaune asks the obvious question.
“Where’s Ozpin?”

Ozpin

The Knight of Fear slides across the white snow beneath him, scraping Formido Falcem’s through the thick layers of snow that he stands upon. He draws his crossbow and aims it at Ozpin, firing it, but Ozpin slows time down and sprints past it and punches Fear right in the head. The Knight grunts as he staggers from the powerful punch, turning to see Wymerus channelling magical lightning into his mace and swinging it straight at him. Fear transforms into a flock of crows and forms behind Ozpin, slashing his huge scythe up his back, making the professor grunt. He staggers forward then Fear darts forward after creating that horrifying screeching sound, his eyes glowing bright gold to terrify his enemies.

He zigzags towards Ozpin then slashes him with force, the impact scraping across his armoured cogs, throwing him into the snow. The fluffy snow falls and crumbles from his armour as he gets back up slowly, seeing Fear standing before him. “You’re fighting style has improved, old friend.” Fear compliments as he paces back and forth in the snow, icy cold breath leaving his torn rotten lips, whereas Ozpin rises up and glares right at him with narrowed eyes.

“I saw you at the roundup, Rylen.” He comments, and Fear stops in his tracks, glaring right at him. “I saw your face…all your faces, I could feel what you thought.” Ozpin states, and Fear narrows his eyes.

“What Umbra did was wrong, cruel…and unnecessary.” Fear states, and that means he really means it, because Rylen has become the most sadistic of all the Knights of Grimm.

“Then why didn’t you help? I know that there is still that honourable Vanguard in you somewhere, Rylen.” Ozpin states as he paces around the Knight of Fear with his mace in his hand, green lightning crackling inside of it, and the Relic of Knowledge floating within the iron harvested from the mountain.

“You think we didn’t want to stop him? Do you know what he did to Starla for just talking to Weiss?” Fear questions, actually calling her by her real name this time, and Ozpin lowers his head sadly. “He tortured her, made her wish she could die. She deserves better.”

“I know, and so do you. And Krekras, and even Axzura.” Ozpin explains, and Fear scoffs.

“But not you?” Rylen questions with confusion.

“No…I am beyond atonement, Rylen. You know that…I cannot find redemption for my sins and I am at peace with that. But if I could try…just try to destroy him…then it will be worth it.” Ozpin explains, showing that he knows of his past sins…and clearly regrets them with every fibre of his being. Fear spins his scythe through his fingers as he stands before him.

“If I had a choice you know what side I would choose.” Rylen states, and Ozpin looks at him almost desperately.

“Then choose it.” Ozpin states, and Rylen stammers, as if he is really trying to agree…but he can’t.

“This is our curse. Our punishment…I intend to see it through.” He states, something that all the Knights seem to say when it comes to going against Vir Nominis Umbra. Krekras has said it, Starla
has said it and now Rylen…but what about Axzura? He is the only Knight of Grimm that was not a Vanguard like the others, he was a Pirate…there is more to the Knight of Fury than meets the eye.

Ozpin sighs, knowing it will take more than reminiscing and honesty to save them. “Then I have to stop you.” Ozpin states, and Fear smirks.

“Then let’s dance.” He replies, his rotten wings extending, and he swings them, leaping towards Ozpin with a nightmarish roar, slashing the curved blade straight at him. Ozpin rolls out of the way and with all his might he swings the mace round into the side of his head. The impact blows fragments of bone and shreds of rotten flesh from his head, making the Knight stagger. Rylen turns and throws his Scythe at Ozpin, and the Knight of Vengeance catches the huge weapon and throws it right back at him. Fear jumps, and he flips through the air, dodging it as he grabs Ozpin and crashes him down into the ground.

Fear punches down into his head with force, but as he holds him down, Ozpin grabs him by the neck and lifts him off the floor, swinging round and throwing him into the boulder ahead of them. His back cracks against it and Ozpin’s wings form again, swinging him high into the air with his mace in both hands to stave his head in. Rylen dashes out the way at the perfect moment and grabs onto the long handle of his scythe, hauling it round and slamming the other side of his weapon into Ozpin’s back. Ozpin grunts and as he turns he sees his hand forming the Nightmare Toxin as he blasts it towards him.

His helmet forms, cogs rolling down and connecting together to protect him from the gas itself. Rylen fires another crossbow bolt at him but Ozpin zooms towards him at great speeds, thrusting his knee upwards into his ribs to make the Knight jolt. Rylen immediately grabs Ozpin and throws him with all his might, roaring as he does it. Ozpin crashes against the wall but Fear lunges forward and slams him up against it with his Scythe handle, trying to choke him out against the face of the mountain.

Ozpin kicks Fear in the chest so hard it knocks him down into the ground and Ozpin stares at the mountain face. He punches his fist into it and he grabs onto a huge boulder, using his almost godly strength to catapult the boulder towards Fear. The Knight smirks as the huge rock falls towards him, but with Formido Falcem he slices the rock in half, the two chunks crashing into the thick snow behind him. His wings unwrap from around him and he flies towards him, and so does Ozpin, the two of them impact and punch one another in the head. Ozpin grabs him by the head and channels lightning up into his head, causing a deafening roar of pain from Rylen.

Ozpin takes his opportunity, punching him up in the air then using his wings to fly above the Knight thrown above him at the time. He deactivates his mace, letting the chunks of metal fall, before he transforms the weapon back into its Sceptre Form, falling towards the Knight of Fear. He stabs it straight into the chest of Fear and they both fall towards the ground, and they both land onto a huge rock, snapping Rylen’s back on the boulder with the Sceptre shattering the boulder from the impact.

The crows in the trees all caw and fly away from the shockwave that blows the snow away. Ozpin pants, still holding the Sceptre in him as he lays there. Ozpin looks down at Fear as he looks up at him with a smirk. “You still got it, old friend.” Rylen chuckles.

“As have you…old friend.” He replies, then he watches as Fear fades away, his skin, bones and flesh crumbling away into dust as he goes back to the Charred Forest like every other time before.

Ozpin exhales.

The Lone Knight…
The Knight of Guilt.
The Hunter Gunship roars across the Mountain Range, away from the Chapel of Vengeance and Dawn, the afterburners billowing blue flames charged by multiple cells of dust of many different forms. Heavily armoured and painted with a shifting camouflage, one that is currently taking the arctic colour scheme, to hide in the snow. But the closer they get towards the woods on the face of the massive mountains the camo morphs into Woodland.

Inside of the Gunship are both Kannix Volantis and Neopolitan, the Assassin’s hired by the Acolytes of Dawn, and working for the False God. Sat down in one of the chairs, Kannix bites onto a cloth as he snarls in agony as he uses his metal arm and extends the blade, heating it till it is white hot. With his chest gear ripped off it shows his many scars and tattoos he has collected over his thousands of year long conflict. Some of them look like they were slowly engraved in curvy shapes over his pecks and many stab wounds battering his body, up his back and in his shoulders. He has many burns too, but also many tattoos. Some of them look like they are just random things, such as a Grimm Wyvern, and others look more…personal.

A pretty young woman with long red hair and silver eyes, just like Cynthia Nikos. Many forget that he was madly in love with the young woman when he was not cursed, when he was just a squire for Kragen Nox…before it all went wrong, and he became a monster. A monster with no hope for redemption, not even a wanting for it either. He is who he is and has accepted it…even enjoys it.

The smaller person in the cockpit glances back at him, silent as ever as she looks at him with his chest bare and the blade closing in on the bloody wound. With countless towels drenched in claret to try and clean up the wound. Most people would be either dead or about to die from a wound like that…but Kannix? This is not his first rodeo, and that much is clear from the number of scars on him, something that Neo examines with her pink and brown eyes. Her long pink and brown hair tied up into a ponytail as she flies carefully.

He presses the blade against his stomach where Harbinger stabbed straight through him and he roars in agony, luckily it did not come out the other side, otherwise he would need to do it twice. He bellows of torment as he feels the almost flaming steel blade melting the skin and welding it all back together, cooking it and creating a terrible cooked stench…like that of a barbecue but nowhere near as salivating. After a few seconds of inflicting such agony upon himself and he pulls the blade away, ripping long liquid and stringy strands of molten skin behind.

He bites the cloth in his mouth as he fights the body trying to fall unconscious, he reaches over with his metal hand to the open medical kit and he picks up an Aura Amplifying Syringe...another one of Archer Merlot’s many creations he has made for the Acolytes of Lien.

The needle punctures into his skin and right into his bloodstream, pressing his thumb onto the injector and forcing the fluid into his body. He sighs with relief as his dark red aura crackles over his body and begins to stop the pain and fix the internal damage done to his body from that huge sword. He pants away, sweat on his bruised forehead, then he looks at the rather concerned Neopolitan who has set the Hunter Gunship to Autopilot. He scoffs as he looks at her, his hand still pressed to the throbbing pain in his stomach. “Enjoy the show, ice cream?” He asks her, calling her by the pet name he gave her, and she narrows those large eyes and she gets up from the cockpit, walking over to the fridge inside of the ship they have been given.
She reaches in and grabs a bear, throwing it to him, he catches it with ease thanks to his trained reflexes, and he pops the cap from the bottle with his metal thumb. She takes a small bottle of orange juice out though, and she walks away from the fridge after closing it and sits down opposite him where that table is on the ship.

Kannix sighs as he twists his metal wrist round, thinking on his semblance and strength of his aura. “Gods I hate my semblance…sure it has kept me alive…but it doesn’t really…protect you much does it? No cool powers like that Xiao Long chick, or that Belladonna girl. Just pain is what I have…” He states as he swigs some of his bear down, the cold bear and the condensation on the glass dripping onto his hot skin is a real relief after what he just had to endure.

She unscrews the lid and she drinks some of it, and Kannix eyes her up. Admiring her toned hourglass figure and her attractive she is. “Wanna screw around?” He asks her curiously, and she pauses, staring right at him with a pretty stern expression. He looks around at the ship and then at the windows of their surroundings as he ponders over the stupid idea. “Look around…just us up here, could have some real fun, might even get you to make a noise.” He suggests.

Until he grunts in pain from her knuckles slamming into his nose with force, whipping his head back from how hard she hit him. The punch crunches his nose too, blood pissing from his nostril as he groans, grabbing the bridge of his now broken nose, Neo slowly taking her fist away with an almost feral glare. She grits her teeth and her face scrunches with pure resentment, she and him might be partners but that by no means mean that she is attracted to him in any way.

She only had one love.

And he is dead now.

Kannix presses his thumb and finger to his nose and twists it round, cracking the cartilage as he resets his nose on his face. He then wipes the blood off with his metal hand, nodding his head with understanding. “Fair enough…so what’s your poison? Only like skinny tall red headed dudes or are you bi and swing both ways?” He asks her curiously and she just raises a brow, and he chuckles. “Oh yeah, no talkie…y’know you’re not the best for conversations.” He states.

Neo scowls, flipping him off with her middle finger before drinking some more of her tasty orange juice. He turns to the scroll by him and he throws it to her and she catches it, since he wants a conversation with her. “There a reason you don’t drink? Weren’t you a dancer or something at a strip club? All those guys feeling you up, surely you would have had a few drinks to forget them.”

Kannix scoffs as he shrugs his shoulders, she stares at him then types the answer into the scroll. “Vir Nominis Umbra took my voice, poisoned a glass of alcohol after we accidentally became indebted to him.

Kannix nods his head, starting to understand why she does drink alcohol anymore, that kind of experience would mess anyone up. “By we…you mean you and Torchwick?” He asks her curiously, she nods once as the response. He chuckles as he remembers his face, crossing one leg over the other. “I remember him…I worked with him on a contract one. Good fighter, for a thief…but he talked too much. Sounds like that was what killed him in the end.” He states as he drinks more from his beer bottle, but Neo types something in and slams his scroll on the table.

**Bad memories**…

“Oh yeah? Like?” He asks her curiously, she sighs as she answers through the scroll.

*Vir Nominis Umbra took my voice, poisoned a glass of alcohol after we accidentally became indebted to him.*

Kannix scoffs as he shrugs his shoulders, she stares at him then types the answer into the scroll. **RUBY. KILLED. HIM.**
He stares at the text and he scoffs, for it seems that the Spectre is not deluded to the truth like she has become. “C’mon, Ice Cream. Don’t be stupid, if the guy was any more up his own ass, he would be a football. His spouting got him killed, swallowed up by a Griffin…nothing more than that honey.” Kannix explains, until she grits her teeth with anger and lunges at him, tackling him and knocking the chair over. She lands on his chest and she presses her knee against his wound and he roars in pain as she presses a knife to his neck, staring into his eyes.

She opens her mouth…

Rasping a breath as she tries to speak. “He…” But then she coughs violently as the irony taste of blood fills her mouth from just trying to talk. Kannix suddenly grabs her by the throat and lifts her off the floor then slams her back down, holding her down. He presses his knees against her arms as he holds her there.

“He…is dead…and it doesn’t matter. He died for nothing and will be forgotten.” Kannix snarls, but she strains hard against him as she tries to break free, but his cybernetic strength is too much for her smaller body to handle. “Unless…we kill and stop those that would ensure that future for him. Don’t you wanna see him again? Because remember…that is what he promised you…that at the end of your story you would see the love of your life again.” Kannix explains, looking down at her necklace he has on and he reaches down, turning it round to see that there is a small picture inside of one of the pieces.

Of her and Roman…when she could still speak and was a singer, something he could tell from the microphone in her hand in the picture. He then looks at her, seeing the scars in her throat where the poison did its damage, he even feels a bit sorry for her. He stares into her eyes with sympathy for her suffering, because he has felt it. “Trust me…I know how it feels to lose everything. It’s what Umbra promised me…that I will kill Kraken for what he did to me. And I am sure you may be able to kill Ruby…but don’t be blind in thinking she was responsible. It was him…and him alone.” He explains as he presses her against the cold metal ground, wincing as he grabs his stomach and releases the young woman.

She coughs in pain, rasping for air as she covers her neck with her hand, feeling vulnerable whenever she tries to speak. Kannix limps back to where he was at, lifting the chair back up, looking back at her. “Should really start trying to find some pleasure in this cold life, sweetheart. Plenty of men would kill for a girl like you…I know I would.” He states, sitting down as the Hunter Gunship approaches the location locked in from her handprint.

Neo pushes her palms against the floor and stands up, walking past him and towards the seat of the cockpit. She sits down and looks ahead as she flicks the waft of hair dangling down over her left eye. She gazes through the thick glass between her and the outside world, towards a small Acolytes of Lien Outpost in the mountains. A small amount of deployed buildings set there for nearby reinforcements to attack whenever they are called upon. The Outpost has Surface to Air Missile Sites set up in multiple areas, ready to shootdown any aircraft nearby that do not leave the area when demanded to by the air control inside.

The Hunter Gunship and Kannix stands up to the microphone, anticipating the demands. “Unidentified Gunship, provide clearance to land or fly…or we will shoot you down.” The Acolyte of Lien demands, and Kannix replies.

“This is the Spectre and Silent Assassin reporting, requesting landing at Pad Five.” Kannix replies, sounding professional for once in comparison to his normally flippant personality he has. Neo continues to prepare for landing, since that this has been something she has handled countless times.

“Access Codes.” The Soldier demands.
“042639250.” He answers.

“Codes confirmed, you are cleared for landing.” The soldier assures and the S.A.M Sites cease to track them as the Hunter Gunship rotates its long wings round so then it can enter Vertical Take-Off and Landing Mode, the thrusters blow the snow and old leaves all over the place as the landing gear folds out from within its undercarriage. The Spectre approaches the door that opens, grabbing his side as he steps down with Neo helping support him as they walk forward, multiple Mercenaries standing guard and preparing weapons and cargo.

He groans, sitting down on a cargo crate since he does not have much energy…but then they both feel an alien chill, colder than what they have already felt from the icy cold air in the mountain caps. They both turn to the landing pad that is clear right now, to see him standing there, the dark armoured Knight of Death, both armoured hands pressed atop his pommel and the blade of Ferrum Arctus pointed down into the tarmac. He coughs as he looks at him, exhaling. “Death.” He greets.

“Volantis, Neopolitan.” Death replies, approaching them with his sword still in his hand, lifted up from the floor as he walks over to the two Assassins.

“What can we do for you?” He asks him curiously as he shuffles on the spot, rubbing the painful spot.

“What happened up there? In the Chapel?” He asks him, looking at his wound with those piercing red visors for eyes, not showing the burning skull that hides within that sharp helmet of his. Kannix glances at Neo and then back at the Knight of Death, clearing his throat as he gets up.

“They found the Visionary Book, but they don’t know what to make of it and where to go next.” Kannix assures as he stands before him, one of the Knights of Grimm who was actually at that place thousands of years ago. He looks at the mountains that surround them and he exhales through his helm.

“It is strange…it has been thousands of years…and yet it still stuns me how these Mountains formed the way they did in such little time. And haunts me.” He adds as he glares at them, these Mountains hide more treacherous secrets than the world even realise. Neo looks rather perplexed whereas the couple Thousand-Year-Old one right next to her does not share the same expression. He looks to them again and he points with the tip of Ferrum Arctus to one of the buildings, one that looks like an Armoury.

He says no more, turning and walking in the direction of the Chapel, where the heroes are currently still inside of. His wings extend from his smoky cape and the armour dissolves away into the smog, transforming into the black Nevermore. The huge creature roars as it flies towards the mountains, leaving them behind. Neo and Kannix both look at the building of which the Knight of Death pointed at, so they get up and walk towards it.

Kannix opens the door, and they both stop as the door closes behind him, seeing Vir Nominis Umbra sat in one of the chairs with his legs stretched out and crossed over each other on the table where a rifle sits. He has a blood red apple in his hand, taking a bite from it and swallowing it down. “So…it appears they have bested you two once again.” He comments, throwing the apple over his shoulder, bouncing it off the wall and missing the bin.

He sighs and gets up, walking over and putting it in the bin, he may be a monster, but he is not a savage.

Kannix coughs, feeling his aura repairing the damage inflicted upon him by Qrow Branwen. “Well we were outnumbered.” Kannix states as Vir Nominis Umbra paces around. “Even with Fear on our
side, they had Ozpin and Kragen there. And two Maidens.”

“Indeed, they did, it is clear that you two are in dire need of an upgrade.” He states, pressing the tips of his fingers against each other as he stands before them, and they all stand, eagerly waiting to hear what it is he meant by that. He presses some pieces of armour down on the table and Neo’s eyes widen when she sees them…the black and gold colour scheme…

Then they both look at Umbra, and walking round from the other room is a chillingly familiar face, for it is their own…but the fractured reflection. The Onyx Phantom emerges with its hands behind its back, walking round and stopping behind the table. “It has become incredibly clear that you were more formidable with the gifts I gave you when Pyrrha was mine to command. But now she is free…we are weaker. Which is why I have come to offer you this – two Onyx Phantoms, both free to make your own choices, but with the same fighting skills and strengths.” The Onyx Phantom offers.

Kannix smirks, already onboard, the man is always wanting to become stronger, to always kill his enemies no matter what. Whereas Neo looks afraid as she massages her shoulder, remembering when Jaune stabbed that hook through her and hanged her off the edge of that building. That put her out of commission for weeks.

“This is not an order…but a choice.” Vir Nominis Umbra assures with his hands extended. Kannix picks up one of the swords that lays on the table with the black and gold metal forged into it, and he grins.

“I accept.” He states, and Neo stammers, running her fingers across her old armour she wore during the Volcanic Chain Isles.

“Neopolitan?” He asks her, awaiting her response.

*He made you a promise, you know…*

She exhales, wanting to get the prise of that promise, nodding her head.

The Onyx Phantoms have returned.

**Ozpin**

The wind whistles around him, icy cold air brushing off the cog armour that rotates round him, his helmet rolling away and the many cogs start to glimmer a green hue…as they fade away and his body changes back into his human form. With his glasses rested over his brown eyes and his hands pressed atop the cane which houses the Relic of Knowledge…he stares out at the beautiful mountains. A sight that did not exist a few thousand years ago, and a sight that has clearly claimed many lives after the Congregation of Dawn did what they did. He can hear the chatter from behind him of the rest of the party conversing with Jaune over what it was he saw inside of the Visionary Book, describing the Arcs and the Varr Skaal, about Vyrryk Arc and Claudia Barrett, about Constantine…

About Wymerus Ozymandias and the three other Knights of Grimm that were with him before the Pirate Captain became one as well.

It was only so long before their attention would turn to him, and he knows exactly when that would
happen as soon as Jaune reaches the topic of the Congregation of Dawn…and what they did. He turns and looks at Blake Belladonna, her reaction visible with horror and heartbreak to hear how her people were killed for just being born the way they were. “They killed them…right in front of Vyrryk and the Knights…the guy who did it though…he had magic.” Jaune explains.

Now their attention turns to the Knight of Vengeance that stands before them with snow on his shoulder and his green scarf blowing in the cold wind. Jaune and Ruby both step forward and stare at him as he stands before them, taller and yet he feels small in comparison to them…for how they have not made the mistakes he has made in his long life. “Professor…the Visionary Book ended when those Faunus Prisoners were killed by the Congregation of Dawn…I don’t know where else we can go, there was no message left behind.” Jaune explains, for they have all reached a dead end right now. They have absolutely no idea of where Vyrryk’s trail ended up next.

Ozpin looks at them, looking down to the shorter but still strong Ruby Rose. “You were there…what happened after they killed the Faunus?” Ruby questions, and Ozpin closes his eyes with a heavy sigh as he walks past them, and he runs his fingers across the architecture of this place, for once the Chapel was on the ground, looking at the steps that lead to nowhere at all.

“The Congregation of Dawn began their campaign that day, sending their Followers across Remnant to hunt down and kill every single Faunus born individual they saw. They were killed in horrific forms of ritual for their sickening beliefs.” Ozpin explains, clenching his hand into a fist as he walks around the room, looking out at the beautiful view, which is also a mass graveyard.

“W-Why?” Blake stammers fearfully, and Ozpin turns to her with sympathy in his eyes for her.

“Because you were different, and they feared that deep down. The Father would never admit it, but the truth was there. They chose to serve a False God that could decimate everything they knew just by clenching his fist when he had all the Relics.” Ozpin explains, and Raven looks at the Professor as she raises a brow at the name – False God.

“False God…you mean Vir Nominis Umbra?” Raven inquires, and Ozpin nods his head.

“He has been known by many names, the Coming Annihilation, the Chaos Bringer, Man of Shadows, the Soothsayer…and as we know him by his real name – Vir Nominis Umbra. It is likely he has countless other titles over the years he has existed, in different universes and different cultures wiped from existence.” Ozpin answers as he thinks back on the many terrors that the entity has delivered in his time.

“He created the Congregation of Dawn?” Jaune asks.

“No…they were not always monsters.” Ozpin answers.

“They once were peaceful religious people, who did not serve a False God determined to end everything we knew. The Shadow Knights? The Silver Eyed Warriors? It is where we once started, determined to serve our Gods and protect those with the gifts we were granted.” Kragen adds with his explanation, showing that there used to be a good version of the cruel order…but now they have changed.

“But the Silver Eyed Warriors split from the Congregation when their methods started to change and became more Fanatical, designing a perfect race, a pure race as they called it. Only Humans, humans that were heterosexual, of the same colour and of the same belief. Everything else would have to be destroyed, and Vir Nominis Umbra promised them sanctuary if they did.” Ozpin explains, and Cinder looks at the floor when she hears how anyone who was not even Heterosexual were hunted down. Her and Emerald would have died, Scarlet and Sage, Ilia, Gray…seems even in death the
Congregation of Dawn have been getting what they wanted in some way.

But now everything is dying.

Ruby scoffs as she looks around at what remains of the Congregation of Dawn. “Didn’t help them though, did it? Guess he is a liar.” She states, shaking her head, then Ozpin looks at her.

“Oh no, Ruby. He didn’t lie, they asked to live forever…so he granted them that.” He explains, and they all look confused.

“What do you mean?” Winter asks as she stops sharpening her swords, and he looks down to the damage around them from their battle against the Knights’ Bannermen.

“We fought them today…or what was left of them.” Ozpin answers, the answer sends chills across their spines to learn that the entities they fought today were once Congregation of Dawn Acolytes.

“The Knights’ Bannermen…they’re them?” Blake questions with disbelief and he nods his head.

“A cruel form of irony, because they never stated how they wanted to live forever. He stripped them of all their personality, their memories and what made them human…and turned them into nothing more…than drones.” He explains, and that sends more alien chills up their spines, chills that are not coming from the cold air of the Mountains.

“I saw how he did it…” Pyrrha stammers, getting their attention and Jaune gently holds her hand as she remembers her experiences inside of the Charred Forest when she died and was taken there. “He tortured their souls…tore them apart, made them suffer until nothing but agony remained. He turned them into monsters, taking the darkest parts of them and discarded the good somewhere else…leaving only monsters behind.” She explains, her hands shaking when she saw Scarlet and Sage in there with her.

But she doesn’t tell them that…the last thing they need to picture is their friends in there. “Well…I just hope the good people found a better place in some form after Umbra was done with them.” The Architect states, and Penny looks up at him, staying rather quiet in the grand scheme of things.

“However, the fallout from their campaign can still be seen today.” Kragen says as he stands there, Blake looks at him with concern.

“I already know what you’re about to say.” She states.

“The hatred towards the Faunus all stems from them, the reasons have merely changed over the years. Meaning even the White Fang stem from the Congregation of Dawn as a side effect, one that is becoming just as dangerous.” Kragen points out, even when they are gone the monsters are still causing people to die.

Penny stands there, thinking on the subject of turning his own loyalists into monsters when he made them a promise.

“Why would Umbra do that to his own loyalists?” Penny inquires, since she of all of them has never really encountered him apart from the first time she ever saw him…butchering their friends right in front of them.

“Vir Nominis Umbra despised them.” Ozpin answers rather bluntly.

“What? Why? He doesn’t seem to hate the Acolytes of Lien.” Cinder questions with confusion as she steps forward, walking past Yenna with her hand extended.
“Because the Acolytes of Lien do not worship him as a god.” Ozpin answers, and they all look at him with confusion.

“Wait…what? He hated them…because they…worshipped him?” Ren asks with the same level of perplexation on his face. Ozpin looks at them, and it is clear he does not have all the answers to this topic, but he has a theory.

“When I served Vir Nominis Umbra, fighting the battles he started when I was the Knight of Vengeance…he would kill anyone that would mention Gods…or call him a god…every single time he would strike them down without a second thought. I believe that maybe…the Brothers of Light and Darkness have had something to do with his hatred for the name.” Ozpin explains, Ruby’s eyes widen when she remembers the expression, she saw on Vir Nominis Umbra’s face when she thought he was the Brother of Darkness.

There…was…anger…

And then he killed Taiyang.

“He hates the Gods?” Ruby questions and Ozpin scratches his chin.

“I do not know for certain, but evidence does seem to point towards it.” Ozpin tells them, walking round again, using his cane like a walking stick, just as he always had done in the past. Oscar looks at the chasm that he and Neo fell into when they were fighting, and he cannot get the piles of bones, and crumbled houses buried beneath them. He exhales, looking at the man that was once bound in his head.

“Ozpin…” He speaks, getting his attention.

“There were piles and piles of bones down there…Human bones…and buildings…” Oscar stammers, since he has not forgotten what Ozpin said about the creation of these mountains. The question now is…was there people still on the land when they did it. “You said that the Congregation of Dawn used the Relic of Creation to form these Mountains…did they do that when…people were still living there?” Oscar questions with concern and fear in his voice, all awaiting Ozpin’s answer.

“This land…as I told you it was once all beautiful rolling hills of emerald green grass. You most likely saw it all in the Visionary Book, Mr Arc.” Ozpin states as he looks at Jaune, and he nods his head as a response. “Well, once there were twelve different villages and towns, one of them was quite large. They each harboured populations ranging from five hundred to three thousand…” Ozpin explains to them, standing at the steps with his eyes gazing at the Mountains that break through the skies. He turns and looks them all in the eyes. “The Father of the Congregation of Dawn? The man you saw leading them, Jaune? He learned to contain the Relic inside of a Sceptre and he used it to form an entire Mountain Range across this side of Anima, wiping out fifty percent of all life on that side of the continent. And he never warned the villages and towns…they all suffocated and were crushed when the rock formed around them. Nobody survived, and became fossilised inside of stone.” Ozpin explains, and they all stand there with shocked looks on their faces.

All bar the Arkhon Survivors.

“We are standing in a mass grave, everyone.” Ozpin adds as he stares at the landscape that the Father tore apart. Jaune clenches his hands into fists and glares at Ozpin.

“Please tell me that you killed the bastard.” Jaune begs.
“I did not, Vyrryk on the other hand did.” He states, looking at Jaune.

“Good…I hope I get to see it in another Visionary Book.” Jaune says as he walks past Ozpin and leans against one of the pillars inside of this place. Blake looks at Ruby and she ruffles her long black hair with her hand, thinking on everything that he has just told him.

“The Father put the Relic in a Sceptre? I have only seen the canes that you have used.” Winter says as she looks right at the relic with curiosity.

“Yeah, I was just thinking that. All the Relics we have so far have been put in the same things.” Nora points out with similar interest.

“Well – Funnily enough there is a pretty interesting explanation for this. You see only Spectral entities like myself, the Knights or Demons or Umbra can actually use the Relics. But for some reason Silver Eyed Warriors are capable of the same feats, I believe it is to do with the Brother of Light. However, we learned that the user does not need to hold the stone to use its powers but putting it inside of a device that can channel its power without destroying the user is possible.” Ozpin explains to them all and Yenna nods his head.

“Yeah, even Maidens can hold the Relics as well.” Yenna remembers as she managed to hold some when she and Kragen were harbouring them after the Fall of Arkhonex.

“Most likely because your gifts were granted by the power of the Relics thanks to Kragen.” The Architect states with his arms crossed.

“Exactly, just as the Knights can because of our link to Umbra.” Ozpin nods his head.

“So…what kind of devices did you create?” Ruby curiously inquires, and Ozpin thinks back.

“We made many…odd…creations. There was the idea of a paintbrush for creation, but that didn’t work because we couldn’t control it. The Sceptre worked better…Knowledge was strange. At one point we tried making a teddy bear.” Ozpin chuckles as he remembers that one, making the Architect laugh as well.

“Oh yeah, I remember that.” The Architect agrees, whereas the new generation just look totally bewildered.

“A…Teddy…Bear?” Winter questions, until Nora gasps so deeply she nearly inhales her own tongue.

“WAS IT CUTE AND FLUFFY?!“ She squeals as she bounces up and down, only for Ozpin to softly chuckle, admiring how they…despite everything…can have a sense of humour.

“At least your humour has not soured, Miss Valkyrie.” Ozpin states with a smile, and she beams brightly. “And yes, it was fluffy.” He answers, and she bounces again, making Ren chuckle. “For a while.”

“Huh?” Nora asks with fear.

“It came to life for a few seconds and then the raw power of the relic burned it to dust, turns out it could not live inside of everythi

For the first time.

All the Arkhoni Survivors are legitimately stumped. Ozpin looks at the Architect, since he ran many systems before Kragen rescued him from Arkhonex. “Why did we do that, Architect?” He asks him, and the A.I shrugs his shoulders.

“Not a clue, another strange thing the scientists came up with we’ll never know the answers to.” The Architect chuckles.

“In the end however we created designs for four devices of which we could use to hold the relics for safe usage. A Sceptre for Creation, A Lantern for Knowledge, a Sword for Destruction and an Axe for Choice. However, we never finished them, and the Sceptre used by the Father was created by the Congregation, and was destroyed. Meaning we could only use the canes to hold them, which were used for transportation and disguise.” Ozpin explains, holding up his cane where all the cogs slowly rotate round and the spherical pommel atop the cane opens up, allowing the glowing green pebble to rise from the cane.

The light shines across their eyes before it returns back to where it belongs. “So…how does the Relic work? What can it do?” Jaune asks.

“It can give people the ability to know all, however only one person ever did this and she was bound to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. But she could answer every single question. It can also provide answers and knowledge on a smaller scale; however, the questions must be exact otherwise the poor thing could be confused.” Ozpin explains as he holds the stone in his hand.

“You talk of the Relics as if they are living things.” Blake points out with her arms crossed.

“Well they essentially are, you saw the Relic of Choice, it used the Guardian Knights to protect itself. The Relic of Knowledge is similar but aims to teach people, but of course it must know what you are asking, otherwise your answer may be different.” Ozpin explains, putting the stone back inside of the cane where it lives. Letting the green energy flow through it once more.

“So, what about your cane? We have seen you change its form. It even looked like a Sceptre at one point.” Ren asks him.

“Indeed, I have learned how to use the Relic’s magical properties to change this simple cane into a Triple Changer, similar to Crescent Rose and Milo.” Ozpin explains, looking at Pyrrha’s Xiphos Sword in her hand right now. Ruby looks at her weapon holstered on her belt then back at the Professor. Ozpin stands there, and he looks around at the place. “The Father you saw? My biggest regret is that we did not kill him that day.” He states with a saddened sigh.

“How did you get out of there? From what I saw, the whole town was filled with Fanatics.” Jaune asks, remembering how many robe wearing Fanatics surrounded the Vanguards that day.

“The Father released us, and we immediately went to attack him, right there.” He explains as he points at the steps behind him, walking towards the open doors where the outside world is. The
platform looking semi-circle of stone looks like it is meant for a ship to land on, however this is just where the Chapel was lifted up by a Mountain forming from the ground. Tearing it from the rest of the world. The scuffs are still in the ground where the conflict ensued.

“The Father looked like Salem, he had a black stone in his forehead and his eyes were just like hers.” Jaune points out and Oscar looks at Jaune with disbelief.

“Really?” He asks him.

“Yep, same veins and everything. His skin wasn’t pale like hers though.” Jaune states, and Ozpin nods his head.

“That is the Salem Curse.” Ozpin answers and they gasp.

“Salem Curse?” They question at once.

“The Salem Curse is something bound to a stone only found in the Charred Forest, one that feeds negative energy and hate into the user’s soul. Their skin over time turns pale like the Grimm, eyes red and scleras black and hair goes white. However, it is not like they are possessed, they literally become the very thing they sought to destroy. Very similar to the Knights of Grimm.” Ozpin explains to them all as he walks down the steps.

“Salem…Kragen once told us that she was a Silver Eyed Warrior, and that Cynthia Nikos worked with them. The two of them and Kragen worked together to start the Silver Eyed Warriors.” Qrow explains as he walks with them and Oscar gasps as he looks at Qrow.

“Cynthia? The girl I spoke to when Oz took me there?” He asks.

“Yes, she is the same woman. I had to take you there to make sure Cynthia would be motivated to begin the Warriors. She wanted to find you, you know…it was cruel I know, but it had to be done.” Ozpin explains, and Ruby looks at Oscar with sadness.

“Well, I couldn’t betray Ruby…but if it helped create the Silver Eyed Warriors then it was worth it right?” He asks.

“We will see.” Ozpin states as he holds his hands behind his back. “The Father was different to Salem, he was completely indoctrinated by the curse and by Umbra, I believe Salem has her own personal reasons…against me.” He explains, and their eyes widen.

“Why you?” Penny inquires.

“She never seemed to be fond of you.” Oscar remembers, Ruby nodding her head in agreement as they remember back to being held in her custody.

“I have made many mistakes…when I was Vengeance…I played a role in her downfall.” He reveals, and they all stare at him with disbelief. “Something I could have avoided if we just killed the Father right then and there…but we couldn’t. He got away and we had to flee. We went from town to town until we could get to the Dauntless…and we sailed back to Arkhonex to warn them of a declaration of War. Whereas Vyrryk went to protect the Varr Skaal…” He explains to them all, but they all come to the same conclusion.

“So, we’re at a dead end…we don’t know where the next Visionary Book is?” Ruby asks, and he nods his head.

“It appears so, I do not know where Vyrryk could have possibly left one. Even the Relic cannot
answer that question, the Books are not linked to it like the rest of the world. They contain personal memories from a dead man in places designed to keep them hidden from its gaze. Meaning it is useless in finding them.” Ozpin explains and they all sigh with annoyance.

“Great…damn it! We need to find Arkhonex if they are gonna survive! We need this cure.” Ruby states with panic in her voice…then luck hits her in a vibrating form. She feels her scroll buzzing away in her pocket, she pulls it out and gasps…it is patchy, but it is still hope. Kassius is calling her, thankfully the C.C.T is still up, and they can use it.

Maybe he could be their hope for finding the next location.

**Kassius**

While aboard their Peregrine…or Karadin’s Peregrine technically…Kassius is sat in one of the chairs as Emerald flies the ship. All of them are back in their memorable outfits that they have always worn. Kassius wears his buttoned-up shirt underneath his deep brown trench coat and his stetson sat on the armrest. With his dark blue jeans on as well and his belt of magazines for his firearms, he feels right at home. Consisting of modified bullets gifted to him thanks to Weiss and Winter Schnee as a birthday present. He also has Lash Equinox and Vulcan Nox beside him too.

Stood over from Kassius is Coco. Her clothes consist of a long, cocoa-coloured shirt with a dark brown waist cincher. She wears long, dark brown trousers with ribbons on the left side and a brown belt with bullets.

Above it, she wears another cocoa-coloured belt of bullets with a gold crosshairs buckle. What appears to be a drape of black skirt hangs on her right side. She wears a pair of dark brown, high-heeled leather boots with buckles.

Coco also dons a number of accessories, such a bracelet with black roses as decoration; these are accompanied by black gloves and necklaces. She wears a beret of a darker brown and a pair of black, wire-rimmed aviator sunglasses. She is seen holding a black shoulder bag with gold studs, which is held by a bandolier strap; the bag is her weapon, transforming into an oversized black and gold minigun.

Sat in one of the chairs, pulling up one of her boots is Velvet. Her combat gear is comprised by a short, long-sleeved brown jacket with a golden zipper, brown shorts with golden detail and black leggings. She wears a black, semi-translucent undershirt beneath her jacket, along with golden spaulders and vambraces on both arms, as well as a similar belt, and her heel and toe are likewise protected.

Emerald and Cardin wear the same outfits that they have always worn, Cardin’s is a bit different to how it used to be back at Beacon, with more wear and tear on it and some additions in places. Whereas Emerald is still just as revealing as she has always been. But they all have their weapons back too, Velvet with her camera and box, filled with multiple weapons she can use whenever she needs to.

Kassius holds his scroll up to his ear as Ruby answers his calls. “Kassius! Oh, thank the gods you’re okay.” She sighs with relief, making Kassius chuckle.

“Hey there, Knucklehead.” Kassius responds with a smile, chuckling whenever he hears her voice.
“Good to know you’re still breathing. Things are getting pretty scary out here.” Kassius explains.

“What do you mean?” Ruby inquires.

“The White Fang have started a war against the Acolytes and Atlas, flying to Vytal has been harder than we thought.” He explains, Ruby turns her scroll onto speaker mode so then everyone can hear him. Luckily Blake just heard what he said, and she walks over to the speaker.

“Wait…they are fighting the Acolytes?” Blake asks with concern.

“Yeah, looks like Mazen is avoiding every other human…targeting all his efforts against our common enemy.” Kassius tells them. “Hell, he let us go and all the other humans out from the Trafficker’s base when we escaped.” Kassius tells them.

“He seemed like he wanted us wiped off the face of the Earth a few weeks ago.” Ruby scoffs.

“Well it looked like Adam might have rubbed off on him…wouldn’t have thought I’d say that five years ago.” Kassius chuckles as he remembers back when he snapped his horn from his head…the first time they actually met in person. Blake on the other end hangs her head sadly, because she had to deliver the killing blow in the end.

“So…how are things going on your end? We got your message about Coco and Velvet being with you. Did you get Pyrrha’s Circlet?” Ruby inquires softly as she stands there with her scroll.

“Yeah, I’m looking at it right now.” Kassius states as he looks at it on the table. “We found the inscription, we are headed to Vytal, at least that is what we think it meant…damn Arkhon love their riddles.” Kassius states, then Ozpin turns and walks over to them.

“Vytal?” Ozpin asks as he approaches the scroll that Ruby holds in her hand.

“Oz.” Kassius greets on the other end.

“Kassius.” He replies. “Did you say you were headed to the Island of Vytal?” He asks him.

“Yeah…not too stoked about it, honestly considering what happened there…but if we have to, we will.” Kassius explains with a heavy sigh.

“You could really help us then, because we have hit a dead end.” Ozpin states and Kassius raises a brow as he stands up with his scroll.

“Why? What’s at Vytal?” He asks him.

“I ordered the construction of that Academy to protect what was buried there, it was an ancient Map Room of Remnant. It is out of date, but it could help us figure out how to get up to Arkhonex without being tracked.” Ozpin explains.

“Hold on a second, you know roughly where the city is, don’t you?” Kassius asks him.

“Yes.” Ozpin answers, something they already can guess.

“Then why don’t we all just go there?” Kassius inquires.

“Because the level of Grimm there is suicide to go in like that, however there is a secret tunnel system under water we can take, something the Grimm are unlikely to be inside of because we sealed it off when the attack began.” Ozpin explains, and they hear a sigh from Kragen.
“Killing millions in the process too.” Kragen adds and Ozpin nods his head.

“Regrettable…but now it could be our best chance we have. We can take our ships to each of these tunnels, there were three, but I think one collapsed or got infested recently. If we can locate where the tunnels opened up on the continents, we can use them. It was used for quick trading routes between different continents.” Ozpin explains to them all, and Kassius nods his head.

“So, we get in the Map Room, then what? Do we take a picture?” Kassius asks.

“That may be the easiest method of recording the evidence.” Ozpin replies.

“Alright then, we’ll look for this Map Room. I’m guessing it is underneath the Academy, right?” Kassius inquires.

“Yes, it was meant to be the next Vault. Until that attack hit.” Ozpin answers.

“Okay, I’ll call back if we find anything.” Kassius assures.

“Stay safe, Kassius. We’ll stay up here in the Mountains, see if we can find anything else, could be another Visionary Book around here somewhere.” Ruby tells him, and Kassius nods his head.

“Okay, stay safe knucklehead.” Kassius tells her and she chuckles.

“You too, Kas.” She replies.

They end their call and he shoves his scroll into his Coat Pocket, picking up his stetson with his cybernetic hand and fitting it onto his head as he walks over to the rest of his team. He may not want to be a Team Leader anymore, but it is in his blood…he is a better leader than he realises. “So? Everything good on their end?” Coco curiously asks.

“They’re at a dead end, one we could help sort out for them. Ozpin said there is an Arkhoni Map Room underneath the unfinished Academy. We get inside and use it we could speed up our search for a way into Arkhonex undetected.” Kassius explains to her.

“And that method is?” Cardin curiously inquires.

“According to Oz, there are two long tunnel networks that go underwater that a Peregrine and a Prowler can fit into. They used it for trading and evacuations, except they closed them off when Arkhonex was attacked to prevent them getting infested.” Kassius explains to them, summing up what Ozpin said quite well.

“Gods…” Velvet gasps as she covers her mouth.

“Sounds like the Arkhonis were…morally grey.” Emerald scoffs as she flies through the clouds.

“To put it mildly.” Kassius chuckles, walking over to Coco to speak with her. “Hey, Coco…I have to ask…why did you decide to help me? I know you promised Yang, but you don’t owe me a thing.” Kassius asks her curiously, she looks at him and she takes off her sunglasses to get real with him. She holds them in her hand and she exhales, looking at him.

“You’re a friend, Kassius. I look out for my friends, but yeah that isn’t the only reason.” She states as she walks over to the window and presses her hands against it, gazing out at the expanse of sapphire blue ocean.

“I had a feeling you had your own agenda.” Cardin states.
“It’s not like that, asshole. If I didn’t have my own problems, we would still help you. It’s what friends do.” Coco snarls, glaring right at him and Cardin scoffs.

“I’m sorry, what was that supposed to mean?” Cardin challenges as he walks towards her with anger in his eyes and Coco turns around as well, clenching her hand into a fist.

“It means that we went and helped save Ruby while you and your team were cowering in Vacuo! Did you even know she lost her eye? Was tortured by a psycho?” Coco snarls with anger and Cardin grits his teeth.

“Don’t you dare try to judge me.” Cardin growls as he squares up against her, until Kassius steps between them and shoves them apart.

“Lock it down! Both of you!” Kassius orders. Cardin scoffs, shaking his head as he turns and walks away from Coco, Kassius looks at the Fashionista. “What do you mean?” Kassius asks her and she sighs.

“Have you noticed that two of my team are missing?” Coco inquires, and Kassius nods his head, dreading to know why…hoping they were not killed.

“Yeah I’ve noticed…been meaning to ask.” Kassius answers, and Coco nods her head.

“We got ambushed by Acolytes of Lien, Yatsu and Fox got captured…Velvet and me nearly got killed in the process. End of the day, Merlot is the one that has been taking people…I know he is your dad and has turned against them, but I need to find them. If we find a lead on their location… I’m finding them.” Coco states and Kassius looks at her and nods.

“We will find them.” Kassius corrects and she raises a brow.

“No, this is our business, I don’t wanna get friends involved.” She states.

“Friends, look out for each other.” Kassius repeats exactly what she just said, and she sighs with defeat, shaking her head.

“Okay…fine…” She sighs.

The talk ends when Emerald calls to them and gets their attention. “Land-Ho! Looks like Vytal… gods…the state of it.” She gasps as she pilots the Peregrine towards it. Kassius walks over to her and rests his hand on the back of her chair, staring at the destruction of the unfinished colony on the island where the Great War came to a close. Just staring at it makes him uncomfortable…but he has a mission and has never let his feelings get in the way of it.

“Forgot how much I hated this place…” He states, feeling his scars from the Terror Bird Grimm begin to throb slightly at the memory. “C’mon…let’s get this over with.” Kassius says as she begins to land the Peregrine. The thrusters decelerate and the landing gear folds out, wings folding upwards as well as it lands…hidden safely behind the rocks. The landing gear sets onto the beach and the door opens up, all of them walking out and looking around at the destruction which surrounds them.

Kassius steps foot first onto the beach, and as soon as he does it is like a channel of memories shoots into his mind. Seeing this place once all repaired, houses being built around him, the taste of claret in his mouth from the fights he got into with other kids. They all walk forward and into the street, and Kassius stops as he sees phantom children playing past him, something the others don’t see.

All of this is echoing from his own past.
Kassius sighs, and Cardin looks at him as he struggles to walk through the place of which he and his sister were born in. He looks at one of the houses to see the ghostly silhouette of a Nevermore screeching to the sky when they attacked. Only now for that building to be a husk of what it once was.

Cardin stands behind him and looks down at his own reflection in a puddle…seeing another face, and not his own. One that is dark and chilling…guilt filling his mind.

He tenses, and keeps moving.

They all walk up a hill to see the destroyed remnants of the Academy that was under construction when the attack began. The land torn apart, and the scars of war still seen in areas. But the Academy was hardly even formed, only the skeleton of the fifth C.C.T Tower was built and the bones of the buildings. And walking around the area are many florae covered Grimm, ones that have never left since the attack a decade ago. They all gasp when they see them around the area, bones scattered.

“By the gods…” Velvet whispers.

Suddenly a deafening roar echoes across the landscape, and they all look up to the clouds, seeing the huge black wings swinging through and the giant Dragon that attacked Beacon banks around the remains of the C.C.T Tower, decelerating and hovering over the Grimm. Velvet gasps with horror, flashes of terrifying memories hitting her all at once as she stares at the monster before her very eyes.

Then…She rises.

Salem.

She stands up off the large saddle on the neck of the huge dragon and she looks down and stares right into the eyes of Kassius, seeing him and the others. “And so…we meet again.” She greets.

“So…you’re still running the show.” Kassius softly says with an impressed voice.

“How the hell did she survive that eruption?” Coco questions with disbelief, unaware Salem teleported off the Volcanic Chain Isles before they blew to pieces.

Kassius glares at her and he clenches his hand into a fist. “Yeah…I got your number, bitch.” Kassius whispers, and Salem smirks.

“Rise up my children!” Salem calls out to the many Grimm around her.

They all rise from the bones of Vytal and stare straight at the Huntsmen.

“Do not let them find that Map Room.” She demands.

Then the Grimm charge towards them. Kassius sighs with annoyance. “Why can’t anything ever be easy?”
Painful Memory

Whitley

After the incident at Solomon Karadin’s…

Jacques paces back and forth in the office he always stands in, with his youngest child sat in a chair before him, normally the kids would look frightened of being brought in here by his command. Yet Whitley just looks bored, showing no care for what he did to Solomon, all because he annoyed him.

“What were you thinking, Whitley?” Jacques questions with a roar in his voice, Whitley furrows his brow and he huffs a sigh.

“What does it matter? He was just a criminal, he was underneath our power.” Whitley shrugs as he sits there, trying to defend his case, but Jacques is having none of it, shaking his head with his blue eyes staring his son down.

“It matters because he was the one that ensured that our passage of supplies into Vacuo was ensured. With the White Fang everywhere at the time, and now of course – we needed defence from them. Unlike what happened the last time when we lost the whole shipment.” Jacques explains, staring at him and desperately trying to get this message through to his son.

“Do you understand what I am saying here, son?” He questions.

“Not particularly, no. With the Acolytes of Lien, we don’t need him.” Whitley shrugs as he sits there, and Jacques grabs the bridge of his nose, groaning with desperation for his son to wise up to the real world. Jacques shakes his head as he stands there, about to teach Whitley a lesson.

“Tell me, what strength do the Acolytes of Lien have?” He asks him curiously, so Whitley goes for the obvious answer.

“Military force.” He answers.

“Yes, what others can you name?” He asks him curiously, but that question stumps the young adult sat in the chair, searching his mind for the answer but nothing comes up for him. Like when someone uses the internet browser on their computer but no matter what it is that they type nothing appears for them.

“I…”

“You cannot find any, can you? That is because they are primarily a military force, whereas Karadin was different. He had thugs, but he also had major pull in the Vacuo Council, extra funding and lots of unique specialists. Things that made the transportation of our dust supplies much easier. Not that it matters now since you have cocked this all up thoroughly enough to nearly start a war between us and the Cartel. That is the last thing we need on our table right now with the White Fang on us.” Jacques explains, staring right at his son with a raided voice at the end of his explanation.

He sighs, sitting down in his chair as he massages his brow with his thumb and forefinger. “It doesn’t matter anymore…what’s done is done…I just wish you weren’t so careless.” He sighs as he sits before the boy at his table.

“The man had it coming.” He defends, still not accepting his responsibility in all this, angering his
father more and more with every single time he repeats the cycle.

“Did he? Because I have heard many concerns about your state of mind recently, from making brash decisions and punching those who disagree with you in the nose. It will only be so long until you piss the wrong man off. Ortega is already showing concerns as well, and the man has never been wrong about these kinds of things.” Jacques explains, and Whitley raises a brow at his father.

“So, what? You've been conspiring behind my back?” He questions, and Jacques rolls his eyes.

“You make it sound like the things I have heard have been whispers, it has been shouting. And I have seen the damages done to reputation over those five years when you were in charge, you kept everything going but you also have been known to hurt employees.” Jacques explains to him, remembering the reports that he read about his own son.

He has been showing increased levels of lack of concern for human life, to almost sociopathic levels.

“You need to make sure you fix whatever it is that is happening here, because you are making our place here very perilous indeed. I already am losing faith in Ortega, and he is starting to drift away from us. Merlot is gone as well, I need as many allies as I can, and I will not have your actions be the reason behind the collapse of our family.” Jacques reminds him, and Whitley looks at him with a sigh.

“Do you think Ortega might betray us?” Whitley inquires, and he sighs.

“I am not certain, I want to speak with him of a new plan later on today.” Jacques explains as he scratches the back of his neck. “Hopefully…he will understand.” He states.

“He will have to.” Whitley adds.

Jacques narrows his eyes as he looks at his son.

This war…

It is really starting to get under Whitley’s skin, turning him into something quite frightening.

Kassius

The rumbling tremors of the many Grimm charging towards them grows and grows.

Kassius cracks his neck as the huge Dragon takes off above their heads, swinging those massive wings with great force downwards, the downdraft breaks shards of wood that stick out of the ground like old bones. It roars monstrously as Salem watches from above as the Huntsmen begin their attack, Emerald staring up at her old master with fear in her red eyes. Kassius however charges towards the Grimm with Coco and Cardin at his sides, flicking the hilts of Lash Equinox upwards. The long blades fold out from them and he jumps in the air, immediately throwing one of them straight into the chest of a Beowulf.

The Creature of Grimm roars in agony as the blade sinks deep, directly through its ribcage and bringing it to the ground, disintegrating away into thick black smoky ashes, leaving his sword wedged in the ground. As he lands beside his sword and spins round on the spot as he grabs onto it with his metal hand, pulling it out from the ground and thrusting both of them upwards, into the chest
of an Ursa Minor, making it roar in agony as the smoke bleeds from the wounds. Until he fires both Vulcan Nox bracers into its head, killing it instantaneously in one duel shot.

Coco walks towards the Grimm as they approach her, roaring and growling viciously, apparently under the idea that they could take the fashionista down…boy are they wrong. She winks at the Boarbatusk that charges towards her, squealing as it runs fast, then rolling at great speeds. Coco steps aside and whacks her armoured bag across the head of the rolling beast, knocking it to the ground. She ducks down and avoids the slashing claws of a Beowulf behind her, and then she kicks it right in the crotch…bringing to its knees. She leans down and kisses her fingers with a grin. “Nighty-Night!” Coco cheers as she slams the bag downwards with all her might, cracking its skull open and ending its life instantly.

The Boarbatusk charges towards her again, only for Cardin to slam his mace into its face so hard that it killed the beast immediately in the single swing. Cardin turns and catches the wrist of a second Beowulf, holding it there as he pushes it back and swings his mace like a Golf Club. “Fore!” Cardin calls out, sending the Grimm stratospheric from how hard he hit the beast into the sky…fading away.

However, it is hard to tell if it faded away due to dying and disintegrating, or because it went through the clouds.

The important part is that it did not come back down.

Cardin has a smirk on his face, until he looks at his reflection in the puddle to see the strange deformed reproduction staring right at him. He shakes whatever that feeling he just experienced from his mind and carries on, then Coco smirks as she transforms her handbag into its Chaingun form, unfathomable amounts of mechanical pieces forming seemingly from nowhere. The many barrels extend, and she aims down the sights at the large horde of Grimm that charge towards them.

“Boo-yah!” She cheers, squeezing the trigger down as she unleashes a storm of bullets upon the creatures before her, shredding them all into a thousand pieces, blowing a large Deathstalker into a thousand chunks that all burn away into the black smoke. But the Grimm just keep coming, especially when Salem and her Grimm Dragon soar overhead and drop down more pools of Grimm into the battlefield, spawning more of them.

Kassius stares at Salem and he sarcastically holds out his arms. “Hey! Uncalled for!” Kassius yells, but Salem just rolls her eyes, annoyed by the constant sarcasm that has surrounded her recently. The Knight of Fear, Vir Nominis Umbra and now Kassius Locke.

*How are they so…energetic?*

Velvet stands there, and she closes her eyes, using her semblance to manifest the weapon of Myrtenaster, forming the fencing sword in her hand, then she rushes forward towards the battle with Emerald. The thief throws one of her scythes with the long grappling chain built into it, wrapping it around a flagpole and swinging round from the damaged supports of a building that once stood there, now overgrown after years of abandonment. She swings down and then slams down onto the spine of a Creep, breaking its back until she presses the barrel of her revolver against its head, pulling the trigger so then she can finish it off. It fades away into thick black smoke at her feet and she walks towards the beasts.

She looks up with a gasp as a Griffin soars down towards her, with its beaked jaws open and clawed legs extended to attack her. But Emerald rolls aside and then she throws both of her scythes with chains built into them up at the creature, stabbing them directly into its ribs. The Griffin screeches in agony as she holds onto the chains and she slams it downwards, directly onto the large spike of wood and metal in the ground, killing it instantly. She rips her scythes from the corpse as it crumbles...
away into black smoke and she spins them round, immediately slashing them across the necks of three Beowulves jumping at her rear. They all fade away, disappearing as quickly as they arrived.

Velvet mimics the fighting style of Weiss Schnee exceptionally well, jabbing one of the Beowulves repeatedly with the Rapier until it fades away, twirling on the spot like a ballerina as she beheads one of them. She even takes their style of personality as well, as if she has photographic memory of specific people and their mannerisms, meaning she could be a fantastic actress.

Velvet turns as her long bunny ears perk up as a Deathstalker erupts from the ground behind her, roaring as it snaps its pincers at the adorable little bunny. She gasps, and she cartwheels away from the titanic arachnid as it slowly moves towards her. She changes weapons to something that could handle a Deathstalker a little better – forming Magnhild in her hands as she blasts towards the beast. She swings the hammer with all her might, just as Nora does, and the impact snaps off one of the mandibles of the huge Scorpion. The Deathstalker roars in agony as the black smoke for blood bleeds from the head of it, stumbling around the area, leaving deep tracks all over the ground. The monster suddenly changes attacks, with the huge stinger thrusting down towards her.

She gasps, and she transforms the Hammer into its Grenade Launcher form, firing a grenade and exploding it near to her, riding the shockwave away from the entity. The explosion throws chunks of debris into the face of the entity and its glowing red eye. It screeches in pain, wobbling around as it stands before them. As the stringer crashes down into the ground where Velvet was stood, it writhes the limb around in distress, finding it to be caught in some roots from the trees underground. The huge Scorpion snarls with fury as it struggles to yank the glowing gold stinger from the ground, then she walks round the huge creature, its four eyes watching her…as if begging for mercy.

Velvet jumps up into the air and she twirls round, holding the huge hammer over her head as she falls towards it and crushes its skull with the head of the hammer. The impact forms a small tremor, one that causes the damaged buildings to buckle around them. Chunks of debris falling down into the battlefield. Kassius rolls out of the way just in time as a chunk of wood from a destroyed building crashes into the ground right next to his head, then he stabs the blade of Lash Equinox into the chest of another Beowulf. He lifts his head and his eyes widen as a deafening and savage roar erupts from the destruction and land of hurtful memories.

The rubble flies up into the air as they see a large group of Horridus Morbus thralls sprinting towards them, roaring with savagery in their demented voices. Some of their bodies have been completely converted from either Human or Faunus into the Grimm Mutations from the plague that has been unleashed. And leading them is a huge Beringel…a Merlot Mutated One as well, with glowing green fluid that flows through its veins. His messed-up experiments are now merely weapons for Salem to use, and it has truly deformed them now.

The Beringel has a pair of tusks like that of a Boarbatusk on its face, curving down from the jaws of sharp teeth with serrated edges on them, along with sharp spines protruding from its back and arms. It charges towards Kassius and he grits his teeth as he clenches his metal fist and pulls his arm all the way back as the Gorilla Grimm storms its way towards him. It swings its fist at him and Kassius swings his forward, fists colliding.

Cybernetic versus Grimm, the impact sends a powerful shockwave of wind through the wooden chunks that stick out from the ground where buildings collapsed. The wood shatters like glass as he holds the beast there, then he fires his Vulcan Nox at its head, only causing it to growl in anger. The beast bellows, swinging at him again but this time Kassius jumps and he grapples onto the muscular Ape Arm, and swings round onto its back. He grabs onto the many spikes and then he stabs both blades of Lash Equinox into its back, holding on tight. The Beringel stares at him, following with a vicious and thunderous howl.
The Beringel grabs onto Kassius and then grapples him tight, squeezing him in its muscular pressure, spinning round as it howls and throws Kassius across the battlefield. Kassius flies through the air, then crashes down into the ground, splitting wood with his body. He grunts as he tumbles through the dirt and wooden supports, slamming against the wall that still stands around the place, that was never finished in time. He groans, pushing his hand slowly against the ground to get back up. He looks up to see the Beringel crashing through the bog towards him, roaring over and over again, jumping towards him with its fists held above its head.

Until a green chained scythe suddenly wraps around the Beringel’s neck, and slams it down into the ground. The mutated beast – still alive – snarls as it presses its knuckles down to get back up, drooling from the mouth to see Emerald landing down next to Kassius, helping him back up. “You still breathing, Kassius?” Emerald asks him as she stands beside him, as the Beringel also gets back up, pacing back and forth. Kassius stands tall, and he cracks his neck as he uses his orange aura to repair the bruises and cuts on his body from being thrown into the shattered buildings.

“Think so.” Kassius answers, picking up his stetson and batting the dirt from the crest, putting it back on his head.

“That’s one of Merlot’s mutations, I remember seeing them.” Emerald states.

“Yeah same, seen them before. Real pain in the ass.” Kassius remarks as he picks Lash Equinox back up, truly showing his priorities there when he picks up the weapons – second to the hat.

He’ll never change.

He loves that hat.

“Just keep hitting the bastard until he explodes, that’s my strategy, but wanna know the best areas to hit? The glowing parts, I found they are the softest.” Emerald tells him, Kassius can tell that this is not the first time she has seen them since Merlot’s experiments either, she must have fought them when on the run from Salem as well. “When we find your dad…can I hit him for making these damned things? They are a real pain in the ass.”

Kassius chuckles. “You’ll have to get in line.” He says as the Beringel roars, charging towards them again. The two of them rush towards the beast, jumping to attack it. Emerald wraps one of her scythes around its neck and she holds on, firing her other pistol at one of the glowing portions on its torso that she described. And rightfully so, every shot spills the green liquid and makes the whole-body flicker, and the Beringel cries out in pain. The Beringel snarls, grabbing onto the chains and wrapping them around its arm, holding onto her and swinging round, throwing the green haired thief into the ground.

Kassius rolls out the way as the Beringel digs its clawed fingers into the ground, grabbing onto a boulder and throwing it straight at Kassius with fury. He just avoids it and fires Vulcan Nox at its weakest part, the belly by the looks of it, the most glowing part. The Beringel snarls, using its thick armoured forearms to protect the weakness as it charges towards Kassius. “Oh shit.” Kassius mutters as it slams both fists down at him, so he slides out the way, slashing the blade of his sword across its jawline, black smoke and green fluid spurring from the wound.

The Beringel turns and slams its open palms together at where Kassius’ head was, only to find he ducked and thrust his blades into its stomach, not enough to kill it yet though. The Beringel roars in pain as it staggers back, then the pain turns to rage as it goes to pound Kassius flat in the ground, until Emerald returns. She jumps up from the rubble and she slashes her scythes across its back and it snarls in anger, feeling the ling spikes on its back get sliced off. As one of them falls Emerald kicks it with her foot, blasting the spike right into its chest, making it stagger back.
Kassius jumps back and looks at the arms then at Emerald’s scythes. “Em! Try and restrain the bastard! I can take him out with a few rounds that Yang got me for my birthday!” Kassius tells her.

“Specific details, but sure!” Emerald jokes, since he didn’t really need to go into detail on where he got them. Emerald fires her pistols repeatedly at the huge Silverback Grimm, thrusting forward as she spins through the air, creating a cyclone of slashes across its body, dealing some immense damage. All it needs now is the final blow from Kassius, cracks and leaking fluid covering the body of the beast. She throws her chains around the arms of the beast and then ties them together, pulling back so then it cannot move its arms.

Kassius removes the mags of normal ammo, then moves his arms down to the magnetic bullet strip magazines with Yang’s Symbol printed onto it. The mechanical pieces in his weapon load the bullets into the chamber as they fit into the slot atop the forearm. Then he aims at the Beringel restrained by Emerald. “Yang sends her regard.” Kassius tells the beast, firing them both at once, launching very similar miniature missiles that curve round, then seeking down to the stomach of the Silverback. It roars one last time as the explosive shells impact the body, sending cracks across its whole body.

Then they remember…

Merlot’s Experiments explode when they die instead of disintegrating. Kassius sprints to Emerald as it begins to detonate, tackling her and protecting her from the blast. The Beringel howls to the sky as its arms are held out, then it explodes piece by piece. Rupturing chunks of armour apart in emerald green flashes of fire, blowing the arms off, then a shoulder and finally the entire body erupts into a spectacle of green flames.

The flames and smoke rush past them as they take cover in the destroyed building, protected by the supports and rubble. “Oof…that was close.” Kassius comments, looking at Emerald. “You good?” He asks her.

“Yeah, c’mon the others need help.” Emerald states.

“I doubt that.” Kassius chuckles.

Rightfully so, since Coco is practically holding the fort right now, unleashing the full fury of her Chaingun upon the horde of Grimm, in which hardly any of them even get close. Just getting pulverised by the number of bullets that hit them, leaving nothing behind but black smoke which gets carried off in the wind. Cardin however has been taking out the few that get past with Velvet, who is using Gambol Shroud at the moment, spinning through the air as she slashes with both the Katana and the Scabbard, slicing the Creeps apart that burst up from the ground.

But as they battle…

The Grimm stop coming.

They unexpectedly cease to spawn.

That’s when the sound of wind rushing through holes in wing membranes can be head, nightmarish whistles of wind that go right through them. Velvet staggers with horror when she hears that sound again, flashing images of her worst nightmares of the Fall of Beacon hitting her once again. “Stay with me, Velvet.” Coco reminds as she aims at the sky, knowing the Grimm have just fallen back.

Meaning only one thing.

Salem is coming.
“When Prometheus stole fire from the gods, he was punished…but in doing so brought freedom to humanity. And destruction to everything it touched.” Salem speaks, her voice echoing across the landscape like some kind of supernatural entity. Fire erupts from the clouds as the black Dragon breaks through, screeching as the pillar of fire glasses the ground, burying everything underneath it in ashes.

“Quick! Everyone into the school! We could be safe in there!” Kassius yells, running with them towards the building as the fire grows closer and closer. The heat getting hotter and hotter, making sweat form from their glands.

They all jump straight through the doors.

Just as the fire hits.

Kannix

Rainfall patters against his head, trickling down his long locks of dark brown hair, silver eyes desperate for vengeance for his own suffering glaring at his enemy. He stands wearing the armour of the Onyx Phantom, complexly designed with many sharp edges on the vambraces and one shoulder pauldron larger than the other. However, he does not wear the helmet that has been bestowed upon him, or at least not yet anyway because he has not activated it. The plates of metal have shifted away and locked into his collar as he stands there, ready for the fight.

Red Lightning flashes above his head as he stands there, and before him is the Onyx Phantom, showing its darker reflection of himself. With jet black hair and fiery orange eyes, its face crumbling away into golden ashes slowly but never ceasing as it stares at him, reflecting his anger. Not much is different since he has let his own dark side take him over completely.

He viciously extends the mechanical blade from his arm and he activates his cannon, igniting a spitting wave of orange flames that covers the flammable oil that covers his blade to keep it ignited in this way. The red dust coursing through the circuitry in his cybernetic arm, and the Onyx Phantom does the same thing. “If you wish to inherit my strength, you must earn it, but defeating yourself.” The Onyx Phantom tells him, mimicking his voice but still sounding very demonic, the darker reflection of himself.

He sprints towards the Phantom and stabs at it, but the Demon ducks down and then winds its fist back up and punches him up the jaw, then catching him in the air and slamming him head-first into the rainfall-soaked soil. Mud covers his face, mud forged from the ashes of unquantifiable souls taken over his genocidal campaign against all life in every single universe he has destroyed. The Onyx Phantom walks around him as he pushes his metal hands against the soil of ashes, staring up at the Demon that crouches down before him. “If you cannot master your own skill then what hope do you have at beating your enemies?” The Onyx Phantom questions, then he swings his fist up at its head, only for it to catch his knuckles with its hand with ease as well.

Suddenly it takes him and swings round, throwing him with little effort into the charred trees that surround them both, upon his impact the bark of the trees shatter like glass, launching chunks of wooden splinters everywhere and black charcoal carried off in the wind. The Onyx Phantom continues to walk towards him and he groans. “You’re…too strong…it is pointless.” Kannix snarls, spitting out blood from where his jaw broke, only to quickly heal thanks to his Semblance. The Onyx Phantom scoffs as it crouches down behind him again, not even using the blades against him.
“What a load of horseshit, strength is not the problem here. It is your lack of patience, despite all the years you have lived...you are letting your desperation for payback make you rush your fighting style. Making your predictable and easy to beat, it is why they managed to take you down. Not because they outnumbered you...one man with the skill and patience could take down an army if they wanted to.” The Onyx Phantom states, making Kannix scoff.

“Easy for a Demon to say, that does not die.” He states, shaking his head and wiping the mud from his cheek, spitting some bits of dirt stuck in his teeth into the mud. The Onyx Phantom raises its brow as he presses his knee into the dirt as he starts to rise back up.

“Demons can die, we are just difficult to kill – want to know why?” He asks him curiously.

“You’re not alive to begin with?” He asks him, making the Phantom laugh in his own voice.

“No, no...close but not exactly. You see Demons like myself have a weakness, just like everything else does. Do you know what that is?” He inquires.

“Magic?” Kannix presumes, guessing that magic is the key to solving all of life’s problems.

“Oh no, spells are merely toys for children to play with. No, Demons are actually very simple...our weaknesses are usually so simple that it actually makes us complicated to figure out.” He explains with a smirk on his face, and Kannix narrows his silver eyes.

“What’s your one?” Kannix inquires.

“Well, that would be telling now, wouldn’t it?” The Onyx Phantom replies, still hiding the truth behind how to kill it. Then the Onyx Phantom rises back up, and paces around him, watching his every move with his blades extending then retracting over and over again. “If you want to earn the powers I can grant you, you must be able to prove your worth. You may have survived for thousands of years now, but that does not mean that you are right for it. You are brash, and whenever Kragen enters your mind, you strike.” He states, and Kannix does exactly that, slashing his blade and firing the cannon right at the Phantom.

The Demonic Entity slashes the blade across his and sparks fly out from the impact of their blades, then it ducks down and dodges the shell fired at its head. The shell shoots off and explodes in the distance, turning over chunks of soil where the tormented souls wail out in utter desperation to be saved from their agonising fates. The Onyx Phantom punches Kannix in the chest then proceeds to swing upwards, nailing his jaw to knock him back. He staggers back, and he keeps his weapons raised. “My point proven.” The Onyx Phantom adds with a smirk on his face as he circles the Spectre.

“He left me to die on those islands!” Kannix yells with rage.

“Aye, so what are you gonna do about it?” The Onyx Phantom asks him curiously.

“Kill him when I see him!” He yells, until he gets a firm kick in the chest, knocking him down to his knee, wheezing in pain as he coughs up blood from the internal wound suffered. A kick from a normal human in the chest is painful, let alone a kick from a demon.

“Wrong! You do that then you will fail or maybe even die, you need to plan out your strategy, otherwise you will have no chance in hell of defeating him in combat. Whether he is alone or not.” The Onyx Phantom explains as it continues to circle the healing and coughing Assassin and Bounty Hunter. He snarls as he remains on one knee, desperately trying to fight against the Higher Demon which circles around him, whilst watching from the distance is Vir Nominis Umbra.
Neo has already undergone the training to become the Onyx Phantom, she had to during the plot in Mistral to trick them.

Kannix glares up at the Onyx Phantom, clenching his mechanical fist as he stares at the crumbling face of destruction itself. “I can… I can take him, I have been preparing for revenge ever since he left me.” Kannix growls with fury in his voice.

“And what? You’re just willing to let all those years be for nothing because you didn’t think? You just attacked for no reason? No plan?” The Onyx Phantom questions and the Assassin stammers on his knee.

“I… I…”

“Vengeance is a powerful fuel source, but like any catalyst, too much of it can cause an explosive reaction. You need to drip feed it, have a steady flow and not let it overflow and destroy everything.” The Onyx Phantom states as it walks away from Kannix and extends that blade once more, staring him down again. “Again.”

The Spectre snarls, punching the thick and wet mud with his metal fist, rising back up as he flicks his long brown hair from his eyes, dripping with rainwater. The red lightning flashes over their heads as they stand there, the two reflections staring one another down. They both move at the same time, then the Onyx Phantom strikes first, as Kannix is learning from his lesson. He swings and Kannix ducks down, thrusting his blade up into the stomach of the entity, until the Onyx Phantom slides across the wet mud and swings its elbow round to knock him down again. But Kannix ducks down to avoid that swing and punches the Onyx Phantom in its side, making it grunt from the attack.

He then aims and fires right at him.

Only for the Onyx Phantom to have vanished.

“What the -?” His voice gets cut off from the roundhouse kick delivered by the Onyx Phantom, slamming into the side of his head and throwing his body across the floor, blood leaking from the side of his head. He growls, looking up from the mud at the Onyx Phantom standing behind him again. “You cheated!” He exclaims.

“Demon.” The Onyx Phantom replies with the shrug of his shoulders, crouching down and staring at him. “I may be able to do that but Kragen cannot, learn how to fight a Demon… and you will be able to tear them apart.” He assures with a smirk.

Kannix smirks back, immediately swinging at him.

In the Charred Forest they could train for days, weeks or even months…and in the universe of Remnant only a few minutes would have passed.

The power of different dimensions is a terrifying one.

Especially when one is controlled by a monster…

**Ortega**

Memories…
Some can hurt, and some can be blissful, sometimes looking through memories of those that have been lost can be both. Remembering the good times, but sometimes those loving memories can shift back into the heartbreaking truth of how they were lost. Despite the rather upbeat jazzy music playing in the background, the tears in the eyes of the Admiral show that he has not managed to move on from his loss.

And with Merlot missing, his desire to save her from her suicide is getting harder and harder to see.

He grips onto the page so gently, of the photographs of the family he once had before it all fell apart, turning it to see the glued-on photos of his family. With the beautiful Faunus Wife, he had named Robin Polendina, the Tigress Faunus with a bright smile and stunning eyes like the daughter they created. Held in her arms is baby Penny Polendina, and unlike her she did not have the Faunus Traits, a very rare and unexpected outcome from the two making a baby. Normally the Faunus trait would override the human, but somehow, she was different.

Unique.

Taped into the page is a pen that was used to name her when she was born, a simple memory that meant so much to them. Stapled into it is Penny’s first ever drawing she did, one of her and her family looking so happy with the sun shining bright.

But as he flicks through the pages, the moment can be seen when Robin passed away, for she was no longer in the picture. Only the form of her cancer she was diagnosed with, and then the funeral documents that followed after her death. Every page the smiles started to fade away, and Penny started to look sadder and sadder, unaware she was being bullied so heavily that it drove her to take her own life.

And the last picture in there after the Funeral Service for his daughter being stapled into this book of memories…is just the photograph of when he became the Admiral of the Drift of Wandering Star…alone…with only medals on him and a cold glare.

The smiles gone.

The happiness gone.

Just a shell of the man he once was, devoted to the only art he ever knew – war…

A knock on his door gets his attention, he wipes the tears from his eye as he stares at the tragic memories of his painful life. He closes up the book with a clap and he sets it down on the table.

“Come in.” He gruffly replies, and it slowly opens to reveal Junior standing there, perhaps to inform him of the failure of the mission to acquire Pyrrha Nikos’ Circlet before their enemies got their hands on it.

“Admiral.” Junior greets with his arms behind his back and his pistol holstered on his belt round his waist. Ortega sighs as he massages his brow with his thumb and forefinger, turning to see him standing there.


“Is this a bad time, sir?” He asks him, and Ortega shakes his head as he taps the surface of the book, something Junior knows about…at the end of the day he was actually there for her funeral.

“No, no, Hei…just looking over some memories…” He tells him with the shrug of his shoulders.

Junior nods his head as he walks in and he grabs one of the chairs and sits down in the room with the Admiral – showing a different side to them. Normally Ortega has been pretty stern with him, but that
was only business, in fact the two of them are actually friends. “I was thinking about the old times earlier…do you remember…that time when Penny made that crazy toy out of random things? What was it again?” Junior asks him curiously and Ortega chuckles.

“It was a Horse…I think.” He chuckles.

“She made it out of…wait lemme try and remember…a bunch of pens from her school, a rubber band ball…and…wasn’t it a –”

“Toilet plunger.” Ortega finishes with a chuckle in his voice.

“Did she ever tell her teacher that was what it was?” Junior inquires.

“I don’t think she did, I just know she was laughing her ass off when she picked it up and then proceeded to eat her sandwich.” Ortega states as he chuckles, mimicking the action of picking something up with his hand.

“She hated that teacher, right?” Junior asks.

“Oh yeah, that bitch was horrific. Dumb as rocks as well.” Ortega scoffs.

“She always astounded me that girl, I couldn’t have made the things she did. She loved her arts and crafts, like if you gave me the things she had and told me to make a Horse, I wouldn’t know where to start. Give me a gun though and I’ll be fine.” He chuckles, and Ortega nods his head.

“Yeah tell me about it…just like her mother…and just as cheeky as her mother as well.” He comments.

“Oh yeah.” Junior chuckles, then they both sit there and the sad memory hits them at the same time as they remember how her story ended. “I miss that girl.”

“Me too…and now the only man who could possibly say her…has gone missing…” He stammers as he presses his hands to his head with concern, looking at his Chrome Revolver and belt on the table next to him. “…things are not looking good, Hei…”

“Did you hear?” Junior asks him.

“About Whitley killing Solomon Karadin? Yeah…part of me wants Kassius and his friends to find Merlot…I don’t think he wants to kill him. But at the same time…he is the only chance I have of getting my girl back.” He explains, trapped like a rock in a hard place, between what is right and what he wants most.

To make things right.

“Well…due to what happened, Jacques has ordered me to ask you to come and speak with him at the Atlesian Academy Amphitheatre. He says he has new orders for you.” Junior states and Ortega narrows his eyes.

“Does he now?” Ortega asks, sighing. “Thank you, Junior. Go on now, I’ll head there now.” Ortega states with the shrug of his shoulders. Junior nods and he walks over to the door, getting up from his seat, until he stops and looks back at him.

“Anything you need sir, just let me know. I know you haven’t always seen me in the best ways…but you can still find a friend in me.” He assures and Ortega smiles softly, nodding his head.
“Thanks, Hei.” He states, and Junior closes the door.

Ortega sits forward and presses his hands to his head, looking at the book and the gun on his table… along with a mysterious necklace sat there. The necklace has a rectangular piece of metal attached to it, he reaches across with the hand that Penny’s little bracelet still holds onto. He looks at it then puts the necklace on, kissing the metal piece. He picks up the book and shoves it into his satchel he has on…

Then takes his gun.

Kassius

The scent of burning wood and melting metal fills the air, coughing up the carbon monoxide that fills the air like a poisonous cloud that never fades away. Coco pushes some of the rubble from her small body, covered in ashes, her brown hair almost grey from how much ash is covering her body right now. They all cough as they sit up, Cardin throwing a heavy log off his body as well as he stands up, still holding his mace in his hand. “Everyone still alive? Sound off!” Cardin calls out as he looks around, and as Coco coughs she sticks up her thumb to him.

He looks over and just sees Velvet’s long bunny ears pop up from the ashes as she rises up, shaking with terror as she coughs up the dry choking ashes that fill the air from the fiery annihilation of the Grimm Dragon. Kassius punches the wood from his body, his eyes glowing faintly from Hyde giving him some extra strength to free himself from their predicament, and Emerald does the same, pushing chunks of wood off her small body. “That…was a little…too close.” Emerald comments as she swipes the dust from her green hair, looking around with her red eyes at the collapsed buildings that lead down into the Academy. The whooshing wind of the Dragon’s wings still heard even from inside the huge building. The very roar of the monster makes Velvet scream in fear, she is terrified of that monster, especially after what it did to Beacon.

“Nobody hurt?” Kassius asks them all.

“Well…nothing apart from a few unattractive bruises.” Coco replies with a chuckle following her voice, standing up with her handbag still in her grasp. She takes off her dusty…and somehow untouched…sunglasses and wipes off the ash that covers it.

“I…are we safe from it?” Velvet whimpers fearfully, getting their attention.

“You okay? I saw you freeze up when you saw the Dragon. You did on the Islands too.” Kassius asks her, Coco looks at her and then at Kassius.

“Velvet has been scared of that thing ever since Beacon, she has had lots of nightmares about it since then. Even recently…must admit even I didn’t like seeing its ugly face again.” Coco states as she rolls her shoulder, hearing it once more.

They turn when they see Cardin slamming down the door that was barely even connected to the hinges in the first place. He holds his mace over his head in case of any Grimm lurking inside of the remains of this Colony that was being built. He looks back at them as he draws his flashlight he has on his person, turning it on. “C’mon, let’s keep moving before Salem comes back around for a second attack.” Cardin recommends as he moves ahead, walking into the darkness.
Velvet walks with Kassius as she quivers, looking up at the ceiling as she hears the Dragon circling the area, but then she calms her fears as she looks at Cardin, with a question in her head. “He’s…different than I remember.” She states, and not just physically with his longer hair and beard.

“I know, Jaune told me what he was like back in the day, with you and him.” Kassius states as he looks down at the smaller Faunus Huntress beside him.

“What exactly…happened between him and his team? Why did he kill them?” Velvet inquires, a question all on their minds right now.

“I dunno, but…I don’t think he did it out of callousness. He killed the Headmaster of Vacuo and his Pyromancer because they were gonna kill people…I think he had something to do with the plague being unleashed on the city. The guy was going insane, made people build him a throne like he was a kid.” Kassius explains, and she raises her brow.

“You were there?” She inquires.

“No, Yang and the gang were. They told us everything that happened there. It sounds complicated, he never told me back when we were in the hands of the Traffickers…but he wanted to. I could tell.” Kassius explains.

“How?” Velvet inquires.

“Because I know what it’s like, wanting to tell someone a secret you have been keeping for a long time…I did with Yang…about my team. And I’m glad I did…helped me move on.” Kassius states as he walks past Velvet and moves ahead, then the roar of the Wyvern echoes overhead, frightening her again. Coco gently pats her shoulder as she walks alongside her.

The destruction here is utterly horrifying…

Skeletons of soldiers who tried to defend this place, only to be torn apart by the Grimm, bones scattered all over the place where the Grimm tore them to shreds. Broken windows where the monsters must have leapt through to attack them. It looks so similar to the Amphitheatre of Beacon…

But as they walk the voice of Salem enters their minds once more, powerful and as if it is speaking through the very fabrics of the world itself. Well spoken in every single word that leaves her mouth. “We all have painful memories…ones we all wish we could forget…they make us who we are but that does not dull the pain.” Salem speaks, but as they walk, they all wince, staggering as they walk through the destruction, all beginning to see different things.

“What…what the hell is happening?” Cardin groans as he looks around with concern.

“I…I don’t…she’s messing with our heads…don’t believe anything you see.” Kassius strains as he presses his metal hand to his head. But as he looks ahead, his amber eyes widen with fear of what he sees. Emerging from the darkness is a monster, a tall bipedal Ornithurine Grimm with jet black feathers covering the body except for the long white bone beak with glowing red eyes and markings across the bone. With long muscular legs and sharp talons curving out from the toes and claws in the short wings…it is too familiar…making his scars ache as he sees it.

The Terror Bird that nearly devoured him when he was a child.

The Terror Bird roars, charging towards him from the shadows and jumps at him…and unlike Kassius would normally do…he cowers, hiding the sight with his eyes as he looks away. But the Bird just erupts into black smoke around him…disappearing.
The others all start to see painful memories before their very eyes, Emerald seeing Mercury looking at her with fear in his eyes. The screaming she let out as she tried to warn him, as Death suddenly drove Ferrum Arctus’ blade right through his spine, so hard that it actually lifted him up off the floor. How she saw the life leave his eyes, making her feel so defeated, she may have gotten frustrated by the things he would say and do…but she never wanted him dead.

Velvet gasps in terror as the ceiling shatters around her very eyes, chunks rising into the sky as she sees Beacon above her, the tall Cross Continental Transmit Tower standing right before her, and banking round the side of it is the same titanic Wyvern gliding round with that terrifying roar echoing for miles. Fire spreading from its open jaws as it burns everything around her, then turning to fly directly at her, blasting fire into the ground at her. She cries out with terror, turning away as the fire engulfs her…only for it all to be a nightmare based off a terrible memory.

Coco stammers with terror, seeing her younger sister – Jasmine Adel – looking at her with horror in her eyes, screaming for her older sister. “Coco! Help me!” She screams in terror, as ghostly Beowulves all suddenly pile on top of her, Coco listens with horror, hearing her wails of agony as they rip her apart, tearing her to shreds, so horrifying that Coco has to look away, tears trickling down from her eyes, unable to witness that terrible moment again.

And finally…

Cardin…

Staring at his team, for all of them glare right into his eyes, judging him, accusing him as if they are the Wardens deciding to keep him in his own prison. “You betrayed us…could have saved us…could have listened…but you didn’t. You betrayed us…” They all speak in unison, covered in blood as he staggers back.

“I…” Cardin stammers with fear, until he tightens his grip onto his mace and swings it with a bellow of a roar. “No!” He roars as he swings at the illusion, finding nothing around him…just the Amphitheatre that they found. “It’s not real…it’s not real…” He stammers, looking at Kassius cowering with his arms over his eyes like a child who just saw something frightening.

Eventually they all recover, realising it was all Salem, using her dark magic against them, showing their painful memories once more. “Your memories are your own…for pain is the great constructer of life.” Salem speaks, as if she is constantly speaking from a poem. The Dragon continues to circle the school for a few moments, but then the sound of its wings seems to fade away…

Meaning Salem has left.

Either because she has been ordered to, or because she did what she came here for.

Unless she is messing with their heads.

Cardin helps Kassius back up, helping him snap out of it. “Hey, it’s not real…c’mon snap out of it.” Cardin whispers, he may not have resisted her, but he managed to break out of it unlike the rest of them.

Coco wipes the tears from her eyes as she puts her glasses back on, immediately helping the shaking Velvet Scarlatina. Emerald gets up on her own, her fist clenched with anger from what she saw…and how she failed to save Mercury from his demise.

They walk down the path, and as they keep moving, they keep seeing more bodies everywhere. Some of them due to the shredded clothing must have been teachers once, and others were students.
The Grimm truly show no mercy and take no prisoners, killing absolutely everything that stands in their path. Cardin raises his mace as he stands around the corner, hearing the sound of a Creature of Grimm snarling, walking around.

A lone Beowulfl walking around, looking at him with a vicious growl, only for him to smash its head apart with one swing. The others move rather slowly, worried with every step taken, waiting to see their painful memories once more.

“Hey? You guys still with me?” He asks them.

“How are you…so…calm? What did you see?” Kassius asks him, but he refuses to answer, ignoring the question. But as he looks down at his shadow, it is different again, with horns and he shudders.

“I’m…I’m fine.” He lies, not telling them whatever it is that is wrong with him. “Come on, we need to find where this Map Room is.” Cardin states, as he turns, and he opens a door, looking around. With all these doors, one of them must head down to something…perhaps a stairway?

But then it hits them…

“A Vault…check the Elevator Shaft, Pyrrha and Jaune said that the Beacon Vault was found by an Elevator.” Kassius reminds, starting to snap out from his fear that has shaken him up so much. Not much scares Kassius like that Terror Bird, but it scares him for good reason, it damn near ate him alive when he was a child.

Ignoring the other doors, they all walk straight towards the elevator shaft, and Kassius takes his metal fist and he punches the closed metal doors, denting them so then he can pull them open with his hands. The thick metal doors slowly slide open as he looks to his left and right, looking down to see something in his eyes…a glimpse of Ilia looking up at him from the shadows.

Only for her to be gone.

Salem can’t be gone, he is still seeing things…he closes his eyes and shakes his head. “Snap out of it, Kas.” He mutters to himself. He jumps and grapples onto the long cable that the compartment is attached to, sliding down to the lowest level there is. They all do the same thing, and Kassius steps off on the crushed elevator at the bottom. He and Cardin both pull the destroyed doors as they look inside…

To see a long hallway…

With a mysterious door…

An Arkhoni Door…

**Ortega**

The Admiral of the Drift of Wandering Star presses his hands against the double doors of the Amphitheatre in Atlas Academy, walking towards the many people that stand before him, Acolytes of Lien standing guard inside of the room. Even Huntsmen being trained under their wing, all wearing the colours of the Acolytes of Lien. Ortega looks at them all then looks ahead at Jacques with his hands behind his back and Whitley with one behind his back.
Ortega narrows his eyes, since none of this feels right.

He approaches them and looks around at the place, seeing how empty all of this looks. “Admiral.” Jacques greets.

“Jacques.” He replies.

“We have received reports on the conclusion of the mission to retrieve Pyrrha Nikos’ Circlet from Solomon Karadin…and his untimely death.” Jacques begins to explain, glancing at his son standing beside him. Ortega looks at Whitley as well, knowing of how dangerous this boy is becoming from how callously he murdered the leader of a powerful Cartel in Vacuo. One does not simply do this and walk away unscathed.

Yet here he stands, proudly as if he did not shoot a man in the head because he annoyed him.

“We were infiltrated by Kassius Locke and some other Huntresses, I believe Cardin Winchester was among them, along with Emerald Sustrai.” Ortega describes, naming the two wanted Hunters with a fairly large amount of money on their heads right now.

“Yes…I would like to know how you allowed this to happen.” He states, and Ortega raises a brow.

“How? They managed to sneak in because your son wanted to pay for cheap labour opposed to fully trained soldiers. Those thugs are supposed to be used to protect low paid contacts and customers, not people like Solomon Karadin.” Ortega explains, and rightfully so too – the thugs that work for Junior are used for Mob-Like circumstances, thugs paid a small portion and are not given much training.

Not meant to be used in situations like that.

“They were requested by Solomon Karadin.” Whitley defends, making the Admiral scoff.

“Kid, you are talking to the man who runs this organisation, remember? I know every single transaction that goes on in this business, and I know it was you who bought them, not Karadin.” Ortega states, pointing right at him, and leaving the young man silent.

“This has not been the first time you have left us concerned, Admiral.” Jacques states, and Ortega glares at him with a scowl.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” He questions.

“The Volcanic Chain Isles, their inability to capture my daughters, and now this. And I also know of the reason you have been in league with us, Admiral.” He states and Darren glares right at him.

“You only agreed to help us because you wanted your daughter back, and Merlot agreed to help you.” Whitley states as he bobs his body gleefully, and Ortega slowly clenches his hand into a fist.

“Leave my arrangement out of this, you spoilt ignorant brat.” Ortega snarls viciously.

“At the end of the day, Admiral – Merlot has betrayed us…and I am concerned for your involvement in our business now that he is no longer with us.” Jacques states, so Ortega steps back and looks at all the soldiers inside of this room that outnumber him.

“So…what is this? An execution?” He wonders curiously, making Jacques chuckle.

“Oh, gods no, I am not a monster.” He states, making Ortega scoff. “We are offering you the chance to walk out of this place untouched…at a cost.” He states, and he raises a brow.
“Oh yeah?” He asks him in return.

“We cannot lose the Acolytes of Lien, but we also cannot risk having you around. Your many failures and your lack of commitment to this role you have makes you a considerable problem…but I have a way to fix it. I have found a new Admiral.” Jacques states as he snaps his fingers, and the door opens.

Ortega’s eyes widen with disbelief from who emerges from that room.

A tall muscular Faunus Man walks out with silver hair and sinister eyes, with a short scruffy beard around his jaws and an eight-shooter holstered on his leg. And Ortega says his name…with recognition in his voice. “Kelham?” He gasps…the same man that was once the leader of the Traffickers…is now the new leader of the Acolytes of Lien.

“You see, Kelham over here and I have been speaking of this for a few months now. You have never been comfortable with our methods, whereas he is.” Jacques explains, but Ortega suddenly raises his voice, gritting his teeth.

“Have you lost your goddamn mind?” Ortega yells, almost drawing his revolver on Kelham. “That man was ex-communicated from the Acolytes because his methods were too extreme! He massacred entire towns with my forces for fun! Then he became a bandit! Why the hell would you trust him?” Ortega yells with fury in his voice, making Kelham chuckle.

“Oh, Darren…been a long time. Sad to see our reunion must be so unpleasant.” Kelham states with a smile on his face, infuriating Ortega more and more with every word that leaves his mouth.

“Kelham has what it takes to get the job done, Ortega. He will now be the Admiral of the Drift of Wandering Star.” Jacques Schnee explains, Ortega steps back with disgusted eyes.

“I…am an Admiral…my duty is never fulfilled until I fall with my ship.” He snarls with anger.

“We can arrange an execution if you wish.” Whitley suggests with a smile, pissing Ortega off even more.

“Then what about your science division? Without Merlot it is falling apart.” Ortega adds, then Jacques turns to a man stood beside him. With grey hair and blue eyes like himself, wearing black suit and trousers with a white tie.

“Meet my brother…Donavan Gelè, recently released from prison for his experiments. He worked with Arthur Watts before he was arrested for his experiments by dear General Ironwood. But now…his scientific efforts will be of great use to us.” Jacques states, and Ortega grits his teeth. “But…I am afraid the project you and Merlot were working on…has been removed.”

Ortega stares at them all…with disgust…and betrayal. “I have given…everything to this company…and you think you can take it from me?” He snarls.

“We already have…we bought the shares after all.” Whitley grins, and Ortega stares right into his eyes.

“That boy is gonna get you all killed…he is too dangerous…and brash.” Ortega warns with a snarl in his voice.

“It matters little to you anymore.” Kelham states with his arms crossed.

He lowers his head with disbelief of what is happening.
The Acolytes are being taken from him.

His ship is being stolen from him.

And…

…now…

…the chance of seeing his baby alive again.

“So…we thank you for your service, Ortega…but now we hope you can live out the rest of your
days peacefully.” Jacques states with a smile behind his moustache.

Ortega hangs his head, breathing calmly through his nose, and Kelham narrows his eyes as he
watches him. “So…I am no longer under your command?” Ortega asks him, and Jacques raises a
brow as he looks at his son.

“No…you are free to go.” Jacques answers.

“Then that means…I no longer obey you.” Ortega states.

It is as if time stops, for the guards are too slow to react in time as Ortega suddenly draws his Chrome
Revolver holstered and points it directly at Whitley’s head and he pulls the trigger, firing a bullet
right into his head. The bullet tracks and punctures into his head, causing his head to whiplash back
from the sudden attack, and he crumples down to his knees, blood splattering across Jacques’
horrified face.

Ortega swiftly takes a smoke grenade attached to his belt and throws it into the ground, creating a
cloud of fog to disguise himself. “Whitley!” Jacques wails as he catches his body before it hits the
ground. Donovan crouches down beside him.

“Take him to the lab, I could save him.” Donovan whispers to his brother.

Kelham however points at where they saw Ortega, roaring at the top of his lungs. “Kill him!” He
roars, and then…all the soldiers that were once loyal and were employed by Ortega…aim guns at
him in an instant. They all fire but he retreats, sprinting to a window and firing the revolver the glass,
jumping through and landing outside, making his grand escape.

With everything taken from him…

He has nothing left to lose.

Except for the one man that can save his baby girl.

Archer Merlot.
The Enemy of My Enemy

Ortega

As Twilight has fallen…

The Admiral without a ship or an army ducks down behind a dumpster with his chrome revolver in his grasp, held up in his hand as he peers round to look at the street. Multiple Acolytes of Lien jog down with their rifles aimed up and flashlights activated as they walk around, searching for where he is hiding. Fingers held above the triggers until they get a target, carefully taking each step as they move, knowing that he could take them out with ease.

And he is not even a Huntsman.

“Keep your eyes peeled, Ortega has to be around here somewhere, no way he could have gotten far from the Academy.” One of the Mercenaries advises as he walks forward, eyes darting around as they stare through the T-Shaped glowing red visor built into his helmet. The ray of light from the lamp attached to the underside of his rifle passes across the dark alleyway. White misty breath parts from his partially open mouth, the cold biting against his skin constantly as he remains on one knee, ready to attack when the opportunity arises.

He reaches down slowly to his knife and draws it, one of the other weapons he has sheathed on his belt. With a serrated edge and made of stainless steel and with golden accents in the blade, it is quite impressive. And clearly, he looks after this weapon a lot from the lack of scuffing and stains on its sharp surface.

The soldiers investigate each of the alleyways available to them, aiming their rifles down both of them as they prepare to investigate the area. Ortega grasps the dagger in his hand tight as one of the soldiers walks in his direction, about to check the dumpster. Ortega swiftly rises up, reaching to the gun and lifting the barrel up above his head, then ramming the knife up his neck where the helmet does not offer any protection. He quickly rips the blade from his bleeding throat and drags the body behind the dumpster, taking his Assault Rifle and his magazines on him, along with another grenades he fits into his pouch on his belt. He remains low, checking the chamber for any rounds currently loaded in, and he has not fired a shot yet.

Atlas is currently still under Martial Law, meaning that there is a Curfew at this hour, no civilians are meant to be outside right now, and if there is…well they get one warning before they are shot on sight. Luckily this means that this soldier has not killed any poor unlucky civilian so far, but there are Mercenaries absolutely everywhere in this once proud Kingdom. He takes the sling and hangs it over his shoulder and neck, then holstering his revolver now that he has a better weapon for this kind of situation.

“This isn’t good, Darren…I need to find a way off this godforsaken Kingdom.” He mumbles to himself, but he no longer has access to the Drift of Wandering Star, they would have been planning this. Kelham’s signature has most likely replaced his own, meaning that his handprint and eyes can will mean absolutely nothing.

Ortega keeps his head down as best as he can, carefully moving down the path in the Alleyway, then he quickly takes cover when noticing a long beam of red light from a Sharpshooter on one of the rooftops, searching the Academy Grounds for the Former Admiral of their Flagship.
There are many more soldiers in the area, armed to the teeth and ready to gun him down the second they set their eyes on him, walking ever so slowly through the streets, with fingers close to their triggers if they see movement. The rumbling of countless vehicles can be felt and heard nearby, both in the sky and on the ground, the Acolytes are checking every nook a and cranny for where Ortega could have gone.

The Admiral scratches his short beard with his nails as he stops by the wall, multiple soldiers walking down the path and then a huge Armoured Personnel Carrier at their left. The vehicle is huge with a long Tank Cannon built into it, no match for a man like himself. He needs to get out of here without alerting the soldiers, otherwise he will be killed quicker than he can blink.

He listens carefully to what some of those Mercenaries are saying.

“…what the hell happened in there? We heard gunshots.” A Mercenary questions with concern, jogging over with his eyes wide, taking his helmet off. He is such a young man with blonde hair, must be at least eighteen years old.

“Ortega has betrayed us, Admiral Kelham is now in command, and he has issued the order to locate and eliminate the old Admiral.” The soldier explains to him, not taking off his helmet, then the other soldier rams him with the barrel of his rifle, making the young soldier step back.

“Get your helmet back on, kid.” The soldier demands, the young mercenary staggers back from the older and more experienced one, looking confused and frightened. “Before you lose your head.”

That almost sounded like a threat…

Ortega leans back around the corner, keeping his eye on the Sharpshooter in the Skyscraper in front of him, waiting for the perfect opportunity to move. However, that opportunity is becoming harder and harder to take advantage of, since there are also Bullheads and Gunships patrolling the skies with searchlights beaming down, constantly examining the area for any signs of life from their now traitor Admiral.

But with an unexpected stroke of luck, one of the soldiers turns when hearing a soldier yelling at the top of his lungs at somebody, and the searchlight of one of the Bullheads whips across the street towards a young couple, looking extremely frightened. They both yelp in fear and hold up their hands in surrender. “Hey! Stop right there, or we will gun you down!” One of the Mercenaries yells, bellows almost as he walks towards them, shotgun aimed at their heads. The two of them whimper with fear terrified of the barrel pressed towards them, ready to fire at will. The spotlight shines upon them, nearly blinding them as the powerful downdraft of the Bullhead blows her long blonde hair around.

Hands shaking both from the cold and the fear, a Juggernaut walks towards them as he drops down from the Gunship hovering above. The impact of the huge Exo-Suit wearing soldier spreads cracks through the tarmac, and the shockwave makes some of them shiver. Car alarms blare from the quake and Ortega has to press his hand against the dumpster to steady himself.

He notices quickly that the civilians out at night have also caught the attention of the Sharpshooter that had its sights on the alleyway of which Ortega was taking cover behind. He slowly emerges out from the dumpster, staying low to the ground and his rifle gripped in his hands, making his way towards the exit of the school. This couple…they are actually more than civilians…they are students at the Academy, they must have just gone out for a few seconds or lost track of time.

They have not done anything wrong.
The Juggernaut walks towards them and stares right at them, speaking through the voice disguiser in the helmet, the triangular T Shaped Visor glowing fierce red and into their eyes. The young woman whimpers with fear, shielding her face from the light as the Juggernaut towers above her. “P-Please…we were just…we lost track of time…we were on our way home.” She whimpers.

“What were you up to? Sneaking around some of our camps?” The Juggernaut insinuates, taking an aggressive step forward with the huge Triple Barreled Machine Gun extending from the massive forearm, the barrels slowly rotating round as they load fresh rounds into their chambers. The boyfriend steps in front of his girlfriend to try and protect her, and it is clear from some of the love marks on his neck and her slightly ruffled hair…it was nothing more than innocent teenage love.

“We went to the Garden…over there…it has always been our…spot.” He awkwardly answers, and the soldiers look at each other and they laugh, one of them slapping their knees with his hand. The Teenage Mercenary chuckles too, and so does the Juggernaut, but considering the situation that they are in this is a pretty good situation.

“Ah young love…how I miss those days.” The Juggernaut chuckles, before stepping aside and letting them pass.

Until a radio in all their helmets activates, and his voice comes through. “Attention all Acolytes of Lien Forces. Admiral Darren Ortega has betrayed us, attacked Whitley Schnee and has been conspiring with Doctor Archer Merlot. He has been helping our enemies all along, and now it is up to me – Admiral Kelham – to take his place and lead this prestigious army.” Kelham explains to them all, and the teenager slowly puts his helmet back on to hear the message from Kelham. Ortega snarls, as he ducks down behind one of the buildings, his rifle ready to fire whenever he needs it to, Kelham has always been unpredictable with his strategy.

The Juggernaut looks at his men then activates his comm. “I’m sorry…our leader betrayed us? I need confirmation on this, sir…he has led us for decades.” The Juggernaut states, and Ortega feels a bit of warmth in his heart to see that some of these Mercenaries are actually loyal to him and not just their pay check.

“Gladly.” Kelham answers, and he can see it through their visors, the footage of him drawing that Revolver and shooting Whitley right between the eyes and killing him right there and then…or at least potentially killing him, depending on whatever it is that Donovan has planned.

“By the Gods…” One of the Mercenaries gasps.

“Worry not, for under my command you will be able to earn double your current share of the profits, for we will get the job done, unlike Ortega. However, we must change a few rules, Ortega was always too soft to do what he had to, so the first rule of business is this – shoot any trespassers on sight, no matter the excuse, they are a threat that must be eliminated.” Kelham states, and Ortega’s eyes widen with horror and disbelief.

Especially when he sees the look of terror on the faces of those civilians. The Juggernaut stands there, looking stunned by this change of orders, and he has to get clarification on these new orders…showing that not all these Mercenaries are mindless maniacs. “E-Eliminate them? They’re civilians, that is not how we do things, we do not harm civilians.” The Juggernaut argues.

Kelham has one response.

“The rules have changed, kill them.” Kelham demands, and the Juggernaut shakily lowers his mechanical Exo-Suit hand, looking at his men with broken eyes.
“Please…we…we don’t wanna die! Please!” The Girlfriend pleads, holding her boyfriend’s hand tight.

“Gods…forgive me.” The Juggernaut softly whispers to himself, turning and spraying a hundred bullets from the spiralling Machine Gun into the pair, gunning them down so fast that they did not even scream or feel a thing. He aimed in a way to make sure that they never felt a thing…the only one in pain is the Juggernaut. He stands there, panting with anguish and tears in his eyes as he stares at their bloody corpses on the ground, bullet holes covering their small bodies in comparison to their own.

Ortega’s eyes and mouth are open with shock, he always knew that Kelham was extreme, but this is something else entirely. They have never hurt civilians, but making that an order is just beyond barbaric.

The Juggernaut sobs as he stands there, heartbroken from what he has had to do, very few Acolytes of Lien are monsters at heart, they are just soldiers that follow orders and it is all they know. But some of them are monsters, like the ones that killed the old man – Reg – that helped Cinder redeem herself after learning Kassius was alive.

And like the man standing next to the tearful Juggernaut. “Well…orders are orders.” The soldier calmly states, the Juggernaut pauses as he stands there, before suddenly swinging round and smashing the barrels into the head of the soldier so hard that the helmet shatters like glass.

Killing him instantly.

The Juggernaut is tense as he stands there and looks at their bodies and he walks away from them, unable to cope with the changing of their leader.

Seems that Jacques’ plan has not gone the way that he expected.

First Whitley and now there are Mercenaries that refuse to accept that their leader is replaced by a madman, there are soldiers in there that are loyal to their leader above their pay check.

Ortega watches the ordeal…

Unaware of the Patrol turning round the corner of the road behind him, and one of the Tremor Troopers stops in his tracks to see the Admiral crouched down behind the building. “There! It’s Ortega! Gun him down!” The Tremor Trooper bellows at the top of his lungs as he aims his rifle at him. Ortega gasps and he gets up, running round the other side of the building to take cover.

The Juggernaut looks over his shoulder at the soldiers turning the corner and the Truck with them, a mounted Machine Gun on the back of it. A soldier aims the turret at where the Admiral is currently pinned down and he unloads the box magazine upon it. Ortega flinches every now and then, just avoiding the stray bullets that come flying through the building by his head, fracturing brick and thistle plasterwork onto the ground, covering him in dust.

Until a constant blast of gunfire unleashes upon the patrol, shredding one of the soldiers to chunks before their very eyes, juggling body parts with the thousands of bullets blasted into them in mere seconds, blood spouting everywhere, on the truck and all over the floor. One of the soldiers is knocked over by the amount of blood and guts thrown into his face and body, coughing and vomiting in his helmet.

Ortega’s eyes widen as he sees the Juggernaut with his barrels glowing red with smoke trailing from the triangular barrels, turning against his orders with the death of those poor civilians by his hand.
“Admiral! Get out of here!” The Juggernaut yells, fighting for his Admiral one last time, for the Gunship that dropped him off blasts off and starts to bank round to attack him.

Ortega looks at the Juggernaut with the wish to help him, but after he killed those poor teenagers because of his orders… Ortega knows what some soldiers are like.

Some of them would rather die fighting to try and right a wrong they have made. Even some of the soldiers who did not piss him off are with him, including that younger soldier, all of them opening fire on their own men. The younger Mercenary fires a grenade launcher at the soldiers from his rifle attachment, the whistling grenade arcs towards them, erupting into a ball of fire and shrapnel into the group of men shooting back at them. One of them loses an arm and wails in agony.

But the other soldiers are just as well trained as they are, and one of the soldiers blasts a bullet and hits one of the soldiers fighting alongside the Juggernaut right in the head. Ortega looks at them and he nods, the Juggernaut looks at him and pounds his fist to his chest. “One day! We shall stand above those who pushed us down!” The Juggernaut roars, thrusting his fist above his head.

Ortega pounds his fist to his own chest, saluting him in return. “And let them taste the pain we endured!” He replies, the two of them quoting the speech of which the Acolytes of Lien were founded upon when they broke off from the Vacuo Military to fight for money. The Juggernaut nods and turns back to the battle, activating the swarmer missiles in his armour, the plates open up and he fires them towards the squad that have gunned some of his men down around him.

Including the Teenager.

The missiles all impact the group and blows them to smithereens, the truck shattering like glass with flames wrapped around the shards of metal that bounce past him and the burning wheel. He turns when hearing the Gunship coming back his way, the wings folding out from the hull and aiming the missiles at him. He aims his machine gun at the cockpit and bellows with fury. “Come on!” The Juggernaut howls, managing to hit the pilot in the head with one of the bullets, and rupturing the thruster, causing it to explode and the ship to crash down into the ground towards him as he yells.

Ortega looks back…

Only to see him disappear into the explosion, dying a warrior’s death. Ortega squeezes his eyes shut with sadness as he keeps moving, running through the garden of which the couple spoke of before they were murdered by that very same warrior. It is never too late for a man to redeem himself, unless there is no coming back, no redemption to be sought.

But as he runs through the garden, with beautiful white trees standing tall and his shoes crunching into the snow beneath him, freezing in the cold and seeing his breath with every pant, he hears more distant gunfire.

More explosions.

Suddenly an Acolyte of Lien fighter jet roars overhead, being pursued by another of the same colour and make, battling in a dogfight by the looks of it. Firing machine guns and missiles at one another as they fly across the sky, performing impressive barrel rolls in the sky. Ortega knows what is happening, a division has been formed in the Acolytes of Lien, one that is showing where true loyalty lies.

There are the soldiers that are fighting for him, and those fighting because they have been paid to. The Jets soar through the city skyline, performing impressive manoeuvres but eventually they pass from Ortega’s sight, so he keeps running as fast as he can. As he runs, some soldiers run out from the
cars left to secure the area, and they turn, aiming their rifles and firing them at him. He grits his teeth
in anger, for they are clearly against him, so he takes a grenade and pops a smoke grenade to obscure
their vision and give him the upper hand.

The soldiers look around with fear, trying to find the Admiral, when he unexpectedly throws his
knife through the smoke and it lodges through the visor of one of the soldiers, killing him instantly.
He then rolls out from the smoke and fires his assault rifle at another Mercenary, nailing a few shots
into his ribs that brings him down to the ground with a scream, blood trickling out from his bullet
riddled body which crashes down to the ground.

Another soldier swings his red sword at his head but misses, only cutting off some branches where
he was stood. He rolls back again and pulls the trigger back, firing three rounds that hit the soldier in
his helmet, knocking him down to the ground and the metal shattering where the exit wounds can be
found. Another one of the soldiers swings his baton at Ortega, but Darren swings his rifle against the
baton with enough force to break it. He swings the stock of the rifle back round and smashes it
against his head, making the armoured soldier stagger. He reaches down to the sheathed machete on
the soldier’s leg, so he grabs onto it and draws it, running it between the plates and his body, forcing
him down to the floor with a crunching squelch.

He pants as he holds the soldier down, looking ahead to see a Seeker suddenly dash towards him and
punch him in the face, the impact of the punch throws him across the ground. He tumbles, and he
stares ahead to see that soldier standing there. He is outmatched here, unlike the Huntsmen and
Huntresses he has been fighting against for half a decade now, he cannot move like they can.

However…

He knows how this technology works, and that all it takes is a small spark to overload the dust pack
that they use to move so fast that time slows for them. His eyes turn to the electrified half of the baton
he broke in half with the rifle, he jumps to it and he grabs onto it, and the Seeker sprints towards him
kicking him in his side. The Seeker draws the Katana to plunge it into his stomach, but as he stands
there, Ortega jams the snapped electric baton into the armour plating, blasting electrical energy into
his systems.

The Seeker screams in agony as his pack begins to overload with energy, the dust all being activated
in one moment, causing the glass to crack from the increasing pressured. Then finally, it erupts into a
fantastic paroxysm of reds and oranges in the forked lightning that bursts out from the pack. Shards
of glass and metal launched everywhere, and the cooked soldier collapses to the ground, killed by
Ortega’s knowledge.

Ortega smirks, looking at the pretty band that Penny made for him when she was still alive, still
giving him good luck even today. He kisses it gently, rubbing his thumb across it as he also draws
his Revolver from its holster, since he broke the rifle. “I’m coming, baby.” He whispers to himself,
but as soon as he steps forward.

A barrel pushes against the back of his head.

“Tell me…you didn’t do it.” The voice of Hei Xiong Junior states with a snarling voice, pushing a
pistol up against the back of his head with worried eyes. From the bushes they emerge, the Malachite
Twins, wearing their Acolytes of Lien Fatigues and their weapons at the ready. Junior is also
wearing his armour that he has earned from years of service, his helmet in his hand.

“Hei…” Ortega softly says, then he grits his teeth.

“Tell me why I should trust you!” Junior yells with anger, and Ortega exhales through his nose,
hearing his friend’s voice echo across the garden of which they stand in. He steps forward, looking at Melanie and Militia who are ready to kill him if they have to. He holds up his hands and lets the Revolver hang on his index finger, turning to face the Mob Boss behind him.

“Because you have been by my side for twenty-five years, and you know that I would never do what I did if I didn’t have my reasons.” Ortega responds and Junior twitches his eye as he stands there, thinking on his statement and thinking on how to proceed from this.

“Alright, what reasons are those then?” Junior questions, clearly wanting to trust his Admiral.

“They betrayed us all, Hei. All of us, they replaced me with a madman, replaced Merlot with someone even worse and Whitley was gonna be at the head of it all. Merlot is my only chance of getting my daughter back, and with my company and my ship gone…that is the only hope I’ve got left.” Ortega explains to him, and Junior ponders as he holds the gun to Ortega’s head. Ortega stands firm with his hands down at his side and he hangs his head. “But…if that is not good enough…then I will not fight you.”

He lets the Revolver fall to the ground with a clink and he lets Junior make his choice, to either pull that trigger and kill him so then he can find his Wife and Daughter in the afterlife…or let him live, so he can give his daughter a second chance.

Junior sighs, lowering the pistol as he decides to trust him. “The Acolytes of Lien are falling apart, Darren. It’s all-out war in Atlas right now, split between to trust you or the lien they are paid. The Drift of Wandering Star is too far for us to get to, but there are some Bullheads nearby. Mercenaries are already fleeing from Atlas to fight for you.” Junior explains, and Ortega chuckles.

“I’m surprised…I would’ve expected them to stick to Jacques since he was the one paying me.” Ortega says as he stands there.

“Seriously? A lot of these people who fight for you had nothing, you gave them purpose, soldiers who were kicked out the army because of injuries…injuries you funded to fix for them. Merlot helped with that too.” Junior explains, and Melanie walks forward.

“My sister and I had to work as Prostitutes until we joined up with you, you gave us a clean slate.” Melanie states and Militia nods her head, and Ortega looks to Junior.

“You’ve got more friends than you give yourself credit for.” Junior states, and he chuckles, scratching the back of his head as he stands there.

“Well…if that’s the case, then let’s get the hell out of this godforsaken Kingdom. Never did like it here.” He states, crouching down and picking his Chrome Revolver back up and holstering it on his leg.

“Nah, neither did I.” Militia agrees with a smirk.

“C’mon, those ships are still nearby. And they won’t lock onto Acolytes of Lien Signatures.” Junior tells him as he moves ahead, and then they all sprint towards the tower in question, one of the Hotels that has some of the Bullheads landed atop. A Gunship roars overhead at great speeds, firing missiles at another Acolytes of Lien Fighter Jet that screeches above them, moving so fast that it actually breaks the sound barrier.

The Sonic Boom knocks them to their knees as they run, Melanie scrapes her knee into the soil as she runs, swiftly rising back up to keep moving ahead, and the shockwave shatters the windows in all the buildings around them. Car alarms blaring for miles from the unexpected bang. The pulse of
sonic energy ruptures the clouds above their heads into a ring like shape, before the clouds part slowly as the Fractured Moon watches their every move.

Militia sprints ahead as they see a truck of Acolytes drive up in front of them, and they aim their rifles at the Admiral, firing straight at them with determination. But as they run, Junior spins his Rocket Launcher Baton through his fingers to deflect the incoming fire, giving Militia the chance to sprint forward, jumping up onto her sister’s shoulders and flying up in the air. She drives her claws into the sternum of the Gunner, killing him instantly, whereas Melania jumps with a twirl, slashing her heel across another soldier’s jugular, spraying blood into the air as he comes crashing to the ground. She lands on the ground and twists her body round again, slamming the bladed heel into the temple of a soldier, ending him in one moment.

Militia slashes her long red claw blades across the face of another soldier, splattering blood everywhere, then Junior jumps up in the air with a roar, slamming his Bat downwards and killing the last soldier. “Admiral Ortega! Stand down!” The amplified voice yells from within a Gunship that decelerates in front of them, aiming the machine guns and missiles at them. Junior grins, transforming his Bat into its Missile Launcher form and turning round, calling one thing.

“Surprise, Motha-Fucka!” Junior calls out, firing a cluster group of missiles towards the Gunship, all of which hit the ship and blow it to smithereens in a cloud of fiery smoke, chunks of metal thrown everywhere.

Junior lands down and he wipes the dust from his shoulder, making Ortega chuckle. “How long have you been waiting to do that?” Ortega curiously asks him as he holsters his pistol again.

Junior chuckles.

“Years.” Junior responds.

“C’mon, we’re running out of time.” Militia advises as she runs ahead, Ortega nods and runs with them, across the streets where multiple vehicles have been damaged from battle. Acolytes of Lien drive off in multiple trucks, but from the fact that none of them stopped to attack them, they must be on his side, either luring the Acolytes off their tail or finding their own way out of the Kingdom. Ortega gets to the door and sees the Fighter Jet on his side bank round and fire missiles into the other that was chasing him, blowing it out of the sky.

Ortega smiles. “Fair winds.” He says, pushing the door open and hoping for the best for the soldiers that remain loyal to him opposed to the others. Ortega runs up the comfy stairs of the hotel and they all run down the halls past the many apartments, where some of the terrified civilians hide. “Sorry!” He apologises as he bumps into a civilian, then they head to the fire escape, taking it up and moving as fast as they can to the rooftop where the Bullhead is waiting for them. Junior opens the door to the rooftop, letting Militia and Melanie run through and then Ortega, closing the door behind him.

They all get aboard the Bullhead and Ortega immediately gets into the cockpit, at the end of the day that is his specialty after all, flying aircraft. Junior holds onto the supports inside with Melanie and Militia as they look down, the thrusters activating, blasting the snow off the landing pad on the rooftop. He turns the Bullhead and they can see the extent of the Division of the Acolytes, for there is smoke and fire in multiple districts where firefights have been triggered.

But luckily…

From how many airships can be seen flying away from Atlas without resistance…

A lot of the faithful have survived to escape and fight another day…if Ortega chooses to join up with
Ruby and the others…they could have just earned a small Army.

Their Bullhead soars away from the city, and none of the Surface to Air Missile Sites are opening fire on them, since they are tagged with the Acolytes of Lien clearance code, making them safe.

Junior looks to the cockpit and he calls to him. “So…what now, Admiral?” He asks him.

“Not an Admiral without a ship, Hei.” Ortega reminds, something that will take Hei a while to get used to saying.

“Oh yeah, what now, Darren?” He inquires, Ortega looks ahead and exhales through his nose, thinking of one thing.

“Merlot still has an arrangement with me…an arrangement that has not been concluded.” Ortega states with narrowed eyes.

Jacques slams his shoulder against the door to the Merlot Industries Labs that are now under the control of Donovan Gelè, Jacques’ younger brother. He carries the body of his son inside, tears in his eyes and horror on his face, and Donovan walks by his side, pointing to a Gurney. “Get him on the gurney! Everyone! Bring me the equipment for Project Transcendence!” Donovan yells, Jacques not even listening to the things that is coming out of his mouth, only staring at his son who is…dead…with blood leaking from the bullet hole in his head right now.

His body is cold, and there is no pulse in him…

He is dead.

“No…no…no…” Jacques whimpers, until Donovan rolls his eyes and smacks Jacques across the face with the back of his hand, then grabbing him by his collar.

“Hey! You wanna save your son?” Donovan roars, he looks very similar to his brother however he lacks the defined Moustache and instead has a gristly white beard, also turned white by age. Many forget that Jacques Schnee is actually a Gele, married into the Schnee Family and took their name for their power and wealth…but now he has never felt weaker and smaller than staring at the only remnant of family he has left dead on a Gurney.

“He…he’s dead…” He stammers with shock, turning pale as if he is about to vomit from the shock and awe of it all.

“Yeah, he is, but he doesn’t have to stay that way, does he?” He questions, and Jacques stares at his brother with confusion. He never really cared for his brother before now, because Donovan was put in the Atlesian Prisons by Ironwood for his extreme experiments, basically an Atlesian version of Doctor Merlot…but worse.

“W-What do you mean?” Jacques questions.

“I have been working on a project since you freed me, the same project that Ironwood imprisoned me for. He enlisted me for his Aura Transfusion Project for that Fall Maiden five years ago? Well my ideas were too much for him, because I realised, we could use that kind of technology to enhance
people. To transfer a soul into another object, an Atlesian Knight for example. We get him in there and he could move his aura from body to body.” He explains, sounding like a madman…but Jacques just looks befuddled, this is all information he had no idea about.

That his brother was involved in the Battle of Beacon to some extent.

That he wants humans to transcend into Artificial Intelligence levels.

Nonetheless, this man is his son’s best chance of survival, so Jacques snaps out of it and nods his head, looking at the body of his son. “But he never unlocked his aura like his sisters did.” Jacques states.

“He doesn’t need to unlock the aura, everyone has it, unlocking just allows you to use your soul like a tool. Without aura…we would just be mindless.” Donovan explains as he and Jacques pull the gurney across the labs to the machine of which he intends to use. Very similar to that of the pod that Amber was inside of, but this time there is an Atlesian Knight inside of it, and they must connect Whitley to it.

But as Jacques looks around…

There are dead Huntsmen everywhere, the Huntsmen and Huntresses that have been captured over the years by Merlot’s Men for testing, however something is different. Normally the bodies have looked…cleaner…and with less agonised looks on their faces.

These people were alive when they were tested on.

“Donovan…were these people alive when you tested on them? They are new.” Jacques questions as he stares at the bodies, Donovan nods his head.

“Yes.” He answers, unfazed.

“But…Merlot always stated that pain would make the results inconclusive.” Jacques points out as he looks at the terrified look on the face of a Huntress, opened up for testing on the table…blood everywhere.

“Oh, he was a pathetic man, always too soft and wanted to be merciful. Modifying Horridus Morbus to knock people out and kill them in their sleep? I heard of some of the things he did because of his bleeding heart.” Donovan scoffs as he connects his son to the machine, jabbing cables into his body.

“So…was he lying?” Jacques nervously inquires, covering the body with a blanket, not because it disgusted him, but out of respect. He may be ruthless and cruel, but Jacques is not an insane monster,

“Oh no, there is no difference in results. They just deserve it, and it’s satisfying to hear them scream.” Donovan chuckles with a smile, Jacques stares at the man with utterly horrified eyes…not much disturbs Jacques…but his brother’s sickening obsession of watching people suffer…that is enough to make his skin crawl.

That is what separates him from his brother.

Where Jacques has an obsession of winning at any cost.

Donovan is obsessed with watching people suffer, no matter the results.

He would pick at test animals because he liked to watch them squirm, he would burn people with hot tools because it made him happy. He was never really there but his radical ideas and intelligence
helped him become a Scientist.

A Mad Scientist.

He makes Merlot’s experiments look sane and moral.

Jacques jolts as the doors swing open and a pair of Gurneys are dragged into the room with a pair of new subjects for their testing. Jacques might not know them, but there are certain people out there that do. “Release me!” The powerful voice of one of the Huntsmen yells with fury.

The yelling man is a tall and athletic-looking man with shaved-short black hair and tanned skin, wearing mostly pale-green and brown attire. He has a long short-sleeved robe, which he wears on one shoulder over a black muscle shirt. The robe is fastened at the waist by a leather armoured belt with two pouches on it. He also wears brown pants and black-and-green boots. His left arm bears a 5-layer sode which extends up past his shoulder. His weapon is affixed to his back with a padded brown strap slung over his shoulder. He also wears a pair of bracers as well as a pair of black gloves with green plates on the backs.

And the other, more silent Huntsmen is a man with dark skin and dark, messy copper hair that has a long fringe and a cowlick. He wears a sleeveless, muted orange zipper vest with black lining and a high collar, a pair of black jeans, and brown, laced shoes. His eyes appear to be pure white, giving off the appearance that he is blind. His arms are covered in scars, and he has a vertical scar on his lips. He also wears a pair of long black gloves and has several pouches attached to his belt.

It is Yatsuhashi and Fox.

They are now in the custody of Professor Donovan Gele. Jacques watches as they are moved off to another room to be tested on, and he sighs.

For even he is starting to grow tired of all this torture.

“Alright, we are ready to proceed brother. Are you?” Donovan asks him, and without question he nods, for all he wants is to save his son from dying a pointless death. Donovan reaches over to the large metal lever and he pulls it, activating the machine that sends powerful volts through the machine and into Whitley’s Body.

His body begins to glow a faint blue, very similar to the other Schnees, pulling his aura out from his body and channelling it through the pipes he has built and into the Atlesian Knight trapped inside of the machine right now.

It takes a few moments but eventually…

The test is complete, and the pod opens up, revealing the machine inside. Jacques stares desperately at it, hoping for it to activate. It twitches and suddenly moves its head, looking around with a scared voice inside. “W-Where…Dad? Where am I!” He cries out in terror, seeing his metal hands and grabbing his mechanical head, then staring to see his body. “What happened?”

Jacques hushes the boy.

“Ssh…it’s alright, son…you’re okay.” He assures with a calming voice.

Death
With the snow and the wind howling…

The Knight of Death slowly walks across the Mountains, his black armour like a shadow in the light, eyes glowing red in that helmet. He holds Ferrum Arctus in his hands and crouches down, pressing the blade down into the artificial rock.

Staring at his prey.

Ruby Rose…

And Professor Ozpin.

The two of them emerge from the Chapel buried in the mountains, the snow blowing against them but for some reason the two of them have decided to take a break from the shelter. Death watches from the distance with the snow concealing him as they approach the edge of the mountain. Ozpin presses his hands atop his cane, staring out at the stunning Mountain Range. Ruby stands behind him, unsure of whether or not she should be trusting him right now. “You wished to speak with me, Ruby…well…here I am.” Ozpin says as he holds out his hands and ready to answer some more questions.

“Yes, you are…I’ve got a lot of questions, I guess…but there’s one that has been on my mind for a while now. Before you came back.” Ruby begins, Ozpin looks at her and he exhales through his nose, some clouds of white mist leaving his nostrils.

“Understandably…I have withheld much from you…but for noble reasons, I promise.” Ozpin assures, but whether a lie or omission is honourable or dishonourable…it matters not, it was information that they could have known ahead of time.

So, then they could have prepared.

Ozpin looks at her. “What is it you wish to know?” He inquires.

Ruby exhales, ready to answer the question she has had on her mind ever since she first met him when fighting Torchwick…outside of the shop Vir Nominis Umbra owned. It still gives her chills to even think about that fact, but it is a fact, and a stapled point in time, it cannot be changed. “Why…did you let me into Beacon early? It couldn’t have been just for my Silver Eyes…if you saw into the future and knew I was important then what was it?” She asks him, and he sighs, turning to her.

“It is your eyes…because as Kragen has mostly likely informed you, for whatever reason you are different. You hold power that is completely unfathomable to the strongest Silver Eyes Warriors. You managed to lift all those boulders on your second try.” Ozpin explains to her, a memory still very solid in her mind right now.

“Oh…okay…” She softly says.

“And you have the Spirit Animal of the Big Bad Wolf, that has not been recorded in generations.” Ozpin states, and Ruby raises her brow in confusion, tilting her head like a dog would.

“What do you mean? What makes my Spirit Animal so important?” She asks him.

“Throughout recorded history there have been five people who possessed the Big Bad Wolf, all of them were incredibly powerful warriors from humble upbringings. They all accomplished great things, one of these people was Vyrryk Arc.” He reveals, and Ruby’s silver eye widens.
“What?” She asks with confusion.

“Don’t worry, that does not mean you are related to the Arcs, Spirit Animals are not to do with Heritage. It is a personality trait.” Ozpin assures and Ruby sighs with a nervous chuckle.

“Oh…that’s good.” She jokes, not that she would hate being related to him, more than she likes being a Rose opposed to an Arc.

“But from what I have seen so far…you play a pivotal role in the battle against Vir Nominis Umbra…I do not know if that means you could beat him, or you are the last to be killed by him.” He explains, sounding flustered whenever that topic comes up, but Ruby has another question which relates to that.

“How much have you seen?” Ruby inquires

Ozpin huffs a breath, closing his eyes as he pictures the final event he saw, the one he cannot seem to see beyond. “Up to the moment…the Shivering Dominion…I cannot see beyond that one moment. I hope that Umbra cannot either.”

“What do you mean?” Ruby asks.

“There are certain points in time entities cannot access, like a firewall protects them. Whatever lies beyond the Shivering Dominion is one of them.” He explains, before he hangs his head and sighs. “I’m sorry…I know it is not the greatest news…”

“Don’t be, Ozpin…just…please…no more lies.” Ruby asks of him, turning and walking away from him and back to the warmth of the shelter they have made. Ozpin watches her go and he sighs.

His eyes harden, and he glances over his shoulder where Death watches.

“I know you’re there, Krekras.” Ozpin states, turning to face him as he rises up from the snow, snow falling from his black armour, holding Ferrum Arctus in his gauntleted grasp.

“Why? Why must you challenge Umbra’s patience? We all know the weight of betraying him, he will torment you for eternity for this.” Krekras warns as he stands there, but Ozpin steps forward, showing his defiance against Vir Nominis Umbra.

“Well that’s just it! Don’t you see, Krekras? It’s the fear. Fear keeps us in line, it suffocates us! Can you not rise up from it and breathe that fresh air, brother? Can you not see past it and see the beauty this world has to offer? Vir Nominis Umbra is just another manipulator, blinding us from our own destiny.” Ozpin explains with poetic justice in his voice, and Death snarls, his helmet cracking and opening to reveal the burning skull within.

“You talk of destiny like you are free, but you are just running from a fate you cannot escape!” Krekras argues.

“I dare to…I dare because I question his Immortality, his reasons for what he does. The man lies to himself more than he realises, I have faced his demons, Krekras. I have turned against the False God…but merely for a chance, a chance I could give for those who deserve it far more than we ever could.” Ozpin states with cold judgement in his voice.

“I know not what punishment lies at the end of such betrayal, Ozymandias, but do not doubt that the Ebony Berserker also failed to see this light.” Krekras states, naming Hyde by the title he was created with.
He turns and walks away from Ozpin but stops, looking over his shoulder. “At one time in all our lives, we’ve taken such strides to escape our fate…but remember…at one point…everything must come to an end.” Krekras states.

Ozpin turns.

And he is gone.

As mysteriously as he arrived.
I was dead…

People have always claimed that there was a light when you die, that light at the end of the tunnel. But when that gun fired, when my life was ended in a millisecond, I saw no light at all. There was absolutely nothing, just a bang and then I awoke here…

As if it were some kind of nightmare…

What am I now?

What am I?

“What am I?” Whitley asks with fear in his trembling voice, sat in front of him are the two members of his family with grey hair, Jacques and Donovan Gele. The Atlesian Knight of which that the Scientist has managed to transfer his soul into is sat down in a chair, the cogs and servos moving constantly inside. The visor glows blue, a different coloured L.E.D inside of its head activated for this purpose, modified for the Transcendence Project. “What have you done to me, Uncle Donovan?” Whitley whimpers with fear, but Jacques gently holds his son’s hand to try and calm him, but Whitley cannot feel the warmth from his father’s hand, if he has ever had warm blood in his icy chassis.

He cannot feel anything, it is as if he is not even in the room with the two family members, completely disconnected from the rest of the world. “Son…everything is fine, your Uncle managed to save your soul from your body.” Jacques explains to him, gently tapping the back of his hand with his thumb. The Atlesian Knight looks at its hand and Whitley shudders, pulling his hand from the human hands of his father, staring at the mechanical digits that have replaced what he was once used to. He touches his head, unable to feel his white hair he once looked after so much.

The Scientists have taken and covered up his body with the bullet hole in his head, the skin gone cold and pale from how long he has been dead. Whitley presses his metal hands against his head with total confusion, trying to comprehend what has happened, feeling a slight residual aching pain in the middle of his head, clearly an echo from his last body. “W-What…what happened?” He whimpers.

“You were shot in the head by the Former Admiral Darren Ortega, I’m afraid he escaped and… well…it seems we have a bit of a fissure in the Acolytes of Lien right now. Almost half of our forces turned against us and fled from the Kingdom to fight for him. I guess more of them are loyal to him above their pay than we expected.” Donovan chuckles as he sits there, crossing one leg over the other as he leans back against his chair.

Whitley looks at his Uncle with concern, but not for what has happened with the Acolytes of Lien but more for what he has done to him. He keeps looking at his reflection and he nearly freaks out every single time as soon as he sees his own reflection. The once familiar head structure, the stubble he fashioned, his combed hair and the ability to actually convey emotion. But now the only way he can even show his feelings is through his voice and movements, as the visor is just a blue shimmer. “What am I? What have you done?”
“The machine over there? That was the answer to your survival.” Donovan tells him, so Whitley follows his Uncle’s finger and stares at the device of which that the Scientist created, the pod where the mech was once inside of. And the detached cables hanging from the other side where the gurney was once beside. The strong well-spoken voice of his Uncle rises again as Whitley stares at the machine that has granted him survival. “The first stage of Project Transcendence, taking the soul from a Human Body.” He tells the young man trapped within the Atlesian Knight. The Knight turns and stares straight at his Uncle.

“Project Transcendence? What is this, why have I never been informed?” Whitley inquires with a concern that seems more natural from him, yet it still worries him, since it was used on him when he had no idea that it existed. Jacques nods his head, since even he – Donovan’s Older Brother – was not informed on this either.

“Neither was I, however we were lucky that you still had the device ready when you did.” Jacques states as he gives his brother a bit of a glare, one that Donovan just looks at him as a response to.

“The reason for that is because I have been in a Maximum-Security Prison for twenty years and dear old General Ironwood buried everything I ever accomplished and created with the help of Ozpin. He never liked my ideas, said that I was too extreme to be trusted, so he arrested me.” Donovan explains with his arms crossed, looking at both of them, Whitley hangs his metal head when hearing that name again. Clearly there is a part of him that feels a bit bad for what happened, the death of so many people to take control.

Including Klein and his Mother.

And in case that his uncle is currently uninformed, he sighs and informs him on what happened, since he has been free from his incarceration for only a few weeks now. “Ironwood is dead, he died in our coup against President Thaddeus Brimstone.” Whitley informs, still remembers the sound of that explosion, the echoes of screaming terrified civilians fleeing for safety as burning rubble fell from the sky and crashing into the streets.

Approximately two hundred and thirty-seven people were killed that day and thousands were injured from the detonation.

But despite how terrible this memory is, and how much it did not seem to mean anything at the time…only through his Uncle does he see someone that is actually worse than him and his father in practically every single way. He just smirks and shrugs his shoulders with a sinister voice he replies. “Good, hope it was slow.”

Whitley stares at him with disbelief, he may not have liked the man, especially since he had a hand in the fracturing of their family due to sleeping with his mother and starting the downfall of their marriage. Creating a war between the Schnees that tore them apart, one that clearly Jacques has won with only Weiss and Winter remaining on Willow’s side. But despite how much he hated his mother for what she did to the family, he still felt upset for knowing that she died in that explosion. Because all those years, all those memories, were extinguished in a second.

And Ironwood never deserved to die like that, he might have been their foe enemy, but he could have been imprisoned instead.

But clearly his Uncle does not share that kind of feeling for the loss of life. Whitley looks at his father whom is colder than his son, but not like his brother – Jacques might be cold, but he is not heartless and understands that unnecessary loss of life is too much. But Vir Nominis Umbra ordered him to have this be arranged, and at the end of the day he had no idea that his wife was inside of that building.
Perhaps that was part of Umbra’s plan all along, to create a small form of punishment for letting his rage get the better of him. “You don’t mean that, do you?” Jacques questions, and Donovan gives him another glare.

“Of course, I mean it.” He replies.

“How?” Jacques questions with disgust.

“Are you seriously judging me for the way I view the world? Like your view of the Faunus is any better than how I viewed that liar? Especially after what he did to your marriage. Don’t you dare judge me when you and I are just alike, brother.” Donovan warns with a stern voice, clearly the two of them are not exactly the closest of brothers – but then again, they hardly ever met him…it is possible that Weiss does not even know who he is, and Winter might have met him outside of prison when she was very young.

A pregnant silence follows, nobody has managed to silence the cold Businessman the way his younger brother has been able to, despite having some kind of superiority through age, his little brother somehow seems so much bigger than him. Jacques looks away from him and he sighs before adding more to what he said. “You know why I view the Faunus that way, what they did to our family is unforgivable.”

“What the few did – I will test on any species, and I heard about some of the requests you made for Merlot and his Horridus Morbus Project.” Donovan states with a smirk.

“You did?” Jacques replies.

“Oh, word travels fast, brother. And I must say it sounded quite childish, making him test on a colony of Faunus because you think they deserve it? Why not just seclude a combination to make sure it works on Humans too? Would have gotten more reliable results.” Donovan explains, and Jacques sighs as he shakes his head, the two brothers and their feud seems to grow over the subject of Whitley being alive…and the confusion that has settled into his mind of his future now. Whitley stares at both of them, clenching his now mechanical hands into tightly forced fists, getting angrier and angrier as their bickering never seems to end.

“It was the quietest and cleanest method we had available to us at the time, not much chatter was coming in and out of Menagerie.” Jacques states, and Donovan laughs with sarcasm in his voice.

“Oh, enough with the bullshit, Jacques. I know you made him do that because of your prejudice, I am many things, but a racist is not one of them.” Donovan snarls.

“You are a madman, who enjoys making people suffer.” Jacques challenges with a snarling voice, in which Donovan leans forward and glares into his brother’s eyes.

“My results have to come from somewhere, pain has always been a valid option. At least I make both Humans and Faunus Suffer instead of letting old wounds fester.” Donovan replies.

It is like a pair of children arguing.

Whitley finally cracks, releasing a cry of anguish as he stands up so suddenly, screaming at both of them. “Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!” He screams with fury, making both of them jolt from seeing the much stronger Atlesian Knight suddenly spring up from the chair and glaring at them, his one glowing blue L.E.Ds inside of the head now turning full red with aggression. He can still display emotion through the machines of which he can take over. Jacques slowly stands up and holds his hand out to the machine that his son is trapped inside of.
“My son…”

“NO!” Whitley bellows, slamming his open palm into Jacques’s chest so hard that it pushes him across the floor, knocking a small table over in the process. Jacques winces in pain, grabbing onto his side as he rolls on the floor, coughing in pain. Donovan slowly rises up and acts much less caring towards the boy he saved, staring him down. “What did you do to me? You have not explained!” He screams with rage.

“I was going to before you interrupted me with news of Ironwood – forgive me for replying.” Donovan scoffs, from the way that the Atlesian Knight stands, it can be assumed that inside of that body Whitley is gritting his teeth aggressively at his Uncle right now.

“I’m not gonna ask again…you have put me in this…machine…why?” Whitley questions.

“To save your ungrateful life, that’s why. The world still needs you, and despite my faults, you are still my nephew. You see I created Project Transcendence as an idea to help people with untreatable symptoms to live forever. Such as cancer, extreme cirrhosis, tuberculosis and so forth. There are some things that modern medicine or even aura cannot repair because it has been eating away at the body for so long. But the soul did not get damaged in that way, yes there are residual pains from that body but that is merely memory.” Donovan explains, gently holding onto Whitley’s shoulder as he takes him for a walk down the laboratory of which he has taken over from Merlot Industries. The symbols and names of the old company are still there but slowly and surely the new Schnee Dust Company – Science Division symbol is going to replace it.

“What do you mean?” He asks his uncle.

“Well it is similar to a phantom pain. I noticed you touching your head earlier, you were feeling pains inside of your skull?” Donovan inquires.

“Y-Yes…” He timidly answers.

“Well due to being shot in the head, courtesy of Ortega, your soul still carries some aching pains from that moment. Obviously nowhere near as painful as they would have been in the moment, but it is still something. But Project Transcendence also has another purpose – controlling our own evolution. Giving us the chance to actually choose what our bodies look like, because I know that dear old Merlot has been working on a secret project for Ortega. To do with his deceased daughter, and he created an Android of her that lacked her human memories.” He explains as he walks towards an old lab of his that was being used.

Inside are some old designs of Penny Polendina before the version that was revealed to Ruby and the gang was first discovered in Vale. There are three of them inside, one of them looks like it is closer to that of an Atlesian Knight like himself, Jacques stands up and follows from behind, staying a bit back from his son. The second is closer to the familiar one, however her skin is paler, and her hair is longer than it was…and then there are the remains of her original body. Torn apart by Pyrrha Nikos in the Vytal Festival, the long cables still hanging out from the pieces that was pulled away.

Then there is the fourth tube, empty because this version of her is currently with Ruby and the gang. “I do wish we had her body to continue tests to finish off his project without him, because he managed to give her the memories, she had at Beacon back to her. Fractured due to her fried memory core when she was launched from the Drift of Wandering Star, but even still it was impressive. He also managed to make her fit in with the others, a body that represents that of a nineteen-year-old girl this time. So, she was a little older than Miss Rose at that time, but her mind was still just as…innocent.” Donovan chuckles, clearly, he managed to get plenty of information on these projects when he was still in prison.
Unless he is an extremely fast learner to figure this out in a few weeks.

“What…what was he aiming to create? With this project?” Whitley inquires.

“Do you know of what happened with his daughter?” Donovan asks him.

“Not in full detail.” Whitley answers.

“Well he was once a family man, married to a Faunus Woman and they had a miraculous baby who for some reason was born a Human. Many didn’t think it possible, but it was. That girl was Penny Polendina, unfortunately a few years after she was born the mother passed away due to cancer. His daughter started to suffer from depression, took to admiring Pyrrha Nikos but the girl never showed any recognition to Polendina, and she was bullied for years. In the end…Penny took her own life with an overdose of sleeping pills. Ortega was broken, then went into a state of rage, killing the bullies and their parents for not stopping them. Ever since then he has wanted his little girl back, and he cut a deal with Merlot to help him in any way if he saved his daughter.” Donovan explains to him, summing up the heartbreaking story of Admiral Darren Ortega perfectly.

“And Merlot agreed.” Whitley nods his head, understanding the alliance a bit better now.

“Exactly.” Donovan nods his head, and Whitley sighs, shaking his head.

“Maybe it was a bit cruel to take that away from him, I know he was a risk and all…but that was a bit much wasn’t it?” Whitley inquires, turning to his father whom he knew was following them. Jacques looks at him then shows his ice-cold personality again, seems some things he decides to do are all for good reason in his eyes.

“The Project was a waste of time and resources, I have been working to get Merlot to eradicate the project, but he never approved. Always claimed he kept his promises. Kelham agreed with me, so we slowly helped him gain more resources. Only when he teleported to us after the White Fang destroyed his Gang did we go through with it.” Jacques explains, the Atlesian Knight stares at him then exhales digitally.

“And killed me in the process.” He adds.

“No, by doing this it is better. Assassination would have caused the entire Mercenary Group to explode in Atlas. We would have been slaughtered by them.” Jacques states, and Donovan nods his head with a sigh.

“Unfortunately, your father is right, kiddo. This little division in the Acolytes of Lien is problematic but if we killed him secretly, it wouldn’t take long before the whole company would turn on us.” Donovan replies, and Whitley sighs, walking past his Uncle and staring at the empty pod.

“The fifth pod…was there anything ever in here?” He inquires.

Donovan looks at his brother and Jacques nods his head. “Well, no there was nothing built inside of it. However, we are aware that he has been working on something in Arkhonex, where he has
created a brand-new lab. He has a few scientists with him too, and from some of the documents of the Empire we have collected…I think I know what he wants to do to give Ortega what he wants.” Donovan explains as he walks past Whitley towards some files, he has collected from the many teams that they have sent into Arkhonex.

“Files? I thought all records of Arkhonex were lost?” Whitley questions.

“Not all of them. In pretty much every single Arkhoni Ruin we have uncovered until now everything is untranslatable. However, it is clear that Merlot has had people in Arkhonex longer than we imagined. They managed to find some intriguing information on the scientists back in the day. Jacques actually hid out in a secret facility we set up in Ephai were we found a few records that were worth saving when you were in charge, remember?” Donovan asks him, and Whitley nods his head.

“I remember.” Whitley agrees.

“Well, with some further reading on the files his spies collected, I have deduced that Merlot is attempting to finish the work that some old Scientists in Arkhonex attempted when the Empire was collapsing. They attempted to create a Cross-Synthetic-Organic body that could live and age just like a human, but before they could do this, they needed to learn how to transfer the minds of people into machines. They did this the same way that we have, using devices that would transfer the person’s aura into a device that can hold it. It worked, however the devices were not stable since they did not have enough time. It exploded, and the secrets were never finished. However, it seems that with Merlot’s wisdom he is learning how to complete their work.” Donovan explains, and Whitley begins to sew the lines together.

“Penny Polendina’s Final Model is a Synthetic Organic Body?” Whitley questions.

“Well not yet, he has not finished it, but he is close. His theory states that by using nanites the human body will work just like our own, it can feel, eat, drink, age and even have children just like we can. However, the nanites infused in the Modified D.N.A Strand would give the body the abilities that Synthetics have, in Penny’s case – hacking, her swords and even stealth systems. All activated inside of her head instead of code. An impressive undertaking, something Merlot could accomplish with his genius…we just need to find him in time for when it is done. Then we use his science to create you a body…and I will be remembered a hero.” Donovan chuckles menacingly with a grin, and Whitley stares at Donovan.

“You mean you will just steal his work and claim it for your own?” He judges with a scoff.

“If Umbra keeps his promise – and according to your father he is a man of his word – the world after this will be ours to forge, we can create a new Humanity. One without limits, where we can do anything, we want with magic created through technology. We would be gods.” He states with a mad smile on his face.

That is the kind of man they are looking at here.

Merlot might have extreme methods, but he was never interested in becoming a god, just to improve Humanity and Faunus odds against the Grimm, and even now…all this…to save a little girl.

Except for one thing.

“What about Penny’s memories?” Whitley inquires.

“His research states that he has been studying her life word for word to create a backstory that would be so vivid that it would be like reality for her. Real memories told by him…but it matters not. If we
stop him from finishing his side and kill his abomination, we can create you a new body…one that you could transfer your mind into to kill your sisters.” He explains with a smile and Whitley turns sharply.

“Huh?” He questions.

“I know you hate Weiss and Winter and for good reason, they abandoned you to be raised by this shmuck.” Donovan scoffs as he points at his father whom clenches his fist even tighter, narrowing his blue eyes. “But thanks to the Project, you now can transfer your aura into other bodies that can accept aura. Even that Deimos Suit you have been prepping is being modified for that purpose now. It may take longer to finish but one day you may be able to live in it.” Donovan explains, and Whitley stands there…his soul most likely brandishing a mad grin.

Jacques turns when he hears the footfalls of a man approaching from behind them, Kelham walks down the steps into the lab and moves towards them with a couple Seekers at his side. They hold their Submachine Guns tight in their armoured grasp, the glowing orange dust circulates inside of the tubes of their backpacks. “What is it? Did you catch Ortega?” Jacques asks him.

“No, he escaped with half his forces – Junior and those two chicks as well.” Kelham informs and Jacques sighs.

“Damn it. We need to find him and stop him, if he gets to Merlot first, he will use all those forces to defend him. Or…worse case scenario…he will go to Winter and Weiss, and their friends.” Jacques snarls with anger, pacing around the room as he taps his chin.

“Unlikely, if the reports are correct Pyrrha Nikos is with them. He wouldn’t work with her after what happened to his daughter.” Kelham states, also filled in on many important subjects at hand at the moment.

Behind them, Whitley stares at the empty casket where the new form of Penny was supposed to be.

“So…Whitley…do you agree with this stratagem?” Donovan inquires…

There is a lull…

But then it is slowly broken by the building maniacal cackling of Whitley Schnee, intimidating his father but his Uncle grins as he laughs with insanity.

He spins round and stares at his Uncle. “Yeah…I agree…I’m ready to watch them both burn.” Whitley snarls.

Ruby

The snow billows heavily outside in the mountains, luckily however the ridge of the rocks and the shelter in the Church has offered them protection from the icy cold storms. Nonetheless, that does not make them any warmer, but the fire that they have fashioned from dry wood found scattered inside of the Church has helped a little bit. Most of the party are sat down around the fire, conversing, but Ruby and Nora are stood off from them as they talk. Nora is sat on a rock with Mgnhild in her grasp, gently polishing the hammer with her cloth in her hand, making the metal glisten again. Her hair has grown a little longer from their days in Anima, now just beyond shoulder length and a bit wavy.
But she has refused to change her outfit since then, it is Nora Valkyrie after all. Ruby is sat beside her, her long black and red hair gently caressed over her shoulder and a flick of it hanging over the eyepatch. She brandishes her combat knife she has drawn from her sheathe on her leg, scraping it across the rock she is knelt beside. The two of them look at the open entrance to the Chapel where they can see Ozpin standing.

He is constantly thinking, trying to find a plan…and Qrow wandered off to do a quick patrol with the Architect going the other way.

None of them know that Death was just speaking with Ozpin earlier, meaning he knows exactly where they are right now. He could be circling them in his Nevermore Form right now and they would never know it. Nora looks down at Ruby beside her, remembering the days where she would be hugging Crescent Rose…now she just looks so serious with everything that she does.

She would be lying if she claimed that she preferred this Ruby…they all miss that squeaky and adorable ball of sunshine back at Beacon. Despite that, she knows when not to press someone on things like that, Ruby tends to get a bit hostile around those kinds of questions. Ruby glances up at Nora and she sighs, looking at Ozpin again. “Hey…do you…trust him?” Ruby asks her, and Nora raises a brow.

“Hmm? Who?” She asks.

“Ozpin?” Ruby answers, Nora smirks with an internal scoff, crossing one leg over the other.

“Not as far as I can throw him, and you know me – I can throw pretty far.” Nora giggles as she rests her hammer on her legs, looking at Ozpin with his hands atop his cane once more, staring out at the snow.

“Yeah you can…”

Nora raises her brow once more, tilting her head as she looks at Ruby. “Why do you ask?”

“Well…when I asked him some questions…he got a bit strange at one point. He said some things and I wasn’t sure if I could believe him.” Ruby explains as she sheathes her knife back into her scabbard belted onto her leg.

“What did he say?” Nora inquires, making Ruby chuckle.

“Well we’ve all heard him say that we might not trust him ever again if he tells us the truth about the things that he’s done…when he was the Knight of Vengeance. I don’t even know if we can trust him on that side, we’ve never met a Knight of Grimm that was against Vir Nominis Umbra. He could still be on his side and even he doesn’t know it.” Ruby explains with concern practically welling up in her voice, her silver eye staring at the Professor whom stands at the mouth of the cave.

“Yeah, I get that…but then again, if he did start opening up to us about these things…I think I might trust him a little more.” Nora admits with the shrug of her shoulders, Ruby looks up at her.

“Even if it’s terrible?” Ruby asks her.

“The guy looks like he regrets the choices he made all those years ago…it’s possible that if he opens up about them, he could start being more trustworthy. But I dunno…I’m not in his position after all. Whatever it is he did as Vengeance…well…he had a hand in the fall of an Empire, so I guess it must be pretty bad.” Nora says with a sigh, rubbing the back of her neck as she ponders the subject. It is utterly mind boggling, the idea of a man having a helping hand in tearing down a civilisation that approximately fell two and a half thousand years ago.
“But how many times has he lied to us in the past?” Ruby inquires, and Nora nods her head.

“I know…he totally lied about the Knights, not knowing what they were…when he was one. But he also said that he knew Umbra was watching us…if he heard him act like he knew all about Umbra and the Knights it could have given us all away. When we were in Beacon? After…well…after what happened…Umbra looked legitimately shocked when Ozpin woke up.” Nora explains with energy in her voice, and Ruby nods her head with a sigh.

Just remembering that night makes Ruby tear up, rubbing a tear away with her fist and she sniffs. “Yeah…he did…” She softly says as she stares down at the floor.

Nora immediately enters her caring friend mode, gently squeezing her good friend’s shoulder. “You okay, marshmallow?” She asks her, and Ruby giggles, raising a brow with that beautiful smile returning to her face.

“Marshmallow?” Ruby inquires.

“Coming up with new nicknames for people. I like calling people foods, thought I’d call Ren my Little Pancake. Pyrrha is a Cute Strawberry, Jaune is a Silly Lemon. You? You’re as cute and as lovable as a Marshmallow.” Nora squeaks with a smile, making Ruby blush with a smile, lowering her head.

“C’mon…what’re you?” She asks her curiously.

“Oh, Watermelon, without a doubt. C’mon, hard-headed gal like me?” Nora answers as she flexes her muscles with a smirk, scaring Ruby from how terrifyingly muscular the girl is. Despite being so small, she could probably pick up a house with little effort.

“Speaking of…how are you and Ren doing?” Ruby inquires, and Nora smiles, sitting down on the floor next to Ruby.

“We’re good, y’know despite all the drama over the past few months…man I miss those five years we had. Even though we all knew it wasn’t over…I still wished it was.” She sighs, looking down at the floor.

“I know what you mean.” Ruby nods her head, and then Nora continues on about loving relationship with Ren.

“It’s been a while since I bought Ren something, if we ever get to go somewhere to buy some stuff, what do you think I should get him? He loves clothes, but he is also an awesome cook…should I get him some fancy cooking things? Like fancy knives and saucepans?” She asks her curiously, and Ruby’s silver eye is wide with overwhelming feeling in her body from the amount of questions being thrown her way.

“Uh…I dunno…which do you think he would like more?” Ruby asks her curiously.

“I dunno, that’s why I’m asking you!” Nora squeaks.

“How would I know? You’re his girlfriend.” She reminds, and Nora pauses and sinks back down after her failed retort attempt.

“Good point…umm…I guess he really does like cooking, he has been saying he wants to get some new tools soon as well.” Nora admits as she thinks more about it, then she nods. “Yeah, next market we go to I’ll find him some nice tools for him.” Nora settles, smiling at her friend who softly smiles back. But then Nora’s smile sinisterly changes to a grin, worrying Ruby, since she knows that the
bullet is about to be shot back at her now.

“What about you two, Marshmallow?” Nora inquires and Ruby groans with embarrassment, all these years of being in a committed relationship and she still gets all awkward when people ask that question.

Seems some things will never change.

“Oh, come on, Nora…” She grumbles, hiding her head in her knees and covering the top of her head with her red hood.

“You know we’ll never stop asking that way until you stop getting embarrassed by it, right?” Nora asks her, getting a sigh from Ruby back.

“Yup…” She grumbles.

“But c’mon, Marshmallow, how’s things between you two?” Nora inquires softly, shuffling up to Ruby, wanting her to talk a little more. Ruby sighs and pulls her head back up, letting her hood fall back down the back of her neck. She looks at Nora and gives her the answer she has been craving for.

“Yeah…things are good between us. I mean with everything going on…I don’t think I’ll be able to get him anything for his birthday. It is coming up…we haven’t seen his Aunt since before we fought Mazen during that Bank Robbery.” Ruby explains, a good point considering how much chaos has been going on as of late. The Knights of Grimm coming back, Salem returning with Neo and Kannix, the Acolytes making their next move.

And of course.

Vir Nominis Umbra meeting her for the first time, crippling three kingdoms in half an hour…a lot has happened.

Nora smiles and nods her head. “How is his Aunt?”

“Last time we saw her, she was fine. Happy to see me, she was ecstatic when she found out we started dating…man you should’ve been there when he went to see her again after disappearing on her like that.” Ruby giggles, remembering how angry yet happy she was to see him okay.

“Mad?” Nora inquires.

“To put it mildly.” Ruby chuckles, since his Aunt gave him a set of red legs, but then immediately started crying with joy and hugging him.

Then Nora asks the question she was dreading, bit personal too. “Have you two…y’know…done it?” Nora inquires curiously, Ruby’s silver eye widens, and she blushes with embarrassment.


“Sorry, I was just curious…but…really? Five years and you’ve never given it a go?” Nora asks her curiously, Ruby glances over to her boyfriend sat down and talking with Jaune and Pyrrha at the fire, just noticing Cinder at the fire too, not really looking at the two but more at Oscar, talking to him.

“No…we haven’t…I…well…it’s stupid.” She sighs, and Nora squeezes her shoulder affectionately.

“What is it?” Nora asks.
“Well…Yang’s always wanted to be a mom, she basically was for me since mine died. I’m just scared if…something went wrong, and I end up…pregnant.” She admits to, and Nora starts to understand why she is scared of losing her virginity.

“You’re afraid of being a mom, right?” She asks her, and Ruby silently nods her head. Despite there being contraception methods, it is completely understandable to have that worry since sometimes things do not go according to plan.

“I get that…I was worried about that too. But eventually we got over our worries and tried it out.” Nora says to her.

“Nobody ever fell in love without being a little bit brave.” Nora adds, those words sitting in Ruby for a while, since she is completely right. However, it does not free her of worries, but it does make her feel better.

Ruby looks at Nora with a smile. “Thanks, Watermelon.”

“Any time, Marshmallow.” Nora gets up and gently rubs Ruby’s head of hair, walking away from her with a playful wink, sitting down next to her boyfriend, holding his hand and resting her head on his shoulder. Ruby sits there and looks at Oscar who looks at her with a soft smile, but as Ruby looks at him…she looks around and realises that Qrow still has not come back yet.

She looks over at Raven sat on a rock with a Whetstone in her hand, scraping it across her blade to sharpen it. Ruby gets up, picking up Crescent Rose as she approaches her Aunt, holsters her weapon she was cleaning. “Hey, Raven. You seen Qrow?” Ruby asks her, and Raven looks up at her.

“Yeah…he just went out to check the perimeter. He hasn’t come back in a while though, be best to check on him.” Raven says with a smile, nodding to Ruby. The young Silver Eyed Warrior nods her head and turns, walking out past Ozpin, who glances at her as she walks way from them. She walks out and across the long path that Qrow went down. The cold sends a chill biting across her slender yet athletic body. The snow sits in her long hair and she shields her face from the cold as best as she can, moving as best as she can despite how much snow slams against her smooth cheek.

The distant cries of Eagles can be heard echoing around her, even over the howling winds…but rather quickly she finds her uncle.

She stops her, and her eyes widen to see him drinking whiskey from his flask that she thought he threw away. “Qrow?” She softly says, he pauses and turns, holding the alcoholic drink in his hand. “What are you doing? You said you quit…"

“No…you promised you would quit! You promised!” Ruby argues, pointing at him with heartbreak. Qrow stammers, then he sighs, closing her teary eyes, holding it tight. “How long have you still been drinking?”

“Not long…ever since…Tai…” He softly admits tearfully, that is when Ruby pauses and her eye widens sadly as she stares at the man who by blood is her father. He looks at her and he sniffles. “He was like a brother to me…always offered me a home…even in our toughest times, kiddo.” He weakly states, walking over to a rock as he stares at the Blizzard in the mountains. Ruby walks over to him, fighting the tears herself, since it has not been very long since her father was killed by Vir Nominis Umbra. “He was my best friend…and I couldn’t save him…I tried…but I couldn’t…”
Ruby shakes her head. “Don’t you dare blame yourself for what happened, if anyone is to blame other than Umbra it’s me. I should have been smarter than to fall for the idea of him being Darkness…and if he does hate the Brothers then he probably killed Dad out of spite.” She explains, leaning against the rock and crossing her arms. He looks at her and refuses to believe she is at fault.

“I’m a bad luck charm kid…I shouldn’t be with you…Raven would be better…you would all be winning by now.” He states, as if he wants to leave them. “Maybe people will be safer.”

“You were both there when Dad died, Qrow…that had nothing to do with Bad Luck or Good Luck. It was all Umbra, it was unavoidable.” She states with sadness in her eye. Her silver eye gazes at the Flask on the rock and she grits her teeth, picking up the flask and holding it away from Qrow. “I’m throwing this thing away.”

“No…please…” He begs, reaching out for it, but Ruby grabs onto his forearm to stop him from reaching any further.

Her words dig deep.

“I will not lose another dad.” She softly yet sternfully says to him with her large round silver eye narrowed. Qrow stands there with shocked red eyes to hear her actually refer to him as a dad. “I lost one…you may not have raised me like he did…but you never left me. Or Yang…I know Raven is trying to make it right but…you were always there.” She reminds with a soft smile.

“R-Ruby…I-I…” Qrow tearfully stammers.

“I need you…and I won’t have you die from cirrhosis…I will not lose another dad.” She sniffles, turning and throwing the flask into the storm, letting it disappear from their lives. Qrow stands there with tears in his eyes then he sighs, looking to his daughter again. She smiles and wraps her arms around him.

They both sob.

Mourning the death of a friend.

Of a father.

And a brother.

**Yang**

Laid down in her bed, approximately three years ago, the twenty-year-old Yang Xiao Long wears her shirt and some pants with her bare legs crossed over as she looks at Kassius on the bed with her. He wears his T-Shirt and a pair of shorts since it is summer, she looks at him lovingly, as he goes over the maps that he and Team J.N.R had been going over for the past few months when searching for Pyrrha.

All this feels like an ancient memory.

Kassius has many areas circled and others have been crossed out, Yang looks at him with that little flirty smile on her face. “Whatcha working on?” She asks him, and Kassius glances over at her.
“Figuring out how many other areas we’ve got to search over in Mistral…Anima’s a big damn place.” Kassius chuckles as he bites his nail, tapping the pen gently against the side of his head. The search has been sending them all over that continent and she always seems to be one step ahead of them every single second of the way.

However…

It has been a while since Yang and Kassius have actually seen each other, and they have a bit of catching up to do. With her bare foot, she slowly and flirtatiously reaches over to his cheek and tickles him with her toe, making him softly chuckle. “What’re you doing?” He wonders as he pauses for a moment, and Yang giggles playfully as she keeps doing it.

“Been a while, Cowboy…think we’ve got a bit of catching up to do, haven’t we?” She coos playfully.

“Yeah…we do.” Kassius softly agrees, suddenly pushing the map and the pen off the bed, then holding her leg and pulling her under him in one impressive motion. She excitedly yelps, perfectly landing beneath him as he holds her there, gently caressing her cheek as he gazes down at her. “What did I do to deserve a girl as beautiful as you.” He softly whispers to her as he gently moves some bits of hair from her lilac eyes. She reaches to his arm and gently strokes it, staring into his eyes back.

“Oh, you don’t deserve me, buddy…that’s what makes it better.” She giggles, making Kassius chuckle back.

“I guess so.” He agrees.

“C’mere, big guy.” She whispers, pulling him towards her lips, but then Kassius sighs as Hyde speaks in his head.

“This’ll be good.” Hyde chuckles, and Kassius narrows his eyes, and Yang knows him so well that she can tell that it is Hyde.

“Get outa here, Hyde, you perv.” She states.

“Aw, c’mon.” Hyde grumbles.

“Lock yourself away, not for your young eyes.” Kassius jokes, making Yang giggle again. Hyde sighs.

“Fiiiiiiine…” Hyde whines like a child, and Kassius feels the second mind disappear for a while, since luckily Hyde can do that, basically going to sleep in his own head so then they can have a bit of…private time together.

“That’s better.” Kassius chuckles.

“I’ve missed you.” Yang whispers as she looks at his lips then at his amber eyes.

“Missed you more.” He replies making her giggle.

“Show me.” She says, kissing him as she wraps one arm round him.

Three years later…

Yang wakes up in a coughing fit, her skin pale as she wheezes, grabbing her chest in agony as she
lays on that bed, spitting some blood from her lips, and eventually the coughing subsides. Her wheezing does not but at least the coughing has ceased here, she looks back at the other side of her bed in the vain hope to see Kassius in bed with her.

But she is alone.

She sighs sadly, sitting upright slowly, looking around to see everyone else asleep with the Fractured Moon seen through the window above their heads right now. Weiss, Neptune and Sun are all still alive with relatively steady pulses and stats on them. Sat down on the stage of the amphitheatre with a bunch of herbs being mixed in a Mortar and Pestle is the Alchemist, seems she knows how to make many things, with a boiling pot down on the floor as she starts to craft some kind of potion.

The difference between how she felt in that memory and how she feels now is quite heartbreaking, back there she was energetic and ready to have fun with her boyfriend she loves so dearly. But now she is struggling to speak, let alone be able to walk right now. The drugs in their system right now are not working well, as their skin is starting to pale more and more, and the veins are getting darker and darker.

Dark grey than black, unlike what Brawnz looked like before the mutations set in on him. She looks at the Alchemist and she lifts her head with a smile to see one of them is awake. “Good to see one of you is still awake…been asleep for around fifteen hours now.” The Alchemist tells her as she keeps grinding those herbs together into that thick sticky powder that she wants.

Yang coughs again, a deep throaty cough, like that of someone suffering from tuberculosis. She picks up a napkin on her bedside table and wipes the blood from her mouth, but that does not take away the irony taste inside. “Gods…this is bad…” She groans.

“Don’t worry, I am working on a concoction that will give you the protection you need so then you can go outside without spreading and give you enough energy to stay in shape. Do training, walk around, even run. It does not cure you, but it gives you strength, and gives you some more time too.” The Alchemist explains, and Yang gasps with disbelief, her gasp sounding so delicate due to how damaged she sounds right now.

It is the frailest Yang has ever felt.

Or looked, she is so much skinnier than she has ever been, she has lost a lot of weight due to this sickness. “That’s…incredible…” Yang coughs, covering her mouth as she sits forward. The Alchemist looks at her and picks up a hot cup of some kind of concoction.

“Here, drink this. It’s not the same as I am making now but it will stop the coughing for a while.” She assures, Yang quickly sips some it then gasps from how hot it is, burning her lip in the process. “Ow…” She grumbles.

“Ooh, probably should’ve warned you.” The Alchemist apologises.

“It’s fine…reminds me I’m still alive I guess.” She says with a heavy sigh.

“Ha! That’s one way to look at it I guess.” The Alchemist chuckles as she sits down at the stage, crossing one leg over the other as she continues her work, reading her very own booklet she has made on these potions that she crafts. Curious as a cat, Yang raises a brow and tilts her head when she observes the Alchemist working away.

“What have you been putting in that stuff? How does it work?” Yang inquires curiously, and the Alchemist looks over to her.
“The ingredients I am using are actually surprisingly common – a bit of Lavender, some Sunflower Seeds and a pair of Frog Legs. Grind the herbs and crush the legs up into a mash, then you mix it together in boiling water. Whilst it mixes though, you have to use a magical spell to really activate the effects. Otherwise you’ve just made a disgusting sludge.” The Alchemist softly chuckles as she continues to crush up the ingredients together into that goo she was describing.

Yang gags when realising that a pair of Frog Legs are going to be included in this potion. “Frog Legs?” She winces.

“I know; however, this could eventually save your life. It will definitely keep you going for a few months. Better than this crap.” The Alchemist scoffs as she picks up an I.V bag and slaps it back down.

“It’s worked well enough for soldiers for years.” Yang groans as she continues to sip the tea that the Witch made for her.

“Aye, but they’ve never suffered from a plague created from Dark Magic.” The Alchemist adds as she points her dirty grinder at Yang with a wink. Yang pauses her sip and looks at the Witch with a curious expression.

“Horridus Morbus is…Dark Magic?” She asks.

“Yes, you see normal plagues or sickness do not give off the same effect as Dark Magic Forged Infections. If you look at your wrists, do you see markings in the skin that look like cracks?” She asks her, and Yang gasps with fear, looking at her wrists and seeing those exact things. Two identical marks that look like sharp jagged lines that form the face of a cobra.

“W-What…is that?” She whimpers.

“That is the sign of the God of Sickness, a Snake so large that if he bit the ground with his fangs his venom would spread countless diseases across the world. It was called Duntyx. It is believed that his plagues were so vast that some of them could be forged by Dark Magic Users…I believe that Vir Nominis Umbra most likely learned it.” The Alchemist explains to her, and Yang stares at her with intrigue and confusion of all this information.

“I thought…there were only the Gods of Light and Darkness…” Yang softly says.

“Well they are the only two we know for certain existed, however there are some out there, mostly from Arkhonex, who believe that once there were other gods. Lesser Gods you could say, ones created by the Brothers to control certain aspects. Duntyx for Sickness, the Goddess of Nature being Iris whom was seen as an Eagle, this is the Goddess of which we serve.” The Alchemist explains, showing a tattoo of a beautiful eagle on her shoulder with trees and animals around it.

“How many others were there?” Yang inquires.

“The God of War was called Ithos, the brother of Iris who was shown as a Dragon. Goddess of Deceit was called Natara who was a Chameleon, one that would trick people with its colours, and in many other ways. The Goddess Karis who was Beauty, Forgiveness and Belief, the most beautiful of the goddesses, a young woman at dawn and a Dove at night. God of Wisdom being Detris, an Owl. There are many more, I could go on for hours upon hours about the myths of the Gods.” The Alchemist chuckles as she bats her hand aside.

Yang sits there, realising she has never mentioned one name. “What about Vir Nominis Umbra?”

The Alchemist pauses and looks at Yang, unable to answer her in a way that would make sense. “He
was never recognised in the texts...however he has the title of – the False God. It is possible he is something we do not understand, but the False God was never found in our Bible.” She explains.

“The Congregation of Dawn’s Bible?” She inquires.

“Well, the Congregation of Dawn took the original Bible of the Moon Phase Following…that was the most beloved religion at the time, one of equality and education…and they morphed it into something completely monstrous. The Moon Phase Following was lost forever…only a few ancient temples and churches remain. We believe some still follow it, but not enough to be recognised.” The Alchemist explains, and Yang nods her head.

“They were the beginning of the end for Arkhonex, weren’t they?” Yang asks her.

“Yes…their ideals…the racism, homophobia and their desperation to create a Master Race started a war. That war triggered multiple Grimm Attacks on small towns…and before we knew it, a decade after these days…Salem was formed, and the Grimm turned against us. Killing everyone in the cities.” The Alchemist explains, giving Yang the chills to simply imagine that happening.

“I’m sorry.” Yang apologises.

“Oh please, we have always been outcasts. The people deemed our methods to be too savage for them…however they begged us for help whenever plagues came along.” She scoffs.

“Did you help?” Yang asks.

“Of course, it’s not our place to judge. We do as the book asked of us, to protect all those that the Gods created and protect. That is why we are helping you now…what Vir Nominis Umbra is doing is not for the Natural Order. He will destroy everything if we do not stop him…we cannot hide anymore.” The Alchemist states.

Yang nods her head, then she puts her empty metal mug of tea down and she pulls her legs close and wraps her arms around her knees as she thinks about Kassius. How worried she is for his safety, and how she just wants him to be here. The Alchemist can see her concern, so she puts the sludge into the pot of boiling water and lets it begin to mix, casting a spell that turns the stick round for her.

The Alchemist walks over to the young blonde-haired girl and she sits down beside her, looking at her. “You were dreaming, looked like it was a good one though. No shuffling, not a nightmare. What was it about?” She inquires softly, Yang lifts her head slightly from her knees and answers her.

“I was remembering a nice time when I was with my boyfriend…Kassius. You haven’t met him, he’s…well…I love him so much.” She admits with a smile on her face, making the Alchemist smile back.

“There are times where I wish I lived a different life, one of love where we could be married…sure the Enchantress likes to sleep around with folk but nothing serious. Hell, we all do sometimes, but we cannot have anything serious. I guess I envy you on that part, Miss Xiao Long.” The Alchemist explains to her with a smile, gently caressing her blonde hair.

Yang exhales a shaky breath, a sign that there is something worrying her. “I can tell you are in trepidation…what is it?” She asks.

“It’s…well…Kassius and I have always wanted to have a baby…just wanted to find the right time. Now? There is the chance I may never have one…” She sadly says, wiping a tear from her eye as she sits there. The Alchemist nods her head as she sits there.
“A chance.” The Alchemist reminds.

“Huh?” Yang asks.

“A Fifty-Fifty chance, remember? I have known worse odds, I met a girl once who begged us to help her improve her chances of having a baby. Her odds were extremely slim, practically five to ninety-five…not in her favour at all. She came back three years later…with a three-year-old son.” The Alchemist tells her with a smile, and Yang gasps with disbelief.

“R-Really?” She asks her.

“Uh-Huh. We were…stunned…to say the least. Wanna know what she said helped her?” She asks Yang.

“What?” Yang replies.

“Faith.” The Alchemist states with a smile. Yang pauses as she sits there, she has never been one to believe in that kind of thing…

But this is a time of magic, gods and demons.

Who is to say that there is no chance that her having a little bit of faith won’t give her and Kassius what they want.

Kassius

On his knees…

In a fiery domain…

He looks forward to see a fiery demon slowly walking towards him with destruction at his foot. As he looks down at his reflection…

He swiftly realises it is not his memory…

It is Hyde’s…
The wind howls within the structure that feels like it has been buried...however that is because they are now underground. Yet even down here they can still hear and feel the Dragon circling the demolished colony on Vytal, the wind whistling through the holes in its wide membranes of thin skin that connect the long Wyvern Wings together. Velvet and Kassius both approach the Arkhoni Door that they found, all of them with their weapons at the ready.

Velvet looks at the door, feeling the stone and the carvings across it. Kassius lifts his hand and he activates the bracelet that the Architect built for the team. The holographic ray of blue light shines upon the markings, forming the letters that are left behind after thousands of years.

*Those who seek knowledge, shall find it with open eyes...* 

*Though those who seek power, shall find it struck into their hearts...*

“Interesting statement.” Kassius says as he lowers his hand down from the door, looking to Velvet, who clearly is still shaking with fear of the Grimm Dragon that circles above the school right now. Its roars have been burned into her memory from that day that will never be forgotten in the History Books of Remnant...if there will be a history to be remembered.

“So...anyone else wondering why a Map Room is being talked about like it is some sort of library?” Cardin inquires as he walks towards the door, looking at the words that Kassius brought up on the device created by the Architect.

“That’s a good question.” Kassius agrees, and Emerald looks at them.

“Maybe there’s more than just maps in this place.” Emerald suggests with the shrug of her shoulders, drawing her scythes as she stands at the ready, letting the curved blades fold out from the green hilts. Kassius takes his cybernetic hand and he presses it against the stone door, turning to the others.

“Well...let’s go and find out.” Kassius says, pushing hard against it, using all the strength in the metal arm, pushing his shoulder against it. The Stone Door scrapes across the ground, a deep heavy groan leaving the door itself, and Cardin gives him a pair of helping hands. He presses against it, pushing as hard as he can, gritting his teeth as they both force it open. The door slides open, and the others move forward with their weapons raised, Velvet summons a carbon copy of Gambol Shroud, looking around as she walks inside of the dark labyrinth in here. The blue light shines across the holographic blades as she stands there, long bunny ears twitching when she hears every single sound around her. From the sound of the wind blowing through the door they just opened after centuries of being left closed, to the sound of stones falling from where they were stood outside.

Coco aims her Chaingun down the ancient labyrinth of stone, long cobwebs hanging down from the ceiling, slowly spinning the barrels round with the left trigger on the huge machine gun. Emerald aims both of her revolver Scythes down there too, the three of them advancing slowly before Kassius and Cardin, who both begin to move ahead behind them, drawing their weapons too. Cardin pulls his mace from his armour, spinning it through his fingers as he follows them, and Kassius thrusts his Vulcan Nox Bracers downwards to activate them, loading fresh bullets form the magazines.
Kassius looks around as he listens, staying extremely aware of his surroundings at all times, knowing that something or someone could be watching him right now. But as he walks, he can tell that someone is definitely still watching...as when he walks past a small dark opening in the tunnel, he sees in the corner of his eyes the glowing red eyes of the Grimm Terror Bird that attacked him.

He jolts like he has just been shocked by electricity, the scars on his body begin to throb from phantom pains, the best way to describe it is like someone pressing a superheated iron against him at all times. The feeling of those claws digging into him, the beak slamming into his spine that still gives him some back pain even now. His aura did a good job repairing the damage to his vertebrae, arms and ribs, but he still has damage to his bones in those areas. There is only so much that the benefits of aura can repair, thus why some people still get scars.

Kassius stares at the darkness, and all he can see are rocks and webs where some venomous spiders scuttle about in their impressive webs...leaving his heart pounding. Emerald stops, looking back at Kassius so she walks over to him, seeing that look of fear on his face. “Are...you okay?” Emerald asks him, he closes his eyes with a shaky sigh.

“Yeah...totally fine.” Kassius assures, turning and walking away from it as he reaches to his back and rubs it, remembering the terrible feeling of when that Terror Bird slammed its beak into his spine. The bang that it made, it was like a thunderous clap and crunch at the exact same time.

Emerald shakes her head, for she is not like the other people in their team that she hardly knows...because he seems to have very similar mannerisms or wording that Cinder Fall uses practically all the time. His voice breaks and he quickly walks away, so Emerald stops him with her voice. “Does it have something to do with your arm?” Emerald asks him with curiosity, since Cinder never told her anything about Kassius since she buried that part of her past when they first met.

Kassius glances down at his cybernetic arm, bringing back more painful memories, remembering when he lost his team. Watching as their corpses decayed away before his very eyes when he first ever saw the Knight of Death...

Many of them forget that of all the students, he was the first one to ever see any of the Knights. But most of Team S.T.R.Q met them long before even he did...that all seems so long ago now.

Kassius turns and looks at her, noticing the others are still walking ahead. So, he keeps moving and Emerald walks beside him. “No...I didn’t lose my arm here...but I was attacked when I was a child here.” Kassius explains as he walks beside her, pulling his sleeve back to show some of the claw scars on his human arm, and Emerald slowly starts to notice what he is getting at. “When the Grimm attacked, Cinder and I tried to get to the Evac Shuttles...but when we were headed that way the civilians kept pushing us out of the way. When we got close...a Grimm Terror bird attacked me after I helped Cinder up a wall.” Kassius explains, and Emerald looks up at him with shocked eyes.

Kassius clenches his hand into a fist, hearing the screeches of the monster in the back of his mind. The razor-sharp beak biting down into his flesh and attempting to devour him alive. “I was only a kid, and I still have scars everywhere from that thing...but...I was lucky, because Taiyang saved me.” Kassius explains as he looks down at the floor, a tear falling from his eye as he remembers his rescuer. “He saved my life...and I couldn’t save his...what kind of a Huntsman am I?” He questions, since he also could not save his team either – he still feels extremely uncomfortable about being in a team again, because he does not want to be responsible for the loss of his team anymore.

In that situation?

He would rather fall than watch everyone else fall.
Kassius walks ahead of Emerald and she looks at him, feeling bad for the Huntsman that she once engaged in intense combat with years ago with Cinder at her side. Emerald walks beside him, but in the corner of her eye she can see the bloodied body of Mercury watching her every move. A large hole in his chest where the blood has poured out absolutely everywhere, on the floor and the clothes that he wears. His skin turned pale from death and his eyes faded to grey, giving her a chill when she sees him.

But…she keeps moving, not facing her fear in the background.

Velvet walks with the feeling of insects crawling all over her skin, her fear of fire and the dragon itself combined has made her terrified of the monster that circles Vytal right now. All they can hope for now is that Salem has not located their Peregrine and destroyed it, so they keep moving as fast as they can in the vain hope that the Map Room will help them locate the way into Arkhonex.

Coco also walks with her eyes carrying tears, seeing the hallucination of her dead sister again truly did bring back some pain for her. Something she always hides from people, because everyone has always believed she would be the one to stay strong even in the darkest of times. That much strain on a person must make it difficult for someone like her, but somehow, she has always kept her cool.

Or at least…with the sunglasses on…that’s what it looks like.

Cardin walks beside Coco with his mace in his hand, his violet eyes staring ahead, so stern looking it is like he is trying to ignore something. He glances to a puddle on the ground that he walks past, and his reflection is different…a dark shadowy figure with horns staring back at him with a faint hiss, forming into the faces of Russel, Dove and Sky – all of them staring up at him from the rippling water. He closes his eyes, feeling guilt eating away at his heart as he walks, gripping his mace tighter and tighter.

Velvet moves on, past the pillars that hold the ceiling up where all that rock stands above their heads. As she walks past a corner, her eyes suddenly meet those of the red eyes of Salem. Velvet shrieks in terror, staggering backwards and right into the arms of Cardin, then Coco shoves Cardin away with a scowl on her face. Cardin glares at her, the tension between them is getting worse every single time that he and Velvet ever interact, and it is clear that Salem knows that.

They have never seen Salem use this power before, the ability to form an apparition of herself that appears and communes with her enemies whenever she needs to. She holds her hands behind her back, her armour formed around her black dress with razor sharp bone armour built around her body, one pauldron on her shoulder larger than the other. Salem walks towards them and Kassius draws Lash Equinox, pointing it right to her face with a scowl on his face.

Salem looks at each of them with no smile on her face, but she speaks with pure clarity. “The five of you are so different yet so similar in every single way.” Salem states with what sounds like awe in her voice as she looks at Velvet, towering above her as she examines her small frame. Her apparition walks straight through her shoulder, a black smoke pulsing from her form as she phases through her body.

“Didn’t take you for a poet.” Kassius snarls, his eyes glaring right into hers – where the others are terrified of her, Kassius just stands fearlessly – hell, he is the only one that is pointing his sword at her face. Even though he would not be able to do a thing to her since she is up in the sky right now atop the Grimm Dragon.

“There are many things about me that you do not know, Kassius Locke…” She softly says, her voice almost affectionate as she walks towards him, standing right before the blade. Kassius narrows his amber eyes as he glares at the Dark Queen, he has plenty of hatred pinned on this woman because of
what she did to his sister, how she corrupted her heart and tortured her. “You remind me a lot of her…she was a good student – for a time.”

“She is better than you could ever know.” Kassius snarls.

“I do know, Kassius – she never disappointed me, I guess in a way I am proud of her for turning against me. I never wanted her to be a mindless drone like the Grimm, or to fall like Tyrian. She was like Arthur Watts – someone who was never afraid to speak their opinion against my own. The fact she had the bravery to turn against me…and Vir Nominis Umbra…that is strength that even I can respect. I may not agree with her decision, but I do respect her.” Salem explains, showing her to still be the enemy they all face, but the enemy that has plenty of respect for her foes.

Just like Vir Nominis Umbra does.

“You won’t touch her again.” Kassius growls.

“We will see where our paths take us, Mr Locke.” Salem says, walking onwards, looking at the other people here. She looks at Emerald and stops, staring straight into her red eyes and she narrows them. “The thief…I am surprised to see you alive…a shame Mercury Black was not so lucky that night.” Salem states, not smirking like Vir Nominis Umbra, again as if she is showing compassion. Emerald twitches her eye, drawing her weapons and grits her teeth with outrage.

“You best watch your tongue, or else you might lose it!” Emerald yells in anger, pointing her blades at Salem’s face. Salem forms a small smile on her face as she walks to Emerald’s shoulder slowly, speaking softly.

“Those who walk on brittle bones must not run.” Salem states, being as poetic as ever with her threatening statements – basically telling her to remember that she is just a thief, and would never stand a chance against her. The words run cold through Emerald’s blood, causing her pupils and irises to shrink with terror. “Where all of you have strength you have weakness, take Emerald. She could have saved Mercury back when they attempted to save Ruby Rose and Oscar Pine from my custody. She had plenty of time to attack Krekras before he struck the killing blow…but she didn’t. And do you know why?”

Salem stares at Emerald again, standing in the middle of the five, her red eyes burning right into Emerald’s soul. “Because, she is a coward…a thief…and that is all she will ever be.” Salem whispers as she walks towards Emerald, then stares down at her, making Emerald shrink in fear. Salem turns and stares at Coco, and knowing of what happened to her sister. “Where you constantly uphold your appearance and status, you are still just as broken inside as everyone here. Because you did not keep an eye on your sister, she died…and you failed.” Salem snarls as she walks towards Coco, but the Huntress glares her back, but inside it hurts…that knife of judgement cutting deep.

Next Salem turns her attention to the sweet and innocent Velvet Scarlatina, who is already shrinking down with fear of the pale skinned woman, her white hair splayed out like the legs of a spider. “And you, who hides behind her own pity – when refusing to admit that envy poisons her heart.” Salem states, staring down at her, before walking ahead, leaving her scared of what she just said.

Finally…

She arrives at Kassius and Cardin, looking at both of them at once. Salem’s words leave something rather curious echoing between their minds. “And the two of you, have something that lurks within you, where one was a parasite and now has become symbiotic…the other is nothing more than a disease…eating away at him.” Salem states, Kassius knows which one he is, but then he looks at Cardin whose eyes are darting around with nervousness.
In his head, Cardin starts muttering constantly. *How could she know that?*

Salem now looks directly at Kassius as she lifts her hand up slowly, flexing her fingers, dark magic flowing between her digits, causing the veins to glow red. “We all have a forgotten past…the most important thing…is to remember!”

Salem suddenly presses her hand against Kassius’ head and he grunts in pain, unaware that everyone else have just fallen to their knees as well as their surroundings transform around them. The stone and the wooden supports crumble away and instead there is soil and blood, absolutely everywhere. Screams echoing for miles and flames rising so high that they pierce through the clouds. The moon shattered completely in the smoking sky and not a single star in the night.

The Grimm wiping everything out, nothing surviving their wrath, monsters so massive and terrifying that they have never encountered yet.

Kassius groans as he looks at his hands, blood covering the palms and ash stuck in them. He stares across the area to see Velvet on the ground with a body right next to her. A Grimm dragging it away to feast on the remains, blood covering the thick black fur. Kassius then pushes his knee against the floor then presses his hand against the over bent knee.

Until he notices…

That both his arms are humanoid…

And his clothes are completely different. “What the hell?” He questions, noticing that this is not his voice either. He shakes his head, before he realises that this is not *his* memory – but someone else’s.

Because then he looks down at his reflection in the evaporating blood contaminated puddle in the ground.

With a top hat on his head and a red Trickster’s Suit on with pale skin and fiery orange eyes…this is not him.

It is Mr. Hyde.

And walking out from the burning buildings with the skeleton of a man in its burning hand, is some kind of demonic entity. Covered in flames and brimstone, rage in the eyes – but it is not Axzura Vex, because it does not look the same. It also has sharp burning wings flayed out from its back, snarling softly.

Yet…

There is something familiar about it.

**Hyde**

Everything is somehow so familiar and so new to him, feeling the alien air in this alien universe, death and destruction however appear to be a theme that follows no matter what universe you find yourself residing inside of. Hyde presses his hand against his knee as he rises up, glancing over at Kassius behind him who is still taken aback by everything that he sees…because this world…this reality…is not their own.
The people being killed everywhere are not Human or Faunus, yet they look hominid in nature, with two legs, two arms and a bipedal stance. They have hair that seems to glow too, markings tattooed across their skin that flicker and glow, skin that appears to be blue as well. None of them are from the universe they know, or the world that they know. But despite the differences, the Grimm are still here in full force. Beowulves attacking the people savagely, tearing them apart, piece by piece. Blood caking their fur and smudging all over their razor sharp and jagged teeth.

Nevermores, Manticores and Griffins screech above their heads as they tear the cities apart, dragons burning the grassland, extinguishing all life. But the most intimidating of them all is the huge Grimm that flies above their heads right now. Like some kind of serpent with heavily armoured plates of bone covering the black muscle underneath, nearly all of it in fact. Four glowing red eyes constructed into the skull, the massive head opening with a roar as red energy and lightning crackles in the jaws. Then it suddenly fires, blasting the city with its power, burning everything, it came in contact with into ashes, some things even turn to glass. It is long, and has what appears to be six huge…fins, almost…like wings that slowly move to keep in in the air, and then two long pincer arms connect to where the shoulders of any other animal would be. The creature descends and with one of the massive arms it crushes the peak of a tower with ease, destroying it instantly.

It’s haunting roars echo for miles and vibrates through their souls.

They all stare with horror as the smoke pollutes the air, choking all life to death, whether it is sentient, or cell based, nothing is surviving this attack. The fires burn so hot that they cannot even tell that the Shivering Dominion has begun for this universe, but all the snow has melted away, and all the ice cannot be seen.

This is clearly what awaits them…

…if they do not destroy Vir Nominis Umbra first.

Hyde stands with shock, whilst everyone looks at him with disbelief, some of them more shocked to see that Hyde really does exist and is not some kind of idea that Kassius came up with to explain some strange Semblance.

He really is a Higher Demon…

And now he sees his younger self emerging from the flames, standing as the tallest of them all bar the Lord of the Wood, the fire flows from his body like that of a cape, very similar to the one that the Knight of Death has. Except this cape is pure fire, no smoke at all, just fire and death, spreading annihilation with every step he takes. It is interesting too, because the Ebony Berserker’s eyes are closer to what Kassius looks like when Hyde takes over in rage. Cracking the skin, causing the embers and fire to bleed through the cracks where his burning eyes are buried within his sockets.

The Ebony Berserker snarls, continuing to drag the charred skeleton across the floor, before crushing the skull in his massive hand. The monster barks as a man swings an axe into his back, not even making Lusus Naturae flinch. The Ebony Berserker spins round, grabbing the man by the throat with his burning hand, and the screeches of torture that echo from him send chills through their spines, nearly making them sick. They stare in horror as his flesh slowly begins to burn and peel away from his muscle, bones cracking and crumbling away.

Until nothing remains but ashes, leaving Hyde horrified as he looks at his hands. He turns to see Salem behind him, now in her familiar black dress she always wore, walking towards them as she speaks. “You see, Vir Nominis Umbra has granted me many abilities – Berserker – and one of them was knowledge, the memories of abandoned pasts.” Salem explains as she walks towards them all, walking past Mr Hyde who steps back, and he shakes his head.
“T-That’s not me!” Hyde yells with anguish, desperately not wanting to believe that he is some form of Higher Demon, especially one which works for Vir Nominis Umbra. Salem extends her hand and points ahead of them, so they all turn in the direction, to see some other familiar entities. One is a Leshen, however this Spirit of Nature and Duty has not lost its antler from Nora’s father yet. The Lord of the Wood has also killed many here, struck them down with his razor-sharp clawed hands or with the roots that he can summon from the ground of through his body. They watch as he uses his transformable body to his advantage, walking towards some desperate brave warriors, forming an axe attached to a long thick root. He launches it forward, stabbing it into the ribcage of that soldier, blood spraying everywhere as it ends his life instantly. The Lord of the Wood swings him round and clatters him right into the other soldiers, so hard that the sound of all those bones breaking in one moment has an echo behind it.

Then to the other side is the Onyx Phantom, taking the form of someone that they do not know since it is from another universe, and just like it does here, the body has been morphed into the monster that they know. The face crumbling away into burning orange embers, fiery orange eyes and jet-black hair instead of the blonde that the woman once had. The Onyx Phantom wields a black and gold spear that it stabs through the throat of the woman crawling away that it has taken the form of. The Onyx Phantom carries with it a demented smile on its insane face, twisting the spearhead in her throat, blood pouring everywhere, ripping it out. The body crumbles away, then they see the entity turn and become what appears to be a silhouette of burning orange ashes, walking towards the centre.

“This…is your dark secret you have let your amnesia bury, Ebony Berserker.” Salem states as she walks up to his shoulder, looking at him with a stern look on her face. Hyde stammers, staring at the burning demon that walks through the burning city, the ground cracking and burning with every step that he takes. “You are the fourth fragment of the Onyx Brotherhood, formed by Vir Nominis Umbra. This is not a curse, this is not a lie – but simply the truth. Do not forget that, Ebony Berserker.”

“My name – is Hyde!” Hyde argues, roaring with fury, and in that moment they all hear the exact same voice of the Ebony Berserker that stands here in this memory. Releasing a roar to the sky, fire rising into the sky.

“You are now, because you failed.” Salem states as she holds her hands behind her back, standing in the middle of the group who all look around. Velvet stares down at her feet with shock on her face, seeing the dead eyes looking up at her of a civilian that was cut down by the Onyx Phantom. Kassius cannot even find words to speak, for seeing all of this for the first time, yet somehow it all feels like he remembers it.

It is very hard to explain, but the feeling is there.

Mr Hyde walks towards Salem with that cane he has always given himself in his hand, ready to attack Salem if he has to. “What the hell are you talking about, Salem?” Hyde questions with a snarl, his eyes glaring right at her calm red ones.

“You disappointed Vir Nominis Umbra, decided you wanted to change your ways…and just as he already told you…he bound you to the firstborn child of Doctor Archer Merlot. He knew you would find a perfect subject to torment…yet somehow…the two of you have formed a symbiotic bond. It appears even Vir Nominis Umbra cannot predict every outcome.” Salem explains, walking round Hyde and then Kassius who looks at the scared entity…the more human he becomes, the more human he actually looks. In the past Mr Hyde’s form used to look horridly deformed, long crooked limbs and body with torn skin.
Now his shape is straight, and the skin looks less pale, and completely intact. It is not just his personality that has changed but even his soul has changed…and when they all look at what he once was…it is clearer now more than ever. “I…am not…a monster.” Hyde snarls, denying the truth every single chance he gets.

“You played the part of the Executioner, the one that was used to bring about the death and destruction of whoever Vir Nominis Umbra pointed you at. You were nothing more than a weapon…and even now…you still are. Just a weapon for Kassius to let loose when he cannot finish the fight himself.” Salem explains, practically whispering into his mind, and Hyde glances at Kassius.

“You’re lying, Salem. Hyde and I? We’re a team, I guess that isn’t something the likes of you would truly understand.” Kassius challenges as he walks around Salem, glaring at the tall woman who looks at him. She smiles, sinisterly at him.

“Interesting, for you believe this to be true. But at the end of the day, this is all he will ever be. A tool.” Salem states, walking past Hyde, they all look over their shoulders to find the Dark Queen. But she’s gone.

They look ahead, seeing the Ebony Berserker kneeling down to him, as they see Vir Nominis Umbra walking through the smoke and the darkness. The caws of thousands of crows and ravens echo all around them, some of them burning with their crystal beaks glowing fiercely. Vir Nominis Umbra clasps his fingers together but there is no smile on his face, the Lord of the Wood and the Onyx Phantom do the same thing as the Ebony Berserker.

And there is another ally here, who looks like a normal man unlike the others. He kneels down and bows his head, with a rifle on his back and his eyes closed. Most likely another follower like the Father of the Congregation of Dawn. Blinded by his beliefs, and most likely will die because of it.

Vir Nominis Umbra lifts up his hand up, then they see the glowing stones rising from his palm. One of them glowing with a white hue, another with a green one, the other blue and the other black with red sparks crackling off it.

The four Relics…

They existed in other Universes as well. They all float up above his head, slowly rotating above him, and then as he stares right ahead of the universe, he grits his teeth as he clenches his hand into a fist. They all gasp with shock., witnessing the Relic of Destruction shattering, then all the others break apart as well.

Where they expected some kind of explosion, something else happened instead. The surviving people look around in terror, but then…they seem to drain. All memory fading away in seconds, everything they had ever learned, everyone they ever met, wiped from their memory…even knowledge of themselves. All of them trying to understand who they are, then they look at their bodies as they begin to turn pale. The skin peels and crumbles away into a powdery dust.

Everyone turns to ash around them, fading away…and none of them move, since they lose all choice in their decisions. With no choice, they could not even move, or think, or even breathe. Their physical forms break away into ashes, and they do not even scream, or even feel it…because everything they were has just disappeared before their very eyes.

And everything that the relics created…
Is destroyed as well, crumbling away into dust around them, the sky collapsing, air fading away, the suns supernova or collapse.

They watch the memory with horror…

As everything…

Is wiped clean.

Destroying an entire universe.

Kannix

What has been an hour in his home Universe…

Has been months…nearly a year of training…in the other.

Time between Universes is extremely confusing, and the strangest part of all of it, is that it has not even felt like it has been that long for him. It seriously feels like it has been a few hours. The Charred Forest is such a damaged Realm that time does not flow correctly here, and that the days pass by faster than normal…or at least they feel like it. With not one star in the sky, not even a sun…it gets very difficult to figure out what the time is here, because clocks spiral out of control here.

Which is why the Onyx Phantom and Vir Nominis Umbra train their warriors here, since they lose no time in the universe they are tearing apart.

Kannix rushes towards the Onyx Phantom who merely walks, firing his cannon which gets deflected by the sharp mirrored blade. The shell shatters and flares into a display of red dust, igniting into flames around the blade. The Onyx Phantom channels that fire through the blade, slashing it straight at the Spectre. Kannix parries, the two blades meet, and they release one almighty metallic bang, sparks ringing out from both sides, and the Onyx Phantom staggers back, so does Kannix.

The Assassin uses his skills he has collected over the thousands of years he has lives, rushing through the dead burned plants, and he grabs onto the ashes and throws them at his face. The ashes land in the silver irises and the Phantom snarls in anger, staggering back from it, shaking his head. Kannix rolls towards him, and as he comes up and uppercuts with the blade still extended, slicing up the jaw of his own mirror image, causing the Onyx Phantom to grunt as he staggers back. The Phantom snarls, grabbing onto Kannix and throwing him across the ash covered grassland which has been burned over time.

Kannix slams his hook into the ground, dragging it through the powdery soil that has been poisoned in ash to slow himself down. The ash spouts up from the ground, but he wastes no time, pointing his cannon behind him and firing it, riding the recoil. He slams his hook straight into the metal shoulder of the Onyx Phantom, and he rolls over his back, ripping the arm clean off his shoulder, breaking the metal pieces apart.

The Onyx Phantom snarls in pain, staggering across the ground as an arm formed from burning embers begins to form.

He jumps up in the air, latching his hook round the throat of the Onyx Phantom, twisting round and slamming the demon into the ground. The Phantom jumps up and kicks his leg right at the source of
the image he is reflecting. Kannix ducks down, just dodging it before he aims his cannon and fires it directly at the Onyx Phantom, hitting him in the chest. As he tries to get back up, Kannix swings the long-serrated blade extended from the wrist of his arm towards his face.

Only to stop, knowing that he finally beat the Onyx Phantom, meaning he is ready to take on the armour and has the skills to take the rank. The Onyx Phantom grins and chuckles, since he used that attack to take out the other arm, so then the other is under his control. “I win.” Kannix tells the Onyx Phantom and the demon chuckles, nodding his head.

“It seems you have…well done.” The Onyx Phantom compliments, and Kannix feels the sensation of a breeze once more, a feeling that was not apparent in the Charred Forest. Snow begins to fall around him, and the ground morphs back into the jagged snow-capped mountains of Mistral. He looks around to see Neo sat on the bench with her armour worn on her body, the hood back and the mask resting on her knee. She looks good in the armour, and honestly so does he. He no longer needs to use whatever he can find to survive, now he can actually use armour that was built for him.

A slow clap resounds from behind him, so Kannix turns to see the Soothsayer emerging from the tent with his hands held at his side as he approaches. The Spectre’s long brown hair blows in the wind as he stares at the Leader of the Decimation, slowly clapping three times with a smile. “Congratulations, Kannix Volantis…you proved me wrong. Seems you do have what it takes to inherit the power of the Onyx Phantom.” Vir Nominis Umbra states as he nods his head, and Kannix stands tall, Neo standing up as well.

“I tend to surprise people.” Kannix states, not carrying the same sort of humble nature that their foes have with them. Honestly that is one of the reasons behind why Vir Nominis Umbra does not respect him as much as the people who try and stop him from destroying their entire existence.

“Indeed.” He replies through forced cheer, walking towards him, holding his hands together like he always does. Neo still looks quite intimidated by the Soothsayer, like most people are – but for some reason Kannix stands with some kind of certainty in him, like he thinks he is above the Soothsayer. All it takes is one mistake and he will learn how false that thinking really is.

But like Vir Nominis Umbra always does, he does not even bring up the fact that he has a pretty low view on Kannix. He just approaches and continues with what he was going to say in the first place. “Now you are both the new Messiah’s for the Onyx Phantom, thus from now you will follow my orders. And you will not go against them, I do not punish failure if it is acceptable…but I do punish those who go against their word.” Vir Nominis Umbra warns as he holds his hands behind his back, acting more like some sort of general now. Most likely because that is the nature of a leader in the world that they live in, making it that much easier to manipulate their hearts.

The hearts of men and women are easily swayed, after all.

“All right then now you can continue on with your next mission.” Vir Nominis Umbra says as he walks by the Onyx Phantom who remains, looking at some of the soldiers, taking their appearance and winking to creep them out.

“We’re ready.” Kannix assures, and Vir Nominis Umbra rolls his eyes.
“Enough with the arse-kissing.” Vir Nominis Umbra demands, making Kannix shut up on the spot, and Neo grins with satisfaction to finally hear the irritating sound of his voice cease. How she did not miss it for the hour that he was gone for, she did not have to do much training with anyone since she has already undergone the experience to be the Phantom last time. “I want the two of you to join the Acolytes of Lien on their mission to attack Kassius and his team. I know that they will find their location in that Map Room, Salem is merely there to fracture their spirit. You will be the knife to deal the killing blow.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains.

It is not clear if everyone knows the full extent of how Vir Nominis Umbra wants to go about fighting this war, since he has not even mentioned the fact that he wants them to act as a place for things to go wrong on Kassius’ side. “What about Kragen Nox?” Kannix questions, and Vir Nominis Umbra stops, turning to face him.

“You will get your revenge when the time is right, Kannix. And the same may be promised of you, Neo. But what you must understand is that you have more pressing matters than something has petty as revenge.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains to them, and Kannix is fighting the urge to argue against him…

…but he made a promise.

So, he nods his head and agrees to the terms. “I understand…we will head to the location.” Kannix assures as he walks away, and Vir Nominis Umbra watches him and Neo…

…until one of the Acolytes of Lien makes a fatal mistake.

“Where will you have us, your grace?” He asks him.

*Your Grace?*

*Your…Grace?*

Everyone stops in their tracks, Kannix’s eyes widen with shock after hearing those words come from his mouth. Vir Nominis Umbra stands there, his hand slowly clenching into a fist as his eye twitches, not facing the soldier asking him such an innocent question. “What…did you just call me?” Vir Nominis Umbra snarls, his eyes starting to turn red.

“Yes…those words…why? Do you think me a God?” Vir Nominis Umbra snarls, still not facing him.

“Yes…” The soldier admits.

Big mistake.

Umbra suddenly manifests three jagged black metal blades and he launches the three straight into the soldier, and they all pin him to the ground. One straight through his chest, the other through his belly and the third lodged through the right socket of his head. Blood splatters everywhere and chunks of metal from his armour are thrown everywhere…leaving Vir Nominis Umbra furious.

Silence fills the air as everyone stares at him, seeing the emotion they’ve never seen from him before.

Rage…

…uncontrollable rage.
He exhales, calming that hatred in his heart with the exhalation. “I…am not…a god.” Vir Nominis Umbra growls with anger, walking away from them all, and as he passes by a sign, all they see are a flock of black crows and ravens with crystal beaks that fly away.

Leaving the butchered soldier as a chilling reminder.

Vir Nominis Umbra is *not* a God.

**Kassius**

The revelation is like a scar…

They will never forget it, the force of the memory leaving their minds causes them all to crash to the ground with force. But Kassius and Hyde on the other hand are undergoing something that they have never experienced before. Both of them are screaming in pain, and Velvet gasps with horror for Kassius’ safety, seeing him writhing around on the ground. But his aura is flickering, orange crackles of energy oscillate across his body on the ground.

And his voice is shifting between his own and Hyde’s constantly, but that is not all that starts to shift. As he tries to stop the pain, they all see his aura begin to move. Seeing the reddish orange form of Hyde appearing alongside of Kassius, blurring with his own face on the ground. His eyes turning fiery orange for those few seconds, they could actually see Hyde’s spiritual form right then, and it sent chills up their spine.

Never before has *anyone* seen that happen in the past.

But finally, Kassius regains control of his body, forcing Hyde back into his place, his eyes wide and sweat beading from his skin as he reaches across the ground, wheezing in pain as he presses his hand against his head, straining as he lays on his back. Salem’s apparition approaches his side and she crouches down beside him, staring down at his face with narrowed red eyes. “You truly have no idea of what is lurking inside of you mind, do you? Any of you?” She asks them all as she turns her head, and all of them still are in fear of the situation they are in…

…and what they are up against.

None of them can even answer her, even Hyde is silent, because he is also trying to comprehend what he has just seen with his very own eyes. “Kassius is a ticking time bomb, and so is Hyde…and that timer will soon run out.” Salem states, then Kassius’ eyes open up with a flicker of Hyde’s inside of his irises, he grabs onto the hilt of Lash Equinox and he cries out, slashing his sword where her neck would be.

Only to hit nothing but air, her apparition disappearing once more…but this time it feels like she is really gone this time. Because they cannot even hear that Dragon anymore, if her mission was truly to mess with their heads, then she has done a fantastic job of doing that. Leaving them in the caverns with nothing but a cold silence on their minds right now. Emerald and Cardin both look at each other, so Emerald is the one to ask the question on her mind as she gets back up, staring down at Kassius. “Did you know?” She questions, and Kassius groans, still comprehending what he saw…an entire Universe being wiped out in seconds like that…

“Did I know what?” Kassius questions, his voice shaking with fear of what he now knows they are
up against. They knew the odds were not in their favour, but this? This is something else entirely… he wipes out universes just by breaking four pebbles…

How can they face that?

“Did you know Hyde was one of Vir Nominis Umbra’s demons the whole time? That he was his Executioner?” Emerald yells with anger in her voice, since she feels like she has just been stabbed in the chest with this revelation.

“Oh, yeah…of course I fucking knew. I just felt like holding it back because I like having Universe Heavy Weights on my frickin shoulders! Of course, I didn’t know, you dumbass!” Kassius explodes, suddenly springing back up on the floor with that same flare of rage in his eyes that they saw in Hyde’s eyes when he was the Ebony Berserker. He pauses, realising that he just frightened them, and after what they saw Hyde do, they sadly have a very good reason to be scared right now. Emerald clenches her hand into a fist and she huffs, picking her weapons up and storming off in anger. Cardin does the same, following the green haired thief, leaving him there with Velvet and Coco.

They both look at each other and then at him…they trust him…so they get up and they stay with him whilst the others stay ahead of him. “Don’t be mad, Kassius…they’re just scared.” Coco softly says to him with assurance in her voice, and Kassius sighs heavily, still trying to understand it.

“I…I…gods I don’t even know what to say anymore.” Kassius softly says with defeat in his voice, feeling apathetic about the whole thing, and Hyde still has not said a word. Just displayed his anger, but not meaning it to be directed towards the others…more at himself for not trying to remember all of this.

Even though it was not his fault, Umbra wiped his memory.

Perhaps there is a reason for it.

The team feel despondent as they make their way through the Arkhoni Labyrinths underneath Vytal, feeling the cold breeze flowing through. Seeing old cave engravings tattooed everywhere, ones that Kassius does not even find the strength to analyse until Velvet gently takes his hand and does it for him.

*Knowledge is a weapon*

*Knowledge is a key*

*Knowledge is a tool*

*Knowledge is sustenance…*

*Knowledge is whatever we choose it to be, what matters is how we use it.*

The walk felt like it took an age, but eventually they encounter something very surprising, as they find an opening, with multiple…worrying things in here. There is an ancient and rusted open cage with a skeleton on the ground. And hung up by the cage is a message, thousands of years old and only now is it being read by someone.

*Follow the trail of lies and you will find your way, but only those with the strength to face great odds may survive the coming ordeals…*

“Interesting, not sure what it means though.” Cardin sighs heavily.
“Maybe the Nikos’ weren’t the best poets.” Emerald scoffs.
That’s when Coco catches on, walking past Kassius as she stares at the name. “This…isn’t a Nikos.” She states, getting their attention, looking at Kassius.

He reads the name written on the panel.
“Axzura Vex?” He questions with disbelief.

“Who’s that?” Cardin inquires.

“The Knight of Fury…” Kassius answers, leaving them all – bar Cardin since he has not met one of the Knights yet – stunned and quite concerned.

“Wasn’t he a pirate back in the day?” Coco asks, and luckily, they are starting to get back on track. Trying to solve the clues in this mystery in locating the map room, looks like it is deep underground.

“Yeah…Pirate Captain, apparently he was notorious.” Kassius remembers, since Yang was the one to read the very first Visionary Book they ever encountered in the past.

“So…if this is Vex’s message…then he is connected to the Nikos Family…how?” Cardin inquires with his hands held out.
Leaving them all stumped.

“That’s a damn good question.” Kassius responds.

Kragen

The blizzard continues to blow across the Mountains forged across the buried fields of Mistral, snow everywhere and the wind howling for miles. Distant cries of Eagles can also be heard in the distance as Kragen sits on a rock, staring out at the forever white snow, the chill of the storm brushing across his cheek. Yenna is asleep, saving her strength, most of them are actually asleep since the sun is starting to set. They have been here for a long time now, camping out inside of the damaged Chapel of Vengeance and Dawn, a few of them however are still awake.

Nearly been a full twenty-four hours.

Waiting for Kassius to give them something, hoping that the Map Room at Vytal could give them what they need to go on.

Yet there Kragen stands, staying awake despite his age…and thinking about his many past mistakes that he has made in his long life. Most of them seem to surround one person in particular, Kannix Volantis…and how he didn’t try hard enough, didn’t search long enough to find where he went back on those godforsaken islands.

The Architect is sat by the campfire that they have made, telling stories of the old days and being his great loving self. Blake looks at him curiously, her coat zipped up to withstand the cold a bit. It is times like this were her father’s question about her clothing now start to make more sense. “Hey, Architect?” She curiously asks him, tilting her head and getting the mechanical man’s attention.
“Yes, sweetheart?” The Architect responds, making her softly laugh.

“I’m curious…what kind of features does that body of yours have?” Blake inquires rather curiously.

The Architect taps his metal chin then he begins to list some of them. “Weeeeell, let’s see: I have thermal vision for night-time alongside night vision, I have targeting and hacking systems to use whenever I need them, enhanced strength compared to yours…” The Architect lists through some of the many beneficial features that this body has. He looks right at Blake. “X-Ray Vision, too.” He adds, slowly lowering his vision and looking right at her chest to follow with this comment. “Looking good by the way.”

Blake gasps, blushing with embarrassment as she crosses her arms over her breasts, her ears creasing with shyness. “Whoa! C’mon, Architect! That’s creepy!” She defends herself, turning her shoulder to him, making the Architect guffaw with laughter.

“Ha-Ha-Ha! I’m just kidding Belladonna.” He says as he looks back to the flames, the flaps of metal over his visor bouncing as he chuckles.

“It’s not on right now.” He reveals, causing her eyes to widen.

“Wait you really do have –”

Before they could unpack that funny exchange between Blake and the Architect, they get interrupted by the old Silver Eyed Warrior who approaches with his staff in his hands. “I’m heading out, should be back soon.” Kragen tells them, Ren raises a brow to him with confusion, Winter too.

“Alone?” Winter questions.

“Want one of us to come with you?” Ren inquires softly, but Kragen shakes his head as he taps his staff against the snowy and icy floor.

“No, no…I’ll be fine. I just want to walk on the ridge on my own, take some time to think.” Kragen states as he stands there.

“You sure? The storm’s still raging.” Qrow says as he sits beside his sleeping daughter, gently stroking her black and red hair. He nods his head.

“Best time for it, I always liked to wander out in storms back home. Keeps me alert but also…relaxed at the same time, if that makes any sense.” Kragen explains with the shrug of his shoulders, the Architect nods his head in agreement.

“He’s not lying by the way, he does that all the time.” The Architect chuckles.

“Well, so long as you’re safe.” Winter states.

“Oh please, I’ll be fine. I’ll be back in an hour, just making sure our perimeter is secure. Don’t want any surprises.” Kragen explains as he walks towards the exit of the Chapel, and he makes his way to the ridge that he was talking about. He walks alone, as the snow blows heavily around him, brushing through the bushes that rustle in the wind. Biting cold wind against his skin but his warm cloak keeps him protected as he walks.

He uses his staff like a cane, walking with ease across the mountains, walking for what felt like a mile. He makes his way up to a beautiful view of the Mountain Range, staring at it as the snowy wind blows around him. He closes his silver eyes as he remembers a time when he was younger.
When times…
…were better.

It was thousands of years ago, back when Arkhonex was at its height, and he was teaching the newly joined Kannix Volantis how to fight like a true warrior. He could never land a good hit on Kragen, but he fought with a sense of purpose that always intimidated the man. He never gave up, kept fighting, getting his ass handed to him every single time.

But whenever he’d get knocked over, he’d get back up.

It was simply in his nature.

Kragen sighs as he closes his eyes, hearing the crunch of a bootstep behind him. “You never could sneak up on me.” Kragen states, turning to face him.

Kannix…
…alone.

He betrayed the one promise he made to Vir Nominis Umbra.

He has come for Kragen.
Two thousand four hundred and seventy-six years divide these two souls, one motivated by revenge and the other motivated by affection. Two things that should not ever be able to coexist, and the two Silver Eyed Warriors that stand on the beautiful mountain range show this perfectly.

Kannix stands before his former master, one of his fists clenched and his hook blade folded out from where his other hand was one also clenched. Silver eyes glaring right back at his, and despite how much younger he looks, Kragen is only older than him by half a century…both of them have suffered for all these years. But none have suffered like Kannix, watching his entire people fall and be torn apart either by the Grimm or by each other. Tormented by Vir Nominis Umbra and his creatures of destruction and suffering, but his semblance meant that no matter how much pain he endured…he would survive it all. Repairing the damage by converting pain into aura.

Pain is all the man has.

And yet somehow…despite how much he hates Kragen and how much time has split the two apart…he still looks so much smaller than Kragen. Almost like he is standing before a father figure, feeling like he needs his help…but it is clear that the help he wants is for his revenge to be given. And that will only be granted if he kills Kragen once and for all…but Kragen’s purpose in this world has not been fulfilled yet.

Kragen stands with his long staff in his hands, grasping it with both hands, pressing it downwards into the icy snow.

“You never could sneak up on me…”

“I always tried but somehow you always knew.” Kannix remembers as he stares him down, surprising Kragen to see how he is actually just speaking to him. Not threatening him or just firing his gun at him instead. But at the same time Kragen knows that his personality right now shows that it is either impossible or very difficult to bring him back to the light. Because he has let Vir Nominis Umbra consume him.

But it won’t stop him from trying.

Kragen chuckles as he softly taps the staff down at the snowy floor, looking back to his old apprentice that he failed. “Even when you were young you would always try and make me jump…but every time you would trip or hit something.” Kragen chuckles as he stands there, the cold breeze blowing up against his body as he stands there.

Kannix chuckles, lowering his head as he looks at the snow, gently kicking some of it across the floor with his armoured boot. “There was always something in the way…like a bucket…or that stupid rat Cynthia had…what was it called again?” Kannix inquires curiously, and Kragen chuckles.

“Rexy.” Kragen answers, remembering every little detail as he looks up at the stunning setting sun. “To think she was just a friend who liked to make us weapons back then…” He says softly, looking down at the ground and sighing through his nose. He looks at Kannix, knowing that he loved that young woman, he always had a crush on her because she saw him as a person and not as a Squire.
“How things change.” Kannix agrees, nodding his head.

“Not everything though.” Kragen says as he shrugs his shoulders.

“Yeah…still using that old staff of yours, what is it called again?” He inquires.

“Ebony Duchess.” He answers, and he nods his head.

“Was there a reason behind it?” Kannix inquires and he nods his head.

“Well I never named it until I met Yenna…so I wanted to always remember her in the staff that protected us. Ebony – like her hair – and Duchess…because she was a Duke’s daughter when she was younger…before Arkhonex was destroyed.” Kragen explains, and Kannix nods his head.

“Never did meet her…you know…before now.” He admits.

“She was the only one of the Maidens that wanted to stay with me…she nursed me when I was old…and her gift made me younger. We stayed in that cabin for years until the many skirmishes of the survivors arrived at our land.” Kragen states, and Kannix sighs.

“I saw a few of those.” He admits.

“At least this new Generation is better than we were.” Kragen says with admiration in his voice, but clearly Kragen does not seem the same way.

“This Generation is no different, they just show their hate more than we did.” For a few moments it actually felt like it was the reunion of old friends, but it was clear that it would not last for very long. “This Generation is nothing like our Empire, everyone is so judgemental of every little thing. Being a Faunus…it is treated like a crime now.” Kannix states as he looks out at the mountain range with him, and Kragen nods his head as he looks out at the mountains with him.

“Unfortunately…I believe our Empire had a part in that. Or at least the Congregation of Dawn did with their genocidal campaign.” He states, agreeing with him on that, and for the first time in thousands of years, Kannix agrees with his former mentor.

“And yet despite the differences, it seems that this Generation has our flaws and some of our strengths as well.” He says as he nods his head. “People are…more accepting…at the same time.”

“How do you mean?” Kragen asks.

“No Family House nonsense…I mean sure you have the Schnees, but they are the only ones I have ever seen acting in such a way. The Arcs and the Nikos Family, even now they endure after the fall. And they are nothing like how they once were…if you ask me, I call that an improvement.” Kannix shrugs his shoulders, and Kragen nods his head in agreement.

“I have faith for this new generation, they are better than we were. We may have seemed all perfect and proper with our technology and unity…but it was because we ruled over the soil of millions buried. Any that stood in our way we destroyed…it was only a matter of time before our judgement was to be decided. This generation…they have only had one real war, it was bloody…but they learned from it. We never did.” Kragen explains wisely to his former apprentice who nods his head, but then he sighs.

“There is no hope for this universe…or any universe.” He states.

“I don’t believe that…I believe that these people are strong enough to brave any danger…even
Umbra.” Kragen explains and Kannix scoffs, glancing over at him.

But as Kannix stares at him, his eyes narrow and that glare returns on the Spectre, that look of resentment and desperation to find closure to his own suffering. What Kragen does not even realise is the level of risk that stands with Kannix coming after him like this, against Umbra’s orders.

“And here we stand…talking like old friends…when I am here to kill you.” Kannix states, as he stares right at him.

Kragen hardens himself as the breeze of the cold mountain storm blows across his face, making his cloak billow gently. The silence between them is so apparent that it bites harder and sharper than the cold air of the mountains. Kannix lifts his cybernetic hand, shifting the hook back into his hand of five digits – the very same one that Jaune Arc cut off when they first ever met him back at Vacuo five years prior. “You figured I would come.” Kannix presumes, looking back at the old Silver Eyed Warrior once more. Kragen nods his head as he taps his staff against the floor.

“Of course…I know you…perhaps better than you know yourself.” Kragen explains, and Kannix scowls at him as he begins to circle him with his hook blade folded out from where his metal hand was once clenched.

“You think you can talk to me like I am your student? After how you abandoned me to die on those godforsaken islands?” Kannix questions with stern judgement in his voice, scowling right at him with anger in his voice. Kragen circles him in return, holding his staff in his hand very carefully as he walks. He taps Ebony Duchess into the floor with every step, and he looks completely heartbroken to see what that young boy has become.

“I never left you on those islands, Kannix. I searched for you, for decades! Forty-six years in fact! I went back to the islands, and I nearly lost every single man that followed me that day…because I was looking for you.” Kragen explains, but Kannix does not look comforted in the slightest as the wind from the coming storm blows across him. The snow sticking to his hair and the long black cape that blows with it as the wind starts to pick up.

“Well either way…it was still too late. Do you know what those monsters did to me?” He questions with gritted teeth and rage in his eyes. “They tore me apart, every minute of every day…pulling me into the depths of a dark, tight cave! It was like they knew I was claustrophobic…feeding on my fear…my flesh…making me suffer. And my aura just kept repairing me, fixing every snapped limb, every piece of meat ripped from me. And it hurt like you couldn’t believe. For three years I suffered like that!” Kannix yells at him with tears in his silver eyes, and he must be covered in so many scars now that it is hard to tell if there are any.

“And now…you come after me…because you think that will make the pain go away?” Kragen questions him, and Kannix narrows his angered eyes at him.

“I know what you’re trying to do, Kragen. It won’t work, the boy you knew is dead. He died in those caves and only the Spectre of who he once was came out. You can’t bring me back to the light…because only the darkness surrounds me now.” Kannix snarls, pacing in the same circle as Kragen, the snow crunching under every step that he takes.

“You never answered my question – how will killing me save you from your past?” Kragen asks him, and Kannix bites his lip as he finds his answer.

“I just know it will – it has to – because there is nothing left for this world to give me! I tried…I really did. I wandered Remnant for years, trying to move on. I ate, I drank, I ran, I walked, I fucked, I married and whored, and nothing ever worked! I have lived more lives than most people can count,
and I don’t feel anything anymore! I hold a woman and I don’t even feel anything anymore! All because you ran and left me for dead like a coward!” Kannix yells with rage in his voice.

“That’s not what happened!” Kragen argues.

“Oh, yes, it is – old man.” Kannix snarls. “Because I saw you when you ran, because do you know where that Grimm dragged me off to? When it pulled me into the grass?” Kannix asks him, and as the snowy wind blows through the bushes beside them, Kragen remains quiet as he listens, his grey hair blowing in the wind just like his long brown hair. “It dropped me a few yards from where it grabbed me…I was still in the grass. I screamed out to you, I was next to you...literally three feet from you in that grass when you chased after me. But you didn’t see me...didn’t hear me...the storm was too loud...and then you abandoned me.” He growls with anger, but Kragen stammers, shaking his head with disbelief.

“N-No...I...No! We chased after it, we followed it into the caves.” Kragen states, remembering the path he and the other warriors took when they searched for him...the Knights of Grimm included when they came here in search for Azzura Vex.

The day that would spark the beginning of the Knights of Grimm.

And the end of Arkhonex.

“It wasn’t me, it was the other Knight who was attacked by the Nightwraith that was lurking in there. It pulled him away into the caves to feast on him...and when you abandoned me? That’s when the Grimm came back and dragged me into the caves. They savaged me...but I managed to crawl away, my leg torn apart...throat cut open. The last thing I saw before they dragged me back into the darkness...was you boarding that ship...and leaving me for dead.” Kannix explains, and it makes Kragen shudder...feeling emotional that when he looked back at those islands...his chosen son was staring back...being eaten alive constantly.

Kragen cannot even find the words, he always wondered how he became the man he is now...but he never expected it to be so horrific. “Lost for words?” Kannix questions as he continues to circle him, catching a snowflake on his hook blade before slashing it away into tiny shards of snow.

“I...I was there...If I had just...”

“If you had just paid attention and used your head, maybe you would have found me. You can create a sob-story all you want, it doesn’t even matter. I am the man I am now because of that mistake you made.” Kannix states with anger in his eyes.

“I wanted to find you! I spent years looking for you!” Kragen defends.

“So, you say, yet here we stand.” Kannix states, and Kragen sighs, nodding his head, accepting his defeat.

“Yet here we stand.” He agrees.

“However, of course, my suffering was rewarded with my semblance. Where I convert my pain into aura – a pretty powerful concoction when you think about it. I have aura as thin as paper, but it heals as fast as you can snap your fingers. That coupled with the curse Vir Nominis Umbra gave me, where I may never age so long as I do his bidding whenever he commands it – I became a hell of a warrior. Trained a bunch of students once at Beacon, created some terrible bodies in the process...surprised the old man and his sister don’t even recognise me.” He reveals, causing Kragen’s eyes widen with disbelief, remembering the story that Qrow told years ago about the teacher that was also
a serial killer who was never caught.

“That was you?” He questions with disbelief.

“Aye, Umbra ordered me to become a Professor at Beacon. He wanted me to provide information on its infrastructure for Cinder and Salem…helped us cause the Fall of Beacon in the first place. After they had all the information, they needed from me, Salem allowed me to leave the school. I did, but I wanted to do it my own way. Have a bit of fun on the way out.” He chuckles sinisterly, smirking as he circles Kragen.

“You murdered all of those people…for fun?” He questions, like the judgement of a father to a son that has wronged him.

“Now you’re catching on! At the end of the day that boy you rescued from a life of petty crime all those years ago…that savage never left. But suffering just made him crawl out from his little hole in the desert and become a man.” He explains, and Kragen shakes his head.

“Did you never return to Arkhonex after your master freed you? Did you not ever find Cynthia and tell her how you felt? Did none of that ever help you be a good man?” Kragen questions, and Kannix glares into his eyes with hatred, pointing at him with his blade.

“Don’t you ever mention her name! That girl meant everything to me! EVERYTHING! And do you want to know what I saw when I finally got free? When I finally got to the hills which overlooked our proud Empire?” Kannix questions.

“What did you see?” Kragen asks him.

“Nothing more than a smouldering ruin, with Grimm infesting in everywhere, devouring any stragglers inside and leaving nothing more than smoke and fire behind. I was trapped on that island for three years, and in those three years, I lost everything I had ever cared for. My parents were devoured…Cynthia’s home collapsed! Everyone I ever knew was dead! So why the hell should I care about these people now from a whole new generation who have forgotten about all of us?” Kannix questions with disgust in his voice, and Kragen shakes his head.

“Cynthia never died that day, she joined the Silver Eyed Warriors and became a valiant Huntress. Paved the way for the Nikos family to become what they are now.” Kragen states, and Kannix looks at him and then at the floor.

“Then I hope she found someone who loved her…because she deserved it.” Kannix states. “Because she wouldn’t have ever recognised me…I didn’t even recognise myself.”

“Arkhonex fell in the first year of the war against Umbra…Ephai not long after…all the smaller cities collapsed too. Everyone else just went into hiding, all the families built their forts in their own locations. Whilst others went into savagery without any kind of real leadership.” Kragen states with a sigh, looking down at the floor.

“I know…I wandered Remnant for years…fought in some of the battles…but…I was trying to find you. I gave up after a few centuries of course, tried to find new purposes. Joined the Acolytes of Lien during the Great War and stayed with them ever since. But I never forgot…and I will do my duty.” Kannix states with a snarl in his voice.

Kannix stands there, and with his other arm he suddenly extends the blade and the cannon opens up, loading fresh fire dust into its chamber, his silver eyes staring him down. Kragen breathes slowly and softly, grasping Ebony Duchess tight. “Please…it doesn’t have to be this way, Kannix.” Kragen
begs, but Kannix glares into his eyes with hatred.

Not spite.

Not anger.

Hate.

“You seem to have forgotten – Kannix Volantis – that boy? He died in those caves, and only his spectre walked out!” Kannix yells, reciting the statement he used earlier, before he unexpectedly leaps towards his Former Father Figure.

And despite how much Kragen wants him to not do what he is going to do, he spins Ebony Duchess through his fingers, and he blocks the attack from Kannix, holding him back. The sound of steel impacting Isomacium is unlike anything heard by the people of Remnant. Like two massive chunks of titanium colliding at once, creating an earthquake. Kragen presses his leg back, immediately activating his aura and starting to fight like the warrior he is. He takes the staff and spirals it round, through his fingers in fact, smacking Kannix across the jaw to make him stagger back.

Kannix snarls in anger as he stands there, the bruise swiftly being healed by his dark red aura and he grins quite maniacally at him. “I’ve waited a long time for this moment.” Kannix snarls, pacing through the snow as he charges his cannon up and fires it straight at Kragen. The fire dust fuelled projectile flies directly towards the old man, but Kragen spins the staff through his fingers so fast he basically creates a shield out of it. The shell explodes upon impact, the flames coursing across the barrier formed from his Isomacium Stick.

Kragen steps back, and his silver irises begin to glow, passing their powerful energy into the glyphs engraved into the staff in his hand, glowing bright in his grasp as he taps it into the ground. Kannix rushes forward and Kragen mirrors him, quickly blocking the first strike from Kannix, sparks bursting from the impact. The Spectre ducks down then slashes his blade across the stomach of Kragen, his aura protecting him from the wound. The white energy that protects him glows as it repairs the damage, but Kannix strikes again, and much like the fighting style of the passed Tyrian Callows, he attacks fast and ruthlessly.

He spins through the air, slashing his hooked hand across the aura of Kragen, causing him to stagger from the impact, but he quickly rights himself, jabbing the staff into his enemy with great speed, before roundhouse kicking him in the side of the head so hard that it throws him down to the ground. He closes his eyes as he uses his Silver Eyes to his advantage, being more aware of his surroundings. He backs up and walks over one of the rocks under the snow, and as Kannix rushes towards him, he trips into it, falling face first into the ground, crashing into the snow and scraping his face across the snow.

Kragen approaches him from behind, wrapping his arm around his neck, pulling him back as he tries to get him to listen. “This is not the way forward, Kannix! I know that there is still a good man in you somewhere! Just see past my mistakes to become it!” Kragen begs, but Kannix snarls with a scowl on his face.

“You misunderstand…this is not going to end like all those fairy tales you read me when I was a child.” Kannix yells, as he fires his cannon into the ground, creating an explosion that throws them both up in the air. Kannix lands on his feet, then catches his elder by the throat, smashing him down into the ground. The snow explodes around them, and Kannix immediately stabs downwards with the blade that extends from his arm, gritting his teeth in fury and what seems to be madness as he presses it down into the staff he wields. “Your old body will give out, Kragen…and I will finally be free.” Kannix snarls, and Kragen stares right back at him.
“I still have a purpose in this world.” Kragen states, disputing his point.

“We all do…until we don’t.” He states, but Kragen kicks him in the chest, then takes his staff and he smacks it right across the side of his head. Kragen is no fool to his odds, multiple people against Kannix is one thing but one man? It does not matter how many years of experience you may have above him or not – you will never be able to take him down because of his Passive Semblance.

“You know that Vir Nominis Umbra will not stop until every living thing in our Universe is wiped out. Is that what you want?” He questions as he paces around him.

“Enough talk, Kragen!” Kannix roars, firing his cannon three times at him, Kragen backs up and he takes the shells out of the sky with multiple well-placed strikes. Each one collides into the shells, creating powerful fiery explosions that ripple across the air with crackling flames rupturing out from it. Smoke trailing from the surface of Ebony Duchess. Kannix takes that time to attack again, ducking under the swing from his Former Father Figure, and slashing across his legs to try and bring him down, but Kragen jabs the staff downwards at where his head was lowered to deal some damage. He slides out of the way then darts forward, swinging the blade again, landing behind him.

Kannix reaches back and connects his metal fingers together around Kragen as he performs a powerful German Suplex on him, lifting him over him and smashing it down into the ground. As Kragen gets up, Kannix fires his cannon and the shell explodes into his chest, throwing the older man across the battlefield that they have formed. Kragen crashes into a rock, breaking it upon impact and Kragen growls in anger…he is getting his arse kicked.

“You can’t bring back that boy you loved! He died a long time ago!” Kannix reminds, and Kragen grits his teeth as his silver eyes ignite.

“You’re right…” He sadly admits, then the silver energy forms around the shattered boulder that he crashed into, and he launches them all towards Kannix at great speed and force. His eyes widen, and he gets hit straight in the face with one of them. The rock throws him, and he crashes straight through a tree, then he stabs his hook down into the ground to stop himself from falling off the edge of the cliff.

But then he sees that same energy wrap around his metal hook, and Kragen pulls him up and he is met immediately by the fist of the old man. The impact knocks him down to the ground and temporarily broke his aura before it quickly regenerated. Kannix rolls backwards and slashes his blade at him once more, but Kragen deflects the blade with Ebony Duchess, then he blasts the full power of his eyes at him, blowing the snow everywhere around them, causing a cyclone of snowflakes around the heated light. The snow melts in the air but Kannix rolls out of the way just in time as Kannix uses the beam to cut down a tree with ease.

Kannix rushes towards him again, sliding under his legs and kicking him right in the spin. He stabs forward with his arm, but Kragen pushes the blade aside and smacks the staff across his jaw, before bringing it back round and clattering his back with it. Kannix jolts from the attack, and immediately gets hit across the cheek again, so hard it breaks the skin, blood leaking from the wound. “Seems like you still got it, old man.” He chuckles, before running forward and performing a backflip that kicks Kragen up the jaw and makes him stagger back.

Kannix takes the cannon on his arm and he slams it downwards into the ground, firing as he blasts a heated shockwave through the frozen stone, causing it to suddenly expand and shatter beneath him. Kragen jumps up in the air and he lands on the other side, using his silver eyes to lower his gravity. Something Ruby has not learned yet, he flips through the air and lands right behind Kannix, kicking him in the chest.
Kragen grabs the clip that holds his cloak together and he undoes it, letting his cloak blow off in the wind. Kannix rises back up and glares at him with narrowed eyes, seeing that despite his old age he is still built like a Spartan, carrying some scars visible on his shoulders. Underneath the cloak he still wears his old battle armour from Arkhonex, and he stares at it, seeing the glyphs have also been branded upon there with magical insignias. Many can forget that he is more than just the Silver Eyed Warrior.

He was also the Wizard.

Flames ignite in one of his hands as he spins his staff through his fingers, using his silver energy in that hand and the elements of fire and ice in the other. Similar to the Maidens but nowhere near as powerful as they are. “Seems age has not made you weak, old man.” He states.

“And time has not made you the wiser.” Kragen replies, as he blasts a fireball towards Kannix, but the Silver Eyes Warrior forms a shield of dark red energy that causes his armour to glow as well. Only then does Kragen really recognise the look of that armour, and Kannix smirks.

“No…but I know when to go for an upgrade.” He states, now holding the flame that he blasts straight back. Kragen spins his staff through his fingers to destroy the fireball and he walks towards Kannix, who sprints towards him. Kannix jumps up in the air and he spins through the air as he thrusts the blade downwards towards him, igniting it with flames as he drops down. He slams the blade down at him, but Kragen jumps back, just avoiding it, the impact blasts cracks into the floor again and he swiftly hooks onto one of the rocks frozen in the ground, recently thawed from his attacks, and launches it straight at him.

Kragen ducks down and he dashes forward, spinning the weapon through his fingers at stunning speeds, creating a blur of black and white all at once. The impact nearly knocks Kannix over as Kragen slides past him, then Kragen reaches down to the roots in the trees, eyes glowing white as he rips them from the ground and uses his power to wrap them around the arms of the cybernetically enhanced assassin. Kannix grits his teeth in anger as the roots tighten around his hand, squeezing the metal and he strains in anger as Kragen walks around him.

Kannix snarls with anger as the roots continue to tighten, so he closes his eyes and the dark glyphs on his black and gold armour begin to glow bright red. He roars as he throws his arms back, creating a pulse of dark red magic that incinerates the roots to nothing more than ashes in the wind. He drops back down and smirks at Kragen, and he thrusts towards him again and connects the hook to his neck, swinging him round and slamming him up against the upturned soil where a tree was torn from the ground. “How the hell…are you using the Onyx Phantom’s magic?” He strains.

“A little gift for honest work.” Kannix replies, taking Kragen and throwing him across the ground. Kannix charges towards him again and he jumps up in the air towards him, stabbing his blade downwards, then slamming it straight into the structure of his Isomacium Ebony Duchess, glaring down at him with a deranged pair of eyes and smile.

He cannot hold off against Kannix for much longer.

Not alone…

Qrow
Unaware of the conflict that has just taken place…

Qrow is sat down on a log that they managed to find out there in the wilderness, a toppled over tree in fact. Luckily since Ruby has Crescent Rose, chopping it up into pieces for people to sit on was not very difficult. As Qrow sits there, he can feel his hand almost twitching for his flask…he has been sobered for years now since he threw it away into the ocean after they saved Ruby from Salem and Tyrian. Just drinking a bit again managed to bring is addiction back, but he can do it again, and it is nowhere near as bad as it used to be.

It is more like just an action of going to get it, opposed to withdrawal.

He sits there, and most of the people on the team right now are asleep, Raven is finally asleep, but it took her a while…it may take her quite a while to sleep properly after losing the man she loved with all her heart. Ruby and Blake are now asleep, Pyrrha is asleep on Jaune’s shoulder and her legs over his lap. Nora and Ren are asleep, Yenna and Cinder too. The Architect however is not, and neither is Ozpin, both of them talking to each other with Winter sat down brewing some coffee for the people who would like some. Oscar is awake too, caressing Ruby’s hair ever so gently as he talks to Jaune, holding the love of his life close, never wanting to let her go either.

Qrow is sat there daydreaming, remembering all the times he once had with his team. With Summer and Taiyang, the fun crap that they would always get up to in the background. And now two of them are just memories, both of them gone and buried. Winter approaches Qrow and she offers him a metal mug of coffee she has brewed. “Found the stuff in the Prowler, some milk and sugar. You still take yours with milk and two, right?”

Qrow softly chuckle, accepting it and nodding his head. Winter approaches him and she sits down right next to him, crossing one leg over the other as she looks at the flames. They dance shadows across Ozpin who holds the mug of coffee that she made for Ozpin and Jaune holds one in his hand too. Oscar was happy without, being the tepid young lad that he is, it is not overly surprising to her. On the other hand, Qrow is the one that has her filled with concern – the two are confused of where they stand, whether or not they are gonna end up together or not…the question has been on both of their minds for a few months now.

They’ve tried but every single time Qrow struggles to connect to her, because nobody has what he had with Summer…a love that was undying…and even in death he still loves her and would never move on. “Things have been pretty bad recently.” Winter sighs as she takes a sip of her coffee, and Qrow nods his head slowly.

“It has…” He softly agrees.

“First everything with the Kingdoms…then Menagerie…and now…” She sighs, having to massage her brow as she sits there, flicking her longer white hair from her eyes. She no longer is actually keeping her hair all Atlesian and looked after anymore…she has just let her hair fall…and she looks really pretty with her hair long. But it is more the fact that is unlike her to do this, she has always been obsessed with her appearance, not in the same way as most think. She always feels she needs to look presentable after being raised in a Militarised Academy, smart clothes and hairstyle with acceptable perfume on.

Now?

She does not wear makeup, she does not tend to her hair, and she is not even wearing perfume. Qrow and everyone has said they like seeing her loosen up a bit, but it is still concerning when it comes from her. “I’m worried about Weiss…” She sighs as she drinks more of her coffee, and Qrow looks at her, seeing that concern. She looks like she has not been able to sleep a lot of nights lately.
He sighs as he looks down at his reflection in the coffee, exhaling as he stares at himself, steam rising from the warm coffee as it rises to his face. “I know…I’m worried about everything…Umbra really showed us how small we really are.” Qrow states as he drinks the rest of his coffee, sighing as he tips the rest of it out and throwing the residue into the corner. Winter does the same, flicking it out to the corner, then she gets up and offers her hand to Qrow to help him up.

“What’re you doing?” Qrow asks in confusion and almost fear.

“C’mon, let’s take a walk for a second. Storm has calmed down, may be able to do a patrol.” Winter states with the shrug of her shoulders.

Neither of them aware that Kragen is fighting Kannix right now.

Qrow sighs, holding her soft hand as she pulls him back up, he nearly bumps into her as he gets up, and he nods, walking past her as he picks up Harbinger, sheathing it on the back of his belt. Winter picks her sword up and sheathes it, looking back at Ozpin. “Qrow and I are gonna do a quick patrol.” Winter tells him, and Ozpin stands up as he pats the Architect’s shoulder.

“Are you sure?” Ozpin asks them.

“Yeah, I know Kragen’s already out there but maybe we could catch up to him. See what we can see, who knows what’s lurking around here.” Winter explains as she shrugs her shoulders, looking back at Qrow who stands there with his back leant to the wall with an apathetic look on his face, exhaling through his nose again.

“Alright, stay safe. We don’t want you lost if that storm hits again.” Ozpin says as he takes a seat again, picking up his mug and sipping it again. Jaune looks at Qrow and he just nods to him, and Qrow does the same.

“We’ll be back soon.” Qrow assures, walking with Winter down the Mountain Path in the same direction as Kragen. But they both had faith in him, so why should they be worried? They are not…but if they find him in time, they may be able to help him, because despite all his skill, he does not have the semblance of his former student…meaning he is outmatched. The wind is calmer at the moment but there is the hint of it starting to pick up, but the storm has not arrived yet.

But as they walk, Winter glances over to him as they follow the path, then she sighs. “There…is another reason I wanted you and I to have some time alone.” She says to him as she walks, keeping her eyes on the tight path. And Qrow looks at her, and he is not blind to it, he knows why she has asked him to come with her.

“I think I know what this is about now.” He agrees.

“You and I…Qrow…is there any point to this? Us trying to…find something?” She asks him, and he sighs, walking ahead of her, unable to give her the answers. He has always believed she deserves someone better, someone her own age she can spend her life with…without them dying on her from an older age. “Or are we just wasting our time?”

“Winter…I…”

He walks ahead of her again, but her words cause him to stop. “I’m worried about you Qrow…don’t think I didn’t notice you hiding that flask from everyone.” She states with narrowed blue eyes, and he sighs, turning to face her…and the tears in his eyes truly does shock her. “I’m scared…for you…for Weiss…for everyone. But not me – never once have I ever given a damn about my own life. If dying could help people survive then I would jump in the path of bullets to protect them. Because
that is who I am.” She explains to him.

She stares at him as he looks back at her, asking a very good question. “So…who are you?” She questions, and the words cut deep as he stands there, and he sighs.

“Who am I?” He scoffs, scratching the back of his neck, pacing back and forth on the path. “Wanna know who I am, Winter? I’m a scared and broken old man! An old man who was too much of a coward to raise his own daughter, a coward who can’t even protect the woman he loved with all his heart. And that same coward can’t move on and will never look at any woman the same way ever again. Because every time I ever see someone, I have a shred of affection for…I see her.” Qrow explains, his voice breaking when he pictures Summer’s beautiful face once more.

Those stunning silver eyes, her soft black and red hair…the warmth of her touch…the calming nature of her voice whenever she sang. She was everything he could have ever asked for and far beyond anything he could ever deserve…and she died…just like everyone he cares for. “I am not…whatever it is you think I am. Because I am fucked up! Bad shit happens to the people I care about, Winter.” He states.

Winter truly is feeling so sorry for this man, because she cares but can see why he has avoided love ever since he lost Summer. “Look around you! Ruby, loses her eye and is tortured for months! Then her home gets destroyed and loses all her childhood memories. Then my niece gets infected with a damn plague. And now…Oobleck…gets his head smashed in…in front of them all. That was unnecessary! They shouldn’t have seen it, it was wrong! Then Roy and Nolan! And…Tai…” He whimpers as he turns away from her, voice breaking when he finally says his name.

The one that has been tearing him down from the inside for so long now. “Maybe…maybe I could’ve done something…that’s on me! Me!” Qrow yells as he smacks his chest in anger, but not directed at her…more at himself.

“Wanna know who I am?”

He walks towards her, tears welled up in his eyes. “I’m a fucking failure.” He states, then he turns and walks ahead of her, wiping those tears from his eyes, leaving Winter behind. She sniffs as she wipes the tears from her eyes. She follows him and looks up at him. “It can’t work between us, Winter…I’m sick of people dying because I get close to them.” He states with anger in his eyes.

Winter nods her head softly beside him, it hurts for her to finally accept that there will never be a future for either of them…but she is strong…and she knows she has to be. So, she hides her own upset of this fact and she finds something to joke on. “Well…maybe I can find a guy who’s actually the same age as me.” She jokes with a smile, making Qrow chuckle.

“Yeah…that’d be better for you.” He assures, nodding his head. As always, he will push people, he could care for away to keep them safe from any harm.

The two of them keep walking up the path, and the more they move, a thought enters her mind…her worries for Weiss are still as strong as ever…so she decides to tell him why. “I’m worried about Weiss, Qrow.” She admits, and he glances over at her, he can tell she is changing the subject from their breakup – which does help – so he engages to help change it.

“Why?” Qrow asks her.

“The sickness…and I know it’s obvious why…but there is another reason. One about Weiss herself.” She states, and Qrow raises an eyebrow.
“What do you mean?” He asks her.

“When she was younger, she was sick from a pretty bad flu, she was sick every day. And it got to the point where she thought that eating less would keep her from being sick. But…that never left after she got better. She developed an eating disorder, she would hardly eat anything, basically small salads and that was hardly enough for a growing girl like herself. I bet it is half the reason behind why she lacks in stamina nowadays.” Winter explains to him, and Qrow nods his head, starting to understand what she is getting at.

“You’re worried it will happen again, aren’t you?”

“Yes – it could have killed her, Qrow.” She states. “And without me there to make sure she eats normally…”

“She still has Yang, Neptune and Sun. Neptune is her boyfriend, remember…he will always look after her. The kid’s an idiot but he loves her with all his heart. And trust me – Glynda will make sure she eats. I’m nearly fifty now and man…I’d never go against her word.” Qrow chuckles, making Winter softly chuckle too as she nods her head.

“I…I…guess you’re right.” She sighs.

“I’m not always…but trust me. She will be fine.” Qrow promises, the two of them reach the edge of the mountain and the clouds pass, revealing the beautiful view of the mountain range…and in the distance the City of Mistral that the moon now looks over.

“Wow…”

They both stand in awe as the mountains roll past them, making Winter’s heart flutter. “It’s…so beautiful.” Suddenly Kragen crashes down into the ground right next to them and they both gasp with shock.

“Kragen?” Winter screams, as Qrow turns his eyes widen as Kannix rapidly attacks Qrow, slamming his blade right into Harbinger that he swiftly drew. They both stare into each other’s eyes, Qrow with utter disbelief to see Kannix perfectly fine somehow. Kannix grins with a maniacal voice as he speaks.

“I told you, you should have killed me when you had the chance!” Kannix reminds with a laugh, firing his cannon into Qrow’s chest that blasts him back and he slides across the ground, and Winter draws her sword as she paces back and forth to protect Kragen.

**Kragen**

“Leave him alone.” She demands.

“Get out of my way, sweetheart. This won’t be pretty.” He advises with a smirk.

“Winter, Qrow! Get out of here!” The bloodied Kragen demands, he has been losing this battle opposed to his Apprentice.

“What the fuck are you doing out here, Kragen?” Qrow yells, but Winter stands strong with her eyes narrowed at him.
“I said. MOVE.” He repeats.

“No.” Winter reminds, and he rolls his silver eyes.

“Fine.” He groans, firing his cannon straight at her and she forms a Glyph that stops the explosive from hitting, but what she was not expecting was for Kannix to suddenly leap and shatter the Glyph, slamming his blade up against hers, forcing her towards the cliff face. “This is not you’re business, honey! Why don’t you run on back to your little ice cube?” He asks her curiously, Winter snarls in anger, forcing him back and slashing him across the face with her sword, but the aura repairs it immediately. He comes around and punches her right in the face, so hard that it knocks her off the cliff face, she screams as she falls, and Qrow’s eyes widen as Kragen is at his mercy.

“Winter!” He roars, Kannix stands above Kragen then he pushes him off the cliff as well and he falls. But Qrow snarls and he sprints directly towards Kannix, and he tackles him with a howl. They both plummet off the side of the cliff, and they fall towards the sloping snow that Winter and Kragen both tumble down the side of. Kannix punches Qrow in the face on his way down but Qrow deflects his blade with Harbinger, only for Kannix to take both his enhanced legs and kicking him right in the chest.

Qrow crashes down into the snow and he tumbles with them down the snow, all the cold sticking to their skin like glue. He looks back at Kannix to see him tumbling then crashing straight through one of the huge trees standing on the surface of the mountain. Qrow turns to see Winter forming a Glyph that she can balance on, and she jumps straight towards Kannix, spinning through the air as she slashes him with her sword. He grunts as her hit deals some impressive damage on his aura, but he grabs her by the hair and scrapes her cheek through the snow, clipping some rocks on the way down.

“Get! Off!” Winter yells, kicking him up the jaw with her heel, he grunts, and she rolls with him down the mountain, punching him every chance she can get. He does the same, pounding her head into the snow as they fall. The snow sticks to their bodies constantly, then she uses her glyphs as best as she can, surfing across the snow with as she blasts icicles towards him as he falls. He fires one shot from his cannon, but she forms a protective barrier with the swing of her sword, the flames rippling across the barrier she had formed. Kannix crashes into one of the huge rocks that sticks out from the ground and he barks in pain, a shoulder pauldron shattering upon contact and a flash of red, which quickly repairs itself.

Qrow starts to control his descent, the terrible thing is that they are getting extremely far down the side of the mountain now. He looks around and sees Kragen struggling to find some grip as he tumbles, but there is also a layer that looks flatter than the rest, where they could rest. “Winter! Get Kragen over to that flat area!” He calls out, and Winter nods, gliding across the snow on her Glyph towards Kragen, reaching out and grabbing onto his hand.

Qrow however, glares at Kannix who fires his cannon behind him to try and attack Kragen again, so Qrow transforms into his Crow form, flying towards Kannix and then returning back to his human form. He tackles him out of the air, and he smashes him back into the slope, swinging his sword across his aura and punching him straight in the jaw. Qrow grunts as Kannix slams the hook into his shoulder and throws him across the slope, causing him to fall again.

Kannix rides the recoil of his cannon once more as he lunges towards Winter and Kragen. Winter throws Kragen to the platform just in time as Kannix grabs her, and he fires his cannon into her chest, blowing her down the mountain again, and now missing that platform that Kragen is on.

And to make matters so much worse…

The storm has returned.
Kannix and Kragen both turn when the howling returns, seeing the wall of frost hurtling their way, biting cold. Kragen groans, limping on a broken leg right now that was broken from the fall. He spins his staff round and stops the cannon that was blasted his way. Qrow suddenly appears behind him as he transforms from bird form to attack Kannix from behind.

Kannix spins round and fires, knocking Qrow out of the sky, and sending him tumbling down into the snow with Winter, making it impossible to fly in his Crow form due to the storm…and lost in the white as well.

Kannix smirks as the storm continues to blow against him as he extends the blade from his arm, staring down at Kragen. “Finally.” He snarls, walking towards him.

“If you kill me…then you will be just as weak as everyone you look down on!” Kragen warns, but Kannix kicks him in the mouth, causing him to spit out blood in the process.

“Enough begging!” Kannix yells with fury, as he pulls his arm back and snarls. “Your time ends now.”

He pushes the blade towards his heart, until a dark red portal suddenly opens behind Kannix and they both realise that Vir Nominis Umbra has found him. The Lord of the Wood emerges, the huge Leshen rises from it and wraps the roots around his arms, pulling him towards the portal to serve his punishment for defying his orders and breaking his promise. But Kannix fights against the Lord of the Wood in anger. “No! I will not be denied this! I have waited for two thousand four hundred and seventy-six years for this moment! I will not wait one more day!” He cries out as he punches the Lord of the Wood up the jaw.

The Lord of the Wood growls as it pulls him back harder this time, now his legs are in the portal, whilst Kragen watches with horror.

Kannix roars, aiming his cannon straight at Kragen, and firing.

Kragen gasps in pain from the flash, feeling the hot pain in his side, knocking him back against a rock. The portal closes as the Lord of the Wood pulls him through, leaving Kragen behind.

Kragen collapses in shock…bleeding out from the serious wound to his side, burned straight through the armour plating. He gasps…barely able to keep his eyes open.

Then…

His eyes close as he loses consciousness, knocked out from the shock.

Left alone…

As the blizzard builds and builds, leaving him beneath everyone.

Qrow and Winter both lost in the storm…

With Kragen dying of blood loss and potentially hypothermia.

And nobody knows where they are…
Lost and Alone

Kannix

The black smog with crackling red lightning erupts in the Charred Forest, burned trees everywhere and the soil poisoned with the ashes of countless universes. Kannix falls from the portal between the Universes, collapsing to his knees with a groan, his hands digging into the soil as he groans, silver eyes wide with realisation of how much trouble he is in. He was angry at first, but now that he realises who stands before him...his fate has never been so uncertain.

Until now.

At the edge of the cliff where the entire Universe expands out before them, stars endlessly supernova in the sky, collapsing into black holes and exploding again, words crumbling and reforming into another. Moons shattering apart everywhere, and trillions, perhaps infinite souls screeching in immense agony from the horrors that this Universe inflicts. Demonic entities and Creatures of Grimm rule this universe, feasting off the fallen that can never die but will never find peace.

And standing with his arms held behind his back, is Vir Nominis Umbra. He slowly looks over his shoulder at Kannix with narrowed glowing red eyes, giving the Assassin immense trepidation of the entity as he makes his approach, the ashes spurting up from the soil that seems to squish beneath every step taken. But then, instead of inflicting immense agony upon Kannix for his defiance against his orders, he initiates something far cruelly as he forms a pair of spirits.

Both with brown hair, and the mother with silver eyes, their ectoplasmic forms look up at the man, covered in burns, bruises and scars from their suffering here on the realm. “S-Son…” The mother whimpers in terror as she reaches out to him, and he attempts to hold her hand, he has not seen her since the time of Arkhonex, only in his nightmares.

“M-Mom!” He cries, tears streaming down his face as he crawls towards the two parents who try to hold their baby boy in his arms. Vir Nominis Umbra stands behind them with his hands held together, the tips of each digit softly touching one another as he stares down at the new Onyx Phantom’s Assassin.

“What has happened to you?” His father whimpers, barely even able to recognise his own son due to the cybernetics, but also the monster he has become. They wanted him to be something far greater and kinder than the cruel assassin he has become that serves an entity of pure annihilation like Vir Nominis Umbra. Kannix closes his eyes as tears stream down his cheeks, for it hurts to hear how his parents cannot even see their son, but only the Spectre of what he once was.

Then, he looks at Vir Nominis Umbra, who brands no smile on his face but no rage, just a very neutral stare, which is far more terrifying than either. Especially when he bends down and caresses the cheek of his mother, and suddenly cracks of pain spread across her face and she shrieks with undying agony. And so does his father, the pain is unlike anything they can describe. It is unbearable, pain that just gets worse and worse with every second, harming them physically, mentally and even spiritually, breaking them down and reforming them every single time. The mother screeches as she falls and rolls on the floor in desperation as Vir Nominis Umbra walks past the parents, looking down at Kannix Volantis.

Kannix stammers, very rarely to people ever see such desperation on Kannix’s face anymore for he
does not care about anything after how long he has lived. But he can only imagine that his parents must have suffered an agonising death when trapped inside the walls of Arkhonex when the Grimm turned on them. They were most likely torn apart by the Creatures of Grimm, eaten alive, begging for them to stop but they never would as they shredded their skin and organs until they were taken by Vir Nominis Umbra to suffer in his own personal hell he created for those who die.

Kannix stares at Vir Nominis Umbra, begging him. “Please…stop…don’t make them suffer anymore, I will accept any punishment from you. Anything! I know I have done wrong!” Kannix begs him, screaming at the end to try and silence the wails of his mother and father who roll around the floor, feeling their skin peeling off and being burned by fire on the inside, or their bones snapping and relocating over and over again. The sound is horrific of the torture spell Vir Nominis Umbra has inflicted upon them as he stands there, just staring at him with no words leaving his mouth.

But then, he hears the tuts of another entity emerging from behind him, and this one does speak as it walks past the Lord of the Wood, whom has its head bowed down like a soldier. “Tsk, tsk, tsk…I truly expected better from you, Kannix. After all our teachings over all the time we spent together here in this beautiful Universe…you still disobeyed your direct orders from our rightful protector.” The Onyx Phantom scoffs, walking round Kannix and standing beside Vir Nominis Umbra, showing itself as Kannix’s Dark Reflection. Kannix stammers, struggling to understand why the Onyx Phantom would use a word like Protector for someone that seeks such annihilation like Vir Nominis Umbra.

“What…has this monster…being protecting?” He yells in anger, then the Onyx Phantom rolls his fiery orange eyes, aiming the cannon at Kannix and firing it, burning a hole straight through his chest which kills him instantly. Smoke trails from the wound as the Phantom grins, then he walks towards his corpse on the ground, then he snaps his fingers, the hole heals itself instantly with the embers of the dead and Kannix gasps with shock, staring at the now missing hole that was in his chest. Feeling the hole burn through him was a feeling that could never be described, only possibly as a superheated drill that was pushed through him with great speed and force.

“You would be wise to watch your words around him, son. You may be our warrior, but we have warriors far stronger than you.” The Onyx Phantom whispers into his ear as Kannix lays on the floor, and the Demon walks back from the Spectre who stares back at the Soothsayer, whom still has said nothing.

“You promised me…that I would get my revenge! You promised me, but you keep dragging me away!” Kannix yells in anger at Vir Nominis Umbra, until the Onyx Phantom stamps down on Kannix’s head, pressing his skull hard against the ash-soaked soil, staring down at him as it scrapes his own boot against his cheek.

“Aye we did, but you never made it clear when you wanted said revenge. We keep our promises, and you will have your revenge. But not before we allow it.” The Onyx Phantom snarls as it presses his head harder and harder against the ground, leaning down to his face to speak with its menacing tongue. “Remember…you are just a flea to him…we are all fleas to him. You can either be a good little flea and do as your told, or you can be swatted aside like all the others.” The Onyx Phantom chillingly reminds him, taking his boot off Kannix’s face, walking round him and flicking some of the dirt from his cheek.

The howling shrieks of his tortured parents still echo from their souls, ripped apart and put back together over and over again. Torment that would kill them if they were alive, but now they cannot truly die – but can still feel all the pain they could ever feel. A fate worse than death, because it never ends, just constant suffering which will only cease if Vir Nominis Umbra allows it.
The screaming…it sends Kannix into a rage, he has never been afraid of death, he has already died countless times. He roars in anger as he fires his cannon directly at Vir Nominis Umbra, in which it just passes right through him, just making his form flicker. He does not even react, just continues to stare, that’s when he ducks under the slash from the Onyx Phantom and slashes up his back, only for him to vanish. He turns and tries to stop the attack from him, but the Demon has more tricks up its sleeve.

“Your lust for revenge has blinded you, Kannix…as ever!”

With a swipe with its hand, all the cybernetics that connect his body together suddenly shatter like glass, shards of metal and circuity fall onto the floor, and his torso falls to the floor, but then the Phantom reaches out with the crumbling arm, using a form of Telekinesis to lift up the Spectre, pulling him towards the Onyx Phantom’s gaze. “It seems the Gods left little to chance, didn’t they? Giving your kind such tenacity against their betters – turning our own warriors, against us.” The Onyx Phantom scoffs, before staring right back at the Spectre again, seeing the terror in his eyes.

The Demon literally just flicked his wrist and all his cybernetic enhancements shattered apart, leaving him completely defenceless. “But what hubris, to believe that we could not control your souls through suffering. Pain has always been a major motivator for those who stand against us, suffering that is so extreme that they could not describe it. I could make you die and be reborn for eternity, and ever rebirth would be met with unique agonizing end for you.” The Onyx Phantom reminds, carrying his levitated body towards the edge of the cliff, holding him over it to show the pools of Grimm beneath him. “Be torn apart by the powers of destruction itself?” He wonders, staring at the pools that would leave nothing more than a gooey mess to be consumed by the force of pure destruction.

He then turns and forms a pack of Grimm, which contain Beowulves, Creeps and giant Spiders. “Or we could watch as they tear you apart, and your body would heal…but the pain would never cease. You would have to suffer the feeling of being eaten alive for eternity.” The Onyx Phantom describes, moving him towards the barking monsters, making him whimper in terror as it brings back his terrifying memories of how it felt to be devoured constantly by those monsters in that cave for years.

But then the Grimm fade away just as he gets closer, then the Onyx Phantom throws his body back to where it was. “Or we could trap you in a small box where you would be surrounded by worst fears, nightmares and temptations that would never be realised.” He states as he walks towards Kannix, holding his arms behind his back as he leans down, that’s when he looks at Vir Nominis Umbra who is still just as silent as the grave.

Two Knights’ Bannermen drag the straining Neopolitan across the floor by her long pink and brown hair, throwing her into the dirt by Vir Nominis Umbra’s foot. She looks completely terrified, and the Demonic Entities certainly know all about his feelings for Neo. He was not joking around and being creepy when he asked her if they wanted to fool around, he really does have feelings for her. And now they will be tested before the Killer of the Devil.

“Many claimed that love is the number one defeater of all evil, but they are merely children who believe in fairy tales. Love has always been a weapon – yes – but not for those who fight for the nobility of another’s affection. It is the weapon wielded by their enemy, because all it takes is for years of relationship building to be brought down by a single action that takes a single second.” The Onyx Phantom describes as Vir Nominis Umbra looks down at Neo and she begins to let out a silent screech, desperately trying to scream but her attempt to wail simply makes her pain worsen. Like her body is being infested with a thousand diseased worms that wiggle through her body, devouring her
from the inside out until only bones would remain. But this is simply the Torture Curse that Vir Nominis Umbra is inflicting upon her, forcing her into a state of endless suffering that also links to their fears.

Hers?

Neo has always feared being buried alive, and the feeling of all those grave worms festering inside of her is just making it even worse, the feeling of all that dirt stuffing her throat and suffocating her. She reaches across the ashy soil as she tries to crawl away, but then the sense of claustrophobia sets in as the Lord of the Wood is ordered by the glance from Umbra to summon the roots. Black dead charred roots erupt from the soil, wrapping around her limbs and restraining her as she begins to cry in pain and desperation.

Kannix grits his teeth, seeing the metal arms and the legs that were blown apart floating back towards him, reconnecting and forging his augmentations that he survived with. He flexes his hand and wrist, staring back at the demons that stand before him. The Onyx Phantom smirking sinisterly at him with its fists clenched, embers of crumbled aura floating away from his decomposing body.

“Leave her out of this! This is my punishment, not hers! Leave her alone!” Kannix yells, standing up as he points at Neo, and she looks at him with disbelief. She never expected someone so consumed in his own rage to ever actually care for her – but Vir Nominis Umbra and the other Demons have something in common. They never lie, they may omit the truth, but they never tell a lie – for some reason, that is something Vir Nominis Umbra does not broker.

Liars.

“This is your punishment; however, your semblance has allowed pain to become something you are accustomed to. Everything that these souls are experiencing would be no different to what you already know.” The Onyx Phantom states as he gestures to Neo, then Umbra ceases the suffering, causing her to pant in pain, grasping her chest in agony as her heart beats with fire pulsing inside of her.

“I demand you leave her be!” Kannix yells, aiming his cannon at them yet again. Despite knowing the punishment, he would be inflicted with he still risks everything he has, even the chance to get revenge on Kragen, to try and save Neo. The Onyx Phantom raises its brow, and Vir Nominis Umbra still does not change his expression, but deep down he is impressed by this man’s tenacity.

“Your courage to protect her…is inspiring. We can all be heroes in our lives…or we can be monsters.” The Onyx Phantom states as it looks down at its hand, igniting red flames that course across its body and back into its palm. “But we are not heroes.” He states, as Umbra inflicts agony back onto Neo, making her desperately try to shriek as the dark magic courses through her veins, and he walks round her with his hands held together, and the Onyx Phantom stares at Kannix who is desperately starting to tear up.

He grits his teeth, wishing that his courage and determination to protect her would stop him – but it is just as the Phantom said. Love is not a weapon used by the lover or the target of their affection, but a weapon used by those greater. The weight of desperation becomes too much for him as he falls to his knees, pressing his metal hands into the muddy ash, bowing his head to Vir Nominis Umbra.

“Please! Just say something!” Kannix begs Umbra, but the dark entity just stares him down with those shimmering red eyes hiding behind the fake brown ones. “If it is my soul you want then take it! If it is my blade your want at your side, then I will do it! I will not betray you again, this I swear! Just please…stop hurting her! She has done nothing wrong, I didn’t tell her anything!” He states, and the Onyx Phantom grabs him by the throat, lifting him off the ground as he stares right into his silver eyes.
“Why?” He questions.

“B-Because…it was my decision, and she should not have to suffer for it!” Kannix states, and Neo’s tears fall to the ash covered floor.

The Onyx Phantom looks at Vir Nominis Umbra, then the pain that was spreading through the crying Neopolitan vanishes instantly, and she gasps for air, despite the fact she was never even being buried. The roots release her, and she is left back on the ground. Vir Nominis Umbra walks past her, and he looks down at Kannix as the Onyx Phantom releases him. “We will not offer you a second chance, Kannix. Try not to waste it…you will head to Queen’s Cove with Neopolitan and the Acolytes of Lien. Do not attempt to attack Kragen again without our permission, otherwise next time we will trap you both here, and you will have to watch her suffer for eternity.” The Onyx Phantom warns, as he walks right past him and transforms into a flock of black crows that fly away.

They both stare at Vir Nominis Umbra as he walks past them and approaches the edge of the cliff that looks over the forest of suffering.

He has still not said a word.

Kannix stammers, looking up through the burnt grass. “Will you please just say something?” He begs him.

Vir Nominis Umbra looks over his shoulder slowly, the red eyes staring straight into his soul.

Then he finally speaks.

“Get back to work.” He states.

The Charred Forest collapses around them as they are transported via teleportation by Vir Nominis Umbra, the white of the snowy regions surrounding them once more as they are both returned back to the Acolytes of Lien Outpost that was set up in the mountainous regions of Mistral.

Both of them covered in their sweat, and Neo stares at Kannix, learning of quite a few things about him. His parents, but most importantly the fact that he actually has feelings for her all of a sudden, something he has kept very secret from her.

He groans, pressing his hand to his head, getting up and storming off from her, leaving her there, since he feels he is the last person she wants to see right now.

Everyone he ever cares about suffers.

There is a reason he keeps his past private.

Qrow

The snowstorm is relentless, throwing waves upon waves of icy cold snow against their aura protected bodies, in fact it is starting to weaken it. Covered in snow right now they claw they way out of the pile, Winter forms a glyph and uses it to melt the snow around them for a moment so then they could move. The water it melted into quickly begins to freeze from the hostile conditions they have found themselves in.
Qrow stands tall, covering his face with his hand as he tries to stare through the snow, searching for Winter. He pulls his scroll out, desperately hoping he has signal despite the storm so then he can call Ruby and the others to warn them that Kannix is out there – despite the fact he is no longer there.

He grits his teeth in anger and despair, for he has no bars. “Damn it…c’mon…” He grumbles, looking around to try and find Winter. “Winter!”

“Qrow!” Winter calls back, they are close.

He quickly he finds her thanks to the small twinkling flame she ignited on the tip of her sword. He staggers towards her, struggling to walk in the thick snow. “Winter! Is that you?” Qrow calls out as he walks towards where he thinks she is, hearing the distant cries of animals in the distance, lurking in the storm. There are creatures everywhere in these mountains, predators and prey.

And of course…

The unnatural Creatures of Grimm, monsters that lack a soul and the light that should spark within a living creature. The distant roars grow louder and louder the closer they get, but finally they grab onto one another. She pulls him close and they both look around, drawing their weapons as they hear the distant sounds that surround them. The roars are distant, mixed with the cries of Elk that must be lost out there.

But there is something else, something that at first, they cannot even hear…but there are in fact very low and soft whispers around them at the moment. So many yet so soft that they cannot even hear them, let alone pinpoint where they are even coming from.

But then another Elk calls out, the poor thing sounds like it is lost and alone just like them.

One of them can be heard quite nearby, for a few seconds they could actually see the Elk’s lonely figure as it walks in the storm, but then the snow in the wind obscures their vision. Then…the Elk screeches loudly in great tormented agony, like something just tackled it and took it down. They stare at where they saw the poor animal, and they cautiously approach where they heard it cry out. The animal releases pained groans in the distance as they approach, knowing it could be a natural predator…

But after what Qrow saw when they went searching for the Witches in the Restless Marshlands, this could be a Grimm. They no longer seem to be discriminating between Fauna and Humanoids. “Where is it?” Winter whispers to Qrow, both of them are shivering quite extensively, teeth grating against one another as they approach the scene of which the Elk was taken down.

The endless white snow becomes besmirched with bright red claret staining it, getting darker in regions, meaning it has suffered immense damage to its body. It must have been lacerated in multiple areas to be bleeding this heavily. Qrow and Winter stay close to each other, both to not lose sight of each other in the heavy storm but also to stay warm in this relentless cold. They can barely even see a few inches in front of their faces right now, but they unexpectedly find the poor animal.

Its struggle is over, and it has finally passed away. But it is not in good condition, with deep slashes inflicted across the body, and chunks ripped out of it. But then they notice the poor elk has been ripped open, its stomach spilled out onto the once pristine white snow, guts everywhere. And something digging and feasting inside. That’s when it shows itself, covered in blood and a long claw protruding from its humanoid arm, glowing red eyes and skin peeled off from its body.

“Oh fuck…Thralls!” Qrow calls out as the Horridus Morbus Thrall shrieks to the skies with vicious savagery in its voice, echoing for miles and they can hear others rebounding the call. The dark and
demonic yet familiar screams of the Thralls surround them and the one they found leaps over the Elk’s cadaver towards them both. Winter thrusts forward, stabbing her sword right through the open mouth of the monster, killing it instantly, and throwing its skeletal body down to the ground. The smoke fading from the bones and the rotted flesh. They both stand back to back, swords in hand and senses focused as they hear the Zombies running towards them.

One jumps through the dense storm, slashing the claw forward and slamming it into the long blade of Harbinger, forcing Qrow down to one knee. The Thrall screeches with rage, and inside of the demonic and dark screams they can still hear the cries of the soul that was taken. “Help me!” The woman inside shrieks, her long once beautiful hair now replaced with dark floating black strands. All colour that brought individuality stripped away from them, Qrow shifts the form of his blade, and the barrel of his shotgun presses against the side of its head.

He fires, and blows the head of the Thrall apart, killing it swiftly and he shoves her corpse off his body, standing tall again. Winter slashes with a yell, beheading another Thrall that emerges from the storm. They quite literally only have seconds to react before they are attacked by these things.

Another one lunges at Qrow and he deflects the razor-sharp claw with Harbinger, a metallic twang ringing out and the creature rolls across the snow past him, lumps of ice falling from the spines protruding through skin. It sprints towards him again and he slashes round from his shoulder and cuts the creature clean in half. But that does not even stop it, it just crawls towards him, snarling as it grabs his foot with its bony hand. Qrow growls in anger, taking his boot and stamping down onto its head, crushing the bone in its skull, finishing it off, backing up to stay with Winter, eyes and ears open as the Thralls keep circling them.

And only now do they hear all these mysterious whispers that circle around them, but it is definitely not the Thralls. They can locate the sound of the thralls running and the screams that they make, but these Whispers are different…it is like they are in the wind somehow. “What the hell is with those whispers?” Qrow questions, and Winter looks back at him as she pulls her second sword from the primary one.

“I thought it was just me.” She states, luckily kicking another Thrall out of the air as it leaps at her, she stabs downwards at where it was fell, but it crawls away into the snow. Then a second one quite literally just throws its whole bodyweight into her side, knocking her down and the second runs at her as well, trying to tear into her. Qrow’s eyes widen, and he realises that Raven is not here, meaning his bad luck is at play now without Raven’s good luck countering it. He runs into the storm and grabs one of the Thralls, pulling it off Winter, swinging round and beheading it with his sword. The second goes to bite down on her throat, but Qrow transforms Harbinger into its scythe form, hooking it onto the neck of the infected one. He swings round and slices its head clean off, before grabbing Winter’s hand and pulling her up.

“Are you alright?” He asks her, checking her body for any tears, scratches or bites, but luckily, she is clear. She is not infected from their disease, the last thing they need is another Schnee infected by Horridus Morbus.

“I’m fine.” She states, until her eyes widen when she sees another Thrall sprinting towards Qrow from behind. “Look out!” She yells, and Qrow turns and transforms Harbinger back into its Sword form, and he holds it up, stopping the teeth of the Thrall from digging right into his jugular. He forces it back, and kicks it in the leg, snapping the bone and forcing it down to one knee. Qrow throws his sword up in the air and catches it so the blade is pointed downwards, stabbing it straight through the roof of its skull and splitting the whole creature in half.

They both stay together, thinking that they can see people watching them from the storm, dark shadowy entities with glowing red eyes. Walking around them and the whispering just continues to
build and build around them. Until other Grimm appear from the snow, one of them was even buried, an Alpha Beowulf erupts from the snow with ice and snow stuck to its tufts of fur, slashing the claws straight at both of their faces. Both block the attacks, and Winter glides towards the large beast, sliding across the snow underneath its legs. The Alpha Beowulf slashes at her as she passes under its legs, then she slices the blade across the back of its legs to bring it to the ground. She throws her smaller secondary sword and it punctures through its shoulder. The Beowulf roars in anger and in pain as the black smoke pours out from the open wound it has suffered from her attack. She rushes at it, jumping and grabbing the hilt, twisting the blade and ripping it upwards, through flesh, bone and hide, and fur.

The head falls from its shoulder and the arm falls with it, collapsing to the ground and disintegrating away into dusts. But the Alpha Beowulf was not alone, as there are still a few more Thralls in the area and other Wild Grimm, from a few Creeps to a Mountain Ursa and…something else.

Something…much bigger.

But they cannot see it, they can faintly hear the sound of it circling the mountains and roaring. But their attention is swiftly caught by the sound of the Mountain Ursa roaring, charging through the storm towards them. Unlike your average Ursa, these Mountain ones are much larger and more armoured than them. They are closer to the Ursa Major however they lack the huge spines that they have, but they are more vicious and tend to travel alone unlike normal Ursae. These huge bears mostly tend to travel in pairs, but Mountain Ursae do not.

The Grimm Bear bellows as it charges towards them, panting as the white fog trails from its open jaws, swinging its clawed paw right at the two. Winter and Qrow both have to split up in the storm, so then the Ursa does not take them both down at once, which also means that the Grimm can be split up as well. Qrow spins his sword through his fingers as he keeps his senses sharp, Winter does the same. The Ursa prowls back and forth, tracking down Winter instead of Qrow, whilst the Thralls and a couple Creeps engage on the older man.

Qrow can’t help but smirk at the Grimm that approach him, cracking his neck as he gets ready to kick their asses. The Creep erupts from the ground and goes to bite down on his arm, but he rolls backwards, aiming his shotgun built into Harbinger directly at its head, stunning it when he fires. The armoured beast groans as it stumble back, giving Qrow the chance to charge forward, carving the legs of the creature clean off in one fell swoop. The black smoke pours out from the wound, making the beast fall to the ground, then he slashes across its neck to cut its head clean from its shoulders.

He slides across the snow and deflects the strike from one of the Thralls that lunges towards him with a screech, then grabs the second by the throat to hold it back. He grits his teeth, falling to one knee as the second gets back up behind him, going for a second attack. He smirks, chuckling as he spins the sword round, his Bad Luck Charm is only affecting his enemies now that Winter is not in his sight. The Thrall immediately meets the serrated edge of his blade that slices clean through its head, cutting the skull clean in half as its body crashes to the snow. He stares at the Thrall in his grasp and he swings round, throwing it directly into another Beowulf that runs towards him. He jumps up in the air, kicking the Beowulf in the side of the head before twirling through the sky as he stabs the blade of his sword down the spine of the Beowulf, cutting it clean in two.

The Thrall gets back up and roars at him, throwing its arms back before charging at him once more, and Qrow leaps towards the monster. He spins through the air after jumping forward, blade pushes forward as he corkscrews straight through the beast. The Thrall practically shatters like glass, bones and corrupted flesh shredded behind him. He lands and slides across the ground, and finally finishing off the last of the Creeps that attacks him from behind.
Only for a loose boulder from a rock above to fall and squish the unlucky Grimm, and Qrow smirks as he wipes the snow from his shoulder. “Oh yeah…I’m badass.” He chuckles.

Winter stands there, focused as she remembers her lifelong training. Keeping her stance correct, back straight and head held high with her right foot forward. She spins her swords through her fingers slowly as she waits for the huge Beast to make its first move. The Mountain Ursa roars, charging towards her with savagery in its glowing red eyes, and it swings its huge muscular paw straight at her face, but she jumps into an evasive roll to avoid it. She forms a Glyph that her feet press against, and she jettisons off it, stabbing her blade straight between the plates in its shoulder. The Ursa lets out a pained roar as it rears up, biting at her constantly, but she rolls across its back and by twisting the blade under some of the plates of bony armour she pops some of the plates off with a great bang.

The Ursa cries out in pain, slamming back down to all fours and rolling across the snow to get her off. Only for Winter to jump up before its back rolled into the icy snow, landing onto a rock with her leg crossed over the other, as if she is taunting the Bear. The Ursa roars at her with anger as it rears back up, showing its weakest spot – the belly. Winter does not need to use her Summoning to take the beast down, he already knows how to kill it with little effort. He jumps and performs an elegant backflip, pressing her heeled legs against the glyph she cast behind her, blasting towards the reared up Ursa, stabbing both blades into its chest, and it roars in pain.

Swinging at her again, but she avoids it once more, forming two restraining Glyphs that glow black and hold onto the arms to keep it in a T-Pose to prevent it from attacking. She uses her dust and lines it across her blade, igniting the blade and making her target, blasting up towards it and plunging the burning blade directly into its chest, killing it instantly. The Ursa roars as it stumbles back, and she slams it down to the ground with her second blade, swinging round her Primary Sword and stabbing the Secondary through its eye and smashing it down into the snow.

The snowy ground erupts with lumps flying into the air, and she stares ahead as the Mountain Ursa fades away. She connects the two swords together and sheathes them both into her scabbard as she stretches her shoulders. “Perfect form.” She moans with delight, before rolling her shoulder. She looks over to see Qrow walking out and nodding to her, both of them happy with their badassery.

“That was easy.” Qrow jokes.

“I know…thought they would give us more trouble.” Winter jokes, that is when the whispers build once more, surrounding them more and more…then a terrifying roar echoes across the sky and they lift their heads a silhouette passes over them.

“You had to say it, didn’t you?” He groans.

“Have you got signal?” Winter asks him, so Qrow quickly pulls out his scroll, and his luck is finally on his side for once, he has some signal. It is patchy…but it is something.

“Yes! Finally…c’mon, Ruby.”

Ruby

Sat down by the fire, Ruby has her head resting on her beloved boyfriend’s shoulder as they listen to the endless tales by the Architect right now. Whilst some of the other people in here are still asleep, the fire is still burning strong. None of them have any idea that Kragen is out there in the storm
somewhere, bleeding and probably freezing to death right now. “So, I grabbed the rabbit by the head, and it somehow bit through steel! I guess I should’ve guessed it was a stupid Mimic.” He scoffs, making Ruby and Oscar chuckle, but as they think about their time together, suddenly Ruby feels her scroll vibrating.

Ruby gets up when she feels her scroll calling her, and at first hoping it would be Kassius with news, it is from Qrow. “It’s Qrow. Isn’t he on Patrol with Winter?” Ruby asks them as she begins to answer her father’s call.

“Yeah…Kragen’s been out there for a while now. Been a few hours.” The Architect states, sounding quite concerned for his friend. Ruby answers her father’s hail and she holds the scroll up to her ear, softly answering him.

“Qrow? You okay?” She asks him sweetly, only to hear the screeching winds that surround them right now and the crackling distortion of his voice.

“Ruby…hear…Kragen was…Kannix attacked…need to…bring help! Something’s…out here!” The call was broken up by the patchy connection due to the Blizzard but luckily most of the call was there for them to piece it together. The Architect swiftly gets up and Ozpin rises up as well, using magical telekinesis to pull his cane to his hand as he stares at Ruby, hearing that.

“Qrow? Uncle Qrow!” Ruby calls out desperately, as the poor connection ends the call and leaves them with nothing. Ruby’s raised voice wakes everyone up, Yenna gets up and looks around, standing up with concern as she looks at Ruby.

“What’s happened? Where’s Kragen?” Yenna desperately asks them, afraid she has lost the love of her life after all these years being torn apart by time and duty. Ruby looks at her scroll and the lack of connection bars that she has, looking at Yenna with concern.

“Kannix…I think Kragen went out to see Kannix. I don’t think it went well.” Ruby states, turning to Crescent Rose and her silver eyes glow as she uses her gift to pull the huge scythe back to her hands. Oscar stands up too, picking up Traveller’s Atrocity. Pyrrha and Jaune get up too, taking their weapons and Blake nods her head. She is not about to let her team leader and close friend go out there without her help.

“You’re going to need help.” Ozpin states as he taps his cane into the floor, and despite the trust issues they have with each other, he is correct on this matter. Yenna stands up and she just looks at Ruby, they would be crazy to try and stop her from finding the man she loves.

“Count me in too.” The Architect states, nodding his head. “The man saved me when he didn’t need to.”

“He’s my other half…I’m coming.” Yenna states, and Ruby nods her head, looking to everyone else who most likely would like to come and help. However, Ruby knows that it would be best if they stay here.

“Everyone else stay here, get the Prowler ready. We’ll need it to help Kragen, Qrow and Winter. They could have hypothermia out there.” Ruby explains, and Nora nods her head as she gets up, holding her Hammer in her hands. Penny smiles as her swords emerge from her back, ready to fight any enemies if the need arises.

“We won’t let you down.” Penny assures, and Ruby smiles.

“You never have.” She replies, and she moves ahead with her team in toe as the Architect draws his
rifle and loads it with a fresh cell. It glows blue once more as the dust channels through it with ease. They all head out towards the path and Ruby takes her scroll out, for luckily, they still have enough signal to figure out where his scroll would be. Since it is on his person, they should be able to figure out which direction they went. She follows the bars and looks down the mountain, realising they are no longer on the path.

“The hell happened?” Oscar questions with confusion shown clear as day in his voice, and Yenna looks at the storm that howls around them right now.

“Yenna? Can you clear up the storm?” Blake asks her curiously, so Yenna holds her hand up to the sky and her eyes ignite a violet flame as she tries to calm the storm down. She stands there and strains…but the snow does not seem to let up one bit. Something that could not be possible, she is the Spring Maiden, this should be easy.

“What’s wrong?” Jaune asks her with concern.

“I don’t know…I cannot manipulate the storm. There is something very strange about it…like it has a mind of its own.” Yenna states, so Ozpin attempts to use some of his magic, to see if it is something to do with the Spring Maiden’s powers not being strong enough. He slams the staff down into the ground and the relic of knowledge glows within as he casts a powerful spell that would usually clear the skies.

But just like Yenna.

Nothing.

“She’s correct, this has nothing to do with her power. Something is controlling this Weather.” Ozpin states, and Oscar looks at Ozpin curiously, remembering the Volcanic Chain Isles.

“Like that Climate Modifier on the Volcanic Chain Isles?” Oscar inquires, but he shakes his head.

“No…this is something else. Like there is some kind of entity controlling this storm for some reason. We should tread carefully, this could be a trap for us all.” Ozpin advises, and yet he jumps down first, holding his cane tight in his hand as he walks forward. Ruby lands beside him with Blake behind her, then the rest of the Four that have been named the four that have some kind of gift. Yenna, the Architect and Jaune look around as they walk, the Architect aims down his sights carefully. His scanners are detecting Grimm in the area, but they cannot see anything as they walk carefully down the sloping face of snow and ice that slides down. Blake listens as carefully as she can, and they cannot hear those strange and mysterious whispers that Qrow and Winter were hearing out there.

But with every step that they take they can tell that something is watching them, the question is what is the entity that has its eyes on them. Ruby watches the area, and they keep moving, the little pulsating light on her scroll that leads them toward Qrow is slowly getting faster and faster, meaning they are getting closer.

Until they all stop when Ruby holds her fist up, because she and Blake both heard the exact same sound. The unmistakable sound of a pair of massive wings flying overhead. They all watch the skies, seeing the huge shadow passing overhead. “Death? Is it Death?” Blake questions as she watches the entity banking round, now headed straight for them at great speed now. A devastating roar erupts from the thick layer of cloud as it erupts through them.

It is a Creature of Grimm with massive black feathered wings that cover its feathered body, using the wings to decelerate and hover above them. It roars monstrously at them, igniting fire inside of its
mouth and blasting it directly at them, they all jump out of the way as the fireball explodes into the ground, leaving a small crater in the ground. The Creature of Grimm has a slender, furry, feline body and large feathered wings, with a four-crested bone mask, and a white snake for a tail.

Ruby’s silver eye widens with disbelief from what she sees before her. “What is that thing?” She questions with fear in her voice, and the Architect aims directly at it.

“That…is a Sphinx.” He reveals, firing his rifle directly at it, it grunts a snarl but then it shrieks to the sky. And like a flock of birds, smaller airborne Grimm swarm from the summits of all these peaks that surround them. Unlike Nevermores they are smaller but larger and heavier than Griffins. One of these creatures flies directly towards Oscar and blasts a fireball at him, but he dashes aside by using his semblance at the perfect moment. The Grimm has the body and head of a lion, wings of a predatory bird and the tail of a scorpion. It also has black fur and feathers, with white bone-like spines on its body, including a white lion skull and a large, crown-like mane of bone. A pair of bull horns also protrudes from the skull.

“Lesser Manticores too!” Oscar calls out, he has experience with these creatures because he had to fight them in the past with Sun and Neptune one time for a contract. However, that was also a Royal Manticore, meaning it was much larger than these ones. But that does not remove the danger that they can possibly bring, for they attack in greater numbers.

“Disperse! Take them out one at a time!” Ozpin commands, slamming his cane into the ground and the green light forms around him, forging his Cog Armour plating around him, the helmet slamming down over his face and the green hue glowing within. Oscar sprints at great speed as he slows down time, with the petals of Ruby fluctuating beside him. He jumps across multiple buried boulders towards a flying Manticore and he stabs Traveller’s Atrocity into its wing. The Manticore roars in pain as he smashes it down into the ground, the snow kicking up around it, but that hardly makes it any weaker against him. The Manticore snarls as it turns to face him, lunging its long scorpion stinger forward towards him, but Oscar throws a Pause Bubble towards the stinger, holding the stinger above its head in a frozen position. The Manticore tries desperately to rip the tail from the bubble but it cannot, so it resorts to blasting a fireball at its target.

Oscar dashes out of the way and he throws another larger bubble that encases the Manticore in shattered shards of chronon particles. He splits Traveller’s Atrocity from its sword form into the Dagger Revolver forms, aiming the bladed barrels at the creature, firing a maximum of sixteen shots from the eight shooters. They all pile up into the Manticore’s Bubble, then suddenly it shatters, blasting all of them into the creature, killing it instantly. It roars in pain as it fades away into a cloud of smoke, and Oscar smiles. Unaware of the Manticore that goes for Oscar from behind, about to tackle him and rip him apart as it dives. Only for Ruby to suddenly dart in from out of nowhere, stabbing Crescent Rose into the neck of the beast, twisting round and firing the sniper rifle, carrying her body on the recoil so then she can behind it.

“You’re welcome!” She cheers before disappearing back into the storm. She lands and spins Crescent Rose round to block the fireball from the other Manticore that was flying towards her. The flames rupture across her weapon but do not harm her, she looks up at the sinister Sphinx that watches from above, roaring as it flies around, then it descends and lands down right before Ozpin. It clearly wishes to challenge the strongest of them all, its long snake headed tail rising above its head and snarling at him. Ozpin spins his Sceptre through his fingers as he thrusts himself towards it.

Ruby gasps, her eyes widening as another one of the Manticores dives down from the clouds towards her, roaring as it exhales another fireball. Ruby rolls out of the way and she loads one of Weiss’ fancy Fire Dust Cartridges, firing one and clipping its wing as it crashes down towards her. The Beast smashes its head against the ground, swiftly beginning to attack her as it slams the stinger
right at where she was stood. She reaches forward with Crescent Rose and fires, slicing its stubby legs off in one attack and bringing it to its knees, before she fires it into the ground to jump up, and severs the tail with the curved blade of her beloved weapon. The Monster roars in pain before she hooks the scythe underneath its neck, firing and beheading it swiftly, killing yet another beast.

Blake throws her grappling hook and it stabs right into its underside, making the Manticore roar in pain as it flies over head. She rides the cable, swinging round the mountain as she fires her pistol at it, then swinging round towards it as it drops in altitude to attack her. She vanishes into a shadow, confusing the Grimm, and suddenly she drives her blade clean through one of the wings, causing it to fall to the ground. She then takes her Katana and slices the tail and causes it to fall and puncture through the top of its skull, killing it instantly with its own stinger.

She backflips off the creature as it crashes into the snow and into a peak, landing in the snow and looking up fast, flicking the snow from her soft and perfect black hair. She gasps when another Manticore fires a fireball towards her, clipping her white overcoat, but it did not do a single bit of damage. She steps back and sees it diving towards her, only for the Architect to walk forward, firing his rifle repeatedly at the beast as it approaches him. He shoots one of the Manticores out of the sky and it plummets down towards the snowy surface. His aim is true, and perfect as it nails each of them that fall towards the ground after every headshot that he nails. Each one disintegrating away into ashes.

But then another comes in from his left, going for one hell of an attack that even he would be hurt by. He aims the rifle and fires, but it does not do enough damage to kill, so he has another idea. He transforms the rifle, the barrel opens up and the long-electrified blade of his sword extends through, he spins it round and he stands his ground as the Manticore flies straight at him.

He pushes the blade forward and stabs it right into the open jaws of the Manticore, cutting deep then he locks his arm upwards at a perfect right angle, cutting through muscle and bone and hide with the blade as he stands on his knee. Eventually the whole beast slices right through the sword, two halves falling to the ground behind him and he rises back up, spinning his sword through his metal fingers with a chuckle. “I’ve always wanted to do that!” He laughs with joy.

Jaune blocks one of the fireballs with his shield as one of them descends and lands right in front of him, swinging its clawed paw right at him. Jaune grunts and he yells, slamming his shield right into the paw to stop it dead in its tracks, before driving Crocea Mors upwards and right through the bottom of its head, killing it instantly as the tip protrudes out the very top of its head, fading away around him. Suddenly a stinger thrusts through the smoke and hits him in the chest, the impact throws him back and he tumbles across the snow, so he stabs his sword into the ground to stop himself from sliding off the edge and into a ravine. He gets back up and looks ahead with widened eyes as the Manticore sprints towards him.

He looks at it, then at the deep crevice in the ground behind him, and an idea sparks in that clever boy’s mind. He stares at it and slams the blade of his sword against his shield to keep it interested. “C’mon ugly!” Jaune yells, keeping its eyes on him as he charges through the thick storm with a vicious roar. He waits for the last second, jumping out of the way and kicking it in the back, sending it falling right down it. The Beast bellows as the ravine’s opening crumbles around it, letting it plummet to its death and he smiles, cracking his neck. “Easy peasy.” He chuckles, seeing Pyrrha stealing the show yet again.

She slides down the icy surface of one of the tall rocky formations, before riding her shield like a surfboard, firing her rifle multiple times at the circling Creatures of Grimm. One of her rounds hits a Manticore right in the eye and it spins out of control as it crashes into one of these formations, causing it to shatter and collapse into the snow. She jumps off her shield and uses her polarity to
throw the circular weapon towards another Beast that goes to attack her, stunning it as it flies towards her. She has learned a few things with her powerful semblance, she holds onto her spear and throws it with the polarity itself, stabbing the spearhead right into its head.

She pulls Akoúo right back to her hand and he performs a stunning backflip to dismount the falling Creature of Grimm that tumbles into the ground, and Pyrrha takes her Xiphos and slashes right across the nose of another Manticore that lands behind her with the ambitious hope it could eat her. But she kicks it with a backflip to make it stagger, before throwing her sword straight through its head, killing it instantly. With her polarity she pulls Milo back and she walks forward with a stern look, which softens into an adorable smile when she waves at Jaune.

Yenna walks towards the many Manticores that fly towards her and her eyes ignite with violet flames, forming her weapons in her hands, using the element of wind to rise up into the air. One of the Manticores slashes its claws at her with savage intent, but she slashes her blade in return, cutting the paw from its arm and then slitting its throat with a fast and hard swing. The Manticore roars in pain as it plummets towards the ground and she throws the other blade into the chest of the other, then summoning a small storm above her that she blasts lightning down from above into the other Manticores that fly overhead, killing the last of them. The Sphinx however survived the lightning strike, staggering from the impact of all that voltage, growling in anger as the burning hot electricity courses across its body.

Ozpin walks towards the creature and he taps his sceptre, leaping towards it and stabbing the Sceptre straight into the chest of the Sphinx. It roars in anger as it thrusts the long snake headed tail down towards him. Ozpin spins through the air, dodging its attack then kicking the snake in the head to make it stun itself. He lands on the spine of the creature and he spins his Sceptre through his fingers as he rams it down into its back, jumping off it and landing down on the ground. He clenches his fists and looks at Yenna, calling to her. “Yenna! Aim for my Sceptre!” He calls to her, and the Spring Maiden nods her head. He looks at Blake and Oscar since they are capable of doing this. “Oscar, Blake! Restrain it! Everyone else be ready!” Ozpin demands as he gets them all involved.

Blake sprints towards the creature with Oscar sprinting through time. He cannot form Pause Bubbles large enough to freeze the entire Sphinx, but he can form some large enough to restrain its legs from moving. The Sphinx snarls in anger, blasting a fireball straight at Blake and Ozpin. Ozpin forms a glyph like those the Schnees use but his is Green and looks more like a magical sign, one he uses to protect Blake from the fire. She throws her Grappling hook and the Architect runs to the other side of it, punching it so then it spins round its torso more and more, before catching it and slamming the blade down into the ice, holding it down. Oscar throws Time bubbles into the Sphinx’s legs, holding it still, whereas Jaune crouches down and lets Pyrrha and Ruby both jump off his shield and blast towards the wings, slicing them with their blades straight from their limbs, creating one powerful screech of pain from the Sphinx.

It is as grounded as it is ever going to be.

Ozpin turns and looks at Yenna, nodding his head. “Now, Yenna!” He calls, and she holds her hands over her head, summoning the elements of lightning and blasting them down into the Sceptre stabbed into its spine. The Sphinx roars in agony as the high voltage burns through its body, burning its body away. The head collapses with a deathly groan and Ruby lands atop one of the boulders with her Scythe resting behind her back, exhaling with relief.

Pyrrha sheathes her weapons and the Architect pulls Gambol Shroud from the ice, gently chucking it back to Blake who catches it. “Good teamwork…seems I taught you well.” He compliments the students with a smile, and they nod their heads.
“Yeah you did.” Blake agrees.

They sigh with relief as they reunite and turn to see Qrow and Winter emerging from the storm, looking weak and cold as they stumble. They must have heard the conflict between them and the Sphinx’s army. “Qrow!” Ruby gasps with relief, sprinting to her Uncle, and Father, wrapping her arms around him. She holds him tight and Winter nods her head to Ozpin.

“Where is Kragen?” Yenna fearfully asks him.

“I think he is this way.” Winter states, and she walks ahead, whilst Qrow rubs his daughter’s shoulder’s gently.

“heard the fighting…what was it?” He asks her.

“You didn’t see it?” Ruby asks.

“No, we just heard it circling and roaring.” Qrow replies.

“It was a Sphinx. Had some Lesser Manticores at its side too.” Ruby explains as she walks alongside him.

“A Sphinx? Gods…those things are tough. I’m impressed, kiddo.” Qrow admits as he rubs her head of hair and she recoils back like she always has.

“C’mon!” She squeaks, showing some of the old Ruby that everyone misses, that playful little ball of sunshine everyone adored.

“Over here!” Yenna calls, they were close by him the whole time, and so was that Sphinx. It is possible it was looking for him so then it could finish him off. Seems like Vir Nominis Umbra did not take Kannix away because he wants Kragen alive because he would have still taken the opportunity to kill him. He just wanted Kannix to suffer. They find Yenna by Kragen, and he has bled quite a lot, gone pale and still unconscious, his body ice cold…

…but alive.

“What the hell were you doing, old man?” Ruby whimpers as she covers her mouth.

“I don’t know but Kannix was there, we were just patrolling when they both came out of nowhere.” Qrow explains, remembering it very well. Still able to picture the look of madness on that man’s face, it is as if as soon as he starts attacking to kill, he becomes a completely different person.

“Come on, help me get him up.” Yenna strains, and the Architect crouches down to help him get back up. Ozpin stands there and casts a spell upon him.

“Superessendam de dea: Salva huic...” Ozpin speaks, in High Arkhoni, and their bracelets also translate the words that he just said.

GODDESS OF SURVIVAL: PROTECT THIS ONE...

“What was that? A spell?” Ruby inquires.

“Old magic from our time, it should stabilize his wound for a few hours so then we can patch him up.” He explains, so they all begin to make the trek back…until the whispers return. And this time they are much louder and clearer than before, all the soft voices are whispering their names for some reason.
At first, Ruby really thought it was in her head, until she saw everyone else hearing them. The whispers get even louder and louder, as if they are everywhere, in the oxygen itself.

But then…

The entire Blizzard pauses, the snow stopping in place around them.

And one voice comes through.

A dark demonic one.

“What...Are…You?” The Demonic Voice questions Ruby, Oscar, Jaune and Pyrrha – for only the four of them can hear this voice.

Suddenly the air explodes before them with thick jet-black smoke erupting from thin air in front of them all, a trillion demonic howling screams erupting from it. The shockwave knocks them all over as long clawed black Grimm-Like hands stretch out from the darkness, clawing towards them all, and faces emerge from the smoke, staring at each of them.

Blake sees Adam. The mask covering his eyes with a black tar leaking down from within, his voice dark and demonic but still his own somehow. His skin pale and with black teeth and black good oozing from his mouth. “You are mine Blake…mine alone…did you really think that bow would protect you? Did you really think you could be happy? I made you a promise, remember?” The dark version of his voice whispers with a snarl in his voice.

Ruby sees Tyrian. Just like Adam, pale skin and black blood oozing from his body in different places. “My little flower…I said we are not finished! Come here!” The voice of her worst nightmare yells, a long hand reaches out and tries to grapple onto her leg.

Qrow sees a dead Summer. “You promised me…you promised you would protect her!” Summer cries out with anger, her eyes ripped out with black blood leaking out from the sockets.

Winter sees a dead Weiss. With her hair torn out in places and skin peeled back, it is her worst nightmare to see her baby sister dead. “You said I was worthy…you said I would survive! Why? How could you lie to me?” She cries out desperately.

Yenna sees a woman with white hair and a scowl on her face staring into her eyes. “Daughter…what a disappointment you really are…”

Pyrrha sees Cinder…but the Cinder that killed her, not who she is now. “Destiny must be decided for us all, little leaf…you have to simply let it take you.” She whispers with a grin on her demonic face.

Jaune sees Skyler Arc, the torn apart version of her. “You are still a failure, you will always be a failure. You could never save me…never!”

Oscar sees Cynthia Nikos for some reason, staring right into his eyes with judgement on her face, the girl he left behind in Arkhonex. “You lied…you said you loved me…you lied to me!”

Even the Architect sees something, the man who created him staring into his eyes with hatred. “Nothing more than a mistake…one I must correct.”

And Ozpin…sees himself.

“Did you really think you could forget who you were? What you’ve done, Wymerus Ozymandias?”
The dark reflection snarls, actually scaring the Professor as he stares at the Dark Reflection of himself, his worst nightmare and memory.

But then the hands stretch out and grab onto the unconscious body of Kragen Nox, trying to drag him into the jaws of this terrifying abomination. “This one…belongs to us…” The voices combined whisper as it tries to consume him. Both Yenna and Ruby gasp as they grab onto him, holding on as tightly as can, forcing him from being pulled in. Ruby stares at the darkness, at the many faces that whisper.

“Leave him alone!” Ruby screams.

“He belongs…to me.” The Collective Voices whisper.

Ruby grits her teeth in anger, the bright light igniting from her eyes, but this time it is not a beam, this time is simply a bright light that shines from her eyes, a gaze directed at the entity. “LEAVE HIM ALONE!” Ruby shrieks with rage, the bright light creates a deafening demonic howl of pain from the entity, the arms burning away and the smoke collapses into itself, retreating from this world fast.

The screams slowly fade away and it releases them…

…leaving one last parting message in Ruby, Oscar, Jaune and Pyrrha’s minds.

“Everything that you love, will be nothing more than dusts scattered in the wind. The Shivering Dominion...is near.”

The voices fade away, and they all lay in the snow with terrified looks on their faces, they all look at Ozpin with fear.

“What…what the hell was that?” Jaune questions, and Ozpin slowly stands up, knowing who it was.

“That…was the Whisperer.”
The Map Room

Ruby

The icy cold winds may have subsided after the revelation of the Whisperer’s existence in these mountains, but that does not mean the temperature has suddenly gone up. It is still biting into their skin, and despite returning back to the Prowler with Kragen in Yenna’s arms, Qrow and Winter are both shivering. “Clear the floor!” Jaune demands as he and Oscar start pushing the supplies out of the way so then they can gently put the cold Kragen Nox on the ground.

“Come on, Kragen wake up. Don’t you give up on me now, you stubborn old man!” Yenna demands as she uses her stabilizing magic on him, but none of that will matter if they do not close that wound of his. Ruby crouches down beside him with Pyrrha, holding his ice-cold hand. He must have gone into shock from the cold as well, just making his situation much more perilous for him.

“Gods…he’s freezing…” Ruby whimpers as she and Pyrrha both press their hands against his wound, Kragen’s thick and cold blood sticking to their palms. His skin has gone pale but somehow the old man is still breathing, refusing to die after all the years he has survived. Ruby is shivering but not from the cold like Qrow and Winter are. She looks at her father by blood and Winter. “Get some blankets, one for Kragen and two for yourselves. Warm yourself up, aura or not the last thing you want is hypothermia.” Ruby demands, and Oscar gets up, running over to the cupboard, because luckily when they were searching this Atlesian Prowler they found some survival materials, one of them are a bunch of blankets. They have been using a few but luckily there are around five others in there, so he gets three.

He throws two of the grey fluffy blankets to Qrow and Winter, and they start to wrap themselves up to stop the hypothermia from setting in, sitting down in the corner as they breathe slowly to calm their heavily beating hearts. He walks over to Kragen and crouches down, he and his girlfriend help wrap him up on the floor, leaving the wound revealed so then they can mend the damage done by Kannix’ cannon. “What happened to him?” Jaune asks Qrow and Winter as he sets Crocea Mors down on the ground beside him, not noticing the faintly shimmering glyphs engraved onto the Isomacium Blade.

“Kannix…I’m not sure how it started but Winter and I came across them fighting…well…he was thrown past us and then Kannix attacked me.” Qrow explains, shuddering from the cold that still lives in his body, remembering when Kannix leapt through the snow at him and slammed his blade directly into Harbinger in its sword form. The look of insanity on his face was utterly terrifying, his hunger for revenge has grown to savage levels, levels that may never be satisfied.

Who knows where his lust for blood will stop if he ends up killing Kragen? Who will die next? Kassius? Velvet? Jaune? Ruby? Pyrrha? Will he even try and go against Vir Nominis Umbra?

Those driven by Revenge always find themselves seeking more blood and death after they kill their target because when doing it for long enough, that hatred becomes all they ever know. Ruby and Pyrrha’s hands are now soaked with Kragen’s blood as they try and stop his bleeding on his ice-cold body. “It’s not stopping…what do we do?” Pyrrha asks them, and Yenna sighs, knowing it to be the only way. She looks back at Cinder, seeing her standing there, igniting the flame to cauterise his wound. The very action of igniting the palm with that intention causes the Fall Maiden to retreat, shuddering when phantom pains of Fury’s Palm burning into her bare chest when Salem almost broke her.
“We need to cauterise his wound…I don’t know if it will save him, but it will stop the bleeding.”

Yenna states, but before she presses it against her beloved’s wound the Architect shouts as he walks into the ship behind them, pulling his poncho from his body and slamming his rifle down on the table that folds out from the side of the wall.

“STOP!” The Architect yells, and they all turn to see him walking towards Yenna.

“Stop? Why? He is bleeding out right now, I need to cauterise it!” Yenna argues, but the Architect looks at her and then at Kragen, crouching down as he looks at the wound.

“There could be internal bleeding, that could kill him anyway.” The Architect states, and his optics shift, plates of metal lifting up and rotating round and revealing that his head is actually a large glass dome surrounded by armour plating, and on the inside of it there is a lot of circuitry. The dome inside is like the shape of a human head that glows blue with no real defining features…a bit like a mannequin. The Armour just makes him look different, then a scanning beam glows through his face and shimmers across the wound where Kragen was shot, highlighting multiple haemorrhaged areas.

Each flashing red, and ones that he can get to. “Give me a second…Yenna you’re right, but you can’t do that until I stabilise his internals. Otherwise it will be for nothing.” The Architect states, and they all step back from the metal guardian who has been by this man’s side for thousands of years.

He crouches down and the old but tended to metal plates on his forearm fold open and a long tube emerges, and he calculates where the best place to enter would be.

The Architect describes his internal damage, and it shows that the cannon blast from Kannix was indeed quite powerful and he is damn lucky it did not hit him square in the chest. “Looks like the cannon partially blew his small intestine open…the shockwave has caused massive bruising and swelling in places. Looks like he cracked a rib too from it. His gall bladder is damaged too…I can fix this.” The Architect states, and they all look at him with confusion.

“Y-You can?” Winter stammers, since those kinds of wounds would require a huge surgery to fix. “Even the best Atlesian Doctors would need the best conditions to fix this.”

“Well…I’m not one of them. And I still have Arkhoni Tech in me…one of those things we used were Nanites.” He describes, showing some of these microscopic augmentations that flow through this syringe also extending from his arm. He takes it and looks at everyone in the room.

“Who here has the steadiest hands?” The Architect asks them, then he looks at someone he knows would be best for this operation, the other Android here. Penny stands there, practically shaking already but she is scared for his safety. “Miss Polendina…Mind helping me here?”

She looks at her shaking hands with confusion. “M-Me?” She stammers, since she seems to be the shakiest of them all.

“Yes…I trust you.” He assures, and his kind words actually do seem to grant her some kind of relief, slowing her shakes down. Ruby smiles, patting her friend on the shoulder as she passes by. He looks at the wounds, and how much blood is filling his body right now.

“Um…what do I need to do?” Penny inquires as she gently pokes her fingers together, looking so small yet sweet as she crouches down beside the less human looking machine – yet his soul is just as human as her own. He gives her the syringe of Nanites, and she holds it in her petite hands, looking at him with worried green eyes.

“I’ll do the messy work, I need to cut him open, luckily Kannix did half the work for me. Just need to open his side so we can get in. There will be a lot of blood coming out, it is already flooding his
insides. I’ll use this tube and that bag over there.” The Architect describes, looking at Jaune and nodding to the empty I.V Bag beside Winter. She looks at it and picks it up, throwing it to Jaune and he catches it, handing it to the mechanical man. He connects it to his tube and looks back to his assistant. “You, my sweet little friend…have the easier job…and cleaner one too. All I need you to do, is get that syringe inside of his body without touching other organs. Ever played that game Operation?”

“No…”

“Well, it’s like that. Touch his other organs and he buzzes…or screams…or dies…I dunno.” The Architect jokes, but poor little Penny just looks mortified by his words, her eyes wide and hand starting to shake again. The Architect looks at her and chuckles, gently squeezing her rocking her shoulder. “I’m just kidding. You’ll be fine, all you need to do is get it inside and inject. The Nanites will do the rest.” The Architect states, and Penny blows out a sigh of relief.

The Architect looks at Kragen and now he takes his blade, carefully puncturing his skin and cutting him open, the areas that are still there and enough to just get inside of him. Blood pours out, a scarily large amount, which means his body is definitely filling with blood right now from where the shockwave ruptured his organs. It is like when someone punctures a bag with fluids in it, so much of it spilling onto the floor. As he opens him, he can see the bleeds, so he feeds the rubber tube into his body and begins the process of suctioning all the blood out of his body with stunning precision, slowly filling the I.V Bag with his blood. Some of the skilled warriors have to look away, not so much for the blood since they have grown accustomed to it – more the fact this is a friend of theirs, and that usually can make the strongest people queasy for their safety.

After a minute of sucking the blood up he shifts the arm and a few thin metal arms emerge from his forearm, like pincers that move into his body and they open him up so then Penny can reach into his body. She pushes her arm through, waiting until the Architect nods his head. He does it, and she is at the epicentre of the wounds, so she pushes her thumb down on it, and the nanites squirt out from the syringe and into his body. They flow through perfectly, attaching their microscopic bodies onto the wounds that the Architect highlighted, using dust inside of their forms to form artificial tissues to help heal the damage done. Pretty quickly the bleeding subsides within him, and he uses that tube to get the rest of it out of his body. His signs very quickly begin to improve, and now all they need to do is cauterise the external bleeding that is stabilised by a field of energy thanks to Yenna.

They get away from him after the Architect uses a beam of energy from his multi-functional arm and closes the wound he made, allowing for Yenna to finish the job. Yenna walks over to him and she deactivated the stabilizer that surrounds his external damage, gently caressing his cheek. “Forgive me, my love…for this will hurt like a bitch.” She warns to the still unconscious man, igniting her hand, Cinder still looking away and plugging her fingers into her ears in case the sound brings back the memories.

She may have progressed in moving on, but she still remembers the pain and the horror of that night when Salem did what she did.

And Fury too, however he is bound by a curse, and Salem commanded it. He was merely the tool for the job, but Salem was the hand.

She blasts the flames into his wound from the cannon, closing the blown open flesh, and the heat causes Kragen to slowly wake up, roaring in agony from the pain. Yenna and Ruby both hold his hands to calm him down, Ruby sitting beside him with a smile. She may not have trusted him after he sent Gray, Vos and Serena to their deaths back at Menagerie…but he is like the Grandfather she never had. “It’s okay, Kragen…it’s okay…we’re fixing you.” Ruby assures as she makes him look
at her. Kragen bites down and luckily Oscar gives him a cloth that he folded up so then he does not accidentally bite off his own tongue from the pain. He screams through his closed mouth as Yenna closes the wound, quickly stopping the bleeding.

“If we had more nanites I could have used it outside…but…I’m only one bot.” He explains with a sigh. Sweat beads out through his skin and he pants, but the pain subsides when Yenna concludes the cauterisation process, lowering her hand and closing her hand into a fist, extinguishing the pain.

“It’s done! It’s done…you’re okay now…” Yenna assures as she looks into his silver eyes, seeing him starting to look younger some more thanks to him being near her. A good thing too, at the age he was when they first met that shot could have killed him. He pants as he holds her hand in his, smiling softly through the tears that formed from that intense pain. He looks down at his side and sees the burns that she inflicted upon him to prevent his condition from worsening any further.

“Tha-Thank you…” Kragen winces in pain, slowly trying to get back up, but she gently pushes him back down to the floor.

“No…get some rest. You need to let your aura heal you up now. Architect and Penny stopped the internal damage, let your body heal.” Yenna requests and he sighs, closing his eyes, then looking over to see Pyrrha holding his staff Ebony Duchess in her hands, assuring him that they did not leave it to freeze out there in the snow.

“Good thing…I found good people in this world.” He chuckles, and Yenna smiles, kissing him lovingly on the lips.

“Yeah…it is.” She agrees, wrapping her arms around him. Ruby releases her mentor's hand and sighs, looking at Oscar with a smile. But as she sits there, her attention turns to the man standing outside of the ship with his cane in his hand, no longer in his armoured form that he summons at will. Ozpin is looking tense as he taps his cane down against the ground over and over again, watching the mountains and listening for any whispers in the air. Ruby gets up and she walks outside to speak with him, past Cinder as she sees everyone packing up the camp equipment as they prepare to leave.

“What’s going on?” Ruby inquires, and Ozpin looks at her.

“This base has been compromised. If Kannix found us…” He stammers, Ruby can hear his fear in his voice, something she has never heard from Ozpin before. The slight shake in his hands right now are not bound to the cold…it is his anxiety.

“No, it isn’t…it was that thing down there, wasn’t it? The Whisperer?” Ruby asks him, she has heard the name countless times now, from the mouth of Umbra at one point and by Ozpin’s very own list of the enemies that they have to face now. Ozpin looks at her and he sighs, nodding his head.

“You always were very observant – yes, it is because of the Whisperer. It lurks in these mountains and we have no hope of destroying it yet.” Ozpin explains, and Ruby nods her head, knowing that her eyes had only caused the Whisperer to retreat. It nearly took and killed Kragen when it exploded from another Universe into their own.

“I…heard it speak before it appeared.” Ruby states, remembering the question it asked her, unaware that Pyrrha, Jaune and Oscar are walking over to her right now whilst everyone tends to the weakened Kragen Nox. Ozpin raises a brow as he turns to her, and that is something she also never expected – to see Ozpin actually look surprised by what she has said.

“Same here.” Jaune agrees.
“Yeah, me too.” Oscar adds as he nods his head, and Ruby raises her brow at them.

“You guys heard it too?” She asks them, and they nod their heads, looking just as scared as her right now. She looks at Ozpin and just by judging by the look on his face, that must mean that he did not hear the voice. “You didn’t?”

“No…all we heard were the whispers in the snow and then it appeared.” Ozpin states, before he walks forward, his curious mind as clear as ever. “What did it say to you?”

Ruby remembers the words so clearly. “What are you?” She recites, not in the same way as that monster said it but it was still the words. Words that have burned into her memory from how chilling it was, gave her the creeps that the cold could never give her in times like these. Ozpin paces back and forth, thinking on this factor.

“Interesting…” He softly says.

“How so?” Pyrrha inquires.

“The fact it only communicated with the four of you, and then tried to trigger your eyes…I think it wanted you to do it, Ruby.” Ozpin explains to her, but that doesn’t make any logical sense.

“Why would it want me to hurt it?” Ruby questions with confusion.

“The Whisperer is smart – far more intelligent than the other Higher Demons are, pretty much as smart as Umbra. It seems logical that it is testing you, trying to figure out what makes you different. Kragen told me about the strength of your power despite having only one eye, I know that does not matter in the grand scheme of things when it comes to how it works…it is linked to your soul. But even still – you possess a lot of power Miss Rose.” Ozpin explains, then he looks at the other three who also are bound by this war that has been started against the Killer of Devils.

“Then…why are we involved?” Pyrrha questions.

“I believe it is for different reasons. Ruby with her eyes, Oscar with his Semblance and Jaune with his family. You Miss Nikos…are still the odd factor. I am not overly sure of why Umbra and the Onyx Phantom were unsuccessful in controlling you.” Ozpin states, and Pyrrha looks down at the floor, shaking her head.

“But they did.” She reminds.

“No, he forced your soul into the trunk. But you fought your way out. Possession is not done that way, they turn you into a puppet by making you become the monster. No coming back from possession, meaning you should have never been broken free.” Ozpin explains, and she looks at him.

“It was Jaune who freed me.” She states.

“No…it was not. It is as I said, love is a tool that he uses against people, he knows how to manipulate people on affection alone. How to break people with affection. Your love for each other was not the deciding factor – I believe it is something else entirely.” Ozpin explains, tapping his cane against the snow, as Nora and Ren walk past with some of the equipment they unloaded, carrying it back to the Prowler.

“And you think the Whisperer is trying to figure that out as well?” Ruby asks him.

“Without a doubt, people would learn how to create antidotes for animal venoms by having to endure the pain of being bitten. It is not insane to think he would not use the same tactic with
learning your secret.” He states, then he sighs, turning to more boxes they have ready, he reaches out and pulls one of them with his magical telekinesis, catching it in his hands. “Come now, we must leave before it returns. We cannot risk the Whisperer getting into our heads like it did to the Father.”

The four of them stop and their eyes widen, turning to face him. “What?”

He stops and sighs, and Cinder nods her head as she agrees to take the box into the ship for him. Jaune steps forward as he glares at Ozpin, from all the stories of the Mysterious Father of the Congregation of Dawn, this has never been touched on before. “What do you mean he turned people against each other?”

“The Father was once a kind man who was also a father of the old Congregation of Dawn. The Pope actually, he ran the Religious side of things. But one day he went mad, it was gradual, but the day came were he took his congregation and…well they were never the same.” Ozpin explains as he holds his hands atop his cane.

“Never the same?” Oscar questions, desperate for answers.

“The Whisperer manipulated him into planting the Salem Stone into his head, inflicting the curse and turning him into another one of the Children of Salem.” He explains, bringing into question of the number of Children of the Salem Curse have existed through the years and why is the one around now still the same person. Who was she and where did her story begin, was she kind?

“And he became a madman?” Jaune presumes.

“Something like that.” He sighs, walking to the edge of the mountain, gazing across the beautiful mountains. He looks over his shoulder to them and speaks softly before he reveals more. “I do not know for certain what Vyrryk did between the time we parted ways after we came here and when I saw him a year later. But I can tell you what happened after they burned the Faunus.” He reveals, since he was there, long before he became the Knight of Vengeance.

Jaune looks at them and they all nod. “Okay…go ahead.”

Blake walks over as well, wanting to know what they did to the monsters that butchered her people. He walks over to the ship so then they can be inside, closing it up and sitting down on a box as he tells his tale.

Ozpin

“The fight broke out pretty much immediately…”

Wymerus remains on his knees, all those years ago, a young a very different man, eye twitching in anger with his fist clenched, teeth gritted. The horrific stench of burning flesh filling the air and the wails of the poor Faunus that were murdered ceased after their bodies gave in from the suffering. The Father stands beside the charred remains of the dead Faunus, ripping one of the burnt antlers from his head and dropping it onto the floor, marking the start of a war. “All those who are deemed unnatural by the gods must be cleansed…rise up my children…find them…and tear them asunder!” The Father roars as he holds his hands up into the air like a Holy Priest.

Wymerus roars with rage, channelling his aura into his body and throwing his arms out, despite being restrained by the power of the Father. The pulse of energy knocks the Servants of the Father
back, and he draws his mace and swings it straight across the face of one of the soldiers. Only for the Servant to shimmer and his eyes widen as the man swings his head forward, clattering it right into Wymerus’ head, knocking him back. The pulse however managed to free Vyrryk, Krekras, Starla and Rylen. They all fall forward, but then stare straight at the Father who glares down at them with that scowl on his face.

Vyrryk grabs his sword on the ground and swings round with fury flowing in his veins, slashing it straight across the throat of another Servant, but just like the other…it does nothing. He just flickers into a translucent apparition, then returns back to his physical one and slashes his knife at Vyrryk. The Ancestor of Jaune Arc rolls backwards and grips his sword with both hands, aiming the blade at his foe. Krekras kicks back and pushes the others away from him and the Knights of Grimm spread out as they watch the Servants of the Father surround him.

They keep flickering between human and ghostly form, something that they have never seen before.

“The Father learned how to destabilise aura as a weapon, thanks to the guidance of the Whisperer. His soldiers, the Servants of the Father, they were constantly trapped between being human and ghosts. Their aura breaking down every single second, making them very difficult to fight.”

“That’s insane…”

“This is what happens when you let the demons in your head win, they can turn you into mindless fanatics.”

The Servants of the Father roar, charging towards their enemies with weapons held in their grasp, swinging the axes straight at their faces. Starla gasps, ducking down and taking one of her sheathed combat knives and stabbing it right into his back, but he turns translucent again. The Servant phases through her slender yet athletic frame and when he emerges on the other side he returns to humanoid form, spinning round and kicking her across the face. Her long ice white hair flicks from the impact and she rolls across the floor, drawing her bow and aiming at him. But he keeps shifting between living and ghostly, making it impossible for her to land a shot, otherwise she could hit one of the poor civilians who have been indoctrinated by these madmen.

With chains wrapped around their robes and smiles carved across their faces, they are truly insane, and were once kind people. But as Ozpin said, all it takes is a monster to get into the head of a leader and those loyal will follow them. Rylen slides under the swing of one of the Servants of the Father, and when he rises back up, he spins his spear through his fingers and stabs forward, jabbing the man in the shoulder and he screams. Blood sprays out and he staggers back, staring at him.

“However…there came a weakness with this ability – in the fact it was not an ability at all. They could not control the flickering between dimensions, which meant that they became predictable.”

“How?”

“You wait until they have phased, once that has happened then you can attack, and they will have to revert back. It became a fight of patience, timing when they were human again.”

Rylen smirks, looking over to Krekras and the Knight of Death nods his head in agreement, understanding what he has learned without needing him to say a word. In the background of all of this the Father is standing there with his hands held out and a smile on his face as the smoke of the innocent dead Faunus flow past his face. “Follow the grace of our god, my children! He shall protect us in our darkest hour! Join us, Vanguards! You are not too far gone from salvation…”

Despite the preaches of The Father they keep fighting against his Servants, clashing blades in the
street whilst all the civilians watch from the side lines, calm with little to no emotion. Krekras slashes his sword against the blade of another, so hard that it snaps the blade belonging to the fighter breaks upon impact. The man staggers back, and he grits his teeth, shifting back into his Astral Form, and Krekras tests the man as he paces around him, grasping the hilt tight as he waits for him to make his move. He also deduces that the Servants of the Father seem to shimmer faintly before they shift, and the same is happening to this man. The Servant lunges towards Krekras, like he is blind, trying to jab his knife into his stomach.

Until Krekras catches his arm and pushes the blade of his sword directly into his heart. The blade erupts through his spine and the Servant of the Father gasps in pain, grabbing onto the large serrated blade that was just rammed right into her heart. Quickly the man dies as the blood pools beneath him, trickling down his leg and onto the floor. Krekras pulls his sword from the corpse of the Servant of the Father, pressing his boot against his torso, spinning round and deflecting the blows from the next Servant that attacks with a flail. The chained mace bounces off his helmet and he staggers as the sparks rupture from Krekras’ head. As he staggers back the Servant swings his flail and wraps it around Krekras’ forearm. Krekras grabs onto the chain with his gauntlet, and starts pulling the Servant towards him, and then he notices him beginning to shift.

Swiftly he pulls the Servant towards him and swings the blade of his sword horizontally, cutting his head from his shoulders in a spray of red. The body crashes into the ground and then fades away from existence, and Krekras rises up, spinning his sword through his fingers. Whereas Rylen ducks down and kicks one of the Servants in the back of the leg, driving his spear straight through the back of his neck, erupting through his jugular. He turns after killing him, making him choke on his own blood, pushing him from the sharp spearhead. Rylen rips the spear from his neck and spins round, clanging his weapon into the hammer of another, but as he slashes upwards with his spear he phases into his Astral Form, just narrowly missing him.

He steps back with a grin on his face, before taking the huge Hammer and slamming it downwards towards his head with a booming roar. Rylen slides back and just dodges the attack as it sends cracks rupturing through the ground. The ground shakes from the impact and Rylen throws his spear straight into his chest, turning on his heel to aim his One-Handed Crossbow and firing a bolt that lands right in the sternum of another unlucky Servant of the Father.

Starla jumps and runs across the wall of one of the buildings that is built here at this once proud village. She spins through the air and draws her bow with three arrows nocked, launching them all. She timed it perfectly, nailing them all in the head, causing them to collapse to the ground with heavy muffled thuds. She lands on the ground and she slides back, hanging the bow over her body as she draws her knives, deflecting the hits from her enemies.

Easy to forget that once the Knights of Grimm did not fight with their signature weapons. Krekras never used Ferrum Arctus, Rylen never used Formido Falcem, he used a Spear and Starla had a bow and pair of knives. Not Arcus Autem Trisitia, a Bow that could be snapped into a pair of tonfas. Starla slides the curved blade of one of her razor-sharp daggers across the kneecap of one of the Servants but as she goes to ram it up his jaw, he turns Ethereal once more, but the other did not. She rises up and stabs him straight through the eye, causing him to shriek in agony as the blood squirts from his face.

The second goes to attack her again when his ethereal form begins to fade, but as soon as he does, she rips the blade out and jumps at him, wrapping her legs around his neck and pulling her bodyweight downwards. She throws his body and he crashes right into the ground, finished off with her blade stabbed into his heart. Blood pours from their wounds as Starla closes her eyes with sadness.
She became a warrior in the hopes to save people, not kill them.

Wymerus bellows with fury, swinging his mace, the one that would later become Mihi Vindicta – the Mace of Vengeance – and he smashes it across the face of one of the Servants of the Father. But only one is killed from the impact, head fractured and blood rupturing from multiple orifices, slamming to the floor. He brings the mace round in the hope to hit another but as soon as he does the man becomes a ghost once more, stopping him from laying a blow. The man walks around him and goes to attack, jumping with hi Pitchfork held above his head to stab into the roof of his foe’s.

Wymerus turns and times it right, catching him by his throat and slamming him down into the fire, causing him to scream in agony and terror as the flames cook him. Wymerus takes the Pitchfork and stabs it through his chest, pinning him to the flames, causing him to suffer in his final moments. Wymerus turns and walks away, showing the viciousness that Ozpin seems to have lost over the years.

“I was young…and when you’re young, and a warrior – you want to kill everything in your path.”

“But not anymore?”

“After hundreds of years of killing as a monster? No…not anymore…I have yet to atone for my sins, and I will do what I must to make things right.”

Vyrryk parries against the attacks of the three Servants of the Father which attack me, slamming their swords against his over and over again, sparks flying from every single impact made against him. He scrapes the blade down that of another, sparks pouring out the other side, then he scrapes it upwards and slices right through his torso and face, spilling guts onto the ground as he chokes. Vyrryk spins round and crosses the blade round, stopping the attack with the axe, backing up when the man turns ghostly and he watches his every move. He begins to flicker at a similar time as the other, so he calms his senses and waits for the perfect moment.

They both sprint towards him to kill the Arc, but he swings with one hard slash and the impact kills the two – beheading them perfectly. Their heavy bodies crash to the floor with blood pouring from their wounds, and the warriors glare at the Father whom stands above them on the stage where those poor Faunus were burned alive. He smiles, slowly clapping his hand to the warriors, as if it was a show that he paid for. “Wonderful display, it appears that his Holiness has graced you with great skill.” The Father states, totally indoctrinated by the Whisperer’s soft words in his ear.

Krekras narrows his eyes as he takes his helmet off and walks towards the Father with his sword in hand. “No…no God made us better – it’s just that we can fight harder and better than a bunch of civilians with spears and pitchforks.” He snarls, pointing the blade of his sword at his foe’s throat. “But you will die today…nobody else needs to die.”

“And nobody needs to – but the animals that humans have been mating with for years must be destroyed.” He states, speaking with a voice that almost sounds sincere. Starla grits her teeth with disgust as she draws her bow and aims it at his face.

“Animals? They’re people!” Starla yells with anger, and the Father smirks sinisterly.

“Are they? Or are they bi-products of evolution?” He asks them, and Starla nearly looses the arrow – but then she actually does by Krekras’ permission. She releases the bowstring and the arrow zooms towards the Father’s chest, but he holds up his hand and the arrow stops right in front of him in mid-air. Their eyes are wide with total disbelief of what they see happening before them.

“What is this?” Rylen questions with his spear in his hand, about to throw it if he must.
“This…is his grace’s will.” The Father responds, clenching his hand into a fist and crushing the arrow into dust that is blown away in the wind. He walks backwards from them, his hands held out. “Follow his grace…and ye shall find salvation.” He preaches, but Rylen has heard enough, gritting his teeth as he throws the spear straight at him. But as soon as it approaches, he vanishes into a blink of dark red light, just as Salem does now.

The spear jams into the wall behind him, wobbling in place and they all look at each other with disbelief.

“What…what just happened?” Vyrryk questions and Wymerus sighs.

“We failed…come on. We need to get back to Arkhonex, warn the Council.” Wymerus states, but as he walks with the Pre-Knights of Grimm, Vyrryk catches up.

“What about the Faunus?” He asks them.

“We do what we can for them…but believe me, Vyrryk – we have a war on our hands.” He states, and he pants as he stands there.

“The Varr Skaal are with my family house right now. If there is an attack…” He stammers, fearing for Claudia’s life.

“Go to them.” Wymerus nods, allowing him this honour. “Help the Faunus and defend them, do what you must. I will go and speak with the council…but first…I must see my family.” He states with a sigh, after that battle…he needs to see his wife.

“So that was what I did, when we returned back home to Arkhonex I went to see my wife.” He tells them.

“What was her name?”

“Raala…she was a Faunus.”

After returning back to Arkhonex on the Dauntless the Knights of Grimm temporarily parted ways to be with their families. Starla with her husband and children, Rylen with his daughter, Krekras with his wife and son and Wymerus with his wife and children. They once had it all, children and family, something they could always love – and now they only have the sins of their past. Sins that were never their choice, just the curse and doing of the real monster that orchestrates all this suffering.

Wymerus opens the door and is met by the small excited children that sprint to him, nearly knocking him over from their embrace, hugging him so tight. Raala stands in the hallway with a giggle, wearing her robes across her body as she smiles, seeing her beloved husband again. She was a Faunus, a Chameleon Faunus like Ilia was, and she was extremely pretty. Long purple hair and stunning violet eyes, and a bright smile as she walks over, positive emotion shown clear through the scales that change to a brighter colour of yellow.

“You’re home! We’ve missed you so much, daddy!” The children joyfully cheer as they kick their legs back and forth atop their father, and Wymerus chuckles as he caresses their hair.

“Hey there you two.” He chuckles, sitting up as the two kids sit on his lap, two sons with the same coloured hair as their mother and Faunus traits like her. It is clear why Wymerus was also so worried about the Congregation of Dawn with their campaign to extinguish the Faunus Blood-Line. “Jax…my goodness, your hair is crazy!” He jokes as he ruffles his hair, making the little boy giggle, then he looks to his other son. “And you, little Robb, what is this?” He asks his youngest, gently accepting the drawing he made.
An adorable sketch of his mother, his father and his brother standing on the house with smiles on their faces. And with the moon in the sky, not yet fractured, meaning the beginning of the end is here but they don’t know it yet. The moon most likely has started to break apart, but it is so small that it cannot be seen from the planet’s surface. “It’s us…I think we’re gonna be really happy!” Little Robb giggles as he bounces on his father’s knee.

Wymerus smiles as he kisses his son on the head. “Go on now, I can smell your mother’s cooking and you don’t want your dinner getting cold, do you?” He asks them as he gets up, patting Jax on the head as he approaches their mother.

“It’s not that good.” Jax whispers and Raala raises her brow with a gasp.

“Cheeky little devil, go eat your dinner.” She states and they both giggle as they run past her. She smiles and rolls her eyes before embracing her husband, kissing him affectionately. “I missed you, honey.” She softly says in his ear, but she knows him so well, able to sense the trepidation in him.

She looks at him, seeing that expression on his face of true dread. “What happened?” She asks him, and he looks at his children, not wanting to say with them right there.

“I wish I could have returned with better news.” Wymerus stammers, terrified that they could find the Congregation here and suffer the same fate. He would die before that happens to them, the very family that he adores with all his heart. Raala has a strong heart, she served in the military once as well but not as a Vanguard like him, but more of a medic. She takes Wymerus by his hand and they walk into another room as they speak.

“Tell me…” She asks him. “Did you find the Congregation of Dawn? Have they agreed to stand down?”

He shakes his head as he answers. “No…they’ve officially declared war…on every Faunus…” He stammers, holding her hands with fear in his hands. The look of fear on her face is apparent, especially for the safety of their children and she bites her lip, looking up into his eyes.

“What happened?” She asks him, since from the fear on his face and how he said they declared war, she knows that means that they saw Faunus be killed in front of them. Wymerus could never lie to her, not only due to the fact he loves her and trusts her, but also because she knows him so well that he sweats when he lies.

“The Father – something has happened to him, he is not the same man he used to be. Something was in his head, physically…a stone…I think it gave him abilities. He captured some Faunus that were living in the village, and…” He stammers as he remembers the horrific agonizing screams of the Faunus that were burned on the stake by the Father.

“What?” She asks him again, wanting him to keep going.

“He burned them on stakes.” He stammers, lowering his head as he paces around and Raala covers her mouth with her hand with anguish for those poor people.

“The Faunus have never faced animosity like this before, sure you get the odd asshole that makes a comment about our traits…but never before have people hunted us down like this.” She stammers.

“I am going to inform the Council. We need to protect every Faunus we can, Vyrryk said he is going to do what he can for the Varr Skaal Family at his fort right now.” He explains to her as he holds his shaking hand.

“Go…” She demands, and he looks at her.
“But…”

“I know, they have been wanting to see you – but this cannot wait, Wymerus.” She states as she holds his hands. She smiles as she kisses him lovingly. “We’ll be here, don’t worry. Tell them what happened, better to get our defences ready while we can.”

Wymerus sighs, nodding his head.

“Okay…” He agrees.

“So that was what I did, I said I would be back soon to my family and I went to go speak with the Council in the Spire. It is the largest building in the city, stood higher than Beacon Tower believe it or not.”

“Really?”

“I don’t know if it is still standing, it survived intense punishment at the end of the war. I guess we will see when we return.”

“Ozpin, what happened when you told them? Did you prepare?”

“We didn’t get the chance.”

And it was no word of a lie, Ozpin’s description of the Spire truly was as stunning as he made it sound. A gigantic tower made of gleaming steel and glass that reflects the setting sun, it is truly an amazing building. Filled with some of the greatest scholars of this generation of Arkhonex, deciding upon the future of the good people of Arkhonex ever single day. The income rates, the laws and so on. Wymerus and Rylen both approach the entrance, seeing the guards standing there and they step forward.

It is clear that they have come by here a lot since they are not as aggressive as normal. “Greetings, may we ask of your business here?” One of the soldiers asks the Vanguard.

“We returned from our mission to find the Congregation of Dawn, we are here to inform the Council of…what happened.” Wymerus tells them, the Guards step back and they activate their radios, still holding their rifles in one hand. It is always odd to picture the Arkhoni People with firearms since they have always seemed like they use medieval weaponry, but in fact they were a combination of both old and futuristic times somehow.

“Captain, Wymerus and Rylen are here to report to the Council. Do they have clearance?” He asks, and he nods his head when he gets the response that Wymerus and Rylen never heard at the time. “You’re clear, go on through Vanguards.” The soldier assures as he and the other stand aside and let them through. The two Vanguards walk inside, and Rylen looks around at the place, chuckling.

“This place always seems so clean.” He comments.

“That’s because it is.” Wymerus responds, causing his friend to roll his eyes at his sarcastic retort to his earlier comment. The two of them approach the elevator and stand inside, activating it so then it sends them up to the very top of the spire. The elevator cubicle shows the whole city as it flies up, the view through the window of Arkhonex truly shows how large that city truly is.

“Never gets old, does it?” Rylen asks him.

“No…it really doesn’t.” Wymerus agrees as they stare at the city, then Rylen looks over at his friend.
“How’s Raala and the kids?” He asks him, and Wymerus looks over to him.

“They’re fine…I’m just scared…after what we saw.” He stammers.

“They’ll be fine, they’ll never get through to Arkhonex.” Rylen promises as he pats his shoulder.

“How about you? How’s your little one?” He asks him curiously and he chuckles.

“She’s still as tenacious as she was when I left her with the babysitter.” Rylen chuckles with a smile, clearly getting that from his side of the bloodline. Wymerus never really commented on what happened to Rylen’s wife, everyone knows she died from sickness after childbirth but because it hit him really hard nobody ever said anything. Nobody wanted to remind him of it, and ever since he has never looked at a woman in a way like he did her ever again.

He’s never even laid with a woman since she died, he may like to tease others but that is just his way. He loved her with all his heart and no woman could ever replace her. They finally reach the very top of the tower and the doors open, revealing the long table where the councillors sit with their plates of dinner resting down on the metal surface. Fat men and women with lots of jewellery – it is very clear that the head politicians must earn the most. Making many wonder where half of the taxes go, definitely not to helping the poor who need it.

The head of the Council stands up – Lord Danik.

“Ah, greetings Wymerus Ozymandias and Rylen Vazquez. How did your mission go? I hope that those lunatics realised they could not stand against the might of Arkh-”

“Shut up and listen.” Wymerus interrupts boldly with his fist clenched, since his family’s life is on the line, he has immense anger towards these pompous pricks. The Council look at him with concern as the silence falls. “We did not succeed – they declared war on Arkhonex…the Faunus specifically. Or anyone else they deem unnatural to their False God.” Wymerus explains with anger in his eyes, hating anyone that would single out people on something as foolish as a lie.

“By the gods, are you mad? What did you do? You had one job!” Danik yells in anger, but Rylen rolls his eyes as he stands there.

“Pull your head out your own arse, Danik. The Father of the Congregation of Dawn? He captured two Faunus and burned them alive in front of us.” Rylen explains, and one of the other Councillors scoff.

“Why didn’t you save them?” She asks.

“Because he restrained us. He only released us when they died, and even then, we couldn’t kill him. He has abilities – a black stone was wedged in his forehead.” Wymerus describes, and that seems to silence the Councillors with shock. Wymerus looks at them and judging by that fear, that means that they know about this.

“You know what it is…don’t you?” Rylen questions as he walks forward, knowing that face well as an actor.

“Yes…we do. It is called the Salem Stone, cursed stones created by the Gods to choose one to become their executioner.” Danik answers, revealing that Wymerus may not be as crazy as he sounds.

“You knew…and never warned us?” Wymerus questions with anger.
“How were we to know he has become a Child of Salem?” Danik questions.

“How? What the hell is all this?” Wymerus questions.

“I never got an answer until I learned it for myself…”

Flames unexpectedly erupts through the side of the building, shattering the glass and the shockwave knocks Wymerus and Rylen onto the ground, sliding across the floor with a grunt. The Councillors however are not as lucky, ever killed by the initial blast or by the shrapnel. Shards of glass shredding their flesh and leaving their bloodied corpses on the ground. Wymerus can only hear the ringing of his own ears as he tries to get, smelling the smoke and hearing distant booms in the distance.

Rylen rolls over with a groan, pressing his hands against the floor and looking back at all the dead Councillors with awe. “What the fuck just happened?” Rylen questions with a cough as smoke begins to fill the room. But Wymerus can’t hear him, all he can see is one distant fiery explosion. And in the Harbour, there are multiple ships out there, battling and firing shells at one another, burning them all to dust.

And one of these Boats is winning over the others, the ship is huge as well – like a Man O’ War – firing cannonballs in all directions at the other ships. But one of the fireballs created from the battle…

…is in the district where his home is.

“No…Raala!!” Wymerus screams, sprinting towards the hole in the building and jumping out of it, and Rylen reaches out for him.

“Wymerus!” He yells.

He dives down, not even needing a parachute because he has his mace. He falls past the building as the battle rages on in the harbour, and as he nears the bottom, he slams his mace right into the concrete wall of one of the buildings. He yells with stress as the mace digs in and he rips it from the wall, sprinting as fast as he can to that nearby district.

“I felt like I was running for hours…but it didn’t take long at all.”

Wymerus turns the corner, wishing for his nightmare not to be true…and as he turns the corner.

Relief fills his heart as he sees his home is untouched. He walks towards it with a smile as he walks towards it.

Until a cannonball willed with explosive dust suddenly whistles towards the house and his eyes widen as he sees his wife looking at him with their children by her side. They had no idea when it hit her…and Wymerus could not even find words. He just wailed with horror as the entire house exploded, throwing chunks into the sky and a mushroom cloud of fire high in the sky. Wymerus lays there on the ground, broken from horror as he sees the burning home…everything he ever loved…

Taken from him…

…and in an instant.

And through the smoke he can now see the sigil of the one that was attacking the ships.

The sigil…

Was the Burning Knight.
Ruby

Ozpin sits there before them all, telling them how he lost his family, and how he his downfall began. They can see the fatigue of pain in his eyes, he has suffered more than any of them could ever imagine. Not only did he lose his entire family in one moment, but he also became the very thing he once swore to destroy. And he played a part in the annihilation of his own Empire’s destruction. “It was Axxzura Vex who killed my family…well…at least back then I thought it was.” He explains with a broken voice.

“What do you mean?” Pyrrha asks.

“For a long time, I wanted to seek my revenge upon Axzura for what happened to my family, because I really believed it was him. For six years I hunted him…six years which finally ended on the Volcanic Chain Isles. Fast Forward a few months later and we all became the Knights of Grimm anyway – and a few years later – Arkhonex was nothing more than a ruin and a tomb for nearly a billion people.” Ozpin explains to them, sighing as he presses his hand against the side of his own head, and they can tell why he always calls himself the Knight of Guilt now.

He has so much guilt in him that it is starting to define who he is.

“Why was he there?” Blake asks him, since of all the people she could understand his pain – Axzura murdered her parents right in front of her.

“He was trying to take down the Congregation of Dawn. I only learned that a few years later, when we became the Knights, he told me. He said that he knew they were coming, and they needed to pay for what they did. He isn’t very different to how I was – except he doesn’t have a target for his rage anymore. When my target was gone, I lost sight…I guess it helped make it easier to break the curse’s hold on me.” Ozpin explains to them all.

They still have so many questions, but they know that he cannot possibly have them all. “Why was he attacking the Congregation of Dawn?” Oscar asks.

“Because they burned the crops of his home and the same for many others. He lived in Ephai, the continent at least. People over there did not want to follow the rules of Arkhonex so they made their own city. Mostly farmland, since Anima has the best soil. The Congregation learned the Faunus were the main trader, so they burned all the crop fields…which caused famine to spread.” Ozpin explains to them all, and he looks right at Blake. “He and his crew never missed a shot, but the Congregation were not good captains like he was. So, despite his attack on their fleet they kept firing, killing the Councillors and four hundred and seventy-six more people…my family included.”

They all fall silent to this information, learning that Axzura Vex was not the monster that the first Visionary Book described him as. A vicious Pirate Captain that decimated Trade Ships and took everything. He never attacked innocents or even military unless he was provoked – he only hunted down those that bore the Shattered Moon Sigil – the Congregation of Dawn. “I sought revenge for so long…on a man who didn’t deserve it. That is what makes hunting for Revenge blindly so dangerous…you can sometimes end up killing more innocents than you do the guilty. Or end up becoming more of a monster than they were.” He states as he looks at his own hand, clenching it into a fist as he closes his eyes.

They all sit there, and Qrow is the one to speak now. “It wasn’t your fault – it was a curse.” Qrow
“Doesn’t forgive my actions, Qrow.” He reminds. “But what I can do to try and atone is to right my wrongs and bring a little good back into this world. All any of us can do isn’t it…not too late to come back?” Ozpin asks them as he looks at Cinder and his words carry deep – still remembering what Reg said to her when he saved her from dying out there in the wilderness.

“I guess you’re right.” They agree, nodding their heads.

“The Whisperer managed to turn a once kind and gentle religious movement into an army of crazed fanatics with his ideas. The longer we remain in these mountains the worse it will get for us. We need to go.” Ozpin repeats, and they nod their heads in agreement. Ruby stands up and looks at Ozpin, choosing to trust him and she looks to Winter.

“Are you fit to fly, Winter?” Ruby inquires, and she nods her head.

“Yeah…may need help though, Architect.” She requests, and he nods his head.

“You got it.” He agrees as he gets up and walks over to the Co-Pilot seat. They all get in their seats and they strap themselves in, Kragen remains on the folded-out bed and has been fastened into that as well, Yenna still beside him in her chair. Ozpin stands there, and he sighs, it is clear that going through his past like that again must have brought back some tragic memories. Ruby looks at him and she sighs as she sits down, and in the corner of her eye she can see Roman standing there in her head.

“Isn’t it funny? He caused all this horror to happen, and there he sits, making himself out as the good guy.” Roman chuckles, but Ruby shakes her head and subconsciously responds to him.

“He’s better then you could’ve ever been.” She states, and Ozpin looks out the back of the ship one last time as the ramp closes. But his eyes do not see all these mountains, he just sees the fields of green…and the smells the burning flesh of those poor Faunus who never deserved the fate they had.

The Prowler rises from the mountains now that the storm has subsided enough, and the afterburners roar, sending them flying away from the godforsaken mountain range.

Leaving the mass grave silent…and alone…

…once more.

Kassius

Unaware of what Ruby’s team, have just learned they continue to stare at the message from Axzura Vex’s Crew that was left behind. Leaving the question in their mind of why this place must be so important to the Knight of Fury. They walk onwards, keeping their weapons held tight. Coco watches their rear with her Chaingun aimed down the halls that just keep stretching on like this. Webs everywhere and the odd scuttle of rats really gives them the sense of how long this place has been left buried. “Do you think they knew the Map Room was here…or was it just by happenchance?” Cardin asks them curiously.

“This is Ozpin we’re talking about. I’m damn certain this was on purpose, so then he could probably look after all the Arkhoni Ruins.” Kassius states as they walk further through it, and they start to
notice it becomes less weathered looking the further they get. The webs start to fade, and the squeaking of rats and mice fades away pretty fast. Something that normally would not make sense.

But before them is a door that has been closed, one that can be moved if someone strong does it. Cardin nods to Kassius and they both push their hands against the collapsed door and they force it out the way with the combined power of muscle and cybernetic strength. The door moves out the way and they force the revolving door back into the wall where it most likely came from. The mechanism must have rusted over the years and it slides out over time, at least they could move it though. The darkness of the underground caverns still remains as chilling as ever, so Velvet and Emerald both get their scrolls out and hold the flashlight up to guide the way with the team.

They keep walking through and Velvet gasps when she sees a skeleton left behind, one that has its arm cut off and skull smashed in. But there is also the same sigil that the Congregation of Dawn had – the Shattered Moon. “Looks like a fight broke out in here.” Kassius deduces as he looks at the scattered corpses in here.

“Never seen that sigil.” Emerald states as she crouches down to the skeleton, and Kassius does not know this yet either.

“Neither do I.”

They keep walking and Emerald shines her light around the area and they are surrounded by statues. Kassius, Coco and Velvet look at each other, hoping to god that they don’t move. “Getting serious flashbacks right now.” Coco shudders, still able to picture the damn Guardian Knights that attacked them, waking up and being almost impossible to kill. Everyone remembers the Volcanic Chain Isles with vivid clarity. So, they keep moving on, but the more they move it seems like the darkness fades…

Then a blue light appears before them, hovering right in front of them and floating off. Stunned by this light they all look at each other with confusion, and it stops, looking back at them and bouncing. “Does it…want us to follow it?” Velvet asks curiously.

“Are we sure that’s a good plan?” Cardin asks.

“No…but I bet this is the best path to the Map Room we have.” Kassius sighs.
Go To The Light

Kassius

The howls of a distant past seem to flow through these catacombs, and the blue light shimmers before their eyes. The beautiful face of Velvet Scarlatina totally transfixed by the stunning array of blues and purples inside of this ball of light. And it is exactly that, there is no drone inside of this thing like they would expect, it is simply light. Floating before them, and gently hovering across the abandoned dark grounds of this old building that has been buried over the thousands of years that have eroded and weathered it away. Kassius watches it, all of them caught in the moment, however they are not foolish enough to simply put their weapons away, but they definitely calm their nerves down a bit.

Emerald watches the little thing move, dancing around like a firefly and she reaches out to it with her hand, and it jolts back from her fingertips. But there is no aggression or fear, it just seems…curious…and intelligent. It gazes back at her red eyes and shimmers slightly, before floating ahead of them towards the bend in the hallway. Coco looks down at the skeleton that rests against the wall, been left here for a very long time. A sword rammed through his stomach, most likely left to bleed out and die. And in his hand is a piece of paper, shredded and aged over time, but somehow still preserved enough. The lack of sunlight did not bleach it luckily, so she can still read the text left behind on the note. She blows the dust and webs from it, batting a spider from its papery copy and onto the floor. She reads his letter aloud. “My dearest Anarietta. ‘Tis been too long since my eyes fell upon your beauty, and now…I fear I never shall see your gaze ever again. And I cannot say that I blame you for leaving me, for I let my weak mind be bent by a madman. I heard what he did to the beautiful fields, my love. And I cannot forgive him or myself for the part I played in helping him rise to power. I do not know if he was always evil or if he was a master of deception…perhaps it doesn’t even matter anymore.”

“I’m afraid, I am going to die down here my love. And I just hope that this letter may find you, wherever you are now. If you have moved on from me and I mistakes then I am truly proud of you for doing so, and if you have not then what I say now is the same to what I would say if you did. I am sorry, I am so, so sorry for what I have done. The world has fallen into chaos, and I played a role in it all by fighting for that monster. Arkhonex and Ephai have both fallen, and the Father destroyed himself in the process.”

“My love however…deep down…I do not think it ever left me for you, and I merely hope that I can offer you some kind of closure my love. Wherever you are, I hope you are safe and happy, and that your children shall carry onto the next life someday. This is my penance, my punishment.”

“And I accept it with all my heart. This is justice, Ana, and it is right. Goodbye my love. Signed, Edward Tarvoss.” Coco concludes, lowering the letter from her gaze and looking at them all. Clearly this man was once a Servant of the Father, and he must have turned against the Congregation of Dawn in the end. They all pay the man respects, and bow their heads to him and pay a moment of silence. It is people like these that make war so difficult, because it can be very easy to forget that the person you might shoot in the head, or drive a blade into the heart of, or blow up with a bomb. Is still a person, who could have a beautiful woman waiting for him with beautiful children.
A family left to mourn the loss of a person that you committed.

Kassius stands there and he sighs, he has always had quite a black and white way of viewing the world, and that is because he has lived quite the cynical life. Sure, growing up around Yang and Ruby did rub off on him, giving him a brighter side, but nearly being eaten alive by a Creature of Grimm would darken a person’s future. He clenches his cybernetic hand into a fist as he stares down at the skeleton of Edward Tarvoss, a man who probably died a few thousand years ago. And due to some of the roots that have wrapped around his bones over the years, he must have been alone down here for quite a long time after he finally died.

Velvet looks down at the floor and wipes a tear from her eye. “It’s people like that…that Servant of the Father? I hate them, it was just like Adam Taurus or like what Salem is. They take good people but with easily manipulated minds and turn them against the world. People who have families and loved ones waiting for them.” Velvet states, her voice cracking as she speaks, feeling such great emotion over the subject. Adam was a complicated man but in the early days that was exactly what he did, the same thing happened with Ilia Amitola and the rest of the White Fang Soldiers. Simple Faunus who wanted a better tomorrow, but their darkest emotions were fed by Adam and the Albain Brothers, meaning they were easily swayed under his rule.

The hearts of men and women are easily swayed.

Kassius turns as Cardin approaches his bones and he picks up a tarp that was left behind in here, pulling it from a pedestal and covering his skeleton with it. He backs up, showing the fallen some kind respect as he bows his head. “He tried to make things right in the end, and he died fighting.” He states, looking around at the place, seeing the many skeletons that were struck down and all of them have the same banner on them as Edward did. Kassius nods his head in agreement, looking at Emerald and Cardin, since they are trying to do the same thing, just as Hazel and Cinder have.

And how Adam tried, and failed…and Ilia did the same, and died too.

This war must end.

“Yes…yes he did.” Kassius says to them with a smile, before turning away from the skeleton of the brave man who stood up to be the man he was once born to be. They all turn and leave the one covered skeleton in the room, the only hero he died in this room, and they follow the ball of light that floats in the doorway. Leaving him there to rest, knowing that his message was at least read, and heeded.

The ball of light floats into a room, not gigantic but it has multiple other rooms scattered about in here, showing the vast sums of information that were left behind and stored in here. And to all their surprise, these stories are somehow still alive, as the light blinks and a bunch of ghostly echoes appear before their very eyes. Men and women walking around and talking, sharing information with each other and at first were speaking a language they could not come close to comprehending. Speaking in Higher Arkhoni, so versatile in pronunciation that there were even those back then in Arkhonex that never spoke it, mostly only spoke in Lower Arkhoni. Less complex as the more advanced counterpart.

However, thanks to either Kassius’ bracelet that the Architect created for him or maybe even this ball of light that is guiding them through the beauties of this dead civilisation, they are speaking in plain common tongue for the New Generation to understand. “Incredible! The work has been completed! The cells are adapting, my love!” The scientist cheers with joy and the woman smiles with happiness, kissing him and wrapping her arms around him. They all look around and see the many experiments that were left behind in here.
“This is ground breaking! This is what we needed! We will be known as heroes!” The woman cheers with happiness, placing the can down on the table, and they look at the specific table, seeing the same one there but nowhere near as full. Emerald approaches the canister and she picks it up carefully, looking at what is inside.

It is some sort of metallic dust, similar to the properties of dust they use now, however it looks like it is made of iron. It is heavier than the Elemental Dust as well, which makes it that much more interesting to her. Compared to what they now call dust, it is black, and they have never uncovered Black Dust before, Purple Dust was new, but the properties are known to have immense destructive capabilities.

What they don’t know is that this is a form of technology, something the couple in their ghostly apparitions are about to say. “She was right! She said that the path to creating the ultimate saviour for our people was under our feet! The Nanites, our own creation inspired by dust, it could save millions of lives.” She stammers with happiness, and she kisses her beloved once more, holding him close, before he picked her up and carried the giggling wife to the door, closing it behind them. In the current date the door never moved, just the ghostly outline of it did.

“Nanites?” Cardin questions, none of them aware that the Architect still has them right now. And if he didn’t, Kragen would be dead right now.

“Well if it’s Arkhoni we’d better take it, maybe Kragen or the others could make some sense of it.” Kassius suggests, and Cardin nods his head in agreement, taking his backpack from his shoulders and setting it down on the table, opening it so then Emerald can fit this canister inside. Who knows how much of this stuff is currently loaded up in the Architect already but having some more would always be a pretty safe bet.

Velvet walks towards a door and she pushes it open, looking around at the place as she sees the bedroom and an old living room inside. It is so interesting to see how different the Arkhoni Style was back then. Instead of having holographic televisions they had something else entirely, a table in the centre of the room that was circular and by the looks of it, it would project a holographic display before them. So, it is clear that the New Generation have taken some inspiration from their elders but nowhere near as extravagant. Velvet gently slides her fingers across the dust that has settled in this room, and she approaches an old and faded photograph that was left behind.

It is the man and the woman, and she can see their faces much more clearly now. The woman had silver hair and blue eyes, and a gorgeous smile – must have been around twenty-six years old – and the man had black hair and red eyes. But despite the colour of his hair and eyes he was no monster like it would suggest, he was a scientist who wanted to make a difference to the world. And in the picture, they had a baby, a beautiful little baby too, matches their sides perfectly. She holds the picture and smiles at it, setting it back down on the table as Kassius walks inside and looks around at the place, seeing this all before him.

He opens the curtains at the other end of the room to see nothing, for it is clear this place must have been buried other the thousands of years it was left behind. How? It is possible that there was a flood of some kind and most of the island was sunk and the silt must have covered over the building. But perhaps there is more to this place, maybe some of it was destroyed to hide the truth of the past by Ozpin’s orders. “They had it all…and they all lost it.” Kassius says with a saddened sigh, knowing that these people must have died here.

Velvet walks over to Kassius and she crosses her arms over her chest. “We don’t know that, they could have survived. Obviously, the entire empire didn’t get extinguished. Otherwise we’d never be here.” She says to him with the shrug of her shoulders, and Kassius exhaled through his nostrils, and
he glances at Velvet, something very curious on his mind right now. Something stuck in his mind, something very specific that Salem said.

“Velvet…” He says, and she raises a brow and looks at him curiously.

“Yeah?” She asks him.

“Back when Salem was talking to us…” He says, and her eyes slowly dart around, and she steps back, swallowing a breath with what appears to be concern.

Oh, gods no…

“She…said something about Cardin. And me…do you remember?” He asks her, and she sighs with what also seems to be relief, panting and holding her chest. She nods her head and flicks her brown hair over her shoulder.

“U-Um…yeah…said something about you two being similar, right?” She asks him, and he nods his head, looking like he still has some concerns on his mind.

“Yeah, and that’s what concerns me. How could he be the same as me? Then she showed us Hyde and his past…how can Cardin know what that’s like?” He asks her, and she stammers as she scratches the back of her brown-haired head, her long bunny ears twitching a couple times as she does it.

“I don’t know, he doesn’t seem the same as I remember.” Velvet comments, for she mostly remembers the nasty and cruel bully that would pick on her because of her ears and her heritage instead of even trying to get to know her. A good enough reason not to trust a man like that, and yet there is conflict in him, not just over what happened with the Headmaster and the Pyromancer but also his team – and yet even then, this all seems very different.

“I don’t know what to think anymore.” He sighs, pushing his hand against the glass and walking away from Velvet, towards the door, until another one of those memories appears before their very eyes. Seeing the couple in bed together, the wife still asleep and the father getting up with a dressing gown on. He approaches the door and walks away from where she sleeps, and clearly that must have been the night that they made love and conceived their baby.

Kassius and Velvet walk outside to see the ghost of the husband approaching the lab and sitting down, pressing his hands to his head as he grumbles to himself. Everyone comes back and sees how he is suffering in some sort of way, until a voice can be heard in the distance. A voice form someone that they cannot see but must be in here somewhere. “You are doing good work, Jax.” The female voice says to him, her voice oddly seductive as she speaks, and he looks around and sighs.

“You are brave, and your work will save millions.” The person says to him, before the ghost fades away before them. Coco looks at where he was sat, and she sits down in the same space, wondering if the voice will come back. But nothing speaks, and she looks around rather curiously.

“What was the voice? I didn’t see another ghost in here.” Emerald asks with confusion, and Coco shrugs her shoulders.
“Dunno…maybe an A.I? They were eggheads, wouldn’t put it past them.” She states with the shrug of her shoulders, getting up and looking around some more. They get up and all start walking. Cardin walks with his hand still gripping his mace despite the lack of Grimm lurking around in here. But that does not mean he is not still on edge, with Salem prowling the skies anything could be in here. From Thralls infected back in Vacuo or Menagerie to Grimm they may have never encountered before now.

But as they keep walking, he can feel the cold gripping feeling of his own guilt whispering into the back of his mind, looking at the faint reflection in one of the old dusty glasses left behind. Seeing the strange shadowy figure staring right back at him, sending shivers down his spine as he keeps walking. All of them seem a bit shook up from what they saw thanks to Salem…Velvet from the Dragon and what she said about her, Coco with her sister and Emerald with Mercury being murdered. All of them have secrets, and they are starting to claw their way back out of their hearts.

Kassius approaches a closed door and he presses his hand against it, only for the hinge to completely snap and cause the whole door to fall from the doorway. They all stand there as the door slams against the ground and Kassius sucks his teeth. “Whoops…” He admits, Velvet laughs softly at that then they keep moving, seeing that the labs are connected to multiple different areas. This was clearly for innovation in Medical Science, so what lies beyond is very different.

And from all the Terminals Scattered in here…

It is clearly some sort of archive. There are locations everywhere across the room, different engraved maps in the walls that show the location of the two major cities of the world at the time. Arkhonex and Ephai, two cities treated very differently. Ephai was built because they did not agree with the methods of the Council – so they pooled their resources and built their own city with their own laws. Unlike Kuroyuri and Mountain Glenn though this expansion actually worked because of the Taming of the Grimm regime they created. The monsters were no longer a threat, and the only danger they faced were by humans unless they lived outside the walls.

Ephai did not have walls though, and most of the time neither did Arkhonex. They were able to build entire civilisations that never required any walls to protect them from the Grimm but had them in place. They would emerge from the ground in a time of siege, whether by the hands of the Grimm or by a rival army that wanted to sack the whole city. Obviously, the attacks would fail, and when the Congregation of Dawn started committing their vile crimes it clearly was a reason good enough to raise the walls.

Kassius walks around, and an old dormant machine unexpectedly activates, folding open and revealing information to them. It is all in Higher Arkhoni though, however it seems to scan the device on his wrist and brings up more text – also in Higher Arkhoni. Kassius looks at the bracelet and he exhales through his nose, lifting the bracelet on his arm and letting it scan the text that has been revealed to him. The database of letters and words inside of that tiny bracelet works away and loads up the words.

**PLEASE LOG YOUR BRACELET INTO THE NETWORK**

Kassius raises a brow and glances at Emerald beside him who is just as confused as him. This technology is so alien to them, which must make the Ghosts of Arkhonex watching them right now feel so annoyed. If they are watching, they must be shaking their heads in annoyance, begging them to just follow the instructions they cannot read. But luckily Emerald figures it out just by the flickering red circle around a plug point, and his bracelet seems to have a cable attached to it that he can extend and connect it to the machine. “Oh wait, what about this thing?” She inquires as she pulls the thin cable from the bracelet and holds it up, Kassius smiles as he holds it.
“Architect, you clever little genius.” Kassius chuckles, in which Emerald slaps his shoulder and raises her brow. “Oh, and you too.” He assures with a wink and she nods her head.

“Gonna say.” She scoffs.

The ancient computer loads up the new data that has not been logged into its servers for thousands of years now. The ancient indecipherable language for the Huntsmen and Huntresses changes into the Common Dialect and they read what it says, for it goes straight to the last data entry that was loaded into the server.

Nexus Note: #12427

It is now been twelve days since they came for us, the Congregation of Dawn. I am a Faunus, and I am trying to save my children and my husband. They are hunting us down one by one, I just watched them burn my sister alive because of her heritage and slaughtered every other Faunus in the town. And I don’t think they are just going for Faunus now, I saw them pillaging and butchering the Sinclair Couple next door. They killed them because of their sexuality as well, and they were human too!

These people are monsters, and they must be stopped. I am going to get my family out of here at any cost, I cannot fathom what they will do to us. Faunus and Homosexual? I dread to think of it, but the Council must hear of these insane fanatics. I saw one of them, he was extremely powerful and managed to stop the Vanguard dead in his tracks without even touching him. He then blew him to pieces in front of everyone...this man, the Father of the Night I believe his acolytes named him. He has something in his head, and I mean that literally, I saw some sort of black stone lodged inside of his skull.

His eyes were blood red two and his scleras were blackened, he looked like a Grimm too. His skin was paling, and his hair was turning a white I have never seen before. Not from age or dying, this was almost deathly. I fear we have a second Bloody Epoch, but this will not be like that war, this will be worse! It is an idea, not a battle between nations for something as trivial as art.

I must save my family from this hell, I beg that the council get their heads together and stop these monsters as fast as possible.

Before it is too late.

- Arthur

Date recorded – 2456

Librarian’s Notes – Arthur and his family never escaped the town, they were caught by the Congregation of Dawn and were murdered. His children had their throats cut in front of him, and he and his husband were flayed alive as an example to the world. But his message will not die in vain, for the Council received it and we will honour him. The Congregation and the Child of Salem will be destroyed once and for all.

They finish reading it and Kassius’ eyes widen with disbelief and Velvet walks over to it, and Emerald swiftly closes the image and walks away from it. “What is it?” Velvet asks them, and Kassius shakes his head as he walks past her and to Coco. Velvet looks at Kassius and then at Emerald.

“You…you don’t wanna know.” Emerald states, her breath shaking.

“I think I do, Emerald.” Velvet states, walking towards her and the terminal.
“Velvet, don’t.” She begs her, but then she brings the file back up and reads the whole thing. Hearing how that poor family were murdered just for being who they are. Kassius looks at Coco and she looks at him.

“The Congregation of Dawn butchered the Faunus… anyone they didn’t deem pure. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans… anything they deemed unclean.” Kassius states with hatred in his voice as he sees the skeleton of a Congregation of Dawn Servant dead on the floor. He grits his teeth in anger as he crushes his head with his boot. “And we showed one respect.” He growls.

“Not all of them are bad, that guy back there clearly wasn’t like them. He showed remorse.” Coco Reminds, and Kassius sighs, nodding his head as he paces around, clenching his fist over and over again.

“It’s just… that kind of judgement… it boils my blood! I had a friend at Haven who was lesbian, and she was beaten for it. She was one of the nicest people I ever knew.” Kassius states, sitting down as he says it, and Coco raises her brow.

“What was her name.” Coco asks him, and Kassius looks up at her, and the answer truly shows how far he has come from where he began from how he says her name.

“Ilia Amitola.” He answers, with a smile as well – no hatred because he knows why she had to sell them out. Because she had no other choice, she was going to die for it.

“What happened to the bully?” Coco asks him curiously, planting her hand on her hip and Kassius chuckles as he gets up from the seat in this room.

“We broke her teeth and her bones. She had to be removed from the school for her injuries and we were nearly kicked out. If it weren’t for Lionheart vouching for us, we would’ve been.” He chuckles, scratching the back of his neck. But Kassius has always stayed true to that stigma of his – he has never let bullies get away with anything. He would shatter every bone in their bodies if he caught them bullying a friend of his. And god forbid it was someone he was in love with, he might even kill them.

“I guess that makes Umbra better than these sick bastards.” Coco chuckles, and Kassius gives her a confused look.

“What do you mean?” He asks her.

Coco looks at him. “He doesn’t discriminate.” She admits, how dark times are becoming if that is some kind of plus side they can give to the False God. He might be working to destroy everything they have ever loved. But he never targeted a specific race, that was all the Congregation of Dawn misinterpreting his orders. Perhaps that is another reason why he made them suffer the fate of becoming the Knights’ Bannermen.

As they walk around the area Cardin approaches another terminal and he opens it up, looking at the information that is inside. And by the looks of things it is clear that the servers are somehow still active, and all of them have been translated thanks to the Architect’s Bracelet that Kassius is wearing right now. Cardin reads the information that appears for him, and these ones are very different that last one. This is no message archived, this is a list of dates.

- 2456 – The Moon first lost a chunk
- 2456 – The Congregation of Dawn begin their genocidal campaign against the Faunus and diversity across Remnant
- 2456 – The Congregation of Dawn murder the council in an attack against Arkhonex that
killed approximately five thousand people

- 2457 – The War of Kings and Fathers begins
- 2457 – Grimm activity across the planet begins to peak to more aggressive levels
- 2458 – Vyrryk Arc defends the Varr Skaal family
- 2459 – Vanguards capture a Soothsayer and question him, all winding up dead from suicide from his answers
- 2460 – The Father of the Night decimates the Grasslands of Anima with the Relic of Creation, burying it as he formed the Mountains, holding it and dying in the process, killing millions and causing cataclysmic damage across the world
- 2461 – The Congregation of Dawn begin to crumble after losing their master, turning on each other from a loss of faith
- 2462 – The War of Kings and Fathers finally comes to an end
- 2462 – The Vanguards are sent to apprehend Axzura Vex after last being seen near the Volcanic Chain Isles

What Cardin doesn’t know is that they know who those Vanguards are, they are the Knights of Grimm, and on those islands, it is where everything went wrong. However, it is clear that Axzura must have come here for the same reason as them, perhaps he wanted to track down the Congregation like the others and they were already here. This is a Map Room after all, perhaps the Congregation came here in the hopes of finding all Faunus Strongholds.

And there are bodies here, and one of them brings sadness to Cardin when he crouches down, seeing two bodies in lab clothing holding each other with blood on their clothes that has stained. Their bones left behind after this place fell, meaning the Arkhoni left this place behind after it fell. And the Scientists are clearly that loving couple they saw those memories of. Cardin sighs, closing his eyes and he pays the same respects he did to Edward, finding a blanket and covering their bodies. He wraps them up and carries them away from this room, back to the labs. They all look at him as he takes their bodies, seeing him placing them down to the bedroom and tucking them in.

At least here, it at least helps them rest easier, in each other’s arms. Coco stands in the doorway, seeing Cardin doing these things and as he bows his head. “What are you doing, Cardin?” She asks him, and he turns his head, looking at her. The look in his eyes just looks so withered, and the orange beard he has grown shows he has really let himself go. He looks back at their bodies.

“I left too many bodies where they fell…Headmaster Theodore, the Pyromancer…Russel, Dove and Sky. I’ve made too many mistakes, if I can help some people rest then I will.” He states, walking past Coco, basically shoving past her and she sighs, biting her lip to stop herself from cursing. But it is not even her restraint that stops her, it is more that she is starting to feel concerned for Cardin.

It is true…something has changed in Cardin, but whether it is good for his health or not is to be seen.

He returns with Coco back to the others to see if they have found anything else interesting in here, and obviously this was quite interesting. Because this was stored here by the Librarians, like that Library they found in Vacuo a few years back with Kragen. Back when they were still searching for Ruby after she was captured by Salem. Velvet touches the screen of one of the terminals and gasps when an actual audio recording begins to blare out, causing her to scream in shock, Kassius catches her and she sighs in relief, seeing it to be nothing but a message from the past.

A recording of a man trying to call his wife. And he sounds extremely distress. “Vienna! My love please answer me! By the Gods, where are you! The Grimm, something is happening to them! Honey please!” He cries out to her, and Kassius reads the text that was noted down to explain where this is. The man is trying to call to his beloved wife in Arkhonex, since he left the city for a while on business.
And then the Grimm turned.

Finally, they hear the other side…and it horrifies them as much as it horrified him. All he can hear is her shrieks of agony and the sound of flesh being torn, bones snapped and horrific roars echoing down the mic. “N-n-no…NO! Vienna! VIENNA!” He wails, and then he stops, hearing something behind him.

“The Grimm…they’re attacking people…they’re breaking in! AAAAAHHH!” His screeches of agony as the Grimm begin to pull him away from his phone and eat him alive, disembowelling and shredding the skin from his body causes Cardin to smash the terminal with his mace, sparing them that sound of howling screams. Because it is not just his and her screams, they could hear, but the echoes of entire cities being eaten alive by monsters.

Silence fills the room after he smashed the terminal.

Normally one would be furious with a person breaking thousands of years of history, but that? Nobody should have to hear that horror. “I…” Velvet stammers, feeling sick to just imagine what the pain would have been like, the terror of seeing the things you thought you could trust turn on you like that. But that was clearly Arkhonex’s number one weakness – they became too arrogant with their power.

“Let…let’s leave this room. I don’t think I want to know what else they have in here.” Velvet requests.

“I’m with you on that.” Coco agrees, walking with her and Kassius stands there, staring at all of this information. Emerald stands beside him and looks at him, seeing that look of concern in his eyes.

“What’s wrong?” She asks him.

“They knew about it all…you saw the dates these were archived, they knew the Grimm were changing.” Kassius states, and she looks at him with confusion.

“Yes…what of it?” She asks.

“That means they could have stopped it years before it happened. But they didn’t.” He states, walking past Emerald and she stands there alone in the room of ancient knowledge and she sighs. Because he is right, these people kept this information behind bars…because of one thing…their own pride. And because of that, innocents like those poor scientists who were so in love…died because they were not warned about the Congregation of Dawn.

Maybe all that death…

…maybe it could have been avoided.

Kassius walks with them and there is another door, one that both he and Cardin need to force open to gain entry to. And inside is the largest and most stunning room of them all.

The Map Room.

The place they came here for, and it is gigantic. With a huge dome like ceiling that has a stunning gold and silver map of Remnant engraved upon it. And every single one has been marked with locations – Arkhonex, Ephai, Anima, Sanus, Menagerie and so many other locations. Just standing here they can feel the knowledge and beauty this Civilisation once had before it all came crashing down. And in the centre of this stunning room is that beautiful ball of blue and purple light with shimmers of gold inside as well. But more curiously, is the fact that there are ten Visionary Books in
here.

Yes…

…Ten.

But they are all different, they do not require a certain bloodline to gain access. And they all have the same energy that glows the same light as that ball of light that floats in the centre of it all. “What the hell?” Kassius questions, looking around. “We’ve never found this many Visionary Books before.”

“Those are Visionary Books?” Cardin asks him.

“Yeah, we’ve found a few but never this many. Hell, we’ve never seen more than one in a single room. And we’ve never seen them connected to a single thing before. And here’s this light again.” Kassius says as he walks towards it, touching it and feeling nothing inside of it. No heat or cold air, just light floating in the middle of the room. Emerald approaches one of the books and extends her arm to place her hand on the page that just opened for her.

“We don’t need ten people to access it, right?” She asks, and Kassius approaches one as well, so does Velvet, Coco and Cardin.

“I hope not. Maybe it is just a maximum of ten people at once.” Kassius says, and he looks at the indecipherable words. Even his Bracelet cannot translate the words on this one, they are so complex that even the Arkhoni may not know it. “Here goes nothing…everyone ready?” He asks them, and they nod.

“Okay…here we go.” He says, pressing his palm to the page and they all follow.

Suddenly the energy courses through them and enters their minds so sharply it nearly causes them to collapse to the floor.

But the magic keeps them stood and frozen in time.

Granting them entry to The Expanse…

The Expanse…

At first, they thought they were killed by the magic, for all they saw was white and nothing around them. They all look around in confusion, because this is not what they expected. Unlike most Visionary Books there is no sign of a memory, just a white page, like nothing has been encoded into the book whatsoever. But as Kassius looks around, that blue light has returned, and they see it forming into a shape before them. So bright that Kassius has to shield his eyes before asking the obvious question.

“Who are you?” Kassius questions and it speaks to them with the same voice they heard speak to the memory of that scientist after he and his wife had their baby.

“I am what remains of the Lesser Goddess of Knowledge and Guidance…once known as Jinn.” She reveals, revealing her true form to them now.

Jinn's appearance is that of a voluptuous blue woman much larger than a normal Human. She has
elongated pointed ears and long, flowing dark blue hair. Her eyes are dark blue in the sclerae and pupils and a lighter blue in the irises. She appears nude-like aside from various gold accessories, most of which have a slavery theme: a chain headdress, big hooped earrings, the right ear also having an extra earring, a choker, bracelets with chains dangling from them along with a single bracelet on her left forearm, anklets and a belt of chains around her waist that ends in a big ring with three prongs. Trailing below her waist is a veil of a wisp-like smoke resembling the skirt of a dress.

She descends down towards them, her hands held together and with a gentle smile on her face which matches her personality. “My soul was fractured when I died by our common foe, and a fragment of me has been waiting her, unable to leave. I assisted the Arkhon on their path to greatness, however…Vir Nominis Umbra cut it short, and Professor Ozpin hid me from the world to prevent your people from suffering the same fate.” Jinn reveals, explaining part of the reason why Vir Nominis Umbra destroyed the Arkhon Empire when he did, he stopped them from advancing to the same level he is at now.

“My memories have been somewhat retained to guide our children to greatness, and I am able to answer any questions you have…although sadly…my time here is soon going to run out.” She explains as she links her hands together. Everyone stares up at the Lesser Goddess who has revealed herself to them, leaving them all in total disbelief…they have met a real god…or at least what remains of one.

She speaks again, every word and syllable pronounced clearly as they would imagine such a powerful and timeless entity to be capable of doing. “The Shivering Dominion is upon this Universe, and Vir Nominis Umbra will soon be coming for the Relics. You cannot allow him to.” She warns, and Cardin looks at her with confusion.

“Shivering Dominion?” Cardin asks her, and she holds out her hand, blue smoke forming and blowing around them, painting a picture that moves. The vision shows their entire world being covered with snow in the longest and coldest ice age that there will ever be.

“The harshest winter in Remnant’s history will soon be upon the world in exactly two weeks and three days, your moon will shatter completely, and the end will be upon you. There will be no war…only slaughter.” Jinn warns as she floats before them, all of them looking at houses being buried by snow that never ceases to fall. “This is what happened to so many universes that came before this one…and none have ever given him any difficulty in achieving his goal…until you.” She reveals and Kassius turns from the Shivering Dominion and stares at her.

“What?” He asks her.

And then the world begins to change once again, the snow being swept away by the blue smoke that forms, and what was snow becomes flames and war. Ships and helicopters, clashing and blasting each other apart other deserts and cities. Causing nothing but suffering and pain everywhere. “The Brothers of Light and Darkness were the first entities to ever exist in the Expanse of Reality. They created life but due to their dispute, Darkness destroyed everything his brother had built. Bringing war, fire and blood to everything. They battled, and every fight would end the same way. Both of them lying down in the ashes of the world his brother tried to create. But before they created Humanity, both sides created entities of their own.” Jinn explains, showing them to the warriors, and they stare with disbelief of what they witness with their very own eyes.

Watching as the Brother of Darkness rose from the shadows, made from purple shadows and with curved horns rising from his forehead and a dark voice emanating from his form. Whereas his older brother was gold with antlers and spoke with a calmer and wiser voice. “But at the end of the day, no matter how many Lesser Gods and Goddesses were formed it never solved their problem. All it
created was more war, I was formed to remember and learn everything there was to know by the
Brother of Darkness. Whereas the God of War – Ares – brought annihilation everywhere he walked.
There were hundreds of Lesser Gods and Goddesses like me, from passion and lust, to hate and love,
to happiness and sadness. The Brothers were practically children, trying to one-up each other.” Jinn
explains to them.

“But no matter what…it always ends the same way.” She states, showing the two brothers in the
ashes of their universe, staring at one another. “This was when they agreed to work together, like
Brothers should do. And created the first humans – a man and woman. And from then on your
species grew to magnificent heights.” Jinn continues to explain to them, and the surroundings
transform yet again, showing the gods standing in their old universe they started in, rebuilt and the
first new Universe created for Humanity to exist in whilst they manipulate the rules.

“We ruled, we guided, we whored, we killed and pillaged our own creations. I only wished for
guidance, but my cousin – Lust – had other ideas. She would tempt specifically married men and
sleep with them, maybe even their wives as well just to see what would happen. War would cause
chaos and Peace would beg him to stop.” She explains as she shows them the many images. Lust
having sex with every man and woman she could find, War cutting down thousands of people and
Peace trying to stop him.

“And the Gods? Where were they? The Brothers of Light and Darkness watched over their creations
and let them continue, creating more universes. It became clear that they were never interested in the
fate of their children, only to see what would happen. Creation knew that to have life there must be
death, and Darkness knew the same but the other way around.” Jinn explains, and then the visions
fade away and return back to the sight of Jinn before them. Kassius stands there, all of them stand
there, barely able to stand in fact, from all the knowledge they have been receiving.

“But…what has that to do with us? And Vir Nominis Umbra?” Kassius asks her, and Jinn chuckles
softly.

“Well, his creation is still unbeknownst to me. I believe my creators never wanted me to know, but
even still…he was of great interest to me. He was so alone, never sat with us, always stayed alone.
Always looked so sad, so I would come to him and see if he was okay. Lust attempted her way, but
trying to sleep with him. She returned half dead after trying.” Jinn chuckles, showing the sight of
Lust covered in blood and bruises.

“You sound like you care for him.” Coco comments as she stares at her.

“I do.” She admits, and they all stare at her in disbelief.

“He wipes out entire universes with a smile.” Velvet argues.

“Incorrect – he does not enjoy it one bit. He enjoys the challenges beforehand, but when it comes to
ending a universe he never smiles. I remember it well.” She states, looking into their eyes.

“What do you mean by that, Jinn?” Cardin asks her, catching onto the last thing she said there.

“I am not certain of what happened, but there came a time where Vir Nominis Umbra returned to our
feast…and he was…broken. Almost deranged with rage and anger, and he attacked us. I watched
him slaughter them all, killing Lust, War, Peace…he destroyed them all. But he also bound them to
another universe, one that would inflict immense agony upon them until they faded away into
nothing.” She explains.

“The Charred Forest.” Kassius says, knowing of it by the stories by Jaune, Pyrrha, Ruby and Yang.
“Correct…however…I feel I should be grateful. For he ended me swiftly, made sure I never felt a thing. I guess perhaps I was a friend in some way to him. I do not know what happened…but I blame our creators. They did something to him, because furious does not describe his rage.” Jinn explains to them all and they are all left speechless to this information.

They cannot even find the words and they do not even have full answers…but they know that Vir Nominis Umbra must have some kind of motive behind his actions. Jinn looks at Velvet and a smile appears on her face. “And it seems miracles without our guidance can indeed happen…” She says, and the Faunus girl’s eyes widen with fear.

“What?” She asks with concern.

“I am afraid that…when the Gods and our domain was destroyed it fractured the tethers, we had to all the other Universes, meaning evolution was free to run its course. It seems the seeds for Homo Sapient and Fauna combined…and created…the Faunus.” She reveals to them, and their eyes widen to how casually she just said that. Velvet can’t find the words, falling to her knees, feeling like maybe Cardin’s words were true. That she is some kind of freak accident that was never meant to exist.

But then…

Jinn speaks once more. “What a beautiful accident.” She softly says with a smile, and Velvet lifts her head slowly with tears in her eyes. “I could not imagine my creators forging something as stunning as you, my dear.” She kindly says, caressing her cheek with her ghostly hand. “Nothing short of a miracle.” She kindly says to her, and Velvet is left with so many emotions. Not only realising the Faunus were never meant to exist…but they are an accident. But one that a Goddess is proud of happening.

Cardin looks at her and he closes his eyes with guilt for how he treated her even more now. “Jinn.” Kassius says, and the Goddess raises her brow as she looks down at him. “Can we destroy Vir Nominis Umbra?”

She leans forward and crosses her arms over her breasts. “Not by your hand.” She states, and they all stare right back at the Ghostly Goddess.

But Kassius is no fool, he caught onto those words. “By ours? So, it’s possible?” Kassius asks her and she smiles.

“If gods can be killed…then so can a False God.” She states, and they stand there with some hope of saving their universe. “So long as you are willing to make the sacrifice.” She states, and they all look at her with concern.

“What do you mean by that?” Emerald asks her, but then she taps her nose.

“Spoilers.” She whispers with a smile and they are left with pounding hearts. Kassius looks up at her.

“We need to get to Arkhonex…we came here to find the best way in without being destroyed by the Grimm.” He states, and she nods her head.

“There are two ways in, child. The ways will be found above your head when you return.” She tells them as she keeps her arms crossed and pokes her lip flirtatiously.

“If it helps us stop him…then we need to take it.” He says to her.

“Then I wish you good luck, Huntsmen, Huntresses.” Jinn tells them, and as they turn away from
her, she says one more thing. “And by the way, Mr Locke.”

He looks at her and she walks towards him in a more human form, with dark skin and brown eyes, the chains clinking against her naked body as she caresses his cheek. “I warn you…to never call him a God. Or you will face the same fate as the Congregation of Dawn.” She tells him, and he looks at her with confusion.

“What do you mean?” Kassius asks her.

“He traps those who call him the name of his worst enemy…into metal armour and eternal pain.” She warns, and he pieces them together. “The Knights’ Bannermen…they’re the Congregation of Dawn?” He asks her, and she nods her head.

“They can be destroyed…but never killed. All who name him a god, face the same fate.” She warns, before kissing him on the cheek, turning and walking away from him, fading away into that ball of light.

Their surroundings collapse around them, and then they are thrown from the realm.

Kassius

The pulse from the books knocks them to the ground, and the shock they all feel cannot be described right now. They are totally dismayed from what they have just learned from Jinn, learning about Vir Nominis Umbra and the Gods…but they still feel in the dark on most of it. They do not know his weakness and definitely are not clear on his motives. However, they do most certainly know what the Knights’ Bannermen are what they once were.

What a grisly fate.

Kassius turns his head to them all, seeing Velvet still comprehending the truth behind her race being a beautiful accident. But as they all look around, Kassius looks in the centre of the room, watching that small ball of light – Jinn – floating up towards the massive golden and silvery map above their heads. As soon as the light enters it, two locations glow on the map and Kassius rolls onto his back as he stares at them.

Knowing where they are.

One is at a cove in northern Vale and the other is at northern anima, also by the sea. “Wait a second…that’s Queen’s Cove.” Kassius says as he stands up, and the exhausted friends of his look at him with confusion, stunned at how he is acting. “And…that, that’s Argus!” He calls out. He presses his hands against his head with shock at this, because it makes sense. Those two locations were known for having some old structures there.

“That’s it! That’s our way in!” He cheers, until suddenly a massive explosion from above unexpectedly sends cracks shivering through the tunnels, hearing the roar of the Dragon overhead.

They all look at each other and their eyes widen further.

“Oh…you’ve gotta be fucking shitting me!” Kassius exclaims with disbelief, another explosion hitting from above.
“We need to move! Now!”
A Father's Fury

Kassius

Kassius stares at the ceiling as the cracks spread across the gold and silver map, dropping stone down into the ground. A huge boulder breaks from the ceiling and plummets down, crashing straight through the layer and causing it to cave in. Fissures spread across the beautiful Map Room, causing to floor beneath them to peel and collapse into itself. Kassius jumps and gets to the stronger section of the floor and the others run. Emerald runs and jumps, Kassius catches her hand and she yells with shock as she dangles over the crater where the floor was once built. “Hold on! I’ve got ya!” Kassius assures, pulling her back up with his cybernetic arm and she holds onto him.

The Visionary Books tumble from their pedestals, the beams of blue light that once connected them together cease, all meeting in the centre and creating a powerful pulse of magical energy, one that accelerates the collapse even further. “No time to lose! Run!” Kassius yells, sprinting with everyone towards the doorway that they entered this room through. Velvet is the last one through after Coco and she looks back as the roof completely collapses, sending giant boulders crashing down in thunderous bangs that bury it all, and the cracking spreads like a disease, into the rooms they run through.

The quakes of the thousands of tonnes of stone crumbling and collapsing above their heads sends them all into escaping. The five of them sprint as fast as they can, not even drawing their weapons, running through the labs and the buried data. The ceiling cracks and crumbled over their heads, hearing the explosions erupting overhead where Salem’s King Wyvern bellows fire down from the sky, annihilating everything in its path. But for now, they cannot see the fire, only hear it through the rock and soil that protects them from it.

But that does not mean they are safe, because this seismic pressure is severely damaging the cavern that the Map Room has become. The fissures split through the labs that they sprint through, seeing the ancient texts that were left behind falling into an abyss of darkness. Kassius stumbles as he runs, but Cardin catches him as the ground tears itself apart. “I’ve got you!” Cardin calls out, pulling him from the fall that would have claimed his life.

“Thanks! I owe you one.” Kassius chuckles as he sprints alongside Cardin, and the much larger man glances at him with a smirk.

“We’d better start keeping count.” Cardin scoffs, and Kassius laughs as he runs alongside them. But the faster they run they all see the doorway collapse before their very eyes, huge tonnes of rock plummeting down from the ceiling and blocking their exit. But luckily not for very long as Cardin takes his mace and engages his semblance, his skin burning as he ignites the Wickerman’s Rage within him. The red dust crystal inside of the huge mace charges up and he swings it straight into the side of the rock with all his might as he bellows, the impact creating an all-powerful explosive shockwave. The rock shatters like glass, and their exit is open again. Kassius looks up and he stops, catching another falling rock, using his back to hold it up and the power of his metal arm. Velvet and Coco stop for a second, but he strains as he stands there, using all the strength he has in his body.

“Go…now!” Kassius yells, his eyes glowing orange from Hyde giving him some more strength as well to hold it high enough for people to get through. He lets out a powerful howl, for just as the two women pass by, he launches the boulder across the room, crushing some of the tables. The impact of the rock on the ground creates a deep chasm that opens up in the ground, splitting and sending
chunks of rock falling down into the depths of the planet. Kassius exhaled with relief, turning and running ahead with his fists clenched, catching up with the others ahead of him.

As he runs, Coco looks back at Kassius. “The hell is happening?” Coco exclaims as another explosion from above sends a thunderous tremor echoing through the stone. Like a war raging above, it really does make them wonder if it is just Salem. But considering she is the only other person up there, then it is a pretty good guess that her King Wyvern is unleashing the full force of its power upon the island to try and create a collapse inside the Map Room.

“My money’s on Salem and that damned Dragon of hers!” Kassius tells her, having to yell over the endless rumbling of stone cracking and falling around them. The ceiling of stone fractures and falls right past their heads, crashing down into the ground. His hypothesis gets stronger and stronger the higher up they get, as smoke slowly begins to flood into the caverns and the smell of flames can be detected through their senses. The temperature slowly begins to increase, and then they all run towards the light at the end of the tunnel.

It feels like they ran for so long to get there, but when they finally get out, the entire island has been set aflame by the King Wyvern that circles around them right now. Kassius watches it with gritted teeth, black smoke from burning flames flowing past their faces and he clenches his fist before drawing Lash Equinox, flicking them upwards and the blades fold upwards. The magazines load into the barrels of Vulcan Nox and everyone gets ready for a second fight in the flames. They all stare at the battlefield as the King Wyvern banks round and stops right before them with a snarling roar, fire crackling around its jaws.

Salem rises up as she stares down at them, her eyes glowing bright red, her armour glowing with purple energy flowing through the Bone Armour that she wears. “See you’ve done some decorating while we were down there.” Kassius comments and she chuckles at his comedy.

“You have always displayed an admirable sense of humour, Kassius Locke.” Salem states as she crosses her arms as she stands upon the Wyvern that slowly descends towards the ground. He watches her and slowly walks towards her, ready for her to pull something, looking at the chains that are wrapped around her forearms and blades attached to them as well. Kassius stands at the base of the destroyed tower, and the rest of his team stand behind him.

“Was that a compliment, from the Dark Queen? Heh…I guess I should be honoured.” He jokes, playfully bowing to the Dark Queen.

“Did you enjoy learning about our past down there?” Salem asks them curiously as she walks across the ash covered home that once belonged to Kassius. Salem stares right into his amber eyes, seeing the shimmer within the irises from his stare being so stern.

“Yeah…was interesting alright.” Kassius admits, and Salem looks at Velvet, able to see her shock still apparent in her brown eyes.

“Not…all of you…it seems.” She states, most likely already aware of the truth behind the evolution of the Faunus. The fact that they are nothing more a mutation of evolution and the gene-codes that the Gods created happened to mix without their guidance overseeing the creations they made. Velvet’s long bunny ears droop downwards as she stands there, her eyes closing sadly as she looks away from Salem. But at the same time, it is her fear of the King Wyvern that stands on the ground, snarling as it paces back and forth slowly. “This is the last time I will give you this chance – you are all out of your depth. Turn back, and do not continue on this path. For it will kill every single one of you.” Salem orders.

Kassius stands there, looking around and he scoffs. “We’re all gonna die one day, Salem. We just
hope that we can have the chance to grow old, instead of letting a bald asshole decide our fates for us.” Kassius states, and probably being one of the only people in the universe to ever refer to Vir Nominis Umbra as…a bald asshole.

Salem sighs with disappointment. “What a shame, to waste such good life.” She states, turning and walking back to her Dragon, and then she holds her hand above her head…and snaps her fingers. Suddenly black smoke forms around them and roars echo from the Charred Forest as the portals open up before their very eyes. They all look around, seeing the Creatures of Grimm emerging from the portals of different varieties. And one of these creatures is not like the others, because it is rarer. This thing is like a six-metre-long centipede covered with huge armour plating and razor-sharp pincers. It hisses as it crawls out from the portal, rearing up and snarling at them with venom dripping from the sharp pincers. The creature is known as an Arthropleura. The creature snarls, before landing back down on all one hundred small razor-sharp legs, charging towards them with the rest of the army. Salem stands atop her Wyvern and grasps the horn of the saddle on the neck of the beast, smirking as her King Wyvern rises into the sky. It’s roars echo for miles, flying over their heads, circling around the huge tower that was never finished, breathing fire into it.

The fire burns through scaffolding and melting the steel beams inside of the building to bring it toppling down to the ground eventually. The huge Wyvern banks round, the massive wings causing wind to whistle through the membrane. The deep grumbling growl reverberates through their bodies as they stand there, and then their attention turns back to the incoming Grimm.

“We need to get the hell out of here…I doubt Salem will wait this time.” Velvet comments as she looks at them all.

“She’s right, we need to fight through these bastards and get to the Peregrine. Forget the Wyvern, we don’t have the firepower to kill it. If an Atlesian Cannon could not kill the bastard, then I doubt our weapons will even scratch it.” Kassius states, remembering the Battle of the Roses with such clarity and the huge cannon they used from the Acolytes of Lien defences. That cannon hurt the creature but did not kill it.

To take it down…they will need a lot more.

They all stare at the charging Grimm, ready to fight them, and get back to their ship. Because the others need to know they need to get to Argus as fast as possible. “Go!” Kassius orders, charging first with his swords at the ready. A huge Ursa charges towards him, roaring as it jumps and swings its huge paw with curved claws right at his face. They cut clean through the air between its paw and his face, but he jumps up in the air, firing Vulcan Nox downwards at the ground to ride the recoil above the creature. He lands behind it as the Ursa passes him, the rest of the team splitting up to keep the creatures spread apart. The Ursa snarls as it turns and glares at him viciously, roaring again before charging again.

Kassius tightens his grip on his swords, and then rushes forward, slashing one of the blades across the stubby leg of the Grimm, making it cry out in pain, smoke pouring like blood from its wound. It groans as it falls forward, staring back at him and biting at him, the impact of its bony jaws creates a loud clap. Kassius jumps back and fires Vulcan Nox at the creature, launching multiple fully automatic bullets into its thick black furry hide. The Bear growls from the bullets that puncture through the tough hide, then it rises up and roars again, its bottom lip hanging low with saliva leaking from beneath.

It charges again, taking the hits but barely even being hurt by them, but Kassius has a plan. As he lands onto the ground, he spines one of his swords round, so then the blade is pressed up against his metal forearm, waiting for the Ursa to get closer and closer. He then smirks, and swings the blade
round with all his might, the blade whistling as it cuts through the wind, and carves straight through the plates of bony armour and the black fur that surrounds its body. The Ursas roar silences and it crashes to the ground behind him, he turns and watches as it fades away into smog. He grins as he stands there, spinning his sword through his fingers again so the tip of the blade is pointed upwards again.

“Didn’t even break a sweat.” He chuckles, until he sees more Beowulves charging towards him and he straightens his stetson on his head. “C’mon then!” He sprints at them, showing no fear as he moves with great speed, and he drops down, sliding underneath the legs of one of the huge dogs. He lifts the blade upwards and cuts straight through the middle of its legs, severing the bonds it had, leaving the halves collapsing to the ground. He rises back up, swinging round and kicking another Beowulf across the jaw. The Beowulf stumbles to the floor and Kassius blocks the claws with his sword, holding the roaring monster back before he takes Vulcan Nox and presses the three barrels underneath its head.

He fires and the bullets all fire at once, blowing the top of its head open and it erupts into the flames, allowing him to be freed from the weight that was pressing down on him like that. Kassius turns and with great force he launches his sword from his hand, it spins through the air before lodging itself blade first into the chest of another Beowulf. The creature collapses with a grunt, whilst Kassius takes his other sword and slashes it across the leg of the other Beowulf, taking a page from Yang as he uses the recoil from Vulcan Nox to slide under its legs.

The dismemberment brings it down to the ground, and he jumps, spinning through the air before bringing the blade downwards with all his might into the neck of the creature. The Beowulf snarls as it dies, he jumps and moves around with impressive speed and skill, avoiding their slashes with perfect movements. He blasts forward and pulls his second sword from the soil, spinning round and slicing across the chest of another Beowulf. Kassius stands in the middle as around ten Beowulves start to charge towards him, barking and howling as they jump towards him.

He grips the hilts of his swords tight, and with one hard and powerful thrust he throws himself up in the air and spirals round, cutting through some of their bodies, and also holding the trigger down inside his gauntlets. Firing a constant spray of bullets across the area, shredding their black furry bodies down and killing all ten of them in his Cyclonic Spin. He lands down on one knee and rises back up with a grin on his face. “Oh yeah…I’m a badass.”

“Quit sucking your own dick for a second, Kassius!” Cardin yells, catching a Creep by the throat and lifting it off the floor before turning and smashing it head first into the ground. The creature kicks its legs around as it roars desperately to break free. He takes his mace and roars as he swings it over his head and slams it downwards into the Creep in the ground, crushing it instantaneously. The Creep dies beneath him, crumbling and fading away into a cloud of smoke. Cardin pulls his mace from the ground and turns, seeing the huge Arthropleura charging towards him, turning up the terrain beneath its many legs, hissing as it suddenly lunges forward and slams its pincers at him.

He swings his mace against its armoured head so hard that the impact throws him back, however the armour plating on the upper half of its body is damn near impenetrable. Only a few chinks in between but they are impossible to get to due to how fast this thing moves. The only way to deal any damage to this thing is to hit the soft tissue on its underside. The Arthropleura charges again, lunging forward and he rolls out the way, watching as the huge razor-sharp pincers clamp together and crush the metal beam that sticks up from the ground. Cardin paces back and forth as he watches the creepy crawly moving towards him again, deeply snarling and hissing like a Deathstalker would.

The centipede unexpectedly attacks again, and Cardin is pushes across the ground by the beast, having to use his mace to hold it back as it pinches the mandibles together over and over above him.
He growls with rage, and he engages his semblance, his skin charring over and his eyes erupting with red flames, and he punches the centipede’s underside, before grabbing the pincers and holding on tight as he roars. He starts to get back up and he lifts it over his head as he roars, swinging it round and throwing the giant creature across the area. It crashes against a wall and he picks his Mace back up, his rage descending and his skin repairing back to the way it was. The Arthropleura writhes around on the ground and eventually rights itself, but then Cardin notices it is looking afraid of the flames, getting away from it fast.

*Fire…*

*It must soften the armour.*

*Meaning we can puncture through.*

*And kick its ass.*

He spins his mace through his fingers and then pounds his fist to his chest plate, letting out a powerful roar, sprinting towards the massive centipede. It rises up and lunges forward, but he dives down and rolls past it as it slides across the ash, snarling as it turns around and moves quickly towards him once more. The droning repetition of a hundred legs running across the ground echoes constantly from every movement made on its behalf. It snaps at him, but Cardin swings his mace across its head, causing it to recoil back, and he takes the chance with the creature stunned.

He jumps forward, grappling onto the splayed-out armour plates, and he bellows as he pushes it towards a glowing orange burning molten rod of steel sticking out of the rubble. He roars, and he pushes it with all his strength, toppling it over and the beam erupts through its body. He rolls away from the body of the screeching Arthropleura, watching as it writhes and its legs shake and wiggle around, almost in a perfect wave motion. It’s shrieks eventually fade away, and its head falls to the ground, and the body crumbles away into ashes.

Cardin picks his mace back up and he stands back up, wiping the ash from his face and turning to the rest of the Grimm that continue to attack them. He watches as Emerald throws one of her chained sickles and wraps it around the collapsing support of a building, swinging round and slamming her heeled feet down into the head of the Beowulf beneath her. The creature crashes across the ground and she performs a graceful flip, landing on her feet, swinging round and slashing her sickles across the throat of one of the charging Ursae. The Ursa is killed instantly, as its head falls off its shoulder and the body topples over with a bang.

Emerald launches one of her sickles forward and it stabs straight into the chest of another Beowulf, she swings round and throws it straight into another, knocking it down onto a spike of metal from the rubble. She dashes forward and slashes the green sickles with great speed and precision, cutting them to ribbons with every single strike. The Creeps roar in anger and pain as they feel their bodies being carved to pieces by her curved blades. She jumps over the charging Ursae that went for her, firing both of her revolvers at the beast beneath her as she arcs over it. The Ursa growls, turning and lunging for her again, but she evades it and as she slides across the ground, she slashes her sickles across its fat and muscle that constructs its body to be as massive as it has become.

Deep cuts have been inflicted, revealing the glowing red innards within, black smoke leaking from the opening as if she has just opened up a bag with a fire burning within it. The Ursa stumbles, weakened from the strike delivered by the green haired thief who paces back and forth behind it. But Grimm never know when to back down unless they have lived for an incredibly long time.

This Ursa on the other hand is just a Minor, meaning that it is not that clever. It jumps towards her with a horrific roar to slash her with its claws. But it misses the impact, as she jumps above it and
throws her sickles into its shoulders. Holding onto the chains she lands behind it and with all her might she pulls it and throws it over her head. The action rips the blades from its muscular body, and they connect back to the hilts she was holding. The Ursa crashes into the ground and rolls into a burning blaze caused by the King Wyvern which still circles around them right now.

Emerald flicks her hair back over her shoulder with a smile on her face, but the smile is washed away when she sees the King Wyvern circling round, and Salem’s glowing red eyes stare directly into hers. “I should have expected a thief to turn tail and run…like a coward.” Salem snarls, before the King Wyvern turns and glides towards her, charging the flames up within its jaws. Emerald’s eyes slowly widen as the Dragon draws closer and closer in the reflection of her glossy red eyes. She turns and runs as fast as she can from the Wyvern as it blasts flames from its jaws with a roar that nearly deafens them all.

The fire consumes the destroyed homes behind her, and as she runs – with her hands pressed to her ears – she vaults across the destroyed cars and takes cover underneath a refuge of upturned land. The flames wrap around the car but luckily do not find her down there, and she hears the sound of the wind whistling through the ripped membranes in its wings that black out the sky. Smoke has also choked the air, making it harder to fight. Salem is not a fool, she knows that they can take on her Grimm – but nobody can survive in a battlefield suffocated by smoke from burning fires for long. It is all a matter of time.

The King Wyvern banks around the island, about to turn around and make its second attack run to decimate them. Velvet stands there, forming her mimicked weapons and she forms Fox’s Tonfas, slashing them at her enemies. A Beowulf jumps towards her but she carves the red blade into its chest, cutting it clean open and causing it to crash down to the ground. The beast groans before fading away, and Velvet grits her teeth, her ears creasing as she blocks the jaws of a deranged Sabre Grimm that attacks her, trying to rip out her throat. The giant Feline Grimm bites at her repeatedly, but she punches it across the face, then changes weapons, forming the holographic mimic of Scarlet David’s sword, and his Flintlock Pistol.

She still has some weapons stored inside of her box attached to her belt, helping with her photographic memory. Even the weapons of old friends who are now gone because of this damn war. She fires the pistol at the beast and as it jumps at her she ducks down, then pushes the sword upwards and cuts the Grimm open, in half actually. It crashes down to the ground with a heavy thud, turning to smoke behind her. She stands tall, holding the weapons in her hands and staying strong, exhaling through her lips. She backflips to avoid the Alpha Creep that just erupted from the ground in front of her. The dirt bursts out from the ground, and it lands on its bipedal legs, swinging round and clattering its tail into her blade. The Blade fades away and she changes again. Shifting the sword into someone else’s weapon – Nora Valkyrie’s beloved hammer.

She takes the holographic clone of Magnhild and she jumps up in the air, swinging the hammer over her head and smashing it down into the roof of the Creep’s skull, causing it to cave in and kill it instantaneously. The beast collapses to the ground and dies literally, fading away. She turns and gasps when she sees a Griffin diving down to swallow her whole, until a storm of bullets shreds the feathered beast out of the sky. She looks over to see Coco, practically laughing like a lunatic as she fires her Chaingun endlessly at the airborne Grimm that surround her.

Her beams of bullets cut down the aerial Grimm with no effort whatsoever, knocking them out of the sky one by one. She carves a Nevermore into pieces, one of the wings cutting off from the number of sharp bullets that rip it apart. The Nevermore crashes down into the town, shattering buildings into a thousand pieces. She then shoots down the Griffins that go for her, all of them getting killed swiftly by her machine gun fire. “Come on, you overgrown pigeons! Come on! Get some!” Coco cheers,
whooping and laughing as she shoots them down, scaring her allies at how much she actually enjoying herself right now.

“She scares me, dude.” Cardin chuckles, helping Kassius back up after he killed a Beowulf that was on top of him.

“I know what you mean…and I date Yang.” Kassius chuckles, but Coco is a special type of crazy.

As she shoots them down, they are given the opportunity to run and she transforms her absurdly huge machine gun down into her handbag, and she looks back at them all. “Come on! We need to get the hell out of here before Salem attacks again.” Coco yells, and none of them disagree with her on this fact. Especially since Salem is coming back for a second attack right now, and they can feel the heat growing as the fire blasts across the town right behind them. Cardin pulls Velvet to her feet before she falls over, and they keep moving, no comment made about it.

They turn a corner, and suddenly more fire rains down from the sky, and Emerald looks up at where that pillar of hearth came from, seeing another Wyvern flying overhead. In fact, there are quite a few more Wyverns, Lesser Wyverns unlike the King one. They all roar and screech as they circle the Academy, and another one glides towards them, its wing toppling the crumbling church tower of an abandoned building over. The bell gongs as it falls, and the Wyvern howls as it unleashes more fire towards them.

Kassius grabs onto a burnt car with his Cybernetic hand, and with all his might he swings it round and throws it towards the Dragon. The car crashes into the face of the Wyvern and it falls from the sky with a roar of pain, slamming into the ground, crushing buildings underneath its body and the wings. The Wyvern growls in anger as it gets back up, Kassius’ attack was never meant to kill the beast, merely to stop its flames from killing them. They turn and keep running, jumping over the fire caused by the Dragons that circle the skies. Eventually they get back to the Peregrine, and they all get inside.

“Emerald, get us off this damned island!” Kassius requests, holding onto the side.

“Cardin! Coco! Get on the guns!” Emerald yells, in which Cardin and Coco both look at each other quizzically, since they have never heard of such weapons ever existing on this thing.

“Uh…what?” Coco asks.

“The seats where the wings are? There are deployable cannons!” Emerald responds, flicking the switches to turn it on. Velvet sits down and acts and Emerald’s co-pilot. She is not as knowledgeable about this sort of thing but at the end of the day she is all they have…and Kassius is not allowed to fly, for good reason after their crash. The lights turn on and the thrusters activate, Emerald sets the fighter to V-TOL before blasting off, using the afterburners to soar across the ocean at great speed. For now, she stays close to the water, hoping that the Wyverns won’t follow her this close to the water’s surface.

But with Salem commanding them, that is not gonna happen. The six Wyverns and the King Wyvern are still on their ass, swinging their huge wings as they soar through the clouds and descend behind them. Coco and Cardin both sit in the seats when abruptly a circular pod closes around them, and they look around with concern. A mechanical arm holding them descends and they are now hanging outside the ship, a pair of doors close up to not pull people out inside the Peregrine. They are attached to a powerful dust cannon that they can aim, turning it with the sticks at their disposal. “Oh, hell yeah! This is awesome!” Cardin cheers.

“For once, I can agree!” Coco cheers, swinging round. Coco literally starts spinning round for the
fun of it until she starts feeling a little dizzy, making Cardin chuckle.

“You alright over there?” He laughs.

“Don’t do that!” Coco warns with a laugh, until they look behind the Peregrine that roars across the ocean, headed back to Vale. The Wyverns are catching up to them and at the very front of them is Salem and the King Wyvern.

“They’re flak cannons, explosive rounds. We need those damn dragons off our ass, it won’t kill Salem’s dragon, but it might deter it!” Emerald advises through the radio, and the King Wyvern is getting closer and closer, inhaling to form the flames inside its chunky jaws.

“Alright, c’mon you nasty bitch!” Cardin challenges, squeezing the triggers, the turrets swinging round as he fires them at her. He is literally inches from the water that is being blown around by the downdraft of the aircraft. The explosive rounds shoot across the sea and detonate around the Wyvern, smoke billowing out from the bursting shells. As they explode the Wyvern flinches and growls, but not being hurt by them. Coco does the same, firing constantly at the armoured titan’s head, but it does not even seem to hurt it, only annoy it. It unleashes a blast of fire and as soon as she does one of her shells explodes in its mouth. The King Wyvern roars in a way they have never heard since the Volcanic Chain Isles – in legitimate pain. It shakes it’s head in pain and opens out the wings to fall back, allowing the Lesser Wyverns to accelerate.

“Come on, you ugly sons of bitches!” Cardin challenges, aiming at one of the Wyverns that soars across the ocean, and he fires at it. These things are far less armoured and much smaller than the King Wyvern, meaning that these rounds should be enough to kill them. One of the shells explodes against the Wyvern and it roars in pain, shuddering and gaining height, gliding around them and blasting a fireball at the hull. It explodes, but luckily did not cause a hull breach. But the scorches have indeed ruined Solomon Karadin’s lovely paintjob.

Coco swings round and fires a shell, and the casing ejects from the side of the cannon, dispensed into the water beneath them for countless Oceanic Grimm to feast upon if they dare please. She fires a shell and hits the Wyvern in the side of the head, the eruption basically shatters the bone armour and its head falls forward, and the beast also falls forward, crashing down into the water in a great splash. There are now five of the Lesser Wyverns left, until Cardin swings round and fires another shot, hitting the one that fired at the hull in the heart. The Wyvern shrieks in agony, falling from the sky and crashing down into the water, buried in the coral reefs beneath them.

Four left.

“Ha-Ha! Got one!” Cardin cheers.

“Alright pal, don’t get cocky.” Coco references with a grin.

“Look out guys, you might wanna hang on. We’re getting closer to the mainland, got some rock formations incoming!” Velvet warns.

“We’ll focus on the Grimm and Salem, we trust you to keep us safe.” Coco says with a smile, firing another shell and it explodes underneath the wing of one of the Wyverns. It roars with shock; the blast knocks it in the air for a second, but it does not fall. It is still on them along with the three other Lesser Wyverns.

In the Cockpit however, Emerald stares ahead and she bites her lip, holding the sticks and she dodges one of the huge pillars of rock and coral that sticks out of the ocean like this. As the Peregrine misses the pillar the right-wing digs into the water, leaving a stunning trail and a rainbow in the
vapour. The Wyverns have also got some extremely impressive manoeuvrability as well, flying through these pillars. Ahead of them though on the mainland are some vast spiky mountains, ones that they could fly through…if they have a good pilot.

Kassius stares at the mountains then looks down at Emerald. “You can’t be serious.” Kassius says to her, in disbelief of what she is about to do.

Emerald engages the manual flight control so then she can move freely. “Trust me.” Emerald requests, remembering Cinder’s training she gave her all those years ago.

The Peregrine swerves through the air, narrowly missing these huge pillars of stone with barnacles stuck to them. Cardin aims down the sights that have been projected onto the bullet proof glass he is encased in. He fires the shell and hits one of the Wyverns, causing it to spin out of control after blowing a hole in its wing. The Wyvern crashes into one of the pillars so hard that the tower of stone collapses and falls into the water, throwing gallons of salt water into the sky, burying it in a watery grave.

Three left.

Coco fires her shells repeatedly, and they explode after a certain distance, rhythmic popping booms echo in the distance where the shrapnel is thrown from where the shells detonate. The Wyverns spin through the air as they dodge the incoming fire from their target, they cannot even say they are not impressed by these Wyverns. They are fantastic flyers, if only they were not trying to kill everything they see. Emerald blast towards the mountains and she breathes slowly, focusing her mind as they fly towards the entrance of all these spiky mountains. “Better hang on. About to get bumpy.” Emerald advises, and then they are in the mountains, and she takes full control, and the Peregrine spins round, dodging the many spikes that stick out from the mountains and their many peaks.

Cardin sits there with total disbelief on his face. “Are we really doing this?” He yells with disbelief, whereas Coco is simply trying to keep her dinner inside of her body right now. Because all this spinning is giving her a bit of motion sickness right now.

“This feels weird!” She exclaims, brown eyes widen, and she covers her mouth when she retches.

One of the Wyverns breathes fire at them but as it goes for them, it does not notice a long sharp peak of a mountain sticking out from the many over peaks. It stabs straight through it, leaving it impaled on the side of the mountain. Leaving only two more, and even Salem is still in here, her Wyvern is just smashing through the peaks that stand in their way. Cardin aims down his sights and fires, launching a shell that hits the face of a Wyvern directly, killing it instantly and sending it crashing down into the abyss of the mountain range beneath them. The last one comes for them, and despite the fact that Coco is feeling sick right about now, she aims straight at the wing of the last one.

“Eat this, bitch.” She orders, firing and blowing the wing from its shoulder, sending the monster spinning out of control and disappearing back into the shadows. But before they could even fire any more shells at Salem and the King Wyvern, Emerald pulls them back in and the cannons fold back into the wings. They are pushed back inside and they both look around.

“Salem is still on us!” Cardin tells her, but Emerald is focusing right now and does not even answer. The Peregrine soars through the mountains and Salem is right behind them, the huge dragon slams through the mountains and blasts flames from its jaws at them, burning through the stone and melting the snow. It wings the wings and blows the snow away, causing mini-avalanches with every single movement. She watches it from the rear scanner that shows her foe still behind her. She narrows her eyes and suddenly dives downwards, and the Wyvern roars with shock as it suddenly crashes into the side of the mountain.
It digs its claws into the mountain, looking around to find them...only to realise they are somehow gone.

Salem stands atop the saddle she constructed, and she looks around as well, unable to find where they went. What neither of them realise is that the Peregrine has descended and shut off all its lights and the engines, going dead silent, using a pair of grappling hooks that she fired to keep them in the shadows. A very risky move, because if she figures out where they are, they will have to blast out of there. And gods know how many monsters are lurking in this darkness.

But they are not focusing on that, they are all just staring up at Salem who looks around for them. She clenches her hand into a fist, exhaling through her nostril. “Well played, Emerald...you managed to trick me.” She says with what sounds like admiration. The King Wyvern pushes its legs off the mountain and spreads the wings, flying away from the mountains to try and find them.

They all sit there and then Kassius looks at Emerald with disbelief. “How the hell did you know to do that?” He asks her.

“I didn’t.” She answers.

She waits until Salem is far enough away, then she detaches the cables and suddenly ignites the afterburners, blasting up and escaping the sharp mountains that she used to her advantage. She then soars across the fields of Vale, heading for the location.

“That...was...AWESOME!” Kassius cheers, and they all laugh with amazement, patting Emerald on the back. She sits there and a small smile forms on her face, feeling such admiration...feeling people actually care for her. It is an alien feeling...but a good feeling...one she does not want to go away.

And now they head for Queen’s Cove...

And Kassius will need to tell Cinder and the others where to head next.

Ruby

Kassius and his team are not the only ones airborne right now, because Ruby’s side of the pond are also still in the sky. All aboard the Prowler, they are flying towards a small town that they located that offers a refuelling platform for aircraft that are either lost out here or are on their travels to another kingdom. The Prowler descends towards the platform, everyone sat down and Yenna beside her beloved. She caresses his grey hair and he looks up at her with a smile, every day that passes by with her and it can be seen how much younger he is starting to look. There are still creases but the grey hair is starting to darken back to the black colour it used to be when he was younger. But very soon he will be more limber, and his skin will be less wrinkly.

It is very...odd...to watch someone age by getting younger.

“You silly old man...what were you thinking?” Yenna questions, her hand holding his on the folded-out bed he is in, still strapped down. Kragen sighs, closing his eyes as he thinks about his apprentice whom he failed.

“I...I wanted to speak to him. I knew he would come back, I needed to see him. Alone.” He states and she shakes her head with sadness in her eyes.
“Why didn’t you ask the Architect? Or me to come with you? We’re from the same time as him.” She states as she presses her hand to her head of black locks of hair.

“I…he doesn’t know you. I am the only person he knows…I was hoping I could talk to him. Get him to realise he is on the wrong side.” Kragen states as he holds her hand.

Yenna looks at him and she caresses his cheek. “You always wanted to find the best in people.” She says to him and he chuckles.

“And you would always find the bad before I could see it.” He states, and she chuckles, nodding her head. She was always the more cynical one in their relationship opposed to his very bright and uplifting personality. Quite similar in fact to the relationship that Blake and Sun have, one is cynical, and the other is a bumbling ball of joy. Or at least Kragen used to be that, now he is an old man who has become very wise and understands the ways in which the world works.

“Do you…do you think I failed him?” He asks her, with tears in his silver eyes. Ruby sits there and listens to them and she closes her eye with sadness, feeling for the man. Because all he ever wanted to do was the right thing…and by doing that to save as many of his men as he could…he created a monster.

Yenna shakes her head. “No…you did what you had to. You’re not a failure.” She says to him, leaning down to kiss him on the lips, hugging him. Ruby sits near them and looks over at Oscar who smiles as he holds her hand in his, rubbing the smooth skin with his thumb. Sat in the cockpit is the Architect, bring the ship in to land onto the pad where they can begin the refuelling process. Blake however is sat down, holding the necklace that belongs to Sun – he wanted her to take it before she left. So, then she feels he is always with her.

The ship extends the landing gear and sets down on the landing pad, and some Atlesian Knights reprogrammed for a new purpose walk over with a tube which will fuel the jet back up. They all walk out, and they go to rent some rooms for the night, all of them going their own ways. Ruby and Oscar walk towards the Motel with the others, and they purchase a room that they can sleep in. After having to rest at a campfire in the icy cold mountains, a warm bed would really be a good feeling. They all buy a room and go to them. Ruby and Oscar enter their room and walk inside, seeing the double bed and the small table and a bathroom.

Ruby enters the bathroom and she takes off her shirt, looking at the cut she has had to bandage up after the battle against the Grimm. She never even noticed she got snagged during that battle by the Sphinx, leaving another cut on her side. Not very deep at all, but when she takes off her shirt and unzipped her tactical coat, she can really see the extent of her scars on her body.

She has so many now, stab wounds, scrapes from Tyrian and the burns from the explosion of her home in places. Some of the scars are from the shrapnel thrown her way in the blast, wood that cut deep into her pale skin. She sighs, and she slowly takes off her eye patch and stares at herself in the mirror, seeing the scar where the arrow cut through her eye, leaving it forever blind in that eye. She shudders as she stares at herself.

When suddenly she sees Roman appearing behind her in the reflection, walking round from the doorway, looking at her scars. “Look at you, little red. Picked up some little marks as time has gone on. Not the perfect little superhero you used to be, are you?” He asks her, and every now and then she can hear her psychosis in the back of her mind.

Look at yourself?

You are so ugly; the scars make you look so terrible
Why do we bother fighting?

Her self confidence has been falling every single day and every scar she picks up from this war just makes it feel even worse. She looks down at the sink and turns the tap on, washing her hands and washing some excess blood off from Kragen when they had to fix him up after Kannix shot him. “It’s admirable…wanting to keep fighting the way you do. Admirable, but foolish. You can’t keep fighting this way, Ruby. These people…they just keep you from getting the job done. Oscar is keeping you from doing what you were born to do. Cut them loose…you don’t need them…and they don’t need you.” Roman whispers into her ear and her breath becomes more and more shaky.

He’s right!

They don’t need you, Ruby.

Shut it! They love her, they need her!

You don’t know what you’re talking about!

She’ll get them all killed, she needs to cut them loose.

“Let go of your morality…that is the only way you can win.” Roman tells her, and she closes her silver eye and whimpers, pressing her hands to her head as the voices keep getting worse inside of her head.

“Ruby?” Oscar’s voice is like a net, saving her from her fall into her own torment, and she turns, seeing him standing there with his shirt off as well. He is much more toned and muscular than he was when they first met…and he too has some scars. Slashes from Grimm at times, a stab wound in placed and a scrape from when he was hit by a truck. But the body is like a canvass, and soon more scars will cover them. “Roman?” He asks her, not even having to ask what’s wrong, because he knows her so well.

She nods her head and walks over to him with a soft sniffle, wrapping her arms around him and pressing her head to his chest. He gently caresses her black and red hair, and he sits down on the bed with her next to him. “What did he say?” He asks her curiously and she sighs with a shaky breath.

“Trying to get me to cut you loose again.” She tells him and he nods his head, pulling her close and kissing her forehead.

“I’ll always be here for you.” Oscar promises and she feels so at home in his embrace.

So safe.

Blake

Hours have passed…

Everyone is asleep now…

Blake on the other hand walks off on her own, holding his gold necklace in her hands. She cannot
stop thinking of the past now, thinking of how many times she would shun him or would never
speak to him. How she turned him down at the dance hurt him at first, or the way she was so hateful
towards him at Menagerie…before they first met the Knight of Fury. All these decisions have piled
up over time and she shakes her head, tensing up and she holds the necklace close, then she puts it
around her neck and clips it together, letting it fall down her chest.

But for some reason she is filled with so much anger, all directed at herself. Thoughts crawling in
and out of her mind, all of them surrounding the man she loves with all her heart.

Why didn’t we ask him to come with us? When we went to see Sienna? Why the hell were we so
stupid?

If it weren’t for me making such a dumb decision, he might not be dying right now!

Can’t I do anything right?

Adam died because of me.

I couldn’t save Ilia.

And now Sun?

She yells in anger, picking up a rock and throwing it at a fountain, and it lands in the water. It falls
right past the Knight of Fury, sat on the edge of the fountain. She stops and her eyes widen, she spins
round and sees that she was not hallucinating, and he is indeed sat down right there. Whilst the others
are currently asleep or about to go to sleep…she is on her own…and staring down the very entity
that killed her parents.

“My dear Blake Belladonna…it has been a while since we last spoke.” Azura says to her as he has
his hands on his knees, and she has not even noticed how he is barely even aflame. Just a faint glow
underneath the pumice and obsidian, that’s it – not rage. He just looks at her extremely calmly, but
that is not what she sees – she just sees the monster that murdered her mother and father callously.
She reaches to her sword, but he holds up his hand, shaking his head. “I have not come here to fight
you.” He tells her with a faint exhale.

“Then why the hell are you here?” She questions and the Knight of Fury glances over to a chair with
his fiery orange eyes. But Blake denies him that, she just stands by the building with a scowl, her
feline eyes narrowed, feeling the passive effects of the Knight of Fury being here.

“The end is near, Blake…you know that by now. If you struggle to comprehend it then just look at
the sky.” He states, and she does that, looking up to see the moon is breaking apart more and more. It
is barely even a moon anymore, just a cloud of dust and shards of lunar stone, slowly floating away.
But that is not all she has noticed…the stars are fading away. There are so many less stars out there
in the sky, meaning the stories were most certainly not lying about the stars disappearing.

They are running out of time.

“And soon the end will claim us all – maybe not the Knights…if anything I hope it does.” He
explains, sitting forward and looking at her. “That’s why I have come here…to confess to my sins I
have committed…against you. And to explain myself.” He says to her and Blake scowls at him,
rightfully angry and filled with hate at the Knight of Fury for what he did to Ghira and Kali. They
did nothing wrong and he butchered them like they meant absolutely nothing to him.

“What is there to explain?” Blake questions, since she has always seen the Burning Knight as
nothing more than a monster.
“I want to explain to you…only you…why I am what I am. My sins overflow my soul and I do not wish to atone for them because I know I never can.” He explains as he looks her in the eye. “But what I can do…is hope that you – Blake Belladonna – will be able to heed the mistakes of a broken warrior to save the person you love. At least then…I can help one more person…one last time. Can you grant me that honour?” He asks her and she stares at him and clenches her hand into a fist.

“There’s nothing you can do that will cure Sun.” She states, looking down at the floor and he nods his head as he sits by the fountain, touching the water with his burnt hands.

“I understand…it seems there is no hope…I don’t blame you.” He says to her, then she snaps towards him.

“You shouldn’t. You only have yourself to blame for the horrors that have been inflicted upon the world by your hand.” Blake snarls angrily at him, unaware of how far he went to stop the Congregation of Dawn. Fury stares at her and he exhales through his nostrils.

“And what horrors did I inflict upon this world, Miss Belladonna? Farming for the poor so then they can eat with full bellies every single night? Hunting down the Congregation of Dawn when they butchered your kind like game? Or the horrors I carried out due to the curse that binds me to this world when I should have died on that stake?” Axzura asks her as he keeps his hands clasped together, a few flames igniting for a couple seconds, but none of that anger was directed towards her. All of it was directed towards Vir Nominis Umbra, because it is clear that Axzura Vex and the Knight of Fury are two very different people. “No, I did what I did because nobody else would stand up and stop them. So, I took it upon myself, to burn them in their homes, as they did to your own kind. Can you understand? The only path to justice is to carry it out by your own hand.” Axzura snarls, showing his way of thinking, and it is not exactly one that Blake agrees with.

“And how did your people thank you? They burned you at a stake, because you killed hundreds with the shots that missed. You may have had noble intentions, but more innocents died in your fight than your enemies.” She states, but Axzura shakes his head.

“No…my men never missed a shot.” He states. “We were just…too late.” He states with a sigh.

“And what about my mom and dad? Was that all part of your heroic acts? Or maybe did you realise you enjoyed the killing? Because believe me…ever since you picked up the axe you have only brought one thing, and it is all in your name. Fury.” She states, since she has seen how much hate has spread across the world, believing it all to be his actions. Axzura scoffs, his shoulders bobbing as he sits there.

“Fury…” He comments. “Perhaps, Miss Belladonna…” He looks down at his reflection, seeing the man he once was in the mirror of water for a second until it returns back to the monster he has become. “And loneliness too…yes.” He states as he stares at himself. Blake stands there, feeling so small in comparison…yet somehow…right now…she actually feels like she can relate to him.

He then looks her right in the eyes. “But I have lived…completely once.” He tells her, and Blake looks into the volcanic eyes, and behind the lava she can see the human eyes. And they look so sad inside that molten helmet that has no mouth. “I was like you – madly in love, and she loved me so. I served in the Arkhoni Navy for years when I met her, and she fell for me…we married…and had a baby girl. I left the Navy and we abandoned Arkhonex to live in Free City of Ephai. Bought a farm, and we grew crops together, feeding those who could not afford our luxuries. Or help the Faunus.” He explains as he looks at Blake and she stares down at him.

She would be lying if she claimed she was not listening to what he had to say. “We were so happy…and it stayed that way for sixteen years. We stayed there, and my daughter was so beautiful…she
reminds me of you.” He tells her, and her eyes jolt at the idea of it and she looks down at the floor. “Long black hair…amber eyes…she was kind.”

“What happened?” She asks him and he looks at her.

“The Congregation of Dawn came, on their campaign to cleanse the world of the impure brought them to Ephai. They set our crops alight, and in turn spread famine for weeks. And attacked us one night, and I was forced to defend my family. They were not fighters; my wife was a merchant. And my daughter wanted to be a dancer.” He explains to her, staring out…practically endlessly as he remembers it all so clearly.

So vividly.

“I remember that day…so well…the warm summer breeze and the soil was cracked. No rain for months, and people were dying from starvation. I was forced to become a pirate, raiding Congregation of Dawn camps to find food for my family. The act of doing so brought them to my home one night and they attacked.” He explains to her. “It is all so clear…the sound of the door breaking…the screams of my wife and daughter…the feeling of the cold steel knife in my grasp. I knew I had to do this, I knew I had to kill them to defend my family.” He explains to her, seeing it all flashing before his eyes.

He looks up at her. “But…there were more than I anticipated.” He tells her. “I heard my wife cry in agony as her throat was cut open before my very eyes, and I was too late to save her. I killed them, butchered them like animals ready for shipment. Taste of claret in my mouth, stronger than iron.” He explains to her. “I had to defend the only thing I had left…”

“You’re daughter.” Blake says, looking at Fury and then she sees the tears leak from his eyes and his hand clenches into a fist.

“But I made a mistake…”

He looks up at her and tells her. “I went to stab one of the Servants, but he caught my arm, and pushed me to the left. It was as if she…and the knife…merged.” He tells her, and Blake’s eyes widen and even she begins to tear up, because just by saying it that way, it could say so much. Especially from the fact that the Knight of Fury – is crying. His voice broken as he keeps speaking, and very quickly Blake has gone from not wanting him to speak out of hatred…and now the kind woman she is wants him to stop for his own sake.

But then the magma glows and the flames ignite. “You cannot imagine, the unbearable finality of it!” He growls with anger, and like her it is all directed towards himself. “And in that one moment…I felt every last emotion in my soul fade away…and it left me…with nothing more…than a Father’s Fury.” He tells her, with tears running down his eyes as he tells her the real reason why he became Fury.

It is because he is the never-ending rage of a father that killed his own daughter by accident.

Blake stands there, seeing Fury standing up and looking at her as he is about to walk away. “I came here…to tell you…that your parents are better than I could ever be. And so are you – because you are here…and they did not end up killing you.” He states, before walking away from her and fading away as he turns the corner.

Leaving her alone.

And truly changing her judgement of the Knight of Fury.
The sky of stunning twinkly stars stretches on forever, with a warm purplish glow of the cosmos floating above their heads. Small leaves wilted from Autumn dance across the floor as the two of them take a nice walk across the town that they found. Everyone has gone to sleep here, except for a few others. Some people are still walking around, perhaps because they needed a moment to think alone and get some air, or they are still working. But this little town – known as Whitewood Pine – is a very sweet and innocent little town. The most advanced part of this place is the landing and refuelling centre for any Airships that need somewhere to drop off, and it is most likely the number one source of income found here.

Ren walks with his beloved girlfriend, her hand held inside of his as they walk, finally able to get some alone time together after everything that has happened. She rests her head on his shoulder, eyes closed as she happily exists in the moment with him. The breeze of cold air on their cheeks does not even deter them from walking around at night, they just want to spend time together in each other’s loving company.

Nora looks up at the sky of the swirling colours of space that seem to float together, and the shattering moon watching them with every step that they take. “It’s so beautiful.” She says to him with a smile, Ren looks down at her and also bears a smile, looking up at the sky as well. They both approach a beautiful fountain where a tree with orange and red leaves – the colours of Autumn – bloom. The fountain trickles up in the air so gently and they both sit down on the wooden bench in front of it.

They sit there, and she keeps her hand tightly in his, and she stares at the stars with the love of her life, never letting go of him. It is like the world just seems to slow down around them, all the horrifying things that they have seen, all the death and war that has beaten this beautiful world down…and yet…it is still so incredible. The vastness of all those stars, the stars that scientists believe that could have many more worlds like their own.

Somewhere out there in the cosmos, is a lonely tree blowing in the wind.

And maybe there are two other small organisms looking back up at the sky, wondering if there is anything else out there. And despite the fact that the stars seem to be disappearing from Vir Nominis Umbra as the prophecy foretold, it is still something to look at. The arrays of colours that seem to shimmer up there, and it could just go on forever. “Be easy to get lost up there, wouldn’t it?” She asks him with a softly spoken voice, very different to her normal crazy and energetic voice she has all the time. Ren caresses the top of her smooth hand with his thumb.

“Yeah…it would.” He says to her, and she smiles, looking at him.

“If we ever are able to…can we go up there some day?” She asks him sweetly, making him chuckle and he looks to her beautiful cyan coloured eyes.

“Yes…I would like that.” He admits, and then they keep looking up at the sky.

“I wouldn’t be scared of being lost – so long as you’re with me, I will never be lost again.” She lovingly says to him, and he sits forward again, looking back to her beautiful face. He holds her
hands in his, and then stares right back at her beauty. Something that many people do not seem to appreciate enough – not a problem for him, meaning that she is all his. She leans towards his lips, and he does the same to hers, kissing him affectionately, wrapping her arms around his body with great love in her beating heart. He slides his hand round the back of her neck as he holds her, cradling her gently.

They break the kiss after what felt like minutes, gently pressing their foreheads together as they sit on that bench. Autumn Leaves that have withered away from the changing seasons dance across the floor as the wind blows them around, sending a cold chill across them, totally ignored by the loving warmth felt between them. “I’m happy…that I’m with you. It doesn’t matter what happens, Ren…I am happy to have been lucky enough to have you in my life.” She says to him, sounding so grateful to him, when they first met when the boys were picking on her.

Even after the Nuckelavee destroyed Kuroyuri, they have always had each other. And at the end of the day that is all that matters now, that they are together. “I can’t imagine my life without you…you have helped me grow in ways I never could have imagined.” He tells her, his gratefulness shown in his voice as well as it softly breaks, and they both close their eyes as they hold each other’s heads together. Their pink aura both glow, for they have already pledged each other together by binding their auras. The ultimate show of love and trust, never wanting to leave each other’s side.

“You saved me…more times than I can count.” She says to him with a smile.

“So, have you…I think if you didn’t stop me, I may have never come back from Kuroyuri.” He tells her, honestly as he holds her hand and she giggles.

“You were a bit silly.” She giggles with joy, and he chuckles.

“Yeah…not sure what I was thinking.” He says.

“Well, you’re not the only one. I’ve done some dumb stuff too.” She admits.

“You mean when you put a firecracker in Professor Port’s Toilet?” He asks her with a chuckle, and Nora giggles adorably as she sits there, remembering the sound of the boom and the shocked scream from Port.

“I didn’t know he could squeal so loud!” She laughs, slapping her knee – remembering the good times of Peter Port opposed to how his story ended back in Menagerie.

“Well you definitely got punished for it.” Ren remembers, patting her knee and she nods her head with a smile.

“And yet you still said you helped me, even though you didn’t.” She also remembers with a smile, getting the same smile back from him as he looks at her, even now he has always been nervous around her. But that is what love does to people, it can turn even the hardest fools into nervous wrecks when they see it at first sight.

“Well, couldn’t let you hog all the glory.” He says as he smiles, sitting back and finding her hand once more.

“Well you beat Jaune to it.” She reminds with a toothless smile.

“Couldn’t let him steal it either, and Pyrrha would never do such a thing. I vividly remember her giving you a lecture about manners with Weiss after that.” Ren chuckles, remembering how they watched the Red Haired and White-Haired girls spouting off their comments of how to be polite to people and to not blow up toilets is important.
But...Nora was laughing the whole time.

They both look back at the tree and she sighs. “I miss those old days...they were so much simpler. Before all this stuff with Gods, and Demons...and monsters.” She says with a sigh, feeling the squeeze of his hand again.

“It can be again...” He assures. “We’ll make it through this.” He promises as he holds her hand. Then he stands up, and Nora nervously smiles and giggles as he gently tugs at her hand to pull her up to her feet.

“Um...what’re you doing, Renny?” She asks him.

“Come on...dance with me.” He asks her suddenly, and she begins to blush shyly, something people have never seen from her.

“U-Uh...” She stammers, but as he gently pulls her up, she stands and walks up to him, but feels so safe and at home in his embrace.

“It’s okay...I’ve got you.” He promises with a smile.

He holds her close, her body moulding into his as if they are made for each other, or like a positive and negative magnet. But this is not just some kind of irony between them, no, this is real.

They are made for each other.

Placing her hands on his shoulders he dances silently, nothing but short gasps of breath are to be heard alongside the gentle toot of a howl from the tree that watches their loving time together. She wants to say something, anything, but each time she opens her mouth to speak, she feels the words just fall from her lips with absolutely nothing to say, just the love that they feel for each other, binding them together like rope.

He smells perfect, like citrus and wood and all things gorgeous. Slowly she moves her hands up to his neck and rests her head on his chest. Her bare cheek is cool from the breeze through the open garden, yet his beating heart brings all the heat back to her cheeks. He pulls her impossibly closer as two people slowly resemble one. Her small feet fitted into trainers on top of his comfortable sandals as he moves side to side.

Slowly pushing one of her loose tendrils behind her ear, he smiles a genuine smile. She is beautiful and she is his, orange hair that seems to glow from the lanterns on the houses, and her cyan eyes like the ocean...expanding forever. She looks up at him in embarrassment and awe, feeling like people are watching them, but they truly are alone, her face glistening in the moonlight and her eyes glittering with an emotion so intense, she cannot even work out what it is.

They have danced before...but every time she feels this way.

Like a schoolgirl dancing with her crush for the very first time.

Then slowly he moves her away, she looks up confused, but within a second, he twirls her around like a doll and pushes his front into her back, still moving slowly side to side. He rubs his nose on the side of her long, feminine neck and grinned.

She smells so good.

Like always.
A scent like that of a beautiful lavendery scent she always uses.

His smile against her skin, and strong arm across her upper shoulder as they danced with a melody no one else could hear. Afterall they were in complete harmony as they dance the night away. He gently and slowly spins her right, twirling her round with his hand and she comes back to him, and her lips find his, wrapping one arm behind the back of his neck. He holds her, his arm around her curved back, and she lifts one leg up as she kisses him, the Moon above their heads as they share this moment together.

A moment they want to last forever.

They hold each other, tight and gently at the same time, taking a breath between the first and going again. He gently pushes his hand through her orange hair as he kisses her, their bodies connected together and their aura ever so gently shimmering the same colour. They finally break their kiss, exhaling into one another’s mouths, staying close, and gazing into each other’s eyes.

And her words leave her trembling lips. “I love you, Lie Ren.” She tells him, and he smiles, still holding her.

“I love you too, Nora Valkyrie.” He tells her and they kiss once more, standing beneath the tree.

Love never fading away.

Ruby

Darkness…

It surrounds her, ashes flowing through the air like snow during a Winter Storm. She stands amongst the ashes with her hand raised, looking around with her eye still scarred over from where the arrow pierced her face, eyepatch not there. But as she walks around, she is just in her nightwear, her scars on show across her entire body. The burns, the stabs and the slashes from the enemies she has made over the years. Her long black and red hair flows in the wind, ash covering some of her red highlights in the black, stumbling across total destruction that surrounds her at every step that she takes.

But when she walks, she gasps, seeing the arrow suddenly bursting through the charred tree, causing the tree trunk to shatter like glass upon impact, and it flies towards her face. It scrapes straight across her face, knocking her down to the ground. Undead hands rise from the ground and grab onto her body, she shrieks in terror on the ground, hearing the voices also screaming inside of her mind, and yet they sound like they are all around you.

They’re all dead! DEAD!

This is your fault!

You STUPID FUCKING BITCH!

Did you really think you could save the world? Look around you! THIS IS OUR WORLD NOW!

The ash begins to smother her body as she cries out, the cold hands gripping her. The ash covers her pale skin, falling into her scars that begin to open and she cries in agony, feeling the flesh tear and
bones break from every injury she has ever felt in her life. Her silver eyes are non-existent as well here, she cannot blast them to save herself, she is just being pulled down into hell by the hands of the dead. She looks over and in horror, one of the hands is a black and yellow cybernetic hand.

That is when the ash parts, and she sees Yang’s undead face, gone grey and her blonde hair turned grey as well. Her eyes black and a horrific black fluid falling from her screaming mouth. Ruby shrieks in horror as her dead friends and family keep trying to pull her down into the Abyss of Ashes.

Then…she sees him walking over to her, Roman Torchwick with his hands behind his back, looking down at her. “Does this frighten you, Little Red? Seeing everyone you ever held close to your heart dead, and pulling you to hell?” Roman asks her, but she also cannot even speak, as the hands grab her neck and squeeze, crushing her throat and making it impossible for her to breath, the back of her head falling into the ashes. “I wouldn’t be surprised, you always did hold your loved ones closer than your own weapon. But that was always your greatest weakness, Little Red. It made you predictable, and unless you let go and let me help you…this is what will happen to you.” Roman tells her, crouching down beside her.

“Like it did your father…and everyone else you have failed.” He tells her, and the voices in her head begin to yell at her again and again.

He’s right!

You’re so stupid, all you had to do was save them! It was all you ever had to do!

Your mother would be so disappointed in you.

Let them take you, it is the punishment you deserve!

“But even then, it is not just them that you remember is it? Kragen’s little silver eyed friends…even when you finally killed Tyrian, you were never freed from him were you?” He asks her as she desperately gasps for air. “Do you still hear his laughs?”

The echoing voice of the madman – Tyrian Callows – echoes in the distance of the Charred Forest. They sound so real that it is like he is here with her, but she refuses to let the bodies of those she loves to take her. And despite the fact that she cannot use them…her silver eyes somehow glow bright enough to push the hallucinations away from her, and Roman vanishes for a few moments. When Ruby rises up, the ashes of her beloved friends are wrapped around her body, and then it forms into her outfit she always wears, looking around as her red cape blows in the soft breeze of death that flows through the dark domain of destruction and death.

She looks around and yells with anger as the voices keep whispering.

Now you’re lost, great job, Ruby, just great job!

This is what happens when you don’t listen to us! This is what those medications do to you! That is why you keep losing!

Listen to us!

“GO AWAY!” Ruby shrieks with horror, pressing her hands against her head as her Psychosis keeps getting worse with every day that passes by. The voices turning more and more aggressive, they were frequent when her father died but now, they are becoming constant. “JUST…please…leave me alone…” She whimpers as she falls to her knees and covers her silver eyes, one blinded by her pain that never fades away.
As she remains on her knees, she feels the hand of Roman Torchwick press against her shoulder.

“Your determination to go on is admirable, but at the end of this road, you will fall. We all fall in the end, and do you know where we will end up? In a Godless Plain, one that will fill up with the fallen until there is nothing left. In death everyone is on the same page, no judgement can be made on how you died, because you are just like them. Another fallen fool…but…you keep trying to delay the inevitable. Why do you persist, child?” Roman asks her, remaining behind her as he caresses her shoulder and Ruby whimpers, sniffling as she feels the ash smothered soil beneath her knees.

“B-Because…he can’t win.” She sniffs.

“Win? Life is not about winning or losing, sweetheart. It is simply about waiting, because the cold hands of death will take you one day. It has come for you on multiple occasions and yet here you are – it is…interesting.” Roman says to her, rising back up and walking around her with his cane in his grasp, using it like a walking stick, sinking down into the spongy soil of air and ash.

“Dad…always told me…I was s-stubborn.” She sniffs, wiping the tears from her eye, looking back up at her old enemy. Someone she has not seen for a long time, and yet here he is, haunting her even now as he holds his hands behind his back, turning on the back of his heel.

“Be ready, Little Red. Unless you give in and let me help you, a great deal of torment and suffering shall be waiting for you. The greatest pain you will ever know.” Roman warns, staring directly into her eyes with that sinister smirk he always carried on his face, before he turns and walks towards the clouds of ash before him. She turns and sees another hallucination forming from the shadows, seeing the ridge where Vir Nominis Umbra always seems to stand.

Overlooking the shattered universe.

And before her…is everyone she has ever known and loved. Her team staring at her, Oscar looking into her eyes with a supportive smile.

And then…

They all turn grey and pale, and their skin and flesh and bones crumble away into ash before her very eyes. They all fade away one by one, and she stares with horror, hearing the voices building and building inside of her head.

You killed them.

You got them all killed!

What kind of a leader are you?

Why don’t you just stop fighting this impossible war already?

Just DIE!

Why don’t you just DIE?

Ruby gasps, her silver eyes opening back into the real world with a terrified scream, with a cold sweat covering her body, but as she jolts from the screams that leave her, she feels Oscar’s gentle hands around her body. He rests his head on her shoulder, one arm around her belly and the other clutching her hand. She pants, letting out a couple more terrified whimpers, looking around to see the world is normal again, no more ashes and no more terror constantly crawling after her.

“Ruby…it’s okay…it’s okay. Remember what we do after nightmares?” He asks her, clearly must
have woken up by her fidgeting and mumbling in her sleep from the nightmares that constantly echo in her mind. Ruby stammers, looking at her beloved boyfriend with relief as she hyperventilates. He takes his hands and turns her round, holding her shoulders and he gently presses his forehead to hers as he whispers. “What do we do?” He asks her softly, and she stammers, feeling her whole-body quivering at everything, like she is in the middle of Atlas. And despite the fact she is only wearing her nightwear – her bra and her pants – she is in a sweat like she has been in five layers.

“W-W-We…b-breathe…in…and out.” She stammers, barely able to speak from how much she is inhaling and exhaling oxygen, so bad it is starting to make her get light headed. Oscar breathes in by her ear, and she does the same in rhythm with him, and he gently strokes her back with his hand as he does it. It takes a few seconds of repetition, but her breathing begins to normalise, and she falls into his arms and onto his chest, he holds her, and he presses his back up against the headboard, caressing her hair with his hand. It has always hurt to see her this way, especially in recent months, seeing how she has gotten worse and worse with her Psychosis.

All this war…

All that torture…

Even the strongest souls have a limit of what they can take before it scars them. Ruby sniffles in her lover’s embrace as he holds her, the bed sheet in her hand, and she pulls it over her shoulder and over him as well. He looks down at her as she lays on his chest, he can feel the warmth, but it is like she has overheated, and he knows her so well. “Another nightmare?” He asks her, able to tell that this was the case, not only from how she woke up, but from how scared she seems right now, and this nightmare must have been a very scary one.

She nods her head. “Mhm.” She mumbles as he looks at her, he then lays down and pulls her close to him, and he looks right into her silver eye. She does not have her eyepatch on, and that is actually because he asked her to keep it off. He wants her to become more comfortable to not need the eyepatch, she may still wear it outside of their company, but she does not need to wear it every second of every day. It is a scar, and it carries with it some bad memories, but at the end of the day – this is who she is.

And it has made her into the beautiful woman she is today.

He caresses her cheek with his hand. “Tell me.” He whispers, ready to hear the horrors that were inside of her mind, and she shuffles up to him, and he tucks his arm under her neck and keeps her close. She rests her head close to his bare chest, closing her eye before she tells him what happened in her terrifying narrative the mind constructed for her.

“I…I saw Roman again. I saw all of you…you were dead…you were trying to drag me into the floor…and I saw you all turn to dust.” She sniffles, still terrified every second of every day that she sees what happened to them. Something that could be very plausible if they do not defeat Vir Nominis Umbra and stop him from annihilating the entire universe. Oscar gently caresses her soft hair and he sighs, all he wants is for this sweet thing to finally be free from these nightmares.

But…even if they win…this is something in her mind, not some entity that is tearing her apart like what happened to Pyrrha.

Or with Kassius.

“Am I insane? Am I going crazy, Oscar?” She whimpers fearfully, and then he looks her right in the eye, gently caressing her cheek and she looks into his hazel eyes.
“You’re not crazy…” He says and she sniffs, but then he chuckles. “Well…not that kind of crazy. You’re definitely crazy, but that’s why I fell in love with you, really. You just amaze me.” He says to her with a smile, and she sniffs with a nervous smile, looking back to his hazel eyes that look into hers. He pulls her close again, kissing her on the lips and she holds into him affectionately. They break the kiss and then she hugs him, resting her head on his shoulder.

“I’m sorry… I… I don’t mean to be such a problem.” She sniffles.

“You could never be a problem, Ruby.” He promises, holding her close as he kisses her neck affectionately and she closes her eyes, resting her head on his shoulder.

They both stay in each other’s loving embrace.

For the rest of the night.

Weiss

When she was only eight years old…

Weiss was sat down on a chair inside of the Schnee Manor, so sweet and innocent back then with her tiny tail of white hair. She played with her toys that Klein and so many others had given her, Winter most likely away for her training at the Atlesian Academy. And it was clear that this was before her father snapped, because that was when she was only ten years old, at the dinner when he smacked their mother in front of everyone. But clearly there was a lot more going on behind the curtain, things that made it clear that Willow Schnee was nowhere near as innocent as everyone was led to believe.

Because across the room from her in the kitchen – was Jacques Schnee – his hair darker back then, before age turned his hair white, and not born with the featureless ice that the Schnees are known for. He was stood there, with a whole batch of ingredients on the counter, and all these bowls and stuff set out, and a book with a recipe inside. He traced his finger across the words on the page, looking totally confused as he reads it, and then picked up the flower, carefully pouring it into the bowl, watching the scale moving, up and down as it reads the weight as it gains and gains. “Okay… I think that’s right… oh wait… no that’s ounces.” He groans, shaking his head and changing it to grams, seeing that he is actually way off the number suggested by the book. “Whoa! That was a lot more than I thought!” He says, taking the bowl off and pouring the flour back into the bag.

Eventually he got the right measurements, and when it all came down to the actual cooking of the cake inside, he stands by the oven and he poked about the buttons and the knobs to try and get the temperature right.

Eventually being the important word…

“Come on, Jacques… you manage a multi-billion lien company, surely you can manage an oven.” He stated, fiddling with it more and more.

Oh…

Oh, how wrong he was.

“COME ON! How the hell does Klein manage this damned thing so well? Why are there so many
buttons?” Jacques exclaims, most likely ten minutes later of him trying to actually get the machine to start working. Weiss giggled as she sat there, looking over at her father – and despite the fact that she is not a great baker herself, she still managed to memorise what Klein would do when he would feed her a cake.

Despite the fact that her mother specifically asked him to not feed her so many sweets – but he could not resist to treat her. Little Weiss walks over to her father, who is now her enemy sadly, and she tugs at his shirt, and he looks down at her. “You turn this one.” She tells him, reaching up and turning the knob and igniting the flames inside of the oven. He stands there and looks at her with a smile.

“Look at you.” He chuckles, ruffling her white hair and she moans with annoyance, pushing his hand away as she stands there. “Come on, why don’t you help me?” He asks her, and they both begin to continue making the cake.

“He never knew how to make a cake before?” Neptune’s voice chuckles behind the memory, and Weiss sits there beside him. She was so prim and pure back then when she was only eight years old – now at twenty-three years of age, she is pale and dying from the Horridus Morbus plague. The others are still resting, trying to pass the time whilst the Witches concoct the brew that they need to make that will help stabilise and strengthen their bodies. Creating an artificial aura that will protect them at all times. But at the moment, Weiss has never looked sicker than she does right now.

She has come a long way, and so has Neptune Vasillias.

He is sat down beside her on the bed, listening to every word that the Former Schnee Heiress has to say. Weiss has let her hair loose, and it has gone wavy – of which it suits her really well too – and she still needs to give it a real good wash. The discolouring in her veins and skin from the plague can be seen on her arms and legs, and even above her breasts underneath the gown she wears until they are fit enough to move without having to wear that piece of clothing given to them by Glynda.

Weiss giggles softly as she answers her boyfriend’s question. “No, he never needed to. In fairness I don’t think he ever had cake as a child, his father was quite a nasty man. I don’t have many memories of my grandfather on his side, but he was very different to my Grandpa Nicholas Schnee. I remember him chastising my sister for being chubby.” Weiss explains and Neptune scoffs at that, both at the idea of him being such a nasty person, but also something else.

“Wait…Winter was overweight once?” Neptune asks her.

“Barely. But he did put me through a phase for a while…I stopped eating properly for a while and my sister always worried about me. I’m better now, definitely improved at Beacon. Being away from the family for some time.” She says to him, and Neptune nods his head.

“I’m sorry…but I can’t ever imagine your dad being a good guy.” He says, and Weiss nods her head.

“He wasn’t always bad… I mean he was never perfect. He had a temper, but his violence came about after he snapped when I was ten years old.” He states, and that just seems to anger Neptune.

“A father should never hit their little girl…should never hit their children or their wife.” He states, but Weiss continues to explain why she knows he was not always a bad person. That something definitely snapped in him one day.

“I think I know what it was – he was running a Multi-Billion Lien Business by himself all the time, he knew my mother was having an affair with Ironwood and the whole thing with his hate for the
Faunus, stemming from his own bad experiences in his life…I think it all piled up and he only found solitude in his anger.” Weiss explains, but Neptune still shakes his head.

“Doesn’t excuse it, Weiss.” Neptune says as he holds her hand, feeling the poor circulation that makes he body cold in comparison to his – luckily this has nothing to do with the Horridus Morbus Pathogen in her system. This is all simply a condition she has always had, not life threatening, just makes her body cooler than others. Adding to her whole stigma of being the Ice Queen.

“I know…but I don’t wanna remember my father as the man he became, I still have some fond memories of him before he snapped. The one with the cake is still my best.” She says to him with a smile.

“You keep saying he snapped…do you think some of the reasons behind why he became violent was because of his dad?” Neptune asks her curiously, since she made the mention of the Gele family.

“Maybe…the Geles have always been known to be pretty aggressive people for many years. My father for a while was the exception because he wanted to be something different, he wanted to be better than that. At least for a while – but my Uncle Donovan on the other hand was not.” Weiss explains, touching her forearm as she remembers the man that has been freed from prison quite recently.

“Uncle Donovan?” Neptune asks her.

“I never saw him much, and the few times I did, it ended with him pummelling someone into the ice. He is a scientist, and I think he worked for the Atlesian Special Forces. But he was put in prison because he went too far with his experiments. But my father would sometimes visit my Uncle…and he would come back…different.” She explains and Neptune looks at her with confusion.

“What do you mean?” He inquires.

“I don’t know how to describe it, he would just come back…and feel nothing. He would look at us like we weren’t really there. It was strange, even when he snapped…he still came back the same way.” Weiss explains, and it does make her twisted Uncle sound quite intimidating to mess with Jacques Schnee like that.

“Man…no offence…but your family is just a horror show.” He chuckles, and Weiss giggles at his funny comment – because he is totally right.

“I know, right? That’s why I was so thrilled to be away from them.” Weiss states with a smile, then looking at Neptune with that loving gaze. He smiles and he puts his arm around her shoulders and pulls her close, kissing the top of her white-haired head and gently resting his head atop hers. “I also met you too.” She sweetly says.

“Well…now you’re gonna make me blush, Weissy-Woo.” Neptune comments, making Weiss roll her big blue eyes with annoyance when hearing that pet name, he has for her.

“Please no…” She groans, making him chuckle.

“C’mon, admit it! You love it.” Neptune says to her.

“I love you, not the name.” She giggles.

“Well…I’ll take it.” Neptune chuckles, and then she smiles as she leans down onto his legs and looks up at him, kicking her legs back and forth, surprising him. “Hello!”
“Hypothetically speaking…if we survive and win this whole thing…”

“We will survive this.” Neptune assures.

“I know, but even still. Should I take a page from your book and add a bit of colour to my wardrobe? It’s all white.” She complains, making Neptune chuckle at how she makes it sound like her clothes are cheap and boring.

“People would kill for your wardrobe.” He comments.

“I’m sure they would, but I am getting bored of white. And black is Blake and Yenna’s thing. I was thinking…maybe I should go with…GREEN!” Weiss decides and he raises a brow at her, she turns and is shocked by his reaction. “What?”

“Green on you? Wouldn’t match your hair.” He says as he points at her long white hair and shrugs her shoulders.

“Okay, fair enough.” Weiss admits and he thinks, since most colours don’t really tend to work…and then he has an idea, something vibrant but also works with her shape and personality. He looks at her and he smiles.

“Blue.” He says to her as he looks down at the beautiful princess resting her back against his lap.

“Blue?” She asks him.

“Yeah, blue. It would match your eyes and work well with your hair.” He says to her as he touches her white hair that hangs down the side of his leg. She ponders on the idea and sucks her teeth, and she also cannot help but agree with him.

“Dark blue or ice blue?” She asks him.

“Oh Ice. You’re the Ice Queen after all.” He jokes and she rolls her eyes with an audible groan.

“I’m so sick of that name.” She groans, hanging her head off the side of his leg, making him chuckle as he caresses her leg.

“What would you prefer? Melted Wench?” He asks her and she suddenly rights herself and stares at him with a shocked expression that he would even dare call her such a foul word. He quickly – and wisely – retracts it. “Kidding.”

“Good…otherwise I’d break your nose.” She threatens with a smirk before winking at him.

“Eh, red wouldn’t work with you.” He comments, making her giggle and breaking from her cold exterior, pressing her head against his shoulder and they both lay down in the same bed, wrapped up in the covers.

As they lay there, they both turn when they hear some people entering the room, and the resting Hazel Rainart opens his eyes and he stands up, seeing Glynda, the Alchemist and the Undertaker arriving. The monstrous entity stands with the massive shovel in its grasp as it looks at them. “What’s up?” Neptune asks them, Yang and Sun wake up slowly with groans.

“The sky?” Sun groans.

“Oh, shut it.” Weiss grumbles as she rests her head on her boyfriend’s chest.

“The three of us are headed out to find the last herbs we need to create the potion that will help you
keep your strength built up.” The Alchemist tells them as she holds her pouch in her hand, clipping it onto her belt.

“We will be back soon. Hazel, keep them safe.” Glynda requests.

“Done.” Hazel assures as he rises up and cracks his neck, looking at the four of them and he sighs, seeing Sun looking away from him due to his feelings of the man. Hazel looks away from him and sheathes his knife on the windowsill.

He has learned to prepare for anything.

Weiss watches as the huge Undertaker walks past them and heads towards the door with the shovel in its hand. And then it leaves, closing the door behind it. “Gods… that thing freaks me out.”

Jacques

The Head of the Schnee Dust Company stands in his mansion, in the kitchen where he once stood many years ago. He stares down at the cake and he feels nothing, and he is the one that made it. But as he looks at it, he just closes his eyes and sighs, taking the oven mitts off and setting them down on the counter. He walks to the dishes and he begins to clean them, not asking his servants to do it, because he simply wanted to have some alone time. He begins to scrub against the bowls repeatedly, but as he looks at the reflection… a face is staring right back at him.

He spins round, shocked from who he thought he saw… he thought it was Willow, from the way she was standing there, staring at him with judgemental eyes. However most of the judgement came from Klein Sieben. He may have been a servant, but he could have still taken down Jacques if he pleased, he did serve in the Special Forces for a long time – he only stopped and retired when his body began to wither away due to time. Jacques always had immense respect for Klein, even if he did end up raising his daughters and cause them to rebel against him indirectly… but he did all that without even asking for extra payment which would have been provided.

He did it all on his own accord, because he cared for those girls like they were his own.

And now he is dead with Jacques’ own wife… killed in an accident that was never meant to happen. The explosion was aimed to kill the Politicians and Ironwood, but not his wife and definitely not Klein. There is blood on his hands and the guilt is starting show on his cold figure as he keeps scrubbing the bowls. Blood forming on his hands but then it fades away as he turns the palms. He sighs with a shaky breath and presses his soap covered hands against the counter, staring at the bubbles that the dishes are in.

Then he hears the sound of a knife cutting into the cake and he turns, to see Donovan behind him. “Wouldn’t mind if I try a piece, would you?” He asks his brother, cutting out a slice and picking up one of the newly washed plates. If Klein was here, he would have smacked Donovan across the face, and that is precisely what Jacques wants to do right now, but he cannot.

“Sure… why not?” He replies with a stern stare, picking up his towel and wiping off the water on the table. Donovan takes a bite out of it and he walks over to his brother.

“Did one of your servants make this?” He asks him, almost condescendingly.

“No, I did.” He responds, and Donovan chuckles with disbelief.
“You? Getting your hands dirty? I’ll believe that when I see it.” He scoffs as he walks around his brother with the cake in his hand and the plate barely catching any of the crumbs that fall from his mouth that chew it. The difference between the Gele Brothers is staggering, and if anything, it makes Jacques look like a better person in comparison. He has more respect than his brother that just takes what he wants from people, the fact he cut into the cake before asking is a perfect example of this.

“Did you really come into my house to trade insults?” Jacques questions as he turns to face his brother.

“Oh no, of course not. However, I am curious, I have never seen you bake before. And I must admit…I never remember you having any skills like this. It was always managing money with you.” Donovan states as he holds the cake in his hand, and Jacques stares right back.

“At least I didn’t test on live rats for fun as a child.” He reminds, remembering the terrible things that his brother did when they were children. And most people would shudder at such an accusation, however Donovan just grins away, nodding his head up and down. “And for your information, this was Klein Sieben’s cookbook. He always made my children nice treats if they did their studies on time.”

“Wow, no surprise Winter got fat.” He chuckles.

“Watch it, brother.” He states with a cold stare.

“Why? They betrayed you, they may as well be dead to you. Nothing more than dirt under your boot.”

“Maybe, but they are still my daughters.”

Donovan scoffs. “Where did this change of heart suddenly come from? The Jacques Schnee I heard of was ruthless. He murdered his own wife in a terrorist attack and abused his youngest daughter whenever it pleased him.” Donovan chuckles as he approaches his brother, in which Jacques glares right into his eyes with a clenched fist.

“What kind of a man are you? Who beats his own child?” Donovan snarls, when suddenly Jacques punches him across the jaw so hard, he drops the plate and it smashes on the floor. Donovan staggers back with a bruise on his face and blood leaking from his split lip. He chuckles as he staggers back, staring right back.

“They betrayed me…yes…and perhaps I cause that to happen. It doesn’t matter now – and I will make sure that they are punished for their crimes against us. But do not think you can talk against them like that.” He snarls with anger, showing that deep down there is still some of the good father left in him. Perhaps the side that always protected them from his own bloodline…perhaps maybe Weiss is not the only one trying to escape her name. Perhaps that is why he would get so angry whenever she would mention the fact he married into the family and took their surname.

“You are…a very confusing man. I have heard stories, about how you bombed one of your own buildings to try and kill your eldest daughter. How you sent Mercenaries into Mistral five years ago to hunt down both your daughters and bring them back dead or alive. Tell me, what would you have done if they were brought back alive?” He asks him, and Jacques narrows his eyes with anger.

The Gele family seems to really bring out another side of this cold Businessman…the human side.

“I would have convinced them to return to my side.” Jacques says, but his answer causes Donovan to guffaw with laughter, stepping back as he responds to his statement.
“They ran because of you…because of what you are. A coward.” He snarls, staring right into his brother’s eyes.

“And what does that make you, brother? The man who is only hear because you want to reap the fruits of the plants I sow.” Jacques snarls back, since that is what Donovan is. He is a Leech, one that has always clung to his brother’s success in the businesses he has run in his life all so then he can get his share out of it. A share he does not deserve but gets because he claims he helped him start the business, and otherwise he would tear him down if he wished.

Donovan is a special kind of cruel, different to what Jacques has become. Jacques is cruel because of his own ambition, whereas Donovan is cruel just for the sake of being cruel. “I am a survivor…” He tells him with a grin. “And at the end of the day, if you are losing grasp of what is at stake here…say so now…but I wouldn’t go running for your daughters. Because I think they will cut your neck open.” He says with a grin on his face.

“I know what is at stake. The Family Name. It is all that matters.” He states with anger in his eyes.

“Yes…it is. So, forget these alleged good memories you have with your daughters. The few there are…because they are your enemies. And they must die for their transgressions against this family.” He states. “And I will make sure I am there to see it.”

“What does that mean? Where are you going?” Jacques questions.

“Kelham is taking the Drift of Wandering Star and we are heading out. Whitley and Kelham are both heading to Queen’s Cove with the Spectre and that Ice Cream Assassin chick. I am heading to my new science facility set up in Arkhonex. Gonna have some fun with my little test subjects.” He chuckles sinisterly as he walks away.

“Why is Whitley going with you?” He questions.

“He is done sitting around. He wants to make something of his life…you could learn a lot from him, brother.” Donovan tells him, before walking away and dropping the cake in his hand onto the floor that he still kept in his grasp despite the punch. “Thanks for the cake.”

He leaves the Mansion.

Leaving Jacques alone…

The only Schnee left in all of Atlas.

Ozpin

The Knight of Vengeance sits on the balcony outside of the motel rooms that the Huntsmen and Huntresses are resting in. Nora and Ren have returned to their room and are also asleep, and as he sits there, he is meditating. Focusing his aura to the surroundings that are all around him, the breeze in the wind to the distant calls of birds that echo in the far miles. However, as he sits there, the door to one of the rooms opens and he turns his head, seeing him walking out, looking tired and concerned.

Oscar.
He puts his shirt back on as he steps out, concealing the scars that are on his body. A stab wound in his abdomen, a slash across his right peck and a bullet scar in his back. Unlike Ruby he has less burn wounds than she has, but one of those wounds is indeed from Tyrian Callows – the slash across his chest was given by him. But Tyrian was more interested in hurting Ruby for what she did to his tail, which is why he only has the one scar to remember him by. But Ruby’s screams of intense agony were enough to scar him for life, especially when he was helpless to save her from his fists, from his blades and his torture.

Oscar sees Ozpin sat there, and it finally gives the two of them time to talk for once. Oscar approaches him, the man that was once inside of his head many years ago and he leans against the railing, looking out at the mountains that they were once on top of. Now they do not look so beautiful, after learning that there are thousands of skeletons that were people buried alive there…and the beginning of the end for the Arkhoni happened here. Where the Congregation of Dawn began their ruthless slaughter across the world.

Ozpin looks at Oscar, and he can read him like a book. “How is she?” He asks him, and Oscar glances at him and sighs. Normally people would be confused at how quickly they would catch onto that…but Ozpin was in Oscar’s mind, and he could see his thoughts as he made them. He could see his love forming when he first met the girl, and now five years later, they are sharing the same bed, and are madly in love with each other.

But clearly, Ruby is not well.

Oscar sighs. “She’s getting worse…her nightmares are getting more frequent.” He says with a sigh, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Still using the coping mechanism, I recommended?” He asks him.

“Breathing in and out only works for so long.” He sighs, and Ozpin nods his head in agreement.

“I take it you don’t have the medication on you?” Ozpin presumes.

“No…we ran out before we went to Vacuo and that was when her symptoms came back. She was fine for two years, I mean sure there were a couple episodes here and there…but she hasn’t been like this since the early days of us dating.” Oscar explains to him, remembering her struggling with her mental problems back then was extremely frightening…and it is now.

“I’m sure we can find her something in the future.” He assures with a smile.

“I hope so.” Oscar groans, shaking his head, looking across the night sky to see the sun slowly beginning to emerge from the horizon. He scratches his neck above the collar of his green shirt.

“We have come a long way, haven’t we? From your Aunt’s farm.” He says, chuckling as he sits there. “How is she? From when I last saw her, I mean?”

“She’s better, I mean you saw her reaction when I came back after we saved Ruby. I still think my face is recovering from that slap.” Oscar describes, making Ozpin laugh at his wording of it as Oscar rubs his cheek.

“I always admired her…one hell of a strong woman.” He says.

“Still is. Last time Ruby and I were visiting her, the payments I gave her from our missions helped her upgrade the farm. Now has a bunch of new Farmhands, new equipment and a whole new barn.” Oscar describes and Ozpin smiles as he nods his head.
“That’s good, I remember you saying you would help her when you visit.” Ozpin remembers.

“Yep…but as always…no, no…I can’t have you and your lovely girlfriend do work on a visit!” Oscar mimics her voice and shakes his fist above his head, and Ozpin chuckles, nodding his head. Meaning he was still in Oscar’s head when that bit happened. “I am glad she likes Ruby.”

“She was right about what she said.” Ozpin reminds, and Oscar raises brow curiously. “She is perfect for you. You match her in many ways.” Ozpin says, and Oscar chuckles.

“I guess so…always do wonder what kind of student I would’ve been there.” Oscar says as he imagines.

“Oh, I bet you would have been a bit like her. Snarky but a hard worker…when she would get to class on time.” Ozpin adds at the end of it.

“She was always late?” Oscar inquires.

“She loved to learn…but also seemed to be late for nearly every class. Of which Weiss would chastise her for.” Ozpin remembers, chuckling as he vividly remembers Weiss smacking her book against the top of Ruby’s head for being fifteen minutes late once. Not overly ridiculous to imagine her doing something like that either.

Oscar looks at Ozpin and he asks him something curious. “Ozpin…”

“Hmm?” Ozpin replies.

“Why…why did you pick me? When you first got in my head?” He asks him curiously, and the old Professor taps his cane against the floor as he thinks on how to word his answer.

“Well…you and I have a very similar way of thinking. We both want the best for the world and would do anything to change it.” Ozpin states as he looks at him.

“Wait…so my semblance had nothing to do with it?” He presumes.

“Oh no, that was all a happy coincidence.” Ozpin admits, of which is actually more surprising. Oscar was sat around, thinking that this was the reason the whole time behind why he was chosen – because of his Time Manipulating Semblance, but in fact that has absolutely nothing to do with it at all.

“Well…in any case…thanks.” Oscar says with a smile, because if not for Ozpin doing that – he would have never met the love of his life.

“The world can be a fickle thing…but there is a lot of beauty still to be offered.” He states as he stands up, noticing another door opening and they see Cinder with a scroll up to her ear and she looks at them, walking towards them now. “And plenty of surprises.”

Cinder approaches the two and she holds out her scroll, putting it on speakerphone. Oscar raises his brow with confusion.

“Who’s this?” He asks.

“YO BIG BOY!” Kassius’ voice suddenly booms, causing all three of them to jump from how sudden it was.

“I guess by your exhilarated mood you have some good news?” He asks.
“Oh…the best.” Kassius assures on the other end, because now.

He knows where they need to go next.
Minutes before his call...

Kassius walks with Emerald down the path after patrolling the area where they landed the ship so then they can all get a rest. At the end of day, since their minds have been messed with by Salem and after using a Visionary Book, their bodies and brains have been totally exhausted. Emerald yawns and stretches her arms, then she looks at Kassius as he tells her a story about a certain someone. “So, did Sapphire – or I guess Cinder…stupid name, sis – tell you about her once trying to be a magician?” Kassius asks her with a smirk, and Emerald furrows her green brows with confusion.

“Huh?” She questions with a soft chuckle.

“Uh-Huh. Cinder Fall wanted to be a magician when she was a kid.” Kassius chuckles, remembering it all like it was yesterday.

“No way…you’re pulling my leg.” She states, unable to believe this.

“Oh yeah, swear to all the gods.” Kassius assures her, nodding his head. Emerald giggles at the idea of Cinder Fall – the one she remembers back with Salem – the Cinder that was a bit of a monster at times, being a cute little girl trying to be a magician.

“Wow…was she any good?” Emerald inquires curiously.

“Surprisingly yeah.” Kassius chuckles.

“Seriously?” She asks.

“Yup, when we were kids, when Mom was still around, we knew this guy back at Vytal who would teach people some cool little tricks. He took an interest in her and said she would make a great wizard. Dunno if he was just being nice to her because she was a cute little kid with chubby cheeks or if he was being legit.” Kassius explains, and they both chuckle. “He taught her some of those card tricks and she caught on quick…always has been a fast learner. Better than me.” Kassius admits.

“Really?” She asks him.

“It took me a long time to learn how to fight the way I do, Taiyang definitely helped with that but it was Yang who helped me figure out how to mend a bike. She’s always been the mechanic.” Kassius chuckles.

“Guess it makes sense though, Cinder knows how to fly planes and stuff. She taught me how to do it.” Emerald says to him.

“Oh yeah? Guess you’re a quick study too, given how well you can fly.” Kassius tells her with a supportive pat on the back. She jolts forward from the impact of his hand on her back, but it was not enough to hurt.

If he used his cybernetic hand though, that would most certainly be a different story altogether.
“Thanks.” Emerald says, rubbing her shoulder for a second before she walks normally again, looking down at the floor and crossing her arms over her chest, exhaling the cold air. It is no lie that the climate is changing all over the world, normally Vale is quite warm even during the Autumn. It does get colder during Winter, but never this early. “She always looked after me back at the Sanctum, I mean there was always Mercury. But he was always pretty self-centred…until the end.” Emerald says with a sigh and Kassius slows down as he looks at the Green Haired Thief – who was once a foe.

“Still thinking about what happened to Mercury?” Kassius asks her, and she stops, sighing as she rubs the back of her neck, turning to face him again.

“Can’t stop thinking about it…maybe I could have saved him. Used my Semblance on Death…or something. Could have helped him.” She states with a defeated sigh, leaning up against the tree and Kassius approaches her and he leans his back against it, looking down at the floor.

“I get that feeling…with my team I lost.” Kassius tells her, and she glances at him and he sighs heavily. “When it comes close to that tragic anniversary, I always fall back into that pit…thinking and wallowing in my own self-pity. Maybe I should have done something, died in their place, been a better leader. Or something like that.” Kassius says to her, then he looks over to her. “Then Yang helps me remember, that there was nothing I could have done to save them. And the same goes for you…your Semblance wouldn’t do anything to Death. If Oscar’s time manipulation has no effect on the bastard, do you really think your mind manipulation would be any different?” Kassius asks her, and she sighs.

“I guess not.” She states.

“Death isn’t like the others, they are all emotions and desires. But he…just exists. Time cannot heal or harm him, and neither can hallucinations. He just exists for his duty.” Kassius explains to her, showing how far he has come from the boy that just heard of a story about the Knights of Grimm. Totally unaware that there was a fifth…and he was in the room with them the whole time, seeing through Oscar’s eyes at the time. It still gives him chills to even imagine that, it is one hell of a thing to keep back, a lie to make.

But if Umbra was watching then perhaps, he was right to do so, because Vir Nominis Umbra could have attacked then and there and killed them all to get to Oscar and kill him.

Emerald looks at Kassius with a smile and he returns the favour, squeezing her shoulder gently. “Go on now, get some rest. I’m gonna call Sapphire and fill them in what we found…unless you wanna talk to her too?” Kassius asks her as he pulls out his scroll, luckily, they still have signal from the Cross Continental Transmit Network that is still operation. Even though Vacuo is invaded by the Grimm, the Knights’ Bannermen must be maintaining it for the Acolytes of Lien to communicate with ease.

Despite how much she wants to speak to Cinder…there is still that whispering thought in her mind. “Um…I don’t think I can yet. We’ve got a lot to catch up on…” Emerald stammers, and she turns to walk away.

“Doesn’t mean you can’t let her know you’re okay.” Kassius suggests, and she stops, looking back at him. He can see how much she loves Cinder, and he also knows how much Cinder loves her. Neither of them are good liars on this front, he has seen the look on her face before. On Yang, himself – Blake and Sun, Ruby and Oscar, Weiss and Neptune, Ren and Nora, Pyrrha and Jaune. The list could go on for days, but everyone who is in love has that look about them. Dilated pupils, red faced and sharp breaths at the mention of the name.
And uncontrollable nervousness.

“I…I…” Emerald stammers, but Kassius flicks his Scroll open and slides the contact list down to Cinder’s name – or as he still names her, Sapphire Locke. Emerald sighs, wringing her hands as she approaches him and she nods her head, because at least then they know that both sides are okay right now.

“Let’s see what she’s up to.” Kassius says, selecting her name and holding it up to his ear for now, pacing back and forth slowly and calmly as he waits to hear from her. It literally takes a couple seconds before he starts getting impatient, making Emerald giggle softly.

“Maybe she’s ignoring us?” Hyde suggests.

“She’s not ignoring us. Probably sat on it.” Kassius states with a sigh, the way that he talks about her truly does surprise Emerald, because she has always known her as a commander up until Mercury’s death. That and the arrival of the Knights of Grimm, things really did begin to change when they arrived.

Eventually though, Cinder picks up. “Kassius?” She gasps on the other end of the line.

“Hey sis.” Kassius says to her calmly, as if the impatient person Emerald was just watching just disappeared.

“Gods…am I happy to hear your voice.” She says with relief, clear that they have had some stressful times up in those mountains, given what happened with Kragen and Kannix…and of course – the Whisperer revealing itself to them all for the first time. That is not something the adventurers are ever going to forget.

“You alright?” Kassius asks her, since he has no idea of the horrors that they experienced up in those mountains when waiting for him and his team to find something to go on next.

“Yeah…we…we just took a bit of a hit on the mountains. Nobody’s dead, but Kragen got badly hurt. He’s recovering.” Cinder assures, and Kassius looks at Emerald and he stammers.

“The hell happened?” Kassius asks her, and she sighs on the other end of the call.

“Kannix attacked Kragen, he walked off for a second and nearly killed him. When they found him, he was nearly dead…and…they saw the Whisperer.” Cinder tells him, and Kassius stands there with confusion, since he has never heard of the Whisperer. He was not there to hear of the stories about this monster until now.

“The Whisperer?” He asks her.

“One of Umbra’s Higher Demons, like the Lord of the Wood and the Onyx Phantom? Like Hyde? The Whisperer is the fourth one, and apparently, he is the most dangerous. We left the mountains behind us because he was there. We’re at a random town right now.” Cinder explains, and she sighs again, on the other end she is rubbing her tired eyes.

“Sounds like I just woke you.” Kassius comments, still comprehending the fact there is now a fourth one of these damned Demons. Makes sense though, Umbra seems to have a knack of creating four of everything.

“No, I woke up on my own.” She assures.

“Well, as long as you guys are safe.” Kassius says with hope in his voice, knowing that at least
everyone on their side is not dead, just a bit shook up by the sounds of things. Not very far off how
his side feel after their encounter with Salem.

“Yeah, how about you guys? Is Emerald okay?” She asks him, again, the second person her worries
are focused around. First her brother and now the girl she has feelings for and misses so dearly.
Kassius smiles, looking to Emerald.

“Why don’t you ask her yourself?” He replies, gently under-arm throwing the scroll to Emerald. She
catches it clumsily, juggling it in her hands before finally finding a good grip on it. She grasps it
softly with both hands, lifting it to her ear with a shaky breath.

“E-Emerald?” Cinder stammers, and Emerald releases and shaky breath, glancing to Kassius and he
just gives her a firm nod.

Finally, she speaks. “H-Hey, Cinder.” She says to her, and she can hear the sigh of relief from
Cinder on the other side. Something she would have never expected to hear from her back when
they were working with Roman Torchwick, when she would be quite a violent leader…but that was
not the person she is now. The old Cinder Fall is gone, and now there is someone new.

“Thank the gods you’re okay…” She sighs with relief.

“Are you? The last time I ever saw you…it was the Emerald Forest.” She says to her, all the way
back when Ruby was still captured by Salem and her minions.

“I know…and now both of us are helping them. So’s Hazel too.” She chuckles nervously as she
scratches her black-haired head.

“Hazel is still alive?” She asks.

“Yes, he is with our friends infected with Horridus Morbus back at Beacon.” Cinder confirms, and
Emerald smiles.

“I always liked Hazel back at the Sanctum...he was always quite kind to us. Unlike Watts and
Tyrian.” Emerald remembers, and then she nods her head, knowing that Cinder was about to confirm
they are also gone. “Not too sad that both of them are dead, if I’m gonna be honest.”

“Well, if only Tyrian bit the bullet sooner...maybe Ruby wouldn’t be suffering the way she has
been.” She sighs, and then Cinder redirects her attention back to Emerald. “Where have you been? I
tried calling you…” She softly says to her, but Emerald sighs.

“I haven’t been able to use it since, few times I tried the Acolytes would find me...or Salem would
send the Grimm after me.” Emerald explains, meaning she has been in hiding this whole time. “If I
wasn’t having to hide every day...I would have answered.” She assures, and Cinder smiles back at
the Motel, sat on the bed.

“Where did you go, Cinder? You vanished after the Emerald Forest.” Emerald asks her.

“I was taken in by an old man...he nursed me back to health. You saw how I was, losing faith in
Salem. After I saw Kassius again...I started questioning where I belonged. He helped me find a way
forward.” Cinder explains to her, and Emerald smiles.

“Sounds like a good man.” She comments.

“He was.” Cinder gravely says, and Emerald squeezes her eyes shut.
“What happened to him?” She inquires.

“The Acolytes of Lien, I don’t think it was by Ortega’s order, they just ransacked his farm and killed everyone. Killed him as well…so I tracked them and killed them. Then I snuck back to the Sanctum…I hoped to find you and Mercury there…but I didn’t. It was only when I overheard some of the soldiers that I found out about Mercury. I had no idea about where you could have gone, so I waited…and I helped get Ruby out of there when I snuck aboard Ortega’s ship.” Cinder sums up, and the rest of it is history.

Emerald nods her head as she stands there, looking at Kassius who has his head hanging low. Despite how well he puts on that smile they can all tell he is struggling as well, learning about Hyde the way he has – and not only that – the deaths of Taiyang and Oobleck are really sitting with him. They are surrounded by death now, and it does not seem to be changing any time soon.

Cinder sighs heavily. “I’m…I’m sorry, Emerald. For the way I treated you back at Beacon…I was…” She stammers, but Emerald stops her.

“Stop, Cinder. It doesn’t matter anymore, we had a job to do. It may haunt me even now…but had no other choice. It was either that…or face the same fate as Mercury.” Emerald states with glassy eyes.

“But…”

“Cinder…it’s in the past.” She says to her, and Cinder sits there, and she closes her eyes, saddened at how she treated Emerald once…but also amazed at how she is just brushing it off as being in the past. Emerald stands there, and she looks at Kassius during the pregnant silence between them. “I’ll see you soon, I promise. But Kassius needs to tell you what we found.” Emerald says and Kassius pushes himself off the tree and uncrosses his arms.

“What did you find?” She asks as Emerald throws the Scroll back to Kassius who catches it in his metal hand, now on the other end.

“Well…who’s with you? Be easier if we can talk with some others, saves you having to tell it all again.” Kassius chuckles, since they have a lot to catch up on. Cinder gets up and she looks out the window, she can see Ozpin and Oscar talking outside.

“Oscar and Ozpin are awake. Everyone else is still asleep right now.” Cinder tells him.

“Well, Oz and Oscar are better than just the two of us.” Kassius says.

“Allright, I’ll get them in, let them know you’re here.” She says to him, but then Kassius has a genius yet silly epiphany.

“Wait…don’t tell them it’s me…I have an idea.” He chuckles and Cinder rolls her amber eye with an audible sigh, knowing exactly what he wants to do.

“You wanna surprise them, don’t you?” She asks him.

“Aw…how did you know?” He asks her.

“You’re my brother.” She reminds.

There’s a short silence. “Good point.” Kassius agrees with the nod of his head, making Cinder softly chuckle.
Cinder opens the door and she walks towards them, hearing only the end of their talk together.

“Well…in any case…thanks.” Oscar says with a smile.

“The world can be a fickle thing…but there is a lot of beauty still to be offered.” He states as he stands up, noticing another door opening and they see Cinder with a scroll up to her ear and she looks at them, walking towards them now. “And plenty of surprises.”

Cinder approaches the two and she holds out her scroll, putting it on speakerphone. Oscar raises his brow with confusion.

“Who’s this?” He asks.

“YO BIG BOY!” Kassius’ voice suddenly booms, causing all three of them to jump from how sudden it was.

“I guess by your exhilarated mood you have some good news?” He asks.

“Oh…the best.” Kassius assures on the other end, because now.

He knows where they need to go next. But Cinder has a comment of her own, looking down at the scroll she puts down on the table. “Did you totally forget that I said everyone is asleep?” She questions.

“You had the power to convince me to do otherwise.” Kassius reminds.

“Oh, shut up.” She sighs, rolling her amber eye again with the shake of her head, in which Ozpin looks down at the scroll.

“Hang on a second…Big Boy? I’ve been staying quite fit thank you very much.” Oscar says with what actually sounds like offense in his voice.

“No, I didn’t mean it like that. When I first met you, you were tiny.” Kassius states, and Oscar looks at Cinder and then at Ozpin.

And both of them agree.

“What?” Oscar questions.

“You were!” Cinder agrees.

“I can’t really argue with him on that.” Ozpin admits with a chuckle, and Oscar sits down like he is having a tantrum, crossing his arms and looking away from them. Ozpin pats his shoulder and turns back to the Scroll.

“Mr Locke…do you have any news for us?” Ozpin inquires, and Kassius chuckles.

“Good to hear from you, Oz. At least your sense of humour is still sharp.” Kassius chuckles, in which Ozpin raises his brow.

“Oh, my sense of humour is just fine. More that after the day we’ve had, we could use some good news.” Ozpin states, and Kassius puts on his serious pants now, leaning against the tree where he has been stood for a while, nodding his head.

“Sapphire told me…Kragen’s alright?” Kassius asks.
“He’s recovering. It was close though.” Oscar answers.

“What about you guys? Heard this Whisperer thing attacked you.” Kassius comments.

“Yes…we were lucky Ruby used her eyes on it. But I highly doubt it was trying to kill any of us, I think it was just making its presence known to us. The Whisperer is far more powerful than the other Demons we have faced, nearly as strong as Umbra in some ways.” Ozpin explains, and Kassius looks a bit worried by that.

“In what ways?” He asks, since he is powerful in so many different ways.

“It is extremely intelligent, unlike the Phantom and Lord of the Wood. It knows how to manipulate people and get into your head. And it is physically strong, like the rest of them.” He states with the shrug of his shoulders, and Kassius sighs.

“I miss the days of simple assholes with guns.” Kassius groans.

“As do we all.” Oscar agrees.

“So…do we have a new lead?” Ozpin asks him as he clasps his hands together atop his cane.

“Yes, we do, and it is the best lead we could have found. Our next locations are at Argus and Queen’s Cove. Two tunnels still operational that go under the ocean, we just need to figure out how to activate them.” Kassius explains, Cinder and Oscar look at each other with disbelief.

“And these tunnels head straight to Arkhonex?” Cinder asks him with shock in her voice.

“It’s what she told us.” Kassius says to them, and the three of them fall silent and look at one another, before turning back to the scroll.

“She?” Ozpin asks him, and Kassius raises a brow.

“Did you know about Jinn?” Kassius asks him curiously, and Ozpin looks at Oscar and Cinder with what seems to be genuine disbelief on his face. He leans back into his chair and chuckles.

“She’s still there? I would have thought she’d leave by now.” Ozpin comments, and Oscar turns to the Professor.

“Who’s this?” He inquires.

“Well back in the day of Arkhonex, the Map Room was built around an old Shrine to one of the Lesser Gods. Remember I mentioned some of them?” Ozpin asks them and the two of them nod their heads in agreement. “Well one of them was there, a fragment of her – the Goddess of Knowledge and Guidance called Jinn. But I had no idea she was still there after all this time. There was nobody there for her to give her vast sums of knowledge to.” Ozpin explains, scratching the back of his neck. And in this case, they can actually forgive him for not mentioning Jinn in the past simply because it did not resemble any kind of importance until now knowing that she is still there.

“By the way, Jinn wasn’t the only immortal gal there.” Kassius brings up, and they all look back to the Scroll.

“Salem?” Ozpin inquires, since that is the only other immortal, he could possibly think of that is female around here. The very mention of the name gives Cinder a chill and a burning feeling on her chest even now.
“Yep, with her damn Dragon too. She’s wearing armour too, getting into the fights now. Guess maybe Umbra is letting her off her leash now?” Kassius presumes, and Ozpin nods his head, looking down at the floor.

“That definitely poses a threat to us. That Dragon is extremely powerful, and she is a powerhouse in her own right.” Oscar remembers, seeing the Dragon destroying everything in its path back on the Volcanic Chain Isles back five years ago.

“Well we will have to keep our eyes peeled then, won’t we?” Cinder says, actually watching the skies to make sure that she has not ended up here. End of the day, Salem can travel great distances in no time with that massive monster she rides. Who knows where she could be headed right now?

“She messed with us there as well…showed us something with Hyde…we saw what will happen if we fail. She showed us one of Hyde’s old memories as the Ebony Berserker…we watched as a whole universe ended by his hand.” Kassius tells them, and they all fall silent, because they can hear the legitimate fear in his voice. “We all are still a bit shaken up from what we all saw…”

“Seems she learned how to use hallucinogenic magic. Been a long time since I last saw Salem…she has grown stronger.” Ozpin states, with a sigh of what sounds a bit like guilt. Not something that Oscar missed as he looks at the Knight of Vengeance – or as Ozpin calls himself – the Fallen Knight of Guilt.

“We…saw something else as well.” He stammers, and he is clearly thinking of the things that Jinn told them – about the Gods, Umbra and the Faunus.

“What is it?” Cinder inquires.

“Jinn…she showed us some of her own memories. She seemed confused though, like she does not have all the answers…but Umbra…he seems to be doing this all for a reason. And that we should never call him a god.” Kassius explains, since they are all still trying to comprehend it all. “Gods it all still makes no sense when I say it aloud.” He stammers. “But…she also told us…that the Faunus are merely a Miraculous Accident. That Human D.N.A and Fauna D.N.A happened to combine without the gods watching over. And that it happened to create something beautiful and new. It hit Velvet hard…but I thought you should know.” Kassius states, and Ozpin sits there, thinking of what his wife would think of that.

*She would probably feel honoured and rub it in our faces.*

Ozpin chuckles softly at the thought of that. “Hopefully Blake will take it well…if you ask me that’s not really a bad thing.” Oscar says.

“But at the same time some Faunus may see this as…I dunno…like they are some kind of mistake.” Cinder suggests, and Oscar sighs and nods his head in agreement, this kind of information is dangerous. It could trigger a second Great War – and they have enough on their plates right now.

“Good point.” He sighs, and Kassius finally has one more thing to mention, something extremely important that they cannot possibly forget.

“She said something else too – that we are running out of time. She said we have approximately two weeks until the Shivering Dominion hits.” Kassius tells them, and Ozpin’s eyes widen with disbelief.

“That little time?” Oscar whimpers fearfully.

“By the gods…” Cinder stammers as she looks at the shattering moon in the sky. Soon it will be completely blown apart and when it does, all out hell will be unleashed upon Remnant. More Grimm
than they have ever known and more terrifying than they have ever seen. Kassius sighs, feeling this heavy weight be lifted from him.

“And that’s it…she told us where to go and then Salem attacked again, harder and it caused the entire Chamber to collapse. We barely made it out.” Kassius tells them and they take a couple seconds to digest this information. Oscar looks at them and he is the one to bring them back onto the important subject at hand.

“Argus and Queen’s Cove? I’ve heard of Argus, it’s at Northern Anima, main trade route between Solitas and Anima, right?” Oscar inquires, making sure he has it right. Ozpin and Cinder digest the information and they all return back to the importance at hand, they can talk about the rest later on.

“Correct, Atlas has heavy pull there. Meaning that if we go there, then there is a strong chance the Acolytes of Lien will be there in force.” Ozpin states.

“So, in other words, be ready for combat.” Cinder translates.

“Yes.” Ozpin nods.

“Jaune’s sister lives there, she came to visit once when we were rebuilding Beacon. She and her wife came with their newly born baby to show Jaune that he’s an uncle now.” Oscar explains, and Cinder smiles for Jaune, at least he has that going for him. Ozpin nods his head and turns back to Oscar. “I mean…we’ll ask him…but she could help us get in undetected.” Oscar suggests.

“What about Queen’s Cove?” Kassius asks curiously.

“I know it, Salem had us infiltrate it once…tracking down some…Silver Eyed Warriors.” Cinder sighs, looking at Oscar with guilt shown in her amber eye. However, Oscar shows no anger or distaste towards her for her past decisions, because as Emerald said…it is all in the past now.

“What can we expect?” Kassius asks, and Ozpin answers instead since he clearly knows more about it.

“It’s a city built into the face of a cliff that overlooks the sea, they hollowed it out for more room, mostly inside of the cliff and roads moving in and out. It has a powerful shield protecting it from massive waves as well.” Ozpin states, and Cinder nods her head.

“Our mission was also to find weaknesses in Shield Technology in case the Relic at Beacon was guarded in that way.” Cinder states, remembering her mission there quite well.

“Why the hell would you build a city on a cliff?” Kassius inquires.

“Well Argus, Kuchinashi and Queen’s Cove are similar in this regard. All three were once small Arkhoni cities of their own accord. All but Kuchinashi were linked to our trade winds, but Kuchinashi was linked to Ephai. The people decided to take advantage of the abandoned cities, many Huntsmen cleared out the Grimm and started anew. There are still some ancient structures left behind, multiple towers as well. Especially around Queen’s Cove.” Ozpin explains to them. “The city at Queen’s Cove was abandoned after Arkhonex fell, and over thousands of years of erosion, the cliff collapsed and took half the city with it. The new settlers took advantage of this problem, creating a shield to block the waves and hollow out the cliff and support it with buildings and towns inside. Ingenious method and is one of the best locations for Airships and Naval Vessels to arrive for trade and refuelling at Vale.” Ozpin explains.

“Wow, gotta give them points for effort.” Kassius chuckles.
“Indeed.” Ozpin agrees with a chuckle.

“So how should we approach this – will the Acolytes be there too?” Kassius inquires.

“Most certainly, Ortega would have definitely secured the smaller cities to fortify. He is a smart military man, it’s what I would do in his position.” Ozpin admits with the shrug of his shoulders.

“So, entering by air is a bad idea?” Kassius guesses.

“Without a doubt, he would have Anti-Air Defences in place to take out unflagged ships or questionable origin. Would be best to head to the nearest auto-shop and find a four-by-four. The area is quite bumpy and there are a few old ruins along the way.” Ozpin advises.

“Take it Raven can’t teleport us there like we did to get to the Mountains, right?” Oscar presumes.

“No, too dangerous. We cannot risk bringing the Knights’ Bannermen to Argus, we will have to simply fly there. We land somewhere safe and enter on foot.” Ozpin states. “We will speak with Jaune if he is fine with us possibly seeking safety with his sister to come up with a plan.” Ozpin states.

“We don’t wanna get innocents dragged into this, especially not Jaune’s family.” Cinder reminds.

“I know; however, we also need to be smart about this. We need allies in there, and I highly doubt Caroline Cordovan will be on our side there.” Ozpin states.

“Who’s she?” Oscar asks.

“Atlesian Commander.” Cinder answers. “We’ve crossed paths before…”

“You have?” Oscar asks her.

“She and I got into a firefight a few years back, when I was with Salem. I bet she’ll remember, that is if she has not been turned to the Acolytes.” Cinder states.

“Well let’s just hope we never encounter her, and we open this tunnel beforehand.” Ozpin states with a heavy sigh, massaging his brow with his hand.

“So, my team will head to Queen’s Cove and open this tunnel. And you will head to Argus? How exactly will we figure out how to open these tunnels?” Kassius inquires and Ozpin smiles.

“Well it is possible I created a law for any cities that have ancient structures in them.” Ozpin states as he crosses his arms.

“You did?” They all question.

“I did. It was deemed to be illegal and punishable by a hefty fine to desecrate or vandalise ancient structures or anything inside. Meaning they should still be standing where they were. Now these tunnels – if I remember correctly – were all activated by control panels inside of these large towers. However, there are many towers in these cities. So, we will have to figure out which one is which.” Ozpin explains, and Kassius sighs.

“Why can’t you Arkhoni people be simple?” Kassius questions, and Ozpin chuckles.

“Blame the Architect for that one.” Ozpin suggests.

“When I see him again, I’m gonna file a complaint.” Kassius sarcastically chuckles.
“I’ll be sure he will note it down.” Ozpin chuckles.

“Alright… I’m gonna get some shut-eye, we’ll head for Queen’s Cove in the morning.” Kassius tells them, and the three of them turn to the rising sun.

“Then we will soon get moving to Argus as well.” Ozpin states, since dawn is breaking.

“Good luck, guys. Talk to you on the other side hopefully.” Kassius says.

“Good luck.” Cinder says, then they hang up their calls, and Kassius closes his scroll and shoves it back into his pocket with a sigh. He walks away from the tree, returning back to the Peregrine landed in the middle of the woods where they will sleep for the night.

Mazen

The High Leader of the White Fang pushes his hand against the door of the truck that they have been driving in. They have amassed more forces since they were last seen back at the Trafficker’s Hideout, with Armoured Personnel Carriers and soldiers with the stolen gear of the Acolytes of Lien. Now covered with the new paintjobs of the White Fang and the Red Wolf. He walks down the steps with his Chainsword sheathed, stopping at the handrail. Staring out across Argus.

The White Fang are already here, and the masked High Leader exhales through his hidden lips. Corsac Albain walks over to him and leans against the railing, staring at the Atlesian Base. “The Beloved City of Argus… gods what a horrible place.” Corsac grumbles as he stares at the people and listening to the distant trumpeting horns of ships entering the harbour to unload shipments. Mazen glances at Corsac but stays silent as he stares out, the other Elite White Fang soldiers walking down as well.

Kardas the insane Hyena Faunus

Anto the Violent Warthog Faunus.

Arkaas the cruel Eagle Faunus.

Kaa the Seductive Viper Faunus.

Kaa flicks her long hair over her shoulder with a grin as she licks her newly added red lipstick on her pouting mouth, her fangs extending slightly. Arkaas jumps up onto a ridge with his bow in his hand, wings spread out with the feathers ready for flight at any point. And the two most violent look like they just want to kill every human they see. “The Atlesian Airbase is our target, not the humans.” Mazen reminds, pushing away from the railing and walking down the stairs.

“What is with your sudden love for Humanity, High Leader?” Arkaas questions as he jumps down and lands in front of him, in which the massive Bear Faunus grabs him by the throat and lifts him off the floor, staring right into his eyes through the glowing red eyes of his mask.

“Do not mistake my targets to be me getting soft. I have no love for mankind… and I also have no love for my own kind. I have been betrayed by both.” Mazen states as the Eagle Faunus strains in pain and fear from the High Leader’s crushing grasp. All he would have to do is push his thumb
upwards and he would snap his neck with complete ease. “We have one target…the one that has been tormenting our people for generations.” He states, releasing Arkaas and letting him fall to the ground. He coughs and gasps for air as Mazen crouches down before him. “The Kingdom of Atlas. Never forget that…not every Human is against us, and not every human wants to fight us. We kill those who stand in our way, but we do not spread violence. It is not Sienna’s way.” He states with judgement in his voice, but the Madman Kardas steps over Arkaas.

“Sienna is dead.” He reminds with a giggle, and Mazen stops, turning to face him.

“I know…but she was my friend. I may not have agreed with her change of heart in the end, or with Adam’s. But there was a time where she knew the source of our pain came from the ice…so it is time we took the flame and melt them down.” Mazen snarls, before he turns and walks away from them.

“Where are you going?” Kaa questions as she stands there with her arms crossed.

“Out for a stroll.” He states as he walks away from them. “We will begin tomorrow at noon, you might as well prepare yourselves.”

They all look at each other and Kaa grins as she grabs Arkaas and pulls him away to kiss him on the lips. Something he does not even fight as he picks her up, giving into her lust with his own. The Hyena and the Warthog growl as they stand there, uncertain of what to do to pass the time.

And Corsac stands alone.

Mazen walks down the steps of stone and eventually he gets to the street, wearing his coat over his armour and a hood over his head to hide the mask. He keeps his head low as he walks, not arousing any suspicion as best as he can, but as he walks alone, he stops and sees a Church standing at the end of the crossroads, facing the sea. He sighs, and he walks towards it, opening the door to find nobody is inside. So, he walks into the church, finding a comfortable pew to sit down on and he takes his hood off, looking up at the worshipped God.

It is a woman, wearing a dress with long hair and with her eyes closed and hands pressed to her heart. Mazen knows exactly which God this is, even though most people do not follow the Religion anymore. Named the Sect of the Faith – unlike the Congregation of Dawn – this religion worshipped any gods that people may seek, and this Goddess was created by the founders of this Religion. The Goddess that takes any forms, even male to create a God – so then anyone can find their faith here.

Mazen – a rarely known fact – is indeed a Religious man who follows this religion and believes in the God of Redemption. It is what he believes his duty is, to help the Faunus be free but also offer Humanity Redemption. But he strayed far from this not very long ago, condemning every human he met, because of Adam Taurus and his words, pulling him away from Sienna’s old ideals.

And now…

…he is lost.

And he treated Adam so harshly back then, and yet now there are all these conflicting thoughts in his mind. He sighs with a shaky breath, not taking off his mask that he wears over his mysterious face. “It’s…been a long time since I last came to your base, your grace…I come here in search for Redemption.” He says to the statue, and before his very eyes, the statue begins to shift into something else. The statue changes forms, into the God of Redemption, a tall man with strangely enough a very thin body, unlike most Gods. He wears nothing at all and has opened arms to those who come to his aid.
The statue is made of Earth Dust, and with electrical charges linked to the words keyed into the system it changes into the model loaded into the network. A clever way to show those in search of faith that their prayers are being listened to. Even if there are no gods watching over them anymore. “I have sinned…more than I could ever count…because for so long I have only ever cared for revenge. But recent events have led me to start questioning otherwise…” He stammers as he sits there, unable to find the answers to his questions.

He reaches up to his mask, and he grasps it firmly, unclipping it so then he can take it off, revealing his face.

He has dark skin, and dark brown eyes – with scars covering his entire face, from a fire that burned his face so bad he could never face his own reflection. The scars have badly damaged his face, and he looks back up to the statue. “I treated a man poorly for feeling the same thing as I…and now he is dead. What does that make me?” He asks.

“Alive.” A man speaks behind him and he turns, to see the Father of this Church standing behind him with a kind smile. He does not even react to the scars that brandish his face, and the thing that truly surprises the Faunus – is that he is Human. He can see the White Fang markings on the mask and yet he does not seem worried in the slightest. He walks over to him and he sits down beside him. “It’s been a long time since anyone has ever entered my church…” The Father says to him, and Mazen looks ahead again.

“Even in times as dark as these?” He asks him, and the Father nods his head.

“Even in times as dark as these.” He repeats and agrees; the Father looks to Mazen and then at the mask.

“How is your cause going?” He asks him curiously, and Mazen looks at him. “Do not worry, sir – Seal of Confession is everything to me. Whatever you say will never leave this room…and as you can plainly see – nobody else here to hear or judge you.” The Father says to him, and Mazen glances back to him, wanting to put his mask back on.

“Nobody but you…” He says.

“Aye…nobody but me. But I would never judge someone with a goal as respected as your own.” He says to him.

“And what is my goal?” Mazen inquires.

“You are a member of the White Fang…the White Fang aim to bring equality for both the Faunus and Humanity.” He states, and Mazen sighs.

“That right there is the problem, father…” Mazen says to him with a heavy sigh, looking at the mask he has finally taken off. “I have hidden behind the mask for so long now…that I believe that I let the fight control me. Only recently have the words of a man I once resented truly spoken through to me…”

“I heard you say – a man who lost his life recently?” He asks.

“Yes…killed by the woman he once loved…” He tells him.

“How did it happen, may I ask?” The Father asks him curiously, and Mazen looks at him and he stammers. The Father looks at him and then at the mask then at the door. He clears his throat and stands up. “Do you drink coffee?” He inquires, and Mazen raises his scorched brow.
“I’m sorry?” He asks.

“Coffee? Would like some? We can continue this conversation in my office if it would be more comfortable for you.” The Father asks him with a kind smile, and despite the fact he is human, Mazen has never ever felt like he is in better company. He nods his head and he stands up, following the Father to his office, opening the door and closing it behind Mazen as they both enter. He has many tidy books in here and, all linking to the different Religious Figures over the years.

There have been so many Religions it can be hard to keep track, and very few even follow the idea anymore.

And yet here the Father stands, still doing his duty, even if nobody shows up in a day, or a week, a month or even a year. “My name is Father Brunswick; may I ask your name?” He asks curiously, and the High Leader gives him a name as he sits down at the table in his office.

“Mazen Ursus.” He answers, and he begins to make him the coffee.

“Nice to meet you, Mazen Ursus.” Father Brunswick greets with a smile as he pours the milk into the mug and then the coffee from the coffee machine that was brewing away. He brings the tray with sugar over and he sets it down. “Take sugar?” He asks.

“No thank you.” Mazen answers, and the Father adds some to his, and then hands him his mug.

“So…what is on your mind, Mazen? Why is it that you feel you are not accomplishing your goal? Why did your friend die by his beloved’s hand?” He asks him, and Mazen chuckles as he drinks some of his coffee before answering and he sighs.

“How did he die?” He inquires.

“I did at one point…and that is what hurts. When it was shown, Adam did not want to believe it was truly her. She stopped loving him long ago, her love was found in the eyes of another, and he grew to accept that eventually. It did not stop him from loving her though – but when our friend was killed… the woman was there, and I kept telling him it was the truth. Because the evidence was strong…and I would still believe it…if not for how she ended up killing him.” He explains, and Brunswick takes a sip of his coffee.

“How did he die?” He inquires.

“They fought, and she was forced to stab him with her sword. He died in her arms and she buried him with all the honours he deserved. It was in that moment I began to question…because the footage showed a woman murdering our friend callously. And…the more I think about it…it does not make sense. And I fear I am the one responsible for his death, and not the girl – she was merely the sword, but I am the one that caused him to attack her.” Mazen explains, his voice filled with immense guilt over how Adam died.

“I have always been filled with hate after I lost everything…and now I don’t know what I’m doing anymore.” He sighs.

“May I ask…what happened?” He asks.
“Of course…” Mazen replies, since here the words can definitely never leave this building. “Eighteen years ago, I was married to my wife and we had a baby girl. She was ten years old, and we would always come to Church to pray. We were a happy family, I was once a Huntsman, but I traded that life for a simpler one. However…we lived in Mistral, and Faunus are not exactly welcome around there. Especially in the parts we lived…we would get spat at all the time. People with stamp on my wife’s tail or throw dirt at my daughter or try and get into fights with me. All because of our appearance.” Mazen explains to Brunswick and he listens to every word that the High Leader has to say to him.

Mazen closes his eyes. “One night…some angry Human rioters attacked our home, set it alight and locked the door with me inside. I tried to save my family, but they blocked every window, every door…there was no way out. I tried to save them…used my Semblance…but they were killed by the flames.” He tells him, and then touches the scars on his face and across his entire body. “I should have died…if not for my Semblance. I can still hear their screams every night…all because of our race.” He explains to him.

Brunswick closes his eyes in grief for him and his family. “I am so sorry, Mazen.” He says.

“I hunted the men down…and I learned they worked for the Schnee Dust Company, and I know of the racism that goes on in Atlas. The slaves that are tortured day in and day out. A young Sienna Khan and Adam Taurus found me one day and convinced me to take the gun from my mouth…they gave me purpose.” He explains and the Father listens to him. Unlike his soldiers that just try and find loopholes to kill innocent humans. “For a long time, I was like them…an angry fool who wanted to kill…but…now…I understand. Not every human is bad.” Mazen says and then looks at Father Brunswick.

“It is cruelty like this that brings so many poor Faunus to my door some days…and I hope that one day we can make things better.” He states.

“As do I…but…I am still uncertain of what it is I am looking for…because of the things I have done.” Mazen states, looking down at his own scarred reflection. He wears the mask to never be reminded of what happened to his family…but no matter how hard he tries…he will always remember.

Father Brunswick nods his head to Mazen, and he sets his coffee down. “What is it you have come here in search for, Mazen? I have spoken to many men and women who have served in the military and all have been lost…but you are searching for something.” Brunswick states as he looks at Mazen. The High Leader exhales through his nose, looking at him.

“Do you believe anyone is capable of Redemption?” Mazen inquires, and Brunswick looks back at the scarred man.

“Anyone? I guess…I do, and I do not.” He personally answers, leaving Mazen confused.

“He inquires, and Brunswick sets his coffee down.

“Do you think I am able to find Redemption for my sins?” He inquires, and Brunswick sets his coffee down.

“I believe anyone can find Redemption if they put their mind to it…but not everyone is the same. It is a complicated idea.” Brunswick tells him, and Mazen looks at him.

“Do you believe it is possible to be redeemed…no matter what you’ve done?” Mazen asks him, and Brunswick pauses and exhales through his nose.

“Would you like the short answer or the long one?” Brunswick asks him.
Mazen looks back.

“The truth.” He asks and Brunswick clears his throat as he drinks some more of his coffee and sets it down, Mazen drinking some as well.

“Okay…” Brunswick begins. “When I was a younger man, in my earlier days in the Church, a man came through these same doors. He was covered in blood and was crying uncontrollably, fell to the floor. So, I helped him up, and carried him into this same room, and laid him down in that bed.” Brunswick speaks, pointing to the bed in the corner of the room where guests may sleep.

“I sat with him and waited for him to wake up, he was dehydrated and bruised. When he woke, I asked him what happened and why he came to my Church. He told me why – he murdered six people with a Kitchen Knife, six people who wronged him in his life. One of them slept with his girlfriend, another spread lies about him, one attacked his girlfriend with a club, another would throw oil at his clothes and set them alight and another was a bully.” He explains to him.

“And the sixth?” Mazen asks, and he sighs.

“The sixth…was his girlfriend. Who betrayed him by willingly sleeping with the first man he slew. Killed them all and was covered in all their blood…the bruises were from her as she fought him desperately as he stabbed her to death.” Brunswick explains to him, and Mazen stammers as he hears the words leave his mouth. “But I knew guilt when I saw it, and he wanted to be punished for what he did. But then I suggested another path for him, the path of redemption. To do something good, to do something right.”

“What did you suggest?” He asks.

“Well I suggested a few simple things…bury the bodies he killed with honour. Do some community service…or…help me look after the Church. He chose the last option and he worked with me for years. He left recently actually.” Brunswick explains to him.

“Where did he go?” Mazen inquires.

“A nearby Church lost its Pastor, died of old age. I had been teaching him and I showed him how to live a life of no judgement and honesty. He was ready, and now he is also looking after that place and anyone that came there. Still works there, and you wouldn’t think he would be the same man he was when he entered this same building.” He explains to him with a smile. “That same day, the day he left…another person came to the church. This man was a happy soul, a wife who loved him, three children and a stable job. But when he came to me, he asked me…what I would classify as a sin.”

Brunswick chuckles. “I could have gone on for hours about Sins and the different forms that exist.” And Mazen chuckles to that as well, since he could imagine him doing that. “Eventually he told me that he slept with another woman and got her pregnant. He said he was filled with guilt over it…and wanted to see if he could find any form of redemption for this. How he could fix what he did.”

“Did he do it?” Mazen asks him curiously.

“Well…I heard on the news the following day about what he chose to do with my advice. What he failed to mention…was that when he slept with this woman? It was not consensual.” He states, and Mazen lowers his eyes and sighs. “He raped her…and from the report it turns out he was something of a predator.”

“What did he do…” Mazen growls, angered by the idea of a man finding joy in such a hideous crime.
“He tracked her down and murdered her, before going back to his family and stabbing them all to death…laughing as he did it. Before he cut his own throat open.” Brunswick explains to him, and Mazen looks at him with a shocked expression.

“So yes, Mazen. I do believe some people are capable of redeeming themselves, but I also believe there are others that are not capable of it. There are some men and women in this world that just want to watch the world suffer, watch people suffer and inflict agony upon innocents. Nothing can cure evil…but there are those who do seek redemption. Those who seek redemption are destined to find it, and those who wonder if they can instead of strive to find it…will never grab onto it.” Brunswick explains.

His words sit with him.

*Those who seek and strive for redemption will find it.*

*But those who wonder if they can find redemption will never uncover it.*

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**Corsac**

He walks through the street, seeing Mazen leaving the Church and saying goodbye to Father Brunswick, with his mask back on and walking out, seeing Corsac looking at him. He walks towards him and Corsac speaks with him. “It’s a good thing my brother is not here, I cannot promise he wouldn’t be thrilled about you going to a Human Church.” Corsac states, with judgement in his voice. Mazen stares at Corsac and behind his mask he narrows his brown eyes at him.

“The Church is open to all no matter their race.” Mazen corrects.

“Still a human, still the same race as the person who murdered my brother.” Corsac states and Mazen sighs as he turns to him.

“Your brother died in combat, I am sorry…but killing random humans would not fix that.” Mazen reminds, but Corsac shakes his head.

“Do you know why my brother and I always stayed together? Why I have always had his back in every single firefight?” Corsac questions, and Mazen listens to his words. “Fennec was always a violent child, would burn ants with a magnifying glass or would pull apart insects. But the older he got, his violent tendencies grew and grew, and he would get into fights with anyone that would look at him the wrong way.” Corsac explains to Mazen as he stands in the street.

“I had to get involved in a lot of fights to protect him, because I was always bigger…it was my duty to protect him. Nobody else would, we were raised in an orphanage. Our parents just dumped us…and our Grandfather passed away a long time ago.” He explains, sealing the fate of Demetrius Albain.

“I’m sorry, Corsac.” Mazen apologises.

“Your apology is not what I need…it is vengeance.” Corsac growls.

“Vengeance will get you nowhere.” Mazen states.

“You don’t know that.” He states, storming off from the High Leader. It is clear the White Fang are
hanging on by a thread, so many of them starting to become more unhinged by the minute. But before he leaves Mazen he turns back. “Ruby Rose killed my brother…I will do the same for her.” He promises, turning and walking away from him.

“You will do no such thing.” Mazen growls as he follows him, but as he turns the corner…

…Corsac is gone.

He hides behind one of the grain stacks between him and the High Leader and Mazen walks away. And then hidden with him is Kardas. “Are we finally gonna kill some humans?” He asks him curiously.

“Better than that…we are not following Mazen any longer. I have tried but he is losing his way…we will go to Beacon Academy. Find Yang Xiao Long and the other infected…and we will butcher them. That should definitely send our message to that human brat.” Corsac growls with a smirk, turning and walking away with the madman.

Leaving Mazen down two Elite Warriors.

And now…

…Yang has a target on her back.
The portal opens on the vast and beautiful plains of Vale, stunning flowers seem to stretch out for miles with the bright sun shining in the sky. Blue expanding over their heads evermore, with not a single cloud hanging above their heads in this sky. The air clean and pure, and Glynda walks out from it with the Alchemist and the Undertaker at her side. The hulking creature built out of all kinds of organic matter walks forward with the huge shovel held in its grasp, looking around the area with a soft yet creepy breath leaving its voice as it caresses the steel blade.

It walks slowly, every step creating some kind of quaking feeling in the ground, with Glynda stood behind it, with her Crop held in her grasp. Despite the fact that this thing is indeed on their side, she does feel a bit intimidated by it. However, it is likely the point, to scare off wanderers who would enter their swamps and kill them if they try to proceed any further. The Alchemist walks past the teacher and she holds her pouch in her hand, looking around for the plants of which she needs, herbs required for the potion that will boost their bodies to the point of health. They will not be cured from this, but it will give them more time and the ability to go outside thanks to the protective artificial aura created by it.

Glynda walks behind the Alchemist whilst the Undertaker remains stood on guard, and she looks back at the creature they built from death. “Is that thing safe?” She inquires curiously, and the Alchemist turns, looking at the Undertaker before her new friend.

“Oh, worry not, he won’t attack unless I give him the command. He is basically a machine, he follows our orders without question.” The Alchemist explains, and Glynda exhales through her nose, since that is probably the best answer, she is gonna get.

“So, what does it do when you don’t give an order?” Glynda asks her, and the Alchemist turns back to her.

“Then it stands guard, that is its purpose. Just as the Leshens were.” The Alchemist explains in return and she nods her head.

“I remember hearing about that, from Qrow. He told me you created the Lord of the Wood.” She states as she approaches the Witch and she shakes her head.

“No, we just built the Leshen. The Lord of the Wood has no real form, just like all the Higher Demons. They just take forms of their choosing but have no true one. Our Leshen went out one day and never returned, it is possible that the Lord of the Wood searches for creations like our own.” The Alchemist explains with her strong theory held strong, and not only this but is very plausible from the flashback that Kassius had of Hyde’s past. The Lord of the Wood was different, he looked like a giant Raven with bones and metal forming the body, meaning that must have been built in that universe as well.

This is simply their version of the Lord of the Wood in this universe.

A chilling thought though, that all the Higher Demons do not seem to have their own true forms. Even the Onyx Phantom does not show itself as its own real form, since it takes the dark reflections of whomever it is facing. The Whisperer’s form is unknown, the one they saw was merely shadows
and faces of nightmares and worst memories. The Ebony Berserker appeared as the destruction that war, and suffering brings, and like the Phantom it was seen as the burning apparition of its targets until becoming Mr Hyde.

And Vir Nominis Umbra?

Well he is the only one they have seen the true form of, the False God. The terrifying monster of darkness and glowing red eyes that would scar any warrior for the rest of their days. “You know a lot about the Demons…have you faced them before?” Glynda inquires curiously, and she pauses, looking back at her.

“Which ones?” She asks back.

“Which ones?” Glynda replies in the exact same way.

“There are Higher and Lesser Demons…I have killed my fair share of Lesser ones like Hymns and Succubae.” The Alchemist states as she stands up, flicking her hair over her shoulder, crossing her arms over her chest.

“The Higher Demons then.” Glynda clarifies.

“We’ve crossed paths on occasion, but they never attacked us before like they did at our home. They never really bothered with us, the Lord of the Wood would be in our forest from time to time but would never lay a hand on us.” The Alchemist explains, and Glynda raises her brow with confusion.

“Why?” She asks.

“Not sure, perhaps we were not a threat to their master plan up until this point.” The Alchemist suggests, making fun of the fact they have a plan to destroy everything that they have ever known. She crouches down and starts picking more of the flowers whilst Glynda also keeps watch, before the Witch asks her yet another question. “So, how did you meet Ozpin?” She asks her curiously.

“Excuse me?” Glynda replies.

“The Professor? How did you meet him?” She asks again, despite the naturally harsh manner of Professor Goodwitch. She stands there and looks back out at the sun, seeing it shining bright in this blue sky. A sky that may end up being choked to death by destruction soon if they do not figure out a way to destroy Vir Nominis Umbra.

“I was one of his students, when I first joined Beacon Academy.” Glynda answers, crouching down as she looks at the flowers in the emerald green grass, feeling the warmth in their sun-baked blades. “He taught me everything I know, brought me up from nothing. Showed me how to unlock my semblance when he was teaching me one day, and I wanted to stay and help run the Academy. He was only twenty years old then…or at least…that’s how he seemed to look.” She says with a heavy sigh, and the Alchemist nods her head.

“You couldn’t tell he was Arkhoni?” She inquires, and Glynda scoffs.

“How the hell would I know that? I was a child; did you really expect me to know all of this? Most of this information is news to me even now.” Glynda states as she looks back at the Witch who picks her herbs from the healthy soil.

“Hmph, fair enough. But do you wish to know the little hint behind someone being born from our Empire?” She asks as she stands up.
“I’m guessing you’re about to tell me.” Glynda replies.

“Good catch.” The Alchemist says to her with a grin, before turning on the spot and gesturing to her entire body. The action totally goes over the Professor’s head.

“What is that supposed to mean?” She asks.

“Our height.” She answers, her body loosening from its rigid pose. “The Arkhonii as a people naturally grew taller and lived longer lives than you do now. It was all due to our way of living, thanks to our technology and usage of the Relics we uncovered we managed to enhance our lives. Most people would be able to live to one hundred and seventy-five years old and still be fit as a fiddle. Of course, unlike you are like us – when we used magic or the Relics to gain immortality.” The Alchemist states with a chuckle, and Glynda scoffs.

“I hope I look as young as you when I get to your age…” Glynda comments.

“You really don’t. I mean don’t get me wrong, all the handsome young men and women that we get to pleasure ourselves with are great fun…but it gets lonely.” She states as she continues to pick up more flowers into her basket she has brought. Such a comment does leave Glynda stumped as she raises her brow.

“Then why did you seclude yourself in a swamp if you were lonely?” Glynda questions as she keeps finding more useful herbs and ingredients for their potion making. She seems to find it so easy, identifying these plants and uprooting them all with perfect precision.

“It was our sworn duty.” The Alchemist answers. “You see back in our day, when the Empire was still standing and flowing, we were the greatest healers of all of Remnant. We were worshipped for our miracles we accomplished, we may have been shunned by some, but we still cured entire villages. Saved livestock and even saved a Duke’s Wife from death once. And many young men and maidens…so many handsome knights…” The Alchemist coos, remembering their faces when she would make love to them.

“AHEM.” Glynda loudly exclaims to keep the Alchemist on the subject, the last thing she needs to hear is the long love life of a woman who is thousands of years old. She may look like she is only twenty-three years old but that does not mean she needs to know the long story of how many parts she touched and had. The Alchemist softly giggles, nodding her head with a smile as she straightens herself out.

“Apologies – we were loved for a long time, and we used our magic to keep our bodies in eternal youth. However, when the Congregation of Dawn came along…everything changed.” The Alchemist explains, and Glynda remembers the stories that they have already been told about the cruel Religious Group of Fanatics that totally lost their minds. “Magical people were being hunted down, the Faunus were targeted, those who had different sexualities to the vanilla taste, the disabled – the madmen killed anybody that they deemed unclean. Sorceresses were hunted down, mages slaughtered and burned at stakes alongside anything else.”

“That’s…horrible.” Glynda gasps, picturing the ghastly actions done by the Congregation of Dawn.

“That’s what fear does to people, honey.” The Alchemist says to her. “People will always fear what they either do not understand, or feel is different. It is why the Faunus are treated as lower class to Humanity. Why homophobia and heterophobia exist. People will always fear whatever is different to them, instead of looking at the real threat that is in front of them.” The Alchemist wisely states, she has seen it all too many times before in the past. “Take this for example, a Human once rocked up at our home, tracked us down despite how hard we worked to stay in hiding. She brought with her a
straw doll, like this.” She says, and she opens her palm to form a magical image of light before Glynda.

It is exactly as she describes it, a straw doll that has bunny ears on it and has a little dress on. Glynda looks at it and then at the Witch who conjures the image. “She wanted us to curse it, to create a Voodoo Doll that she could use to torment a little Faunus Girl who her daughter was playing with. All because of her ears, she wanted to hurt the little girl because of how she looks.” The Alchemist describes to Glynda, and the mere thought of someone doing something so pathetic and cruel makes her feel so angry – everyone has heard of what Voodoo Dolls do, and they are absolutely hideous tools of control.

“Did you do it?” Glynda asks her, sternly as well.

“Well…in a way.” The Alchemist replies with a smile.

“What does that mean?” Glynda inquires.

“Well I knew what she wanted, however the way she worded it was all wrong. She said – *Curse this Doll so then I could do harm to someone.*” She states with a smirk, and Glynda feels like she knows where she is going with it. “She told me who she wanted…but I decided to do what my duty is – I gave her what she wanted. A Doll that could harm someone…what she didn’t realise, was that I cursed it so then it could only harm her.” The Alchemist states with a smile.

It is hard to tell how Glynda feels about this, part of her feels satisfied that such cruelty is punished so beautifully – but the way the Alchemist seems to be so proud of her actions makes it seem a little…cruel. “One should be careful with what they wish for, lest the wish be granted – with unplanned side effects.” The Alchemist states as she continues to pick up some plants for the potions.

“What happened? What part of the doll did she hurt?” Glynda asks her curiously, and the Alchemist softly chortles.

“She bent the arm so it would snap…and so the same thing happened to her own arm.” She states as she walks around.

“Do you…not feel bad for her?” Glynda inquires.

“Why ever would I?” The Alchemist asks.

“She still was hurt, she was stupid but…it is a bit sadistic.” Glynda states as she wrings her hands.

“We are Servants of the Forest – the matters of simple villagers and politics is of no concern to us. Those who come to us seeking misfortune for their own kind or for our lands will be punished accordingly. It is our way, we do not follow the light or the darkness – we sit somewhere in between.” The Alchemist states, easy to forget that they are still not heroic people – they are only helping them in the hope that it will save the world and therefore their home.

“Even now, that is still the case?” Glynda asks.

“Yes.” The Alchemist swiftly answers, reminding Glynda of where the Witches stand. Once the disease has been cured, they will return back to their home. It is what they do, they help places and people when necessary and then return back into hiding. “I personally feel no love for those who aim to bring misfortune to others, no matter the reason. Even after what happened to her years later, it mattered not.”

Glynda pauses, not realising that the story of the Racist Mother is not over yet, and it seems the
“Voodoo Doll and its curse has more to tell. “What happened to her?”

“Years after she tried to do that, she hid the toy away in their home. She changed her ways, got to know the little Faunus…and all her fears faded away. She actually began to care for the Faunus, no longer having any phobia towards them.” The Alchemist illustrates. “One day…she went out to collect apples in the nearby garden, but her little girl and her friends – the Faunus Girl included – happened upon the doll. And they had no idea of what it did.” The Alchemist explains and Glynda’s eyes widen. “They played with it, threw it around…and accidentally ripped it in half.”

Silence fills the blissful garden, Glynda’s eyes wide when she imagines the horror. “The mother never came home…and nearby travellers found her contorted and mangled remains.” The Alchemist explains to her, and then she closes her basket as she stands tall, looking at the Professor. “There is a rule, when it comes down to playing with magic. And it is a very simple rule – Play with Evil, and your affliction will never be cured. It will only fester in you, and when the time comes, judgement will be swift and painful.” The Alchemist states.

Glynda stands there as she walks towards the Undertaker and looks back at the Professor. “Only those who know how to handle fire, should be the ones to set light to it.” She states and opens the portal now that she has all the herbs, she needs to finish the potion. Glynda sighs as she stares out at the fields, seeing all the beauty and the listening to the birds that tweet, before following her back through the Portal, the Undertaker following behind her.

They return back to the Beacon, seeing the Afflicted sat on their beds, unaware of the lesson that the Alchemist had just taught Glynda about magic. That lesson will most certainly stick in her mind for quite a while, and the Alchemist approaches her sisters who have their cauldron at the ready. “Do you have the herbs, sister?” The Sorceress asks her curiously. The Alchemist holds her basket up with all the smelly flowers inside, the aroma is absolutely delightful unless you are like Weiss Schnee who suffers from Hay Fever.

“Achoo!” She squeaks. “Is there a cure for Hay Fever?” She inquires.

“There are some things even magic cannot fix, darling.” The Alchemist says to her with a chuckle, leaving all of them dumbfounded.

“Hang on…you can cure nearly anything…use magic…but Hay Fever is too far?” Sun questions with total disbelief and the Alchemist walks past them, winking at her sisters with a smirk.

*These kids will believe just about anything.*

She sets the basket down and Glynda sits down on the edge of the chair beside Hazel who watches the event. He glances at her, able to sense her concern as she sits there. “Are you alright?” He asks her curiously with his gruff voice. She exhales through her nose and nods her head, but he is no fool, he can tell when someone is holding something back. “What did she say?”

Glynda sighs. “We should just be careful around them…I don’t suspect them to betray us at any point…but we need to remember they are not doing this out of the kindness of their hearts. They are Witches…and their rules are no different to Vir Nominis Umbra.” She states, since what the Witches pulled on that woman is directly out of Vir Nominis Umbra’s book. Bending the contract for their own satisfaction and judgement.

Hazel nods his head as he watches them mix the ingredients together. “I’ll keep an eye on them.” Hazel assures.

“Thank you, Hazel. I know this is difficult for you…but I appreciate you staying here.” She states,
since not only is Sun Wukong – the son of the married couple he murdered – here, but also the man responsible for his Daughter’s death is also out there. He rightfully wants revenge, but he is shoving that down to protect the good people. That will always put you in Glynda’s good books.

“I have made more sins than rights in my life…I want to make things right.” Hazel states with a heavy sigh, and Glynda softly smiles to the huge man, patting his shoulder before gently squeezing it.

“You are.” She assures.

The Witches continue to pour the ingredients into the mixture, from ground frog legs to the flowers to even kinds of oil. It is quite literally as if they got a random collection of cards with ingredients and threw it together to make this potion. The potion is thick, like some kind of cake mixture, but as time passes it thins from a tar like substance to more of a milkshake-like texture. They all watch and Neptune gags from the smell of the potion that they make, and even though they are helping them – both Glynda and Hazel are ready to stop them if they are planning something.

They know people, and those who have lived alone for a long time tend to be a bit insane.

But as the Alchemist turns the potion with her huge wooden spoon, the Sorceress approaches and holds her hands above the liquid. Her eyes glow and the tattoos across her body begin to shine as well as she chants in some kind of High Arkhoni Language.

“Educ de tenebris vita tollunt dolorem metuens pueris implete gaudium et delicium.” The Sorceress chants, her voice changing as she speaks, and Hazel stands up, his hand dropping down to the hilt of his dagger. Her voice, once pleasant and young sounds darker and almost demonic when she chants. But the Undertaker stands in front of him staring down at the man who dwarfs most. Glynda listens, hearing her continue to chant. “Auferes malum nisi cor eorum iterum sentio. Haec dea vitae ... amabo ... auxilium filii.”

They all gasp when a bright blue light of energy forms inside of the pool of magical liquid, and shines through the Sorceress and her entire body. She falls to one knee afterwards, caught by her youngest sister – the Enchantress. The Alchemist stops stirring and it bubbles…and the potion is ready. The Alchemist pours it into the four cups, and she walks to the Afflicted with the Enchantress beside her whilst the eldest of the three sisters recovers beside the cauldron, her aura slowly returning.

“Drink this, sweetheart. It will not cure you, but it will protect you for much longer…and the world around you.” The Enchantress assures as she holds the cup and gives it to Yang. She coughs in pain, feeling the affliction in her lungs. She looks at it and it is a dark green colour – not exactly appetising – but it may end up saving their lives. She drinks it up, gulping it down and gasping in shock.

“Ugh!” She nearly throws it up, but the Enchantress rubs her back.

“Tastes like Goat jizz but it will keep you alive.” She assures, and the coughing Sun glares at her with disbelief.

“Don’t tell me that is in this!” He gags.

“Not in this one, is it?” She inquires, winking to her sisters again. They keep forcing it down their gullets until it is in their systems, and it seems to start working immediately. The veins do not stop being discoloured but they definitely calm down a bit, and a field of energy starts to form around them. One that keeps the disease trapped inside of their bodies instead of spreading.
The Alchemist also created something else, a banishing spell that kills any diseased particles in the air. Unfortunately, it never works on those afflicted, but it at least gets it out of the air, meaning Hazel and everyone else can finally let their aura down to recover. Glynda approaches the Sorceress and sits down on the stage beside her. “What was that? The chanting? What did you say?” She inquires.

“A prayer…for them. The potion will keep them safe for two more weeks…if they do not have the Aphax by then…I’m afraid their fates are sealed.” The Sorceress explains to her. Hazel walks around and he also helps give them the drinks, trying to help Sun but the Huntsman shoves him away with a furious glare. Hazel looks down and he walks away from the boy – he cannot be mad, because he murdered his parents. But all he wants is to make things right.

Yang presses her bare feet against the floor, feeling her breathing start to improve as she looks around, feeling her temperature calming down. It is one hell of an impressive suppressant, because they look better already – but as the Sorceress said, it will not last forever. And if they are not back by two weeks they will die.

That much is certain.

The Enchantress turns to Yang and walks over to her as she staggers, her muscles have weakened, and she falls into the Witch’s arms. “It’s alright…come on. How long has it been since you felt the sun?” She asks her, and she helps her walk towards the doors, the Undertaker, Hazel and the Alchemist help Neptune, Sun and Weiss walk outside as well whilst Glynda and the Sorceress remain outside.

The Enchantress opens the doors for them, and the light shines upon them, nearly blinding the infected as they stand there. Yang shields her eyes, hearing the beautiful tweets of birds, feeling the warmth of the sun-baked cobblestone beneath her feet. She stumbles, feeling the fresh air on her skin.

Tears well up in her eyes, and she breaks down with joy, crying with happiness to feel the outside world again. Weiss, Neptune and Sun collapse as well, feeling the beautiful world around them.

A world they would die for.

A world anybody would die for, if it meant saving it.

Kassius

The Huntsman rests on one of the folded-out chairs in the Peregrine, his arm behind his head as the ship flies to Queen’s Cove. They have been taking turns flying, because right now Emerald is asleep as well – with Velvet and Coco both flying it whilst Cardin is sat against the wall. In one of his hands, clutched tight is a chain of some kind with silver and gold seemingly woven together. As Kassius sleeps, a beautiful dream comes upon him as he lays there. Feeling the hands of his beloved girlfriend around his torso. She kisses him firmly and lovingly on the lips, his hands gently pushing through her blonde hair.

“Happy Anniversary, you big oaf!” Yang giggles as she holds him lovingly, and he chuckles, kissing her again.

“Happy Anniversary, Firefly.” Kassius says to her in return, before he shows her the wrapped-up
gift, he got her. They both sit down on the carpeted floor, and she begins to unwrap the gift, tearing the wrapping paper off with every single pull with her arms. Kassius leans back, his hands pressed against the floor as he watches her excitement. It warms his heart to see her so happy.

She finally sees the box and her eyes light up. “You didn’t…” She gasps.

“Oh, I did.” Kassius chuckles.

“Oh gods, Kas! I’ve been wanting one of these for years!” She squeals with happiness, staring at the box. It is a Remote-Control Racing Bike, that he painted himself to look like Bumblebee. She has been saying she has wanted one of these for so long now, and the fact he painted it himself – since he has always been artistically gifted – makes it even warmer to her heart.

“Well I saw it but none of them were yellow, so I thought I’d customise it for you.” Kassius says to her, and her lilac eyes widen when she realises.

“THAT’S WHY YOU WERE ACTING SHIFTY! I was trying to figure out why you said you were with Bumblebee all day.” She giggles, since he was doing quite literally that – hanging out by her motor cycle but painting the bike to make it look just like her beloved bike. Yang has never been the kind of girl to obsess over jewellery, never has been her interest. But cool motorcycle stuff has always been her thing.

“I must admit…I don’t remember sucking at painting as badly when I was a kid.” Kassius chuckles, and Yang’s eyes widen.

“What? That doesn’t suck, it’s SO COOL!” She laughs with joy, opening the box and holding it, her huge lilac eyes gazing at every single little bit of the paint that he artistically put together on this little bike. Not the exact same type of bike since she made Bumblebee herself, but it is still one hell of a cool bike.

“Well…you deserve it.” Kassius says to her, and she sets it down and immediately cups his jawline, pulling himself to her as she kisses him with so much love that it is practically glowing in her blonde hair. She smiles as they break the kiss.

“I love you so, so, so, so, SOOOO, MUCH!” She giggles, making him chuckle and he smiles as he gently caresses her cheek with his hand.

“I love you more.” He jokes with a wink and she giggles, gently punching his shoulder in which he slumps down to his side with a laugh.

“Okay! My turn…Happy Anniversary, baby!” Yang gleefully giggles as she slides her much smaller and so neatly wrapped up.

Oh boy, she's taken her time on this.

Yang watches intently as he carefully unwraps her sweet little present, she got for him, and he pulls the wrapping paper off and looks at what’s inside. A small box, so he opens it up, and there is a little necklace inside. One with gold and silver woven together, and he picks it up, holding it in his hand. He takes his other hand and gently grabs onto the circular lid of the piece – opening it to reveal a beautiful picture of him and Yang inside. As Kassius stares at it, he feels his heart melt from how sweet this gift is that she got him, something he never expected from her. That is why he got her the R.C Bike, they always get each other silly things.

But this is so meaningful.
“I…”

Yang’s eyes widen and she looks at him with worry. “What…what’s wrong? Do you not like it?” She asks him with worry.

“W-What? No, no, I love it… I just didn’t expect you to get something so…so sweet.” He says to her with a smile and she saddles up beside him, looking down at the picture of them together, caressing the top of his human hand.

“I wanted to get you something, whenever you’re away with Jaune, Ren and Nora…you have that to remember me by.” She says to him and he looks at her with a smile.

“How could I ever forget you?” Kassius asks her as he pulls her close and kisses her gently.

“Better not.” She giggles.

The memory is something he holds so closely, but suddenly it changes, quite literally like it happened at the snap of someone’s fingers. Because Yang disappears and he is now on his knees, staring up at Vir Nominis Umbra. He stares right back at him with what appears to be disappointment in his eyes.

“You attacked me, son.” Vir Nominis Umbra says to the man, and the voice that comes through is most clearly Hyde but when he was the Ebony Berserker. Hyde’s memories are beginning to clash with Kassius’, something he has never experienced before now…because Hyde never had any memories to clash with.

Until now.

“You attacked me first.” Hyde reminds, his voice harsh and yet he sounds so different to what the Demon of War would sound like.

“You betrayed me.” Vir Nominis Umbra sternly snarls, his eyes glowing red, but Hyde scoffs instead.

“I could say the same of you.” Hyde states with his fists clenched, staring up at the Soothsayer who glares down at him with anger and disappointment.

“Maybe…but here you are, on your knees before me.” Vir Nominis Umbra states, but it is clear that he has no real choice in the matter from the blades that have pinned him down to the ground in the middle of the Charred Forest.

“You are fighting against something you cannot win! You will never find what it is you are looking for!” Hyde yells with rage at him, but Vir Nominis Umbra smiles as he laughs, but for some reason the words that come out of his mouth are completely different to what would have been said, spoken in a tongue he cannot translate.

Not even High Arkhoni – Umbra must have done this to make sure it hides whatever his past entails.

“Deorum mindent elvett de part meva. Kinahanglan silotan sila, sula bhfulaing aon anam nóis mó fel yr wyf fi. Og du vil ikke stå I veien for meg.” Vir Nominis Umbra speaks, his voice changed in the memory, and Hyde snarls up at him, tensing as he glares up at the dark entity, and then he walks around him, speaking softly and in English again. “I can imagine…that you’re feeling defeated…and lost. You wish you could have stopped me and struck me down when you had the chance.” Vir Nominis Umbra states.

“No…” Hyde responds. “I merely wish I had the honour to save them.”
He had justdestroyedyetanotherUniverse, the one the Ebony Berserker must have tried to prevent the destruction of. Umbra turns and stares down at him. “What honour you once had is now mine…you are nothing more than a fragment, with no other purpose in this universe or any universe. Unless I command it.” Vir Nominis Umbra states as he walks around him. “You have bowed before me out of mercy…and that comes at a price.” He states, staring down at him.

Hyde looks back up at Vir Nominis Umbra. “There is no redemption for what we are – rise with me once more, and we will deliver the justice they so greatly deserve…together.” Vir Nominis Umbra says as he holds out his hands, walking ahead of Hyde.

“You may have defeated me…but you will prove nothing with this campaign!” Hyde yells, and Umbra stops moving. “You have not found your purpose!” Hyde yells.

“And you never will…”

Umbra roars with a fury Kassius has never heard, swinging round and launching a blade towards Hyde’s face, one that hits him so hard that it causes Kassius to gasp and wake up. He pants as he wakes up, shocked from what he just saw, but as he sits there, time freezes…not in the same why like Oscar or Ozpin – this is more like what Umbra could do. He looks over to see Hyde sat there in his mind, looking at his burning hands…he has never looked like that before. He has always been pale; his hands have never burned…but then the flames extinguish, and he looks normal again.

Hyde looks over to Kassius with disbelief, because that was new for him as well. “I…I think that was when he banished me.” Hyde says as he looks at his hands.

“What was that about? What did you mean? About his purpose?” Kassius asks him, and he stammers.

“I don’t know…” Hyde answers and from the look in his eyes that is of true honesty, he cannot remember exactly what started that. But they can piece it together, because it is clear that Hyde – or the Ebony Berserker – had a change of heart over time through all the universes and wanted to stop Umbra from destroying another. But he failed, and for that Umbra banished him, cast him out…and in time his soul would be bound to Kassius. “I…I think I am starting to remember though. When Merlot said I was a Demon…I felt something in me wake up. And I couldn’t stop it…”

Kassius nods his head, and he looks around. “Are you the one doing this?” He asks.

“I…I think so…But I don’t know how…I just wanted to talk to you. Privately.” Hyde says, since this clearly is extremely personal for him.

“Well this is…some power.” Kassius comments as he looks around.

“I don’t think I can hold it for long like Umbra can…but he called me a fragment.” Hyde states, and Kassius nods his head, remembering that word extremely well.

“There was something else he said – but I have never heard a language like that before. It’s not even Arkhonie, more complex than that.” Kassius states as he looks at the entity in his head, who nods his own head.

“I know…I can’t remember what it was he said, but it must have been important for him to not let me remember it all.” Hyde states, and then Kassius looks at him and clasps his hands together.

“And…you said something else to him – about Purpose.” Kassius comments, and Hyde nods his head.
“I don’t know what it means.” Hyde states.

“Neither do I…but it really pissed him off.” Kassius states, since the sword hitting Hyde in the face really did jolt him back up.

“It must be related to whatever he changed in my memory.” Hyde says, and Kassius leans back.

“So…how quickly is your old memory coming back?” Kassius asks him curiously.

“It started at the Trafficker Base.” Hyde answers, and that feels like it was months ago. But considering it has been around four days since that happened, it is clear as day now that his memory is returning at an astonishing rate. He never had entire memories popping back into his mind before.

“You could know about his weakness, Hyde…you were close with him once.” Kassius points out.

“Maybe, unless he hid that too.” Hyde states, and Kassius nods his head again.

“Bastard’s smart.” Kassius comments. But as Kassius looks at Hyde, he notices something…Hyde is shaking.

“Kassius…” He whimpers, and Kassius leans forward as he looks at the Demon in his head, looking up at him with terrified tears in his eyes. “I’m afraid…” He confesses, his voice cracking in the process. Kassius smiles to him, gently which gives him all the hope he needs.

“That’s what it means to be alive buddy.” Kassius states.

“What…what else does it mean? Because I don’t know who I am anymore.” Hyde states, feeling lost between the entity he once was and what he has become now.

“Only you can know the answer to that. You have a choice, I could have taken the shot and killed Ilia. If I did that…I may not be here.” Kassius states, since if it weren’t for Ilia the White Fang may have never followed her to the Volcanic Chain Isles with Sienna Khan as well.

“You have Yang…but me…I have nobody.” He says with sadness.

“Doesn’t have to stay that way…maybe we can help you be free from my body. Give you a body of your own.” Kassius suggests, and Hyde glances at him with confusion.

“What’re you saying?” He asks.

“Penny managed it…and I know you relate to her in many ways.” Kassius states, and Hyde seems to look really nervous when he says that. “Buddy we share the same mind.” He reminds, and Hyde stammers again, looking away from Kassius. “You both fell and returned with broken memories – maybe if we can figure out how to free you…she can help you.” Kassius suggests, and he looks at him with worry.

“But what about you?” Hyde asks, with legitimate concern for him – how things have changed from when time began.

“I’ll be fine. This is your life…you have come leaps and bounds from when I was a kid. You are your own person now…all you need is your own body.” Kassius states, and Hyde looks down at the ground.

“I don’t know if it’s possible.” Hyde says.

“Nor do I…but with every day I realise miracles are more possible by the minute.” Kassius states as
he looks at Hyde and he smiles. “You’ll be fine, Hyde.” He promises, and Hyde smiles, and Kassius blinks…the hallucination ends and time resumes, Hyde back in Kassius’ mind now.

Things are different…
…but not in a bad way anymore.

Ruby

The Silver Eyed girl sits on one of the benches inside of the Prowler, which soars across the sky towards the city of Argus which is waiting for them. As Ruby sits there, her eyes glance over to Kragen and Ozpin – with Yenna sat down beside Kragen, who is also now able to sit down. He will not be accompanying them on this mission in Argus and Yenna will be staying here on the ship with him.

Everyone else on the other hand is ready when they get to the city.

Ruby looks to Kragen again. “How are you feeling, Kragen?” She asks him, and he looks over to her, looking at the bandage where he was wounded.

“Better…I still need some more time though.” Kragen admits as he rubs his side, and she shakes her head with a sigh as a wife would.

“Silly old man.” Yenna comments.

“Hey, hey now.” Kragen chuckles as he defends himself, but as Ruby looks at Yenna – a question enters her mind. Because in truth they do not actually know the answer to this question.

“Kragen…”

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“Kragen…”

“Well, well, well.” Ozpin chuckles.

“Hey, hey now.” Kragen chuckles as he defends himself, but as Ruby looks at Yenna – a question enters her mind. Because in truth they do not actually know the answer to this question.

“Kragen…”

“Hmm?” He responds.

“And Ozpin, I guess…”

Ozpin looks over to her. “Kragen you created the Maidens thousands of years ago…Yenna is the Spring Maiden, Cinder is the Fall Maiden, that Ayla girl was the Summer Maiden…who is the Winter Maiden?” She inquires, since they have never found her yet. They have not even heard of where she could be, let alone who this Maiden could be. Kragen looks at Ozpin and they both sigh.

“The four women who found me, Yenna was one of them. The two who would become Fall and Summer were called Bryce and Nylah.” Kragen explains. “The two of them passed away and their power went to their children, and we know where that power is now.” Kragen explains.

“And…the Winter Maiden?” Ruby inquires.

“That…was Cynthia Nikos.” He answers.

“Cynthia?” Oscar asks with disbelief, turning when he hears that name. It has been a long time, but he never expected to hear that she was the Winter Maiden. Pyrrha looks at them as well, hearing her family name being mentioned as well.

“Yes…the same one. She came to my door, wanting to help me. And she did, and she was the one
that inspired me to go and help fight the Grimm with the other Silver Eyed Warriors. Remember what I told you, all those years ago?” He asks some of them, Blake included since the three of them would not remember this talk. “Cynthia started the Silver Eyed Warriors, the Knights who fight the Shadows. She was an incredible fighter.” Kragen explains, and Oscar looks at Ozpin, easy to forget he brought Oscar there.

Maybe Oscar disappearing was required for her to go down such a heroic path…

Creating the path for the Nikos name.

“The power left Cynthia when she died as well, and we kept track on it…until recently.” Ozpin explains to them and they all look at him with confusion.

“What do you mean, until recently?” Jaune asks with concern.

“The last known Winter Maiden was killed from unknown causes, and we were unable to track down the host of the power. Because it went somewhere completely random, it could be anywhere now.” Ozpin explains, meaning that the Winter Maiden is a bit of a lost cause.

“That is if Umbra hasn’t already taken her power.” Yenna states, remembering what the Onyx Phantom told her about Ayla’s fate.

“Everyone!” The voice of the Architect calls, and they all turn. “You’re gonna want to see this.”

As the Prowler glides across the mountains of Mistral, they finally locate the other side of the enormous mountain range where the snow melts and green grass flows. And down the sloping hills, is the city they have been looking for. Built into a cove – is the City of Argus – surrounded by massive walls and huge cannons ready to fight off even the most monstrous Grimm with huge Towers scattered across the location. Sparkly sapphire blue ocean stretching out for as far as the eye can see.

They have finally arrived at Argus.
Sleeping Angel of Remnant

Jaune

The City of Argus, sometimes known as the Sleeping Angel of Remnant, the largest city built outside of the Kingdoms. And not only is it the largest city beyond the protection of the Kingdom Walls, but it is also one of the most successful.

As the Prowler approaches the walls of the city, they descend to the landing platforms, unfolding the landing gear and setting down, blowing some of the sprinkles of snow from the pad. The thrusters slowly shut off, the blue glow of the dust that fuels it cooling down within the powerful cells. Jaune sits at the descending ramp with Raven stood beside him with her arms crossed, looking at the traders approaching the walls after a long journey. Raven exhales through her nose as she gazes at the place, before they walk through the gates that are still open to people. “This place…can tell that Atlas has their claws in it.” Raven states with a sigh, since the military presence here is double that of Mistral – but then again that might be the reason behind why the city is still standing today.

Jaune however has not got his mind focused on something as trivial as the resentment they share for the Atlesian Government. Raven glances down to the young blonde-haired knight who gently caresses the engraved blade of Crocea Mors. “What’s on your mind, Kid?” Raven asks him as she stands there, some of the others walking past them. Penny bounces past Jaune and he looks to Yang’s mother.

“I don’t wanna get my sister involved in all this…” Jaune says with a sigh, and Raven looks ahead again.

“You said she is happy to provide a place for Huntsmen to stay.” Raven comments, remembering what he said about her.

“I know, and I’m sure Saphron and Terra would happily shelter us for a few hours today to plan – but…with Umbra, I don’t wanna risk them getting hurt by him.” Jaune states, and Raven looks at him and closes her red eyes with a sigh. It does feel quite insensitive, to just ask people in his family for assistance just because they happen to live in the same city as the path to Arkhonex. But at the end of the day they need to get to Arkhonex fast, to find that Aphax Violet, otherwise the Afflicted will die and maybe even millions more could die without this cure.

“They will be fine. We won’t be staying with them for long, only to catch our breath and come up with a plan of action to use. And besides, Jaune – they know Argus better than we do. They may be able to help us with locating these towers.” Raven explains to Jaune as she crouches down beside him, and he looks at her and she pats him on the back before standing tall again. Jaune looks back to see Ruby and Pyrrha talking before they both walk over to him with a smile on their faces. Jaune stands up and he holds Pyrrha’s hand affectionately, and they all walk out of the Prowler, leaving the Architect to finish up on the locking up of the ship.

Jaune looks around as the soft flurries of snow come blowing in from the storm, but luckily it has died down from when they were up on those mountains. Ruby looks around as the many immigrants and emigrants enter the city’s many huge arching doors. Trucks loading their supplies from across the world into the massive warehouses outside of the walls themselves. Atlesian Paladins – now painted with the Acolytes of Lien colours – march back and forth, however they have not seen any kill orders in the area yet. Especially since this Paladin has not opened fire on them, perhaps these
soldiers have not yet been informed.

Unless it is a trap – either way, they are ready and are not about to surrender their weapons any time soon. The cold snow gently blows against Ruby’s cheek and Oscar walks beside her, looking at the place. Argus, a place he has never actually been before, not everybody has had the luxury of visiting this unique city. Ren and Nora both approach the steps down the landing pad with everyone behind them, as some airships glide over their heads, softly roaring thrusters – these are also trade ships.

“Argus – main trade route between Solitas and Anima. You can tell, can’t ya?” Qrow chuckles as he walks down the steps, whilst Kragen and Yenna both walk down as well. Kragen may not be joining them for the search of the Towers and the activation indexes for the Tunnel hidden here, but they can still help plan out the mission if Saphron and Terra-Cotta allow them to stay for a few hours at their house.

“I know, ships and trucks galore.” Penny comments as she steps past someone carrying a crate filled with canned goods. But as they keep moving, they notice there are lots of canned goods being shipped – and more worryingly – rations. Penny stops when she sees entire crates filled with Rations being unloaded from the trucks that have arrived here, and they are not the military grade rations for the Acolytes of Lien either.

These are civilian rations.

“Are things really this bad? That rations have to be sent out to families?” Penny inquires and Ozpin sighs as he walks beside them.

“Qrow informed me on what happened at the Witches’ Swamp. The Grimm have started hunting, killing and eating all life forms on the planet. Nothing is safe anymore and farms have become extremely dangerous locations. Rations must be spread in times of crisis like this – if anything this is actually a good sign. Getting the rations out faster and earlier can make sure people are fed long before the natural supplies are washed away.” Ozpin explains, and Oscar stops with widened eyes, thinking of his Aunt.

“Wait…all farms?” He questions.

“Those with Livestock.” Ozpin adds, and he sighs with relief.

“Okay…my Aunt doesn’t deal with Livestock much. Mostly grains, the only living animals there are horses.” Oscar says with relief and Ruby smiles as she holds his hand lovingly.

“She’ll be fine.” Ruby promises with support filling her heart for her beloved boyfriend. Oscar smiles back to her and he squeezes her hand, and they both keep walking down the stairs from the landing pad that their ship is upon. Cinder walks slowly as she looks around, Pyrrha ahead of her and the Architect behind her. With his rifle loaded on his back he watches the many soldiers that patrol the outskirts of the city, uncertain of whether or not they can even be trusted.

“Is Arkhonex at least…a bit hotter than these places?” Cinder asks as she rubs her bare shoulders due to her outfit. She has always preferred wearing less, keeps her from overheating and keeps her quick on her toes, however the downside to this kind of attire is that if it gets cold – she is freezing. The Architect looks at her and he chuckles, seeing her discomfort at the cold and he nods his head.

“The Southern parts of the city are warmer than the Northern.” The Architect assures as he pats her back with his much colder hand. Cinder winces as she stumbles forward from the impact of his much stronger arm.
“I guess asking a robot about temperature is a pretty dumb idea.” Cinder says and the Architect chuckles again as he walks with her, before taking off his poncho and wrapping it around her. “Whoa, no it’s yours. I can’t –” Cinder stammers but the Architect shakes his head.

“I only wear it in hazardous weather, to protect my circuits and internal mechanics. Nothing hazardous here other than a snowflake.” The Architect says as a snowflake lands on his face and he sighs, but Cinder wipes it off with a smile on her face.

“Well…thanks.” She sweetly says to him, and they continue to walk down the steps from the landing pad. Stepping onto the tarmac is a surprising feeling, from the slight slip under their step due to the black ice that has formed around areas of the roads. Some more large trucks drive past with deep thunderous grumbling engines, the scent of countless fuel sources polluting the air outside. But amongst the constant barrage of engines out here in the shopping Warehouses – the sound of Seagulls calling out above their heads and the smell of the ocean beyond those walls.

Raven walks beside her brother but she slows down when she notices some of the people here giving her a look. People in Anima have heard of Raven, and over the years she has gained quite the name for herself in her attacks. And her outfit does not help disguise her identity very well, making it very easy for people to figure out she is the Chieftain of the Branwen Tribe. She narrows her red eyes at them as they watch her, before they move on and she exhales with annoyance.

Kragen and Yenna both approach the gates with Ozpin at the front, the Headmaster stands there with Qrow and Winter stood behind him with their arms crossed. He turns to everyone and he steps aside, letting their eyes fall upon the beauty of the largest City Beyond the Kingdoms. Ruby gasps when she looks at it, Blake’s eyes wide as well as the city stretches out before them, Impressive architecture that seems to be a combination of Atlesian and Mistroalian, roads and blocks structured perfectly where cars drive through for civilians and workers. Alongside a Tram Network that runs through the entire city, providing constant transport for everyone here.

And the people, it is so different to what they were used to when they were at Mistral, because there are both Humans and Faunus living here in harmony. Much like Vale in fact, and despite the Atlesians that have such a heavy pull around here, it does not seem to affect that. A very different feeling than what Blake was expecting when she was walking through the doors. The first thing she expected to see were people giving her dirty looks and calling her names, but in fact nobody has said a word. The only dirty look directed so far was towards Raven because of the things she has done.

Cinder has also been getting some looks, basically anybody that has been in the news lately for having some rather worrying reports surrounding them. Something Ruby can sense as she walks through the town, feeling the eyes on her – because when she butchered Dew back in Vacuo it was recorded by multiple people and spread across the news like wildfire. However, as they keep walking through the city though, Blake can feel the eyes on her as well, but not for being a Faunus.

For the same reason as Ruby, because when she was broadcasted murdering Dew the way she did, it was when Salem also showed the footage of Umbra disguised as Blake, killing Sienna Khan. If Yang was here then she would be judged as well for what happened with Mercury as well, the world never forgot what happened at Beacon, and they definitely have not forgotten the horrors shown when Umbra crippled the three Kingdoms in thirty minutes.

Just thinking of it can bring down morale.

However, Argus pulls Blake’s mind from the gutter of terrible memories as Pyrrha walks with them throughout the place, and they can tell she does not seem to be overly stunned by the city. As if this is all part of her memory, like she has been here before. Jaune holds her hand affectionately as they walk, and Nora is the one to ask her the question. “I’m surprised you don’t look so surprised,
Pyrrha smiles as she looks at her friend. “Well I’ve been here quite a few times in the past, actually. I lived here for a few years, because this is where Sanctum is.” She states as she shrugs her shoulders and some of them look at her with disbelief. Many people heard of Sanctum but in the grand scheme of things they never really did know where it was. Everyone just thought it was in Mistral somewhere, since that city is just so massive.

“This is where Sanctum is?” Ruby inquires.

“Yes.” Pyrrha answers with a smile, and Winter softly chuckles.

“It really amazes me how little Beacon teaches you guys.” Winter comments, sarcastically to provoke a reaction from Ozpin. The Professor just glances at her and rolls his eyes with a smile, good to see his sense of humour has not soured over the circumstances of late.

“Hey now.” Jaune replies, getting a chuckle from both Qrow and Raven as they walk with them. Yenna and Kragen look around, the old Silver Eyed Warrior having to press his hand to where his wound still needs time to heal as he limps, Yenna remaining close to him. Using her aura and presence to help bolster his body’s healing capabilities, being the Spring Maiden after all.

“I will give it to your generation, you have done an impressive job of rebuilding civilisation where we failed. After the destruction of Arkhonex, I feared it would simply be a time of survival forever. But you have all proved us wrong.” He says as he looks at the city, that was once an Arkhoni City in their time. And the signs are there, for some of the buildings here are far older than any of the ones that were built over them. There is a huge Cathedral in the city that is unlike any they have seen before, and of course the many towers around the city, which is what Queen’s Cove must have everywhere as well. But even then, there are the signs of ancient buildings that were buried by time.

They all come to a stop at the Tram Station, but they have no intention of buying tickets and taking the trip. They need to find Jaune’s other sister who is in this city somewhere with her wife, but the issue is this is indeed one of the largest cities on the planet without the requirements of a Kingdom’s Borders. Kragen sits down on a bench, looking across the descending hill past the Argus Theatre, showing multiple films. Such as the *Destiny of Remnant* movie, or the *Eclipse* movie – even one of the sillier films.

*Horse Puncher – the Uncle returns!*

Kragen looks at the bay though, not the movies on show, seeing the glistening blue ocean and the Atlesian Base with the massive Radar Station built into the huge rock it is stationed in. Multiple Acolytes of Lien Aircraft can be seen landing down here, and it must be filled to the very brim with soldiers ready to fight them if they need to do so. “We shouldn’t sit out here for too long, there could be spies everywhere.” Kragen advises and Qrow nods his head.

“He’s right, Jaune. Do you know where Saphron is?” Qrow asks him curiously.

“When I called her on the way here, she said she was at the nursery with Adrian.” Jaune says, and Ozpin stops and turns to look at Jaune.

“Adrian?” He inquires and they all look at Jaune and he winces, since he never told them that there is a baby potentially getting involved in this now.

“He’s…my baby nephew…her son.” Jaune reveals and even Pyrrha gasps, both with happiness but also now understanding the worry that Jaune has. This does change things, especially with one of the
Relics being brought there. Ozpin holds his cane and he looks down at it, worried to think if Umbra will come after them to get to Jaune. He will do anything, they saw that to be true when he murdered the four.

“A baby?” Raven asks with worry in her eyes, and also a look of worry for her own state of mind, because her and Tai were legitimately talking about trying for another baby some time. Another dream shattered when Umbra murdered him right in front of her, and Ruby closes her eye with a heavy sigh, scratching the back of her neck.

“This changes things…I do not want to risk your sister and your sister in law as it is…but a child?” Ozpin states, even showing that he has his limits of what he is comfortable with doing.

But then, Ren comes up with a plan. “What if just the four of us go to the Nursery? We ask her if it is okay, and when we can you take one of the trams to their house?” Ren inquires curiously. Ozpin stands there and he looks at Jaune, simply to see if he is okay with them staying with his sister. This is a side of Ozpin that Jaune never expected to see from him, after what happened with Pyrrha he just assumed that he was the asking questions later kind of leader.

But clearly – this is not the case.

“Okay…I will have to warn her there is a danger though.” Jaune states as he looks at them all – having two Maidens there, a Knight of Grimm and a Relic, three Arkhoni Born people and the Four most important people among them in that house is an immense risk. But from what the Universe faces, it is a tiny risk in comparison to everything ending and leaving nothing behind to be remembered.

“We’ll stay here at the Tram Station.” Ruby assures with the nod of her head, and Jaune nods back. The leader of his team turns to them and he nods to them and they follow him. Team J.N.P.R walk ahead from Ozpin and everyone, and for once they actually have some time to themselves for a while. Ren looks at Jaune and he pats his shoulder with assurance.

“It will be fine, Jaune.” He assures.

“I know…but…we don’t know that. This is Vir Nominis Umbra, remember? We don’t know how far he will go to tear us apart. He could be watching us right now.” Jaune states as he looks at the trees, looking for those damned crows with the crystal beaks. But even then, he could be using another disguise, none of them ever realised that he was the Old Man Shopkeep – hell, they never knew he existed until five years ago when Oscar mentioned him. Nora walks past a couple kids and they giggle as they look at the warriors, nervous and excited to see such awesome warriors. She smiles and looks at Ren, holding his hand.

“Remember when we were in their shoes? Back at Kuchinashi?” Nora asks him curiously, and he chuckles.

“Yeah, I remember you jumping on my back to get a good look.” Ren states, when suddenly she does that again, leaping up and landing on his shoulders, nearly knocking him over. She shields the sun from her eyes and laughs like an adorable lunatic.

“I can see the world from up here!” She cheers as she holds out her hands, whilst Ren just sighs with a small smile on his face. Pyrrha giggles and Jaune chuckles as well as she jumps off his back and stretches her arms and cracks her neck.

“Yep…still just as heavy.” Ren winces as he cracks his neck like his girlfriend, in which she raises a brow and plants her hands on her hips, leaning forward and turning her head curiously.
“Ahem?”

“Not like that!” Ren defends, with legitimate fear in his eyes of his beloved. She then smiles, and giggles as she hugs her boyfriend, kicking her legs back and forth. Pyrrha and Jaune both chuckle and they keep walking.

“Saph is gonna love you guys.” Jaune chuckles as he walks with them, and Pyrrha looks at Jaune as she holds his hand with love.

“I never knew you’re an uncle.” She comments with a smile, and Jaune blushes, Nora and Ren both join in and walk up to him.

“Yeaaaah…” Nora softly coos as she slides up to him and Ren looks at him with a smile as well, making Jaune shrink into his shoulders slowly.

“When did this happen?” She asks him curiously.

“It was about a year ago now.” He admits, and Nora gasps.

“Why’d you never tell us?” She gasps.

“I…I dunno actually…I think it might have slipped my mind.”

“SLIPPED YOUR MIND? Being an Uncle’s pretty big, Jaune.” Ren questions with total disbelief in his pale pink irises.

“I know…I guess I was still a bit preoccupied with finding…you.” Jaune says as he looks at Pyrrha and she lowers her head with a sigh.

“Sorry…I was a bit of a pain.” She apologises and Nora chuckles.

“There’s the Pyrrha we know.” Nora giggles, and Pyrrha raises a brow as she looks back at her smaller yet more energetic friend.

“What do you mean?” She asks.

“Always apologising for everything.” Nora answers with a grin.

“I don’t apologise for everything.” She argues.

“Really? You ate my cookie last night.” Nora replies.

“What? I’m so sorry I –” Pyrrha pauses, and her head drops with defeat, realising how right Nora is on that. Nora smirks as she reaches her hands behind her head and whistles with a smile as she walks.

“Oh, I love you guys.” Jaune chuckles as he puts his arms around them all, and they all smile in their embrace with him.

They turn the corner, to see the Nursery that Saphron mentioned when on call with Jaune earlier, and there is a cute little playground outside. Multiple little kids playing out there with each other and sat on one of the benches is Saphron.

Saphron is a young woman with wavy, dirty blond hair and blue eyes. She wears an orange top with a beige vest, light brown trousers with orange stitches on each side, and dark brown boots. In addition, she wears her wedding ring on her left hand and a bootlace necklace around her neck.
Playing in the little playground is Adrian Cotta-Arc. Adrian is an infant with short black hair and brown eyes. He wears a white and blue long-sleeved shirt with denim overalls and white socks.

As Saphron sits there, looking at her little ball of life playing with the other kids, she looks over and her blue eyes widen with joy when she sees her little brother standing there. He nervously waves to her and smiles awkwardly. She gets up and runs straight to him, and he walks over to her, catching her as she jumps and wraps her arms around him. She cries tears of joy to see him okay. “Oh, thank the gods…you’re okay…when I heard your voice, I nearly cried…and here I am…” Shehiccupsin his arms, and as Jaune holds her he buries his head into her long blonde hair on her shoulder, tearing up as well.

Pyrrha smiles as she looks at him and his sister, her hand on her hip and Nora looking up at her with a smile, Ren with his arms behind his back as always. “Are you…are you…ok-okay?” Shehiccupsin again, looking at him, checking for wounds on her little brother. Saphron is now the last of the eldest Arc Sisters, since Skyler was the oldest and she was the second born.

“I’m okay, Sis…don’t worry. Takes a lot more than everything that’s happened to rid you of me.” Jaune chuckles as he wipes some of his own tears away. He has always been the closest to Saphron, she may have always teased him, but it was all in love, and she has always loved him the most of her many siblings. She shoves him playfully, giggling the tears away from his humour.

“Screw you, little brother…” She giggles, wiping her tears away before hugging him again, just making sure that he is there. She looks over her brother’s shoulder and gasps when she sees Nora and Ren standing there. Ren and Nora have already met Saphron and Terra in the past, however they had no idea they had a baby in that time. The time they visited Vale feels so long ago now.

“Sup, Saph?” Nora greets with a grin.

“Nora! Ren!” Shegleefully squeaks, walking over to them when Jaune releases her, and she shares a warm embrace with them both. “Been keeping my brother out of trouble?” She asks them.

“Easier said than done.” Ren chuckles as he releases Saphron and Nora hugs her as well.

“Been busy I see.” Nora chuckles, looking at little baby Adrien, and Saphron looks back at him with a nervous chuckle.

“Yeah…sorry about that. I managed to reach out to Jaune when he was born, tried to reach out to you guys as well…never could get through.” Saphron admits with the exact same awkward smile that Jaune always does.

“Oh please, no need to apologise. We’ve had a pretty…busy…few months.” Ren admits, not feeling like they should burden her with the knowledge of what happened at Beacon nearly a week ago now.

Then Saphron’s eyes sparkle with curiosity. “Oh! Did you find her? Is she here?” Saphron asks curiously, totally oblivious to the fact she is stood right behind her. Pyrrha shyly massages her forearm and Jaune gently holds his sister’s head, and turns her to look at Pyrrha standing there nervously. Her eyes widen and mouth opens with disbelief as well. She looks at Jaune and then at Pyrrha about three times. “You…you found her?” Shegasps as she looks at her.

“H-Hi…” Pyrrha shyly greets with a tiny wave of her hand.

Saphron immediately wraps her arms around Pyrrha as well, and Jaune chuckles. “She’s the huggiest of the Arcs.” Jaune states as he looks at her. Pyrrha holds her and smiles as she holds her Boyfriend’s
sister, he has always been the closest with. Saphron steps back and looks at Pyrrha with a smile.

“Wow…you’re so beautiful…if I wasn’t already married…actually, never mind.” Saphron corrects, causing Pyrrha to blush and look away for a second.

“Saph…” Jaune chuckles, making Saphron laugh aloud as well.

“Oh Pyrrha, honey – I can’t wait to tell you some embarrassing stories about my brother.” Saphron giggles.

“Oh really?” Pyrrha requires.

“Oh yeah.”

“Don’t even think about it, Saph.”

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Mazen

A few hours later…

The Sun has started to descend upon Argus, the days just seem to be flying by. Sat on a crate though is the High Leader of the White Fang, his forces in hiding, waiting for the right opportunity to strike on the Island Facility. He has his Chainsword resting against the crate and his leg bent upwards to rest his arm on. He stares off at the beautiful ocean where the reds and oranges reflect off the water, shining onto his mask he uses to conceal his scars.

It is so peaceful out here.

And as he sits there, that peace is swiftly interrupted by the presence of Kaa – the Venomous Snake Faunus – who approaches slowly with that sinister look in her serpent eyes. Kaa has always been the tenacious and stealthiest of the Elite White Fang, she has the snake-like tendencies after all. But she is not quiet enough for him to not detect her presence, or maybe it is not just the sound of her approach.

“I can smell your perfume from here, Kaa.” Mazen comments, looking over his shoulder at her as she stands there. She rolls her eyes and sighs, walking up the steps to the little area where he could be alone. She hops up and sits on the railing, one of her legs dangling over the edge of the building. Her long silver hair blows in the wind as she looks out at the place and she softly speaks.

“Beautiful place, isn’t it?” She asks him curiously, and Mazen continues to stare out at the ocean.

“It is.” He agrees, always been the man of art.

“Plenty of people here to see, men and women…all so pretty…” She softly says with her husky voice, her long serpentine tongue slivering past her teeth as she looks out with an almost insane grin on her face. Mazen glances at her, he did not just free her and not read her file.

“I know what you did to be put in that prison, Kaa…if I did not need dangerous soldiers you would still be in there. Remember that.” Mazen advises, and she glances at him curiously.

“So serious, aren’t you?” She whispers softly as she slides her fingers across her bare leg, showing
some of the scars she has collected from that prison she was in. Some of them by knives by the looks of it, slowly cut into her skin that was once smooth over those sections. And yet despite that, her beauty has always been able to seduce thousands of men and women. Making them easy targets for her.

“Tell me, did you get the nickname Succubus in the prison or before? When you tricked and slept with countless victims before you murdered them?” Mazen questions and she grins, slowly sliding off the rail and approaching him, sitting on his lap, and her hand finds his, then she lifts his hand and places it on her leg.

“Before…the people heard of my actions but never knew what I looked like…one of them was a detective…and he just…couldn’t resist.” She whispers, as she takes his hand and moves it towards her hip and between her legs. But before she can make him do anything, that pressure of his hand suddenly grabs her wrist and he slowly pulls her arm away from his body, glaring at her constantly.

“Don’t test me, Kaa. You may have tricked the weak willed with your looks and your voice…but you can’t trick me.” Mazen growls, and she smiles at him curiously.

“My, my…I do wonder what you look like underneath that mask.” She says, unaware that he has taken it off, but the reason why he never gets close to people is because he already had his happiness…and the Atlesians stole that from him.

“Don’t.” He repeats one last time, and she glances down at his hand and then back at his masked face again. She exhales.

“Fine.” She accepts, stepping off his lap and walking back to the railing, crossing her arms as she looks out across the city. “You saved me from that place…freed us all…I don’t intend to double cross you on that like some of the others do.” Kaa states, of all of the warriors he freed she is the only one that had nothing to do with the White Fang to begin with. She actually has absolutely nothing against the Humans unlike the others – she does not even wear the masks like they do.

“Then why are you still here?” Mazen asks her, and she raises her brow. “I freed you, sure – but you could have turned tail and be free whenever you pleased.” Mazen comments, and she giggles softly.

“Come now, Mazen…You are one of the few people in the world who actually went out of their way to save me. I must admit I am shocked that you refused me just now…and if you are worried about me killing you like the others then worry not. I am many things, a crazy bitch and a killer, but I never turn on a debt I owe. And I owe you for letting me out of that prison.” She explains, flicking her long silver hair over her shoulder again, and Mazen looks at her and then back at the sea.

“I rejected you because there was only one woman who ever made me feel alive…and she is dead. My entire family burned alive by the Atlesians.” Mazen snarls as he clenches his hand into a fist as he pictures their faces, the things they did and the things they said. She looks at him and she lowers her eyes. “I do not hate humanity, just the Atlesians for what they did to me. Once the Atlesians are finished…then I’m done.”

“What of the Cause?” She asks him.

“Let it burn. All it has ever brought the world is pain.” Mazen states with a heavy sigh as he stares out at the battlefield. Kaa looks at the Bear Faunus and she leans against the wall, looking at her nails.

“And what of Corsac and Kardas? You just gonna let them kill that kid?” She asks him curiously, and he sighs.
“He made his choice…and if I remember anything about Yang Xiao Long and the rest of her friends is that they don’t go down without a fight. I remember fighting Weiss Schnee, back on the train years ago…a very long time ago…I wasn’t even a Commander at that point, just Adam’s Lieutenant. She fought well, but the only reason I beat her was simply because I was stronger, and she was just a student then. I am not sure why…but part of me wants them to stop Corsac.” Mazen chuckles as he looks out.

“You want him dead?” She questions.

“No dead. No…just stopped. The man is poisoned with revenge for his brother, but he was prone to violence long before the White Fang. He needs help, not revenge. But if he does end up dying…then I hope he finds his brother…wherever the fallen go when they end.” Mazen says when he sits there, and Kaa looks up at the clouds.

“My Wife once told me that when we die, we all head to our own heavens and hells…the good goes to our heaven and the bad goes to our hell. I don’t know if I believed her though.” Kaa says with a heavy sigh, and Mazen looks over at her.

“I read the file…I know what happened to her.” Mazen tells her and she looks at him with glassy eyes.

“She is better off without me…I guess I can relate to Fennec on that. I was raised in violence and she was the good…but…even her kindness could never cure me.” She says as she takes another swig of her drink.

“It’s not too late.” Mazen states, and she scoffs.

“For what? Redemption?” She questions and Mazen nods his head. “Redemption is too far for even me to reach…all I am waiting for now is for my punishment to find me. And if I could get plenty of pleasure along the way then why not?” Kaa says with a grin, and Mazen looks at her with curiosity.

“Kaa…why did you kill the men and women you would sleep with?” Mazen asks her, and she looks at her leader and opens her mouth, revealing the fangs.

“You could say it is like a second nature for me…the taste of blood…it is like a condition. When I feel that…ecstasy of climax…I don’t know, I just get that hunger as well. So, I end up kissing their necks when they are in the middle of their own climax…and I bite them. And they die in their sleep.” She explains as she sits there, and Mazen is unsure of how he views her on that. It is quite literally like she does not mean to kill them.

“Then how come you never murdered your wife?” He asks her, and she sighs, closing her eyes.

“She would always calm me…she is a singer. And…when we were together in bed…she had control over me. She would whisper into my ear when she would hold me, make me feel things I never knew I could ever feel.” Kaa describes, closing her eyes as she remembers the feeling of her body on hers. She opens her eyes and sighs. “But that hunger always awoke when she was never there…and I killed anyone that stood in my way.” Kaa says with a snarl.

“She couldn’t support you after that, could she?” Mazen asks her.

“No…and like I said – I don’t blame her. I don’t really know where she is now, but I hope she is safe…and happy.” Kaa states, before she wipes a tear from her eye and gets up from the rail. She looks at Mazen and she gently touches his mask with her hand. “Arkaas and I fool around…but it is just to try and feel what she made me feel. I know you feel like everyone is against you, Mazen – but
I’m not.” She promises with a soft smile, one that is genuine, before she walks away from him.

A side to one of the Prisoners he never expected, and of all of them it was the one that he felt he could never trust.

And yet in truth, it is the others who are more far gone than her.

**Jaune**

The large plate of sandwiches sets itself down onto the table inside of the living room, a variety of little meals made, which causes their mouths to salivate like dogs. Ruby holds her sandwich in her hands, and she eats it gently and sweetly, sat on the sofa with Oscar sat beside her. Ozpin stands by the wall with his hands against the cane, and Qrow hands him a sandwich, despite that he never asked for one. “You may be a Knight, but you still need to eat.” Qrow comments, and Ozpin chuckles, taking a bite from it as he stands there.

Jaune however, sitting as the centre of attention, is sat like a kid being embarrassed with so many stories about him being told by his big sis. Penny and Blake both sit on the floor with the adorable little baby Adrian. Pyrrha plays with his little plane whilst sat beside Jaune on the sofa, and he coos as he watches it fly around above his head thanks to her polarity, before she lets it land in his tiny hands. Nora and Ren sit beside Pyrrha, and Kragen is sat down in one of the other chairs with Yenna on the floor.

Cinder however is not here for some reason.

Something Ozpin has actually noticed. “I can’t believe you told them that story.” Jaune grumbles like a kid with his arms crossed, pouting like a child as well. Acting more like a baby than the actual baby in the room.

“HA! Couldn’t resist…and call it revenge for the clown story you told my wife.” Saphron comments with a grin on her face.

“You blurted it out though!” Jaune argues.

“But you brought in the details. I mean imagine it, me meeting this cute girl and the first thing he tells her is how scared of clowns I am. First thing she did after one of our weddings was buy clown outfit…nearly broke up with her over that.” Saphron admits, crossing her arms just like Jaune does.

“Aaaaaand…two weeks later you proposed to her.” Jaune remembers with a chuckle.

“Hey, it wasn’t two weeks – it was three weeks.” She corrects, making them all chuckle at the tiny correction made to his story.

“I still can’t believe you managed to set your entire bedroom on fire.” Ren comments with a chuckle.

“Oh, come on, I was six!” He argues, making Pyrrha coo.

“Aww…”

“Eh, Yang managed to blow up our kitchen once.” Ruby admits, and Oscar looks at her with confusion.
“How?” He asks.

“She thought it’d be a good idea to put tinfoil inside of the microwave. I bet her a lien she wouldn’t do it.” Ruby tells, and Winter gasps with widened eyes.

“A lien? A single lien?” Winter questions with total shock.

“And she did it.” Ruby assures.

“What happened to the kitchen?” Saphron inquires.

“Let’s just say we needed to call the fire department.” Ruby answers and they all laugh at that, and Saphron looks back at her brother.

“Well little genius over here tried to put out the fire in his room with a bottle of water and cardboard.” Saphron comments, and Jaune groans with defeat as he picks up a cushion on the sofa and buries his face into it, muffling his groans inside of it. Pyrrha giggles as she rubs her boyfriend’s back.

Ozpin shakes his head and looks at the Architect. “I can’t believe we are responsible for Remnant’s future.” Ozpin says with the shake of his head, chuckling at the same time. The Arkhoni Survivors nod their heads to Ozpin.

“Oh, come on, like you guys didn’t get up to crazy stuff back in your day.” Raven defends as she crosses her arms.

“I never set my bedroom on fire.” Yenna says with shock.

“Well…” Kragen awkwardly admits as he scratches the back of his head, and all eyes fall upon the wise old man. “I did manage to flood my parents’ house once.”

They all stare at him with total disbelief.

Kragen Nox – flooded his parents’ house.

“How?” Qrow inquires curiously, and he sighs as he shakes his head at how silly the story is.

“As old as the book, I left the tap on in our kitchen and the whole place flooded. Up to the neck in water somehow. I was a kid in fairness, but even still.” He sighs as he shakes his head.

“Was your mom mad?” Saphron curiously asks.

“Oh yeah, still scared of taps now.” Kragen chuckles as he looks at it. And Saphron giggles softly as she sits back.

“Well what I’ve learned here is to not let any of you near my kitchen.” They all laugh at that comment and then she looks at her brother. “Especially after your cooking skills.”

“Oh, can you please knock it off?” Jaune grumbles, looking away from her, only to see the giggly Pyrrha Nikos next to him.

“What? I love telling stories about my baby brother…” She coos as she pinches his cheek, but then – like a baby – he waves his arms around to get away from her, nearly falling onto Pyrrha’s lap in the process.

“I AM NOT A BABY! That is a baby.” Jaune argues, pointing at little Adrian on the floor, who
looks up at him, before frowning and crossing his arms and pouting at Jaune. Jaune however, as an Uncle would, winks at him with a smile. But Blake, Penny and Pyrrha are both far too encapsulated by how adorable the little baby is, eyes bulging from their sockets and cooing at him.

“Aww…he’s so cute! Oh, gods I could just swallow you!” Penny squeals as she picks him up and sits him on her lap, tickling his belly, making him laugh as he cuddles her arm. Blake also tickles the little one too whilst Pyrrha smiles with her heart filled with warmth. Ruby looks at them playing with Adrian and she smiles as well, for once their smiles are genuine and they are happy. Something they have truly been needing lately after all the horrors they have experienced.

But not everyone shares these smiles, because Raven cannot look at the baby…it keeps reminding her of what could have been. And Ruby is too afraid to be a mother, she always has been, especially with her condition. The Architect stands in the corner with his arms crossed as he looks at the photograph of the Arc Family. They can see the parents that they already met, and they can also see little Alyssa as well. And then there are the rest of them. “So, Saphron? Any other Arcs move all the way out here to Argus?” He asks her curiously.

“Nope, just me. I was hired to work as a Journalist out here, focus on both Atlesian and Mistralian Affairs. It’s also where Terra grew up, thought it would be better out here.” Saphron admits, that constant welcoming smile on her face as always. On the picture there are all there.

All of them…

Even…Skyler Arc.

The Arc who died a terrible death when her team abandoned her to be killed by the Grimm to save their own skins. As Saphron speaks, Jaune looks at the picture and seeing her with a smile, so young and happy…it hurts…it hurts a lot. Especially when he now knows how she died thanks to Umbra, knowing that it was not heroic, it was not painless...she deserved better than that. Pyrrha squeezes his hand affectionately, knowing what he is looking at able to feel the pain that flows through his veins as he sees it.

He looks away from the picture, to stop feeling that searing emotional pain. “Jaune’s the only son in the family, poor little guy was outnumbered by us little gals. But I guess Jaune wanted to be like his big Sisters!” She giggles, and she is righter than she realises. Because he always wanted to get out of Vale…but also wanted to be like Skyler.

“I…uh…”

“Aww. You didn’t deny it!” She coos, which Jaune replies but pushing her face away and she pushes back, fighting like siblings would. Until the door opens with the ding of a bell, and they all turn to see Terra Cotta-Arc entering the house with groceries weighing her down.

Terra is a young woman with short dark brown hair and eyes. She has a single smooth bang that goes down her forehead and in between her eyes. She wears a dark navy collar shirt with a light-blue cardigan, dark-grey jeans, and red sneakers. She also wears red glasses and a wedding ring.

She opens the door and uses her foot to close the door. “Everyone, this is my wife, Terra Cotta.” Saphron introduces, and the sixteen – or fifteen since Cinder is not here right now, wherever she is – Huntsmen and Huntresses look at her and smile, greeting her at once. Ozpin simply nods his head to her, staying as quiet as ever before.

“Why hello there! Wow, quite a party, you weren’t kidding Jaune.” Terra chuckles.
“Never do.” Jaune replies.

“Saph, hon, can I get a hand with these?” She asks her, and Saphron gets up and walks over to help with the shopping. As they sit there and talk, Ozpin looks at the door where she entered, knowing where Cinder most likely has gone.

“I’ll be right back.” Ozpin says, walking towards the doors.

“Where’s you going?” Pyrrha inquires, and he stops as he goes to open the door.

“Just gonna chat with her.” He says, since they all know who he is talking about.

**Ozpin**

The Professor walks through the paths of Argus, with night fallen and most people retreated back into their homes, it is just him and the wind as he walks. But there is only one person he is looking for, and he knows exactly where to find her. He turns a corner, and heads towards a garden, seeing her standing before it. A huge bronze statue of Pyrrha Nikos, stood in the centre of this Garden. She may have returned, but the rest of the world for the most part still believes her to be dead right now. Only a few people know that she is alive, and unfortunately most of them are not exactly on their side.

They are their enemies and the soldiers assigned to kill her.

And standing before the statue is Cinder Fall – she may have become more accepted towards the person she is trying to redeem herself into, but it is not as simple as changing an outfit or fixing your hair. She killed a person, and that person is in that room, happy…Ozpin approaches Cinder with his cane in his hand, like a walking stick. “Memories…some are dreams…others nightmares.” Ozpin says to her.

“I can’t believe I really thought I was free of it, Oz…I thought I could really just let that guilt escape me. But…there’s so much more to it than that damn dress, Ozpin.” Cinder says to him as he approaches her, standing beside her, and looking at the plaque beneath her statue.

*In Honour of Pyrrha Nikos*

*One of many students who fought valiantly at the Fall of Beacon*

“Now isn’t the best time to dwell on things we cannot change Cinder…believe me, I have dwelled on my sins for thousands of years. And not once has it ever brought me consolation.” Ozpin assures as he stands beside her, looking at the statue with her.

“I just…I can’t be in the room with them, Ozpin. The sister of the guy I took the love of his life from? It’s not my place.” He states.

“And here I stand, the man who forced that same girl into the position she was in. Because of my own schemes. I am no better than you, and do you see me hiding in the shadows?” Ozpin asks her, but she shakes her head.

“You didn’t fire the arrow.” Cinder points out.
“No…I didn’t, but maybe if it weren’t for me, maybe she would have gone with Jaune. And maybe, just maybe, she would have never wound up with Umbra.” Ozpin explains as he taps his finger atop his cane. “Or maybe all of this is a fixed point, and everything happens the way it’s supposed to.”

“Supposed to…like Destiny? That’s exactly what she died for.” Cinder points out.

“Time is a fixed path, I tried to go back and save a man from committing suicide, but in doing so I frightened him, and he fell anyway. Or perhaps when I tried to warn people about a flood that would kill them all…they walked across the dam but there were so many it made it become unstable. And the dam blew anyway.” Ozpin explains to her.

“What’re you trying to say, Oz?” She questions.

“What I am saying Cinder – is that sometimes we cannot change how things go, and sometimes things have to happen. If Pyrrha had never died, do you think we would stand a chance now? Knowing how important she is to the universe?” Ozpin asks her curiously, and Cinder stammers with confusion.

“I don’t…”

“I believe…that maybe she had to die, to become who she is now. Because at the end of the day, we managed to show Umbra that he cannot control everything. Maybe you should think on that back at Saphron and Terra’s home.” Ozpin says, but before he walks away, Cinder has one more question.

“Ozpin…do you think what I did was right?” She asks him.

He stops, and then looks back. “No…but I am not one to judge. Your sins…are nothing compared to my own.” Ozpin states. “Come on, let’s get back inside. Still need to introduce yourself to them.”

“I can’t begin to introduce myself…there’s so much I can’t put in words.” Cinder says as she follows him.

Leaving the statue of Pyrrha behind as an Autumn Leaf falls upon it.
Jaune sits on the sofa still with his sister and her wife as they speak, and he looks at Pyrrha with a smile. Saphron holds Terra’s hand gently and affectionately as she speaks with Qrow. “Are you sure this is okay? Letting us stay here? We don’t want to risk your safety, with everything that has been happening lately.” Qrow asks her as he gestures to the television which turns off. Terra however does not seem worried in the slightest to the danger that surrounds them by housing these people, they have not deigned to share some of the information with them but that is all to protect them. Sometimes secrets must be kept to prevent their enemies from targeting the people that they love, and both Saphron and Terra understand this fact.

Terra chuckles softly before she answers Qrow’s question. “Of course, even before everything began to…happen…Saph and I would always allow refuge for Huntsmen and Huntresses. And since you are all friends and family to my brother-in-law, well how could we say no?” Terra asks, and Jaune chuckles as he shrugs his shoulders.

“I wouldn’t blame you if you did.” Jaune admits, in which Terra chuckles with a playful slap on his shoulder. Qrow nods his head with a smile and Saphron looks at him, then Ruby and pretty much at all of them. She can sense the pain that flows through them, that feeling of loss and defeat that just seems to exist within their hearts. She looks at Jaune, or glances, and that same feeling can be sensed from him as well. Same as Pyrrha, but she does not pry into it, but she would be lying if she said she was not worried for their health right now.

At the end of the day the world is falling apart, all the politicians being wiped out, Atlas being invaded and the White Fang turning, and Vacuo falling to the Horridus Morbus Plague. Their enemies are powerful, and they are far from beating their foes. “And besides, you don’t need to worry about us not being safe here.” Terra promises with a smile, and they all look down at the floor. Her confidence just shows how out of the loop the two of them are, because if they truly knew the nature of Vir Nominis Umbra then they would be certain that he could burn their home to cinders.

Speaking of Cinder, the door opens up again, and they all turn to see Ozpin returning with Cinder, who almost shyly, walks in behind him. Her eye looks to Jaune at first, seeing him glance at her before looking away. “Professor Ozpin…I heard you were here, I must have missed you when I came in.” Terra says, almost like she is apologetic about it. Ozpin chuckles with a polite and welcoming smile as he walks in with his cane.

“Our mission has brought us a long way from where we started.” Ozpin says as he walks in, and Cinder stands in the corner with her arms crossed as she listens to what Ozpin has to say. Saphron nods her head and she looks at them all as they sit there, waiting to begin their planning for their mission.

“Y’know I was about to ask. With how busy you all must be, I can’t imagine the reason why you came here was just for our company. As good as it may be.” Saphron jokes with a playful smile, and they all look at each other in silence, and that truly does set the mood for Jaune’s sister and her wife. “Oh…so that’s the tone we’re going with?”

“I’m afraid our mission has indeed brought us here, we did not want to risk your safety coming here.” Ozpin says, repeating what they have all said, but Terra holds her hand up to stop him right
“Please, if I hear one more, *we wanted to keep you safe* I will explode.” Terra warns as she sits there, and her dominance actually seems to intimidate the old Knight of Grimm to the point where he retracts his statement. The saying truly does go, never scorn a woman unless you wish to be burned. Ozpin avoids bringing that side of the topic up and he continues to explain the situation to her.

“I cannot disclose any sensitive details with you, end of the day that information is classified.” Ozpin says as he holds both hands atop his cane, and the two nod their heads.

“Understandable.” Saphron agrees.

“There is an ancient tunnel network here at Argus, as there is another in Queen’s cove where some of our other operatives are currently investigating. Scattered throughout this city are many ancient buildings left behind from a time long past, and one of these towers holds the activation terminal necessary to open this tunnel for our entry. We desperately must locate this Tower before our enemies do, our arrival at our targeted destination is vital.” Ozpin explains to the two of them, and Saphron holds baby Adrian in her arms as he plays with her long blonde hair.

“Do you know which tower you need to find is? Where it is?” Terra asks him, and he shakes his head.

“I’m afraid not. I have rarely ever been to this city and my reasons there never surrounded the towers up until this point.” Ozpin explains as he taps his fingers against the rounded head of the cane.

“All we know about this tunnel is that it is underneath the harbour of the bay, I just hope that none of the piers get destroyed when we activate it.” Ruby explains, and Terra ponders on this, when Saphron beats her to it, gently rubbing her beloved’s hand.

“Terra, honey – do we still have that map of the city you had?” Saphron asks her curiously, and Terra nods her head in agreement.

“I…think so.” Terra replies. “I’ll go have a look, back in a second.”

Terra gets up and she walks away from the large group of warriors in the room, and Kragen looks at them as he rubs his side, sitting forward. “I hope we can locate it, and besides I am going to help us find it.” He assures, which is when the door opens up and they turn to see Terra returning with a rolled-up map in her hands and she approaches the table. Winter picks up the plate of sandwiches and she carries it over to the kitchen so then they are out of the way. She sets the map down and unrolls it, revealing the vast city that has been mapped out onto this piece of paper.
“This map is a bit outdated now, there are some new buildings in certain areas. But the towers are all still in the same place as they have always been. Part of the law is to never demolish them, looks like that law is finally gonna come in handy.” Terra explains as she flattens the map across the glass table, and Yenna walks around the table with her as she looks down at the map of the city.

“What exactly is it that you do, Terra?” She inquires.

“I’m an engineer, I work on the Atlesian Equipment and I also help plan the installation of new tech too. We recently put up some new Radar Towers around the city for maximised communication with the other Kingdoms if – gods forbid – there is another attack that damaged the tower.” Terra explains and Jaune gets up as he walks over to his sister in law, looking down at the map. Multiple old circles drawn in blue pen in different areas to mark different places to build the Atlesian Facilities required for constant communication across the Four Kingdoms.

Jaune looks at Terra and he has to ask her this, since she is family. “Are you sure you wanna help us? I know you hate when people say this…but our enemy is smart, and I don’t want this getting traced back to you.” Jaune says to her with nervousness in his voice, Terra looks at her wife who is completely in support of everything in the room right now as she holds Adrian in her arms who coos as he leans against his mother’s shoulder, sucking his thumb. Terra squeezes her brother in law’s shoulder with a smile.

“Yes, Jaune. Your family, you and the rest of your sisters accepted me into the Arcs…I’d do anything for this family. Better than my own ever did for me.” Terra promises with a smile, and Jaune returns with another smile, nodding his head as Pyrrha walks round and Ruby presses her plans against the table as she looks down at the map.

“So…what’re we looking at here? How many Towers are we talking about?” Ruby inquires as she looks up and uses her other hand to push her hair from her silver eye.

“Well there are buildings from the Old Kingdoms everywhere in Argus.” Terra says to them, referring to the Arkhoni as the Old Kingdom since the rest of the world have no real clue that the City of Arkhonex even exists. And let alone have any idea of the Empire that came before them, all the people know is that there are ancient structures from an ancient past. Plenty of conspiracy theorists have looked into the ancient history of life on Remnant but have turned up no real proof. “But I think I know what towers you’re talking about, you can see one of them through this window.” Terra explains as she points to the window, that Cinder is stood beside.

The Fall Maiden glances out and she sees that tower, and it stands tall and kinda looks like a Lighthouse, with the very peak of it with some impressive reveals and tiles. They are most certainly ancient watchtowers that were set up by the Arkhoni for Marksmen in case of an attack, makes the most logical sense. “There are around twenty of them, but one of them collapsed recently, fell into the sea because part of the cliff face collapsed. So, I guess that leaves nineteen.”

“What’re the odds that it was the one we need?” Nora groans with frustration.

“Unlikely.” The Architect answers, and their eyes all fall onto him.

“How do you know?” Ren asks him.

“Because the Towers that activate these tunnels technically act as a locking mechanism, they were usually always left open. Our job is to shut the locks down so then the tunnel can open up again. If the tower that fell into the sea was the one, we needed then the tunnel would already be visible.” The Architect explains, and Oscar walks round the table as they discuss the plan.
“What if it is already open?” Oscar asks him.

“Oh, you’d know, because it rises from the ocean. And it is huge, designed for massive groups of people or even Airships to take safe passageway underneath the ocean. Since the Aquatic Grimm were the only Creatures of Grimm the Arkhoni could never tame.” The Architect explains, getting both of the uneducated civilians’ attention as they look at the huge mechanical man.

“Um…huh? Arkhoni? Taming Grimm?” Terra asks curiously.

“I’m sorry, but that’s also classified. Part of our mission.” Ozpin says to her, and she sighs, shaking her head as she keeps checking them.

“Nineteen Towers is still a lot of ground to cover.” Winter says as she stands by the table with her arms crossed, looking down over her shoulder as Qrow walks around the table as well, thinking constantly as he searches for ideas.

“What if…what if we can narrow it down?” Penny inquires.

“Easier said than done, Penny.” Blake says with a sigh as she scratches her Feline ears with her filed nails.

“Maybe not…Architect?” She calls and the designer for the Arkhoni Structures and cities turns his mechanical head to her.

“Yes?” He replies.

“Would the tower that happens to be linked to the Tunnel be closest to the entrance itself? You know, to activate it?” Penny inquires curiously as she looks at him so studiously. He ponders as he searches through some of his archived memories, and then his brow flicks up with realisation.

“Yes. Yes! Penny, you genius!” The Architect praises as he claps his hands together, causing the bright eyes Penny Polendina to squeal with total joy.

“Genius? Oh, Sen-Sational! I’m a genius!” She squeaks as she bounces up and down and claps her hands together with a giggle, making baby Adrian giggle as well at her happiness.

“Penny is right, the tower that is closest to the Tunnel entrance would be the one that would activate it…may I?” He asks Terra and she nods her head with agreement as she rises up.

“Of course.” She agrees, despite still being a bit surprised by the mechanical man that has just picked up the red marker pen that was clipped to the map. He pulls the lid off and he circles a part of the ocean and he writes the word **Tunnel** in the centre of his circle.

“Okay, this is approximately where the Tunnel is currently buried, and the Entrance will rise out of the bay when we activate it. The Tower’s Terminal only has a limited range, so the only way to activate it would be to go to the closest one.” The Architect explains, and he looks at the map, circling four towers left behind at the very front of the city. Two on the cliffs and two in the city itself.

“Well, Four beats the hell out of Nineteen.” Raven says as she nods her head, and Qrow scratches his beard on his face as he looks down at the map.

“Alright…four Towers…sixteen of us. We can split up into teams of four.” Ruby suggests as she looks around.
“She’s right, may be our best bet.” Qrow agrees, despite how much he hates splitting up, but it is the most logical solution. It would be stupid for all four of them to go and search each tower at once, especially with the Acolytes of Lien prowling the city – and unbeknownst to them – the White Fang.

“So…who will go with who?” Kragen asks as he stands with his beloved Ebony Duchess in his hands.

“Well…I believe Ruby, Oscar, Pyrrha and Jaune should head to this tower.” Ozpin suggests as he points to the one nearest the centre of the bay, in the Market District of the city.

“Why?” Oscar inquires.

“The four of you all have qualities that compliment each other, Ruby has her aim and her speed, Oscar you have your semblance and not only that you have immense problem-solving skills. Jaune is a masterful strategist and Pyrrha is one of the best fighters we have. In case the Acolytes attack us, you will have the best qualities to challenge it.” Ozpin explains, and he is not wrong at all. All of the strengths he pointed out are what make the four quite formidable together as a team even without the strange supernatural link that seems to bind them together against Vir Nominis Umbra.

“Okay, who’s next?” Winter asks.

“Qrow and I should stay together, balances out our semblances, can’t risk bad luck hitting us.” Raven explains as she looks at her brother, and he is not even offended. He nods his head in agreement pretty much immediately. “Who’s gonna join us?”

“Count me in.” Cinder volunteers as she approaches them with the nod of her head, and Qrow nods back.

“Me too, I can help you unlock any Arkhoni Doors if the need arises.” The Architect explains as he holds his rifle in his hands.

“Okay then, Qrow’s team will head to the East Cliff Tower.” Ozpin says as he marks that spot on the map, where one of these towers overlooks the ocean, writing the first letters of their initials down into a team name.

Q.R.A.C

“Kragen is with me, as long as I am near him, I can make sure his wounds heal properly before the fighting starts.” Yenna states as she looks at her husband and he nods his head to her.

“I’ll go with them, I can help with my glyphs if they need me to.” Winter volunteers.

“And I will join you.” Ozpin says as he nods his head, marking their initials down around the Western Cliff Tower.

Leaving only one tower and four people remaining.

“That leaves Blake, Ren, Nora and Penny. And you will head into the northern side of Sanctum Academy where that tower has been left behind. Be careful, I fear the Acolytes of Lien have Sanctum under their control now. I believe they are training their own Huntsmen there to fight for them. Meaning we could be up against new and stronger enemies if this goes wrong.” Ozpin explains as he marks their location.

Four teams.
They all look at the team names and Ruby bites her lip at them. “Not… the best Team Names I’ve ever heard, Professor.” Ruby jokes as she looks at him, and he shrugs his shoulder with a sigh.

“Not my best work, but it will have to do, I guess.” He chuckles as he sets the pen down, and Saphron smiles as she looks at her brother.

“This is really cool, getting to see Huntsmen and Huntresses in action.” She giggles, and he scoffs.

“You haven’t seen nothing yet. Wait till you see us having to fight Evil Undying Knights. That’s when stuff gets fun.” He chuckles, and her eyes widen with total disbelief and she leans forward.

“Say what?” She asks.

“I’ll tell you about it if we win this thing.” Jaune chuckles as he looks to his sister with a smile.

“You guys can’t go now though, it’s late and I am about to start making dinner. Stay the night… please.” She requests with a smile as she looks at them, and Jaune looks at them all and he shrugs his shoulders.

“Are all Arcs this welcoming?” Penny asks curiously as she looks at him with a bright smile on her face, and Saphron smiles.

“Only to those that are nice.” She says with a wink.

**Kassius**

All the way in Northern Vale...

The seagulls cry at another cliff face, with Ancient Arkhoni Structures standing despite the thousands of years of punishment that the world has forced upon them. Cardin stands there as he holds a stone in his hand, and he throws it up in the air, catching it as he looks at the bones of the past protruding up from the ground. The sun glares down above their heads, and Kassius sits in the Car that they rented from a nearby Dealership, not exactly brand new but nice enough. Has some rust in places and the suspension works well enough.

Could be much worse.

Velvet sits on the back of the truck’s flatbed with Emerald whilst Coco stands on the bonnet with her scroll held high above her head as she keeps searching for a signal to the C.C.T. Cardin turns and glances at Coco as she searches for a signal. “What’s the C.C.T saying, Coco?”

“Right now? Not a damn thing… stupid C.C.T, lost the signal. Cross Continental Transmit right? And yet I stand here, nothing blocking the signal… and I can’t get SHIT!” Coco yells with anger at her scroll, making Velvet wince as she sits down in the passenger seat next to Kassius as he grasps
the wheel. Cardin walks over and he climbs into the back of the truck, holding his mace in his hand as he looks around at the beautiful environment.

“Told ya we should have bought one of those maps.” Kassius comments.

“Don’t.” Coco demands.

“What was it she said, Em?” Kassius asks her.

“Don’t push me.”

“I think it was something like – *paper is overrated.*” Emerald says, and Coco turns, and she just pushes her sunglasses down slightly and raises her brow as she glares at her. Emerald’s eyes widen massively as she sees that glare and she swiftly – and wisely – backs down. Coco sighs as she turns back to the front of the landscape before them as the engine softly grumbles and she taps her hands against her handbag.

“Come on, let’s get to Queen’s Cove.” She says to him.

Kassius picks up his stetson on his lap and he fits it onto his head of brown hair, smirking. “Showtime.” He says with a grin and he drives forward, and the car bounces across the terrain with beautiful ease – good thing they went for the off-road vehicle, otherwise this would be much more painful.

“So, what did Ruby text you earlier?” Cardin asks him.

“She said that we should search any towers that are closest to the ocean, they are most likely our best bet.” Kassius says, since due to the time difference between the continents they are on, it is night at Argus right now, but it is in the middle of a scorching afternoon today.

“Gods, did it have to be so hot?” Velvet exclaims. “Should’ve brought sun screen.”

“Can’t you just conjure a hood or something from that box of yours?” Cardin asks her curiously.

“It doesn’t work like that.” Velvet clarifies.

“Why not?” He asks.

“It’s a hard-light dust canister, and I have bonded my aura with it so I can use my photographic memory to conjure weapons.” Velvet clarifies in greater detail so then he can understand, showing that Velvet also has photographic memory. Kassius drives by some of the cliffs that overlook the beautiful ocean that has waves constantly crashing against the sharp rocks that protrude through the forever blue surface. Foam of white from the constant collisions can be seen on the ocean’s surface as he drives. In the background of him driving of course, alongside the incessant seagull cries, he can hear his team all conversing with each other.

It has been a long time since he has actually felt…responsible.

He’d be a big fat liar if he said he was not enjoying this feeling right now.

“So, you definitely can’t do clothes?” Cardin questions.

“Why’re you so interested?” Emerald questions with curiosity.

“Well that’d be so convenient wouldn’t it? Just conjure clothes right then and there, would never have to buy anything.” Cardin explains, but that is when Velvet just conjured a copy of Cardin’s
Mace and holds it up, showing the blue – see through – holographic form it has taken.

“Hate to tell you, but I don’t think I’d feel very comfortable wearing a dress that someone can…see straight through.” Velvet states as she waves her other hand behind the mace, and he just sits back, and he gives a sarcastic grin.

“I mean…I wouldn’t mind.” He admits as he looks at Velvet, and she swiftly turns away from him and looks out at the beautiful ocean instead of his snide comment as her brown hair blows in the wind with her hair. Coco gives Cardin a glare and that shuts him up pretty quickly as Kassius drives the car across the cliff face.

“Watch it Cardin.” She warns, and Cardin has not forgotten the threat she made towards him about making nasty comments towards her. Sure, that may have been sarcastic, but it was not okay for him to just say something like that. Especially to Velvet Scarlatina, someone he body shamed for her ears. He holds his hands up in surrender, accepting that and staying quiet.

“Alright…I’m sorry.” Cardin apologises, fully meaning it as well, but Velvet just looks out and listens to the ambient noise of the waves crashing against each other beneath them at the cliffs. They keep driving along, passing by some old Arkhoní Ruins that stick out from the ground where the land has buried them. Kassius decelerates and Coco rises up as they see an Arkhoní Structure just sitting there. And it looks like it is partially intact.

“What’s up?” Emerald asks.

“Gonna check this out, back in a second.” Kassius says as he opens the door and he walks away from the truck towards the collapsed building. He and Coco walk side by side whilst the others patiently wait for their return. Kassius pushes the broken door open, and it snaps from the rusted hinge, crashing down to the floor. They both ignore it and walk inside, looking around at the collapsed roof, and some of the old beds left behind.

“Whoa…I mean…I remember the stuff we saw in the Volcanic Chain Isles, but this is something else…” She says as she looks at the house.

“I know, Arkhoní Residential Home. Crazy to think all this used to be a city…and now…it’s just all flat land.” Kassius says as he holds out his hands to the surrounding grassy cliff face, and obviously most of the city fell into the ocean hundreds of years ago anyway. It was gonna fall anyway, the waves finished that one off…at least this destruction of a city was actually, understandable and caused by nature and time.

But even still, it is clear the city was attacked. “Look, claw marks. Grimm must have attacked the city at some point.” Coco deduces.

“Hopefully the family escaped.” Kassius says.

“Not like it’d matter – their Empire fell anyway.” Coco says with a heavy sigh, and Kassius walks further into the old building. Sat on a mantelpiece is some sort of old Arkhoní Trinket, cast in pure gold and he picks it up in his cybernetic hand. He wipes the dust from it and sees the Higher Arkhoní Text engraved into the metal.

Volo enim vos me sentire sicut regiae in eam Nuptialis Nocte

Naturally out of curiosity, Kassius takes the Translation Bracelet that the Architect built for them to use and he scans the text. The database of letters comes up and gives him the Common Tongue version of what this says.
And it is not what he was expecting.

_I want you to make me feel like a Queen on her Wedding Night_

Kassius scoffs as he looks at the little golden trinket, turning to Coco. “Not what I was expecting that to mean.” He chuckles, and Coco walks over to see the translation. She laughs aloud at that, seeing that even the Arkhoni seem to have a dirty sense of humour as well.

“I wonder if that worked.” Coco chuckles.

“Might give that to Yang one day, see if it works.” Kassius chuckles as he opens up his satchel and shoves it in.

“Gross.” Coco says back.

“Oh, come on, like you weren’t thinking the same thing.” Kassius says to her, and she scoffs.

“I mean…alright sure.” She gives in, since she and Kassius have always had a pretty similar sense of humour. Kassius looks around at the place and they both realise that this little valuable might be the only thing worth noting in there. So, they both depart from the Arkhoni home, and return back to their team in the truck. She opens the passenger seat door and sits down next to Kassius and he continues on.

“Anything interesting?” Emerald asks.

“You tell me, master thief.” Kassius responds as he hands her the Golden Trinket and she holds it in her hands. She seems to go from Woman who wants to make things right to Master Thief at the snap of her fingers. She gazes at it, feeling the golden metal that it is forged out of, feeling the coolness and running her fingertips across the many markings of the Fertility Totem.

“Wow, this thing’s worth a lot.” Emerald says as she looks at it.

“Is that thing gold?” Velvet asks curiously.

“Sure, looks like it.” Cardin agrees.

“Bet you could get a bunch of lien for selling one of these babies to the right dealers.” Emerald says as she holds it so carefully as Kassius drives along.

“Wanna know what it is?” Kassius asks them.

“What?” Emerald asks.

“It’s one of those Fertility Totems.” Kassius answers, and in the rear-view mirror of the truck, he can see Emerald’s eyes widen and her irises shrink with shock. Cardin shuffles away and Velvet just looks away from the doll, Emerald reaches round, and she just shoves it back into Kassius’ satchel.

“You know what? You can keep it.” Emerald says, making Kassius chuckle. But as he drives, it brings up a subject that makes Coco quite curious about the green haired thief.

“Hey Emerald, is it true people called you a Master Thief?” Coco inquires, and she raises a brow.

“No.” Emerald responds.

“Oh…”
“Master Thieves are liars, because clearly they’re nowhere good as they think they are if everyone knows who they are.” Emerald states with a confident smile on her face as she sits back. “Real Master Thieves? Nobody knows their names.”

“But…I know yours.”

“Do you?”

“Wait…what?”

“Ha! Just messing with you. No, I’m no master thief. I’m good but not that good, I think Cinder only brought me on at first because of my semblance.” Emerald says as she crosses one leg over the other whilst using her other hand to hold onto the metal bar on the back of the truck, keeping herself steady when Kassius happens to drive over some bumpy parts of the terrain.

“Just…for that?” Coco coos softly.

“W-What are you getting at?” Emerald stammers.

“Just pinching you, Em. Don’t get all defensive on me…nothing wrong with a bit of girl-on-girl.” Coco says with a grin, talking from experience as well. But then Kassius chimes in and snaps his metal fingers to stop them right there.

“And I’d like to remind you that the second girl in that scenario is my sister.” Kassius states, making Velvet giggle. Kassius drives along and she gasps as she stands up, picking up the binoculars.

“Whoa! Guys look!” She calls out.

“What? What is it?” Cardin asks as he stands up, and they all follow her line of vision to the base of the cliffs. They can actually see the chunks of the cliff that fell into the ocean, and one of them looks like a building. Rebar that has rusted away sticks up from what remains, and the glass has withered away. The ocean has been pounding that building for generations and it is still somehow not buried in silt.

“Part of the cliff…what kind of building do you think that is?” Velvet asks as Kassius looks down at it.

“Dunno…maybe an office building? Easy to forget the Arkhoni had Skyscrapers too.” Kassius says with the shrug of his shoulders, and Velvet smiles as she feels Kassius supportively pat her shoulder. “Good find.” Kassius tells her and she softly blushes before sitting back down on the seat in the back, Emerald doing the same as she brandishes her sickles. Velvet gazes at them, their craftsmanship is highly impressive. Emerald swiftly notices her staring at them and she leans down to meet those brown eyes of hers.

“Eyes here, Velv.” Emerald says to her, and Velvet yelps, her ears bolting upright, and she bounces in her seat.

“S-Sorry…I just…I’m a bit like Ruby, I’m a geek for weapons.” She admits as she wrings her hands together as she looks at them. Emerald looks at her sickle and she passes one of them over to her so then she can look at it. She grasps the green blades in her hands, feeling the cold metal that they are made up of, seeing the many different gears that help them fold up into their revolver forms – and the chains hidden inside of them so then she can throw them. A pair of lethal weapons for someone who knows how to use them. “How did you make them?”

“Well…I initially stole the guns for a contract I was hired for – long before I met Cinder. But when I
went to give them to the guy, he sold me out and tried to get me arrested for a bounty. So, I shot him with them and kept the weapons…over time I taught myself how to customize weaponry and I added the sickles. The chains came later, when I realised that having a grappling hook would come in handy.” Emerald explains to her.

“What did you call them?” Velvet curiously asks her.

“What the owner named them – Silent Judgement.” Emerald answers as she looks at them, the two Sickles known now as Silent Judgement.

Velvet smiles as she gives the sickle back to her. As they drive Kassius looks around and then he sighs, coming up with something to pass the time as they head for Queen’s Cove. “Knock, knock.”

“Who’s there?” Velvet replies

“Oh, gods here we go.” Coco groans.

“Impatient cow.” Kassius responds.

“Impatient cow wh-”

“MOO!”

Velvet jolts and Kassius laughs as he interrupts her, and they all laugh at the stupid comedy that seems to flourish in this truck. Velvet giggles as well, feeling like she shouldn’t though since it was so silly. But her adorable nature is something that even she cannot fight the nature of. They keep driving and it feels like they have been going for miles now, and Cardin groans like a child.

“Are we there yet?”

“We’ll get there WHEN WE GET THERE!” Hyde suddenly exclaims through Kassius, until Kassius takes control again and shakes it off.

“Sorry about that…” Kassius apologises.

“Man, Hyde has a temper.”

“You don’t say?” Coco responds to Cardin sarcastically, but as they drive Velvet stops them as she touches Kassius’ head with her hand, her ears flicking up at the sound of something. “Ssh…listen…can you hear that?” She asks them, so they all pay attention to the sound in the air. They all listen extremely carefully as they hear the distant sound of trucks and ships in the docks, not far away.

“I think we’re here.” Velvet says to them with hope in her eyes, so Kassius keeps driving across the bumpy terrain, when the terrain begins to flatten out into a dirt road, and they follow it towards the descending slope. As it descends, their eyes widen with relief to see Civilisation.

Queen’s Cove.

A stunning city, and without a doubt one of the most unique Trading Cities in the world. A city that has survived by hollowing out the faces of entire cliffs into massive open caves with powerful supports. Buildings and entire streets and districts hidden underground which protects them from the harsh icy cold nights that the ocean brings forth. Lights scattered across the cliffs for night and day cycles, and roads connecting the entire place together between the two cliffs. The road heads down the very centre of the city towards the beach at the very bottom, splitting off at multiple places with countless impressive bridges that connect buildings and districts together.
People from all walks of life live here, from Faunus to Human, Traders to Black Smiths…and as always…there are sections that have heavy crime levels. But that is not what has their curiosity piqued, they have been really needing a good night’s sleep. And since their search for the right tower here will be difficult since there are quite a few here at Queen’s Cove as well as Argus, they will need to find somewhere comfortable to stay.

With the Peregrine hidden safely in stealth mode somewhere nearby in the cliffs, they will send one of their team members there once they are about to activate the bridge. But it is clear the Acolytes of Lien presence here is very strong, from some of the Warships that have entered the harbour at the very bottom where so many tourists come to get a great suntan. Velvet gasps and gazes with awe at the beautiful city, and its totally unique splendour. Cars and lorries driving across these bridges, it is without a doubt one of the many wonders of the world.

Kassius looks back at them all. “Everyone, we’ve finally made it to Queen’s Cove.” Kassius says.

“Civilisation! YAY!” Coco cheers with relief as she slumps down into her chair, making Kassius chuckle and he nods his head.

“Good to be around people again.” He says, and he drives into the city with them all looking around as he drives underneath the many bridges that surround them. There are also some Paladins around here, but they are all Valerian since they are still part of Vale’s protection, not as strong a presence as Argus, but it is clear that the Acolytes do not have the same level of permission to be here as at Anima. Vale is the one Kingdom that they do not have total access to, so seeing a Warship this close to Vale is rather frightening.

Emerald looks around at the many people who go about their business here at Queen’s Cove. “Do you guys know why this place is called Queen’s Cove?” Velvet asks them as she looks around.

“No…I actually don’t.” Kassius replies.

“Oh…such a romantic story.” Velvet sighs as she holds her hands to her chest with a blushing smile. “You see, the King of Vale during the Great War married a beautiful young woman who would rule beside him as Queen. And it was here that he actually proposed to her, and he vowed that when the war was over, he would have a city built here in her name. So, then it would always be remembered as where he fell in love with her.” Velvet explains with joy in her heart as they drive past the many people here.

“So many different people here…take it the Queen was a very accepting gal?” Cardin presumes.

“She was, in fact she as Faunus like me. Not a Bunny, but a Gazelle. She was one of the most beautiful women in all the Kingdoms, and for that she was hated by many. But she wanted to make sure there could be a safe haven, like Menagerie, but for both Faunus and Humans to live in peace. This idea exists in Vale to an extent but nowhere near to the level it is here…” Velvet explains as she sits back down, looking at the huge hollowed out cliffs where entire towns have been built inside of.

As they drive down the main street of the city, they come across a stunning statue of the Queen of Vale, and Velvet was not exaggerating about her beauty. She stood tall, and with her antlers on her head, she looked to be a fierce ruler. But in fact, she was anything but, she was so kind and wanted only the love of her people to be there for her. With short hair, and a heart shaped jawline and beautiful eyes, she was a sight for those to gaze upon.

Her name was Angelica Zibiah and took the surname of Cerulean when she married her beloved Husband, King Xavier Cerulean.
“Why do we no longer have a Monarchy anymore in Vale?” Kassius asks, since he is not overly sure.

“They stood down when the people elected a Government to take over when they were older. They graciously accepted and lived out the rest of their days together here at Queen’s Cove.” Velvet explains, and it actually warms their heart.

“At least some people get a happy end.” Cardin says as he looks around at the beautiful city that continues to thrive even after they had gone. Nice to have some history lessons from someone who is not from Arkhonex as well, since everything seems to surround the ancient Empire nobody knows about apart from the few.

They drive past the statue of the Queen, and they head towards a Hotel at the end of the street before heading down into the beach, connected to another street. They park up outside of the hotel and they get out, looking at it, the Hotel is built up at the edge of one of the cliffs, and they read the name of it.

*The Stanley Hotel*

“The Stanley Hotel…must admit this is the first city I’ve ever been to that only has one hotel.” Kassius comments.

“I’ve heard they’re working on more.” Velvet says.

“Well. Let’s go see what’s what.” Kassius says to them.

They all get out of the car and they approach the entrance, hearing the bell ring as the doors open up. As soon as they enter, they notice that there is pretty much nobody inside bar the people at the reception. So, they approach, and they look at them. The two receptionists look up at them, yet something is immediately odd about these people. They…are almost robotic the way they lift their heads and stare at them. “Hello, welcome to the Stanley Hotel…how can we help you?”

“Uh…we’ve had a long trek to get here, we’d like to rent a room for the night. Do you have any suits that have five beds?” Kassius asks them, since this is not an unusual request at Hotels like these. They do tend to have things like these…but then one of the men just looks right into Kassius’ eyes…almost further than that.

“You do not belong here.” The man says, and Kassius raises a brow.

“Huh?” Kassius responds.

“I’m sorry, forgive me…it’s been a long day today. Of course, we can happily book you five a room for the night. If you are interested, there is a party happening tonight, we invite every guest in the hotel to these parties to have fun. We hope you can join us.” The Receptionist says to Kassius and the others, and the Huntsman narrows his eyes with concern at the man, but then he turns to see Coco nodding as she pays the lien and he steps back, looking at Emerald and she shares the same expression.

“That was…weird.” Emerald whispers.

“Yeah…let’s be careful here.” Kassius says, as he walks away.
Unaware that something was just watching them the whole time from the shadows.

Jaune

Whilst everyone is talking and having dinner with Terra Cotta and with each other, Jaune walks through the halls of their house, looking at the pictures on the walls with his sister. Seeing the face of Skyler on some of them, seeing Alyssa and many others that he has not seen in a very long time. And if they do not win this…they might never get the chance to see them ever again. Saphron stands with him, Adrian currently asleep in his little cot in his bedroom, cuddling a huge plushie toy, and then she picks up the picture of when Terra gave birth to him.

“Gods…I never thought another human being could crush another’s hand like she nearly did to me that day…and I love that memory so much.” Saphron says with a smile as she sets the picture down. Since the two of them are married, they paid a man to be the surrogate father for Adrian, henceforth the reason why his male features are not like her mother’s. However, he somehow has Saphron’s personality on point.

“He’s a good kid…” Jaune says with a smile.

“And he has an amazing Uncle.” She tells him with a proud smile, and he chuckles softly.

“An Uncle who had to lie to get into Beacon.” He clarifies.

“And here you are…you’re not seriously still hung up on that are you?” She questions.

“Can you blame me? I’ve made it this far…and…well…”

“Don’t.” She demands, turning his face away from Skyler in the photograph of the Arc family, because she had had enough of hearing him feeling so sorry for himself over this. “It is not what Skyler would want, you know that. Skyler was an incredible warrior, I know – and so are you.”

“She should have this sword, Saph.” He says to her as he looks down at Crocea Mors in his hand, looking at the Glyphs that faintly shimmer within them. Saphron is not blind, and now that it is just her and Jaune she can actually ask him what was on her mind earlier.

“What happened, Jaune? I can see it in all your eyes…” Saphron asks him with worry, understandable worry.

“I…”

“Please…I’m worried about you, little brother.” She gently squeezes his shoulder as she looks at him and he closes his eyes with a heavy sigh.

“W-We took a hit. And I don’t just mean what happened to the Kingdoms, I mean recently. We lost a great teacher on a mission, but…when we got back…our enemy found us. And he murdered four of our friends in front of us. Bashed one of their heads in…made Ruby kill one, killed the other…and murdered Ruby’s father right in front of her.” He tells her the full truth, and Saphron’s eyes widen and she peers round the wall to see Ruby sat there. And amongst all the laughs, she is the one of the few that is not laughing. Raven and Qrow among them as well, and some of the others are simply just trying to lighten the mood.
They cannot keep living a life surrounded by the grief of their past.

“Jaune…I…”

“It’s alright…but do you understand why I’m worried about coming here now?” Jaune asks her, and with tears in her eyes she nods her head. “I can’t lose anyone else.”

Saphron wraps her arms around her little brother and she closes her eyes lovingly as she holds him close, and she holds him. “We will be fine…it’s you I’m scared for Jaune. And not because I think you can’t do it – but because I know you can. I know you will do anything for them, Jaune…and I can’t lose someone else I love. Not after Skyler.”

“I know…but we can’t stand by and do nothing, Saph. We’re running out of time, every second that passes by is giving our enemy time to use against us.” Jaune explains, and she stammers.

“Are things…really as bad as they sound out there?” She asks him with worry, for her son. He stops and he closes his eyes.

“It’s not good, sis…but we have a plan. And I believe in Ruby.” Jaune promises with a smile.

“Well…you’ve always had good judgement before.” She says to him with a smile, before hugging him again.

“I love you, baby brother.” She says to him.

“Love you too, sis.” He replies.

Family means everything, and not even Vir Nominis Umbra can tear that apart.
The Stanley Hotel

Ruby

The morning has risen across the City of Argus, the Sleeping Angel of Remnant…

Ruby walks out of the house of Saphron’s, looking around as the people of this city begin to continue their daily lives. The way in which they all act as if the world is not going to hell is truly quite impressive, in a way encouraging. It shows the resilience of their people despite how many horrors in the world should leave them a crying mess in their houses. But they do not care, they just keep going with their lives.

They just keep moving forward for as long as they possibly can.

The bitter northern wind scrapes across their cheeks as they emerge, looking around at the huge city that expands before their very eyes. As she stands there, Ozpin stands beside her, holding his cane in his hands as he looks out as well. “Quite a view, isn’t it?” He asks her as he admires it, and she frivolously nods her head up and down, not saying a word. Ozpin glances down at her as she stands beside him, and he looks back out across the land. “Something is on your mind, is it not?” Ozpin asks her curiously, able to read her quite well. A skill he has always been able to utilise at the best of times, especially when in interrogations with a prisoner.

Ruby glances at him for a moment with her silver eye before looking back down at the floor, then back to the city. “You can speak with me, Ruby. I understand your distrust with me, I have not exactly earned your trust after the amount of secrets I have kept – and the things I have done.” Ozpin explains as he holds his hands atop the cane. Ruby stands there and she sighs, rather loudly as well as she stands there, tapping the barrel of Crescent Rose where she has holstered it onto her belt around her waist.

“I’m…I’m just scared is all.” She says to him, and he looks at her.

“It’s natural to be afraid of Umbra, Miss Rose, he is beyond anything we have faced before.” Ozpin answers, although he clearly did not really understand the point she was trying to make just then.

“That’s…not what I meant.” She says with a sigh as a soft gust of air blows her black and red hair, and Ozpin glances down at her where she stands.

“Then what did you mean?” Ozpin inquires curiously, and Ruby blows out a shaky breath as she looks up at the seagulls that cry as they glide across the blue skies. Fluffy white clouds floating over their heads.

“I’m not scared of Umbra specifically, Professor…it’s…everything else that scares me. The weight on our shoulders.” She explains, and she turns to see a beautiful purple and red butterfly fluttering over to her, and she lifts her index finger and middle finger up to give the tiny and lovely insect a place to land. It sets itself down upon her slender fingers and it gently flexes its thin wings as it sits there comfortably on her finger. “Everything…kind or cruel, good or bad, Human and Faunus, Intelligent or Not…it will all die. And the weight of saving it all rests with us…I…I don’t know how to cope with that.” She stammers, and Ozpin looks at her and the butterfly that she tenderly cares for.

Then a kind smile graces Ozpin’s face as he looks down at the young woman, for the answer to her
stress, and why she has been chosen is right in front of him. “You already are.” Ozpin tells her, and she looks up at him with a raised eyebrow of confusion. “The way you care for something so small, so insignificant like an insect, it shows why you have made it as far as you have. You protect the little ones, the ones that cannot defend themselves from those bigger and stronger and crueler. It is a spark like you, that can ignite a flame that can shine light through the darkness, and because of that, you will do whatever needs to be done to save them. Whether or not they may see you as a monster or not…those you are forced to kill left you no choice. You possess power but do not use it, only when you must.” Ozpin explains as he crouches down beside Ruby, looking at her and the butterfly.

The little insect spreads its wings and it flies away with beautiful and peaceful grace, gliding away into the distance. “That, is who you are, Ruby Rose. And I feel the same way, having this weight on our shoulders can hurt and can bring us down…but we can beat him if we stand together. Vir Nominis Umbra is not unstoppable, nothing ever is. Everything has a weakness, and I believe it all comes down to a moment, a time when you can deliver the killing blow.” Ozpin explains as he rises back up, and Ruby looks at him as he stands there. “The way to cope? Is to have people you trust by your side.”

“Is that why you created the idea of Teams?” She inquires curiously, and he nods his head.

“A warrior can be powerful on their own, but their hide is rigid, easily broken. But a group of warriors who fight and live together? Bound by friendships and happiness? Why that is a hide that is far tougher to break.” Ozpin states as he nods his head, and then he walks forward. Ruby turns when she hears Jaune emerging from the room behind him. Both the Professor and his Student turn to see everyone coming out of the house in their respective fireteams to locate the Activation Tower for the Tunnel Network.

As Jaune walks out with Pyrrha and Oscar, Saphron and Terra walk out behind them, standing at the door. Saphron holds baby Adrian in her arms as she smiles to her brother with supportive affection. Jaune stands before his sister and sister-in-law. “Stay safe, baby brother.” Saphron says and he chuckles with that cheeky grin on his face that never seems to go away no matter how old he gets.

“Me? I’m always safe.” Jaune jokes, and Nora spins round with a raised eyebrow of total disbelief at his words.

“You?” She questions, making Saphron snort as Jaune bites his lip with annoyance to his lovable friend, slowly turning to stare at her smug grinning face. She knows exactly what she did right there and shows almost no signs of regret whatsoever on her face. Through intensely forced cheer, Jaune replies to her.

“Thanks…Nora…” He grits through his fake cheer, eyes about to explode as he glares at her. She presses her nose and she blows a raspberry at him before she joins up with the rest of her fireteam, walking with Penny to Ren and Blake. Qrow walks down the steps and he gently ruffles his daughter’s hair, and she groans, pulling her head away from him and ruffling it back into the way it was. She sits there like a grump after that, and Qrow winks at her as he leads his team down the stairs.

Jaune turns back to his sister and he reassures her once more – without the impending threat of Nora Valkyrie totally wrecking his words. “Don’t worry, sis. Fingers crossed we can open that tunnel without drawing too much attention, but if it does go down…well just stay inside and stay safe, okay? We’ve handled Acolytes of Lien before, but I wouldn’t say they care too much about collateral damage.” Jaune explains as she approaches his family, and Saphron smiles and nods her head.

“Don’t worry, Jaune. We’ll be okay, won’t we pumpkin?” Saphron coos to Adrian who coos back
as he reaches up to his mother’s long blonde hair that droops over before his little eyes. Jaune chuckles as he looks at him, and he leans down, and he gently holds his tiny hand in his finger and thumb.

“Keep ‘em safe little guy, yeah?” Jaune asks the child, and the coo gives him a grin, and he chuckles as he rises back up.

“Jaune?” Oscar calls as he stands there with Traveller’s Atrocity in his grasp, looking back at him as everyone begins their mission to investigate the Four Towers. “You ready?”

“Yeah. On my way. Stay safe you three…” Jaune begs as he goes to walk away from them, but Terra stops him, and he looks back at her.

“There’s something I need to warn you about.” Terra reveals and he looks at her with both confusion and concern.

“Huh?” He asks her.

“Open your scroll.” Terra requests, so he does that, and he opens up the map that they took a picture of for reference on their mission, everyone has a copy on each of their Scrolls.

“What’s the problem, Terra?” He asks her, and she points at the circled Tower that they are headed for, but then she traces her finger down to something else in the city right beneath it. He notices it as well.

_Silver Bay Mental Asylum_

“It was something that we overlooked, but I was looking at the map earlier and I remembered something. These roads can’t be used anymore because there is construction happening here for a new Supermarket.” Terra explains to him whilst the rest of his team walk up the steps to hear what she is saying to him.

“Naturally.” Jaune says to her, and Saphron scoffs in agreement.

“Yeah, so there are only two ways through for you. You take the much longer route which requires going around the whole city…or…you go through the Asylum.” Terra explains as she taps the screen, and they all look at each other and then at her.

“Honey…will they even allow that?” Saphron asks her.

“They’re Hunters. Their scrolls grant them access to places like Asylums, if it has something to do with your investigations. Use that as a cover to get through, and beyond that there are some more old ruins that haven’t been touched. I doubt that will be a problem for you guys, but this is the fastest route you have.” Terra explains as she steps away from his scroll and he blows out a breath.

“It’ll be dangerous won’t it?” Pyrrha asks.

“As long as you stay away from the cells you should be fine.” Saphron reassures with that supportive smile of hers. Jaune ponders on it before he turns to his best friend, Ruby. She looks at him and waits for his question.

“What’re you thinking, Rubes?” Jaune asks her curiously.

She ponders as well, and comes to a good conclusion. “Well, we can’t burn anymore time. We’re wasting daylight as it is just standing here. We can’t afford to circle around the city…it’s a solid
plan.” Ruby replies with the shrug of her shoulders.

Jaune nods his head in agreement before looking at his Girlfriend and Ruby’s Boyfriend – the two of them nod as well, since it is the best move. If not a bit disturbing to go through a maximum-security Asylum, but it is a path, nonetheless. “Alright, we head through Silver Bay Asylum. Thanks, Terra.” Jaune thanks as he wraps his arms around her in a warm and thankful hug, one she returns the favour with, resting her head on his shoulder.

“Any time, Jaune.” She promises as she holds him close, and then he whispers into her ear.

“Look after yourselves, okay? Things…are gonna happen…so stay alive.” Jaune begs her, and the words truly do send a chill of pure dread through her body, but she bravely swallows it thickly and nods her head.

“We will, and stay safe yourself.” Terra begs, and Jaune steps back with a grin.

“No promises.”

Kassius

The music can be heard blaring from all the way up here in the hotel as the sun begins to fall behind the horizon. That really does show the contrast in time between the two locations, since Anima is ahead of Vale by nine hours. Kassius and the gang entered their hotel about an hour ago and found that there was already some rather nice-looking clothes left in here, quite an assortment as well. Turns out that the staff leave these dresses and suits inside of the wardrobes for the guests staying with them for their parties they have once a month for people to blow off some steam. And these are some pretty nice outfits too.

Velvet wears a beautiful blue dress with a split in the right-hand side that her leg can be seen sticking out of. They all have been asked to leave their weapons behind so that is precisely what Velvet does. She stands in front of the mirror, posing as she looks at herself and she touches her ears. “Are you sure this isn’t a bit much, Coco? I mean…it’s a bit revealing with my leg isn’t it?” She asks as she moves the dress and looks at her leg. Coco stands behind her as she does her hair, already dressed up and ready for the party downstairs.

“Nah, it’s fine. You look sexy as hell.” Coco compliments, and Velvet blushes and looks away from the reflection. “Stay still, trying to do your hair isn’t easy when you keep moving your head.” Velvet responds to that by swinging her head back and forth, making Emerald chuckle as she zips up her Green Dress she found inside as well, matching her hair colour. Except this time, they have no need for disguises and new names, they can just go there and be themselves for once in their lives. “I will shave your hair off.” Coco warns Velvet, and she gasps and freezes still.

“I’m sorry.” She apologises, making Coco grin since that threat has always gotten her to stop…because she actually did shave her head once. That nearly shattered their trust with each other, but maybe Velvet shouldn’t have pushed Coco to that point by being a little too cheeky with her.

“Thank you.” Coco replies as she keeps braiding some parts of her hair together, not the whole hair into a tail though, just some areas to give her a unique look. As Coco does her friend’s hair, she wears a familiar bronze dress, one so familiar that even Emerald notices that as she eyes it up. It is literally the exact same dress she wore at Fallingwater Estate…that cannot be a coincidence.
It even has some of the scuffs on it.

“Is that…the same dress?” Emerald questions with disbelief in her voice, and Coco turns around with a playful wink at Emerald.

“Oh yeah.” She answers, and Velvet raises a brow.

“Wait seriously? I thought it was just a similar looking one.” Velvet questions with a similar level of disbelief as their green haired friend.

“What can I say? This Vir Nominis Umbra fella has one hell of a great sense of style.” She says with a smile on her face, in which Emerald looks away. She may have never really seen Vir Nominis Umbra when he saved her life by having Kassius and Cardin happen upon her, but his style is hardly what they should be worrying about. But at the same time, that is just Coco’s way, she has always been one to joke these things around to lighten the mood and improve morale.

Better than dwelling on it twenty-four-seven.

In the other room whilst Coco is helping make Velvet look stunning – which really is not much effort to do thanks to her natural beauty – are Kassius and Cardin. Suited and booted, sat down on his bed Kassius is fiddling with the sleeve of his grey suit that he wears over his white shirt. He opens and closes his cybernetic arm and continues to play with the sleeves with frustration, whereas Cardin is equally annoyed with this outfit. “Gods…how to businessmen live in these things?” He questions.

“I know, damned thing keeps getting caught in the gears of my arm.” Kassius complains as he keeps sorting it out until he just rolls his sleeves up to prevent the problem from getting any worse. Cardin looks at Kassius and he raises his brow, since he could never really understand the struggle he is experiencing.

“Well…at least yours actually fits you!” Cardin strains as he tries to move his arms, wincing from every movement as he tries to not burst a suture. Kassius looks at him struggle and he chuckles at him as he stumbles around in it. Neither of them like suits but it is still quite entertaining to watch such a big man stagger around the way he is right now. “Oh, come on.”

“Were you always this much of an idiot at Beacon?” Kassius curiously inquires.

“Oh…much worse.” Cardin assures as he sits down on the foot of his bed, resting his arms on his knees, checking his watch as they wait for the girls to come out. “Gods, how long does it take? Been waiting half an hour.” Cardin groans.

“You haven’t had to wait for Weiss Schnee to get ready. That’s when you experience true pain.” Kassius says.

“Take a while?” He asks.

“Oh yeah. Yang and everyone else were ready long before she was.” Kassius clarifies as he taps his metal finger against his human hand softly. As he starts doing that, Cardin makes a beat with his foot, matching the rhythm formed from Kassius’ finger. They look at each other and grins form as they immaturely start forging a musical tune together with their bodies. They both bob their heads and Cardin starts beatboxing as they wait for the girls, and Kassius whistling as well.

Before they even know it, they have created an epic tune.

Which gets cut off as soon as they get to the base drop, the door opening and Emerald coming out, stopping and staring at the two boys, catching them in the act. “Aw…just as we were getting to the
good bit.” Cardin complains, and Emerald just scoffs before she rolls her eyes in disgust.

“Losers.” Emerald insults as she sits down on one of the stools in here, catching a gasp from Kassius as he slaps his hand to his chest in total awe at her cruel words.

“How dare you…that was legendary.” Kassius states.

“For a pair of losers.” Emerald adds.

“You really haven’t changed much from Beacon, have you?” Cardin asks her, and Kassius raises an eyebrow.

“What? Was she always a nasty stuck up little thief back then?” Kassius whispers, and Emerald spins her head round and narrows her eyes.

“I was not stuck-up.” Emerald defends as she stares at the two boys sat there, and Cardin animatedly shakes his head as he bluffs to her.

“Oh no, not at all.” He assures before giving her the thumbs up, leaning down to Kassius and whispering in his ear. “100%, she wouldn’t keep her eyes off the girls.” He whispers, and Emerald suddenly blushes as she springs up and glares at him, catching his words.

“That’s it, Winchester!” Emerald explodes, until the door opens, and the guys turn, and their eyes widen when they see the beautiful Velvet Scarlatina standing before them. She is one of those people who somehow just gets prettier, like a fine wine. If Kassius wasn’t already devoted to Yang…he would have fallen for Velvet most likely, if she were a little less innocent though. Kassius likes his girls having a dirty side, which is why he loves Yang so much.

Velvet looks at them with a shy smile as she shows herself and the makeup that her Fashionista Best Friend came up with for her, some beautiful sapphire blue eyeshadow and glistening lip balm. And she smells like that of the most wonderful flowers in an endless field. All that echoes in the guys minds is that she can really clean up well, and even then, she has immense charm outside of this kind of attire. Coco walks around her beautiful friend with a smile, holding her sunglasses in one hand and tucking them down into her bosom. “Whoa…” Cardin softly says as he looks at her in awe, and even though Kassius has no feelings for her, even he cannot help but be awestruck by her.

“Looking good, Velvet.” Kassius compliments, causing her to blush and smile.

“Not too bad yourself.” Velvet softly says to him with a nervous smile.

“Now, now everyone. Buffet isn’t open yet, have to wait your turn.” Coco jokes, in which Velvet blushes and covers her face in her hands with immense awkwardness at her dirty humour. Coco just winks at them and they chuckle. “Everyone ready?” Coco asks them and the two guys stand up and Cardin walks past Emerald as she flips him off, and he just replies by sticking out his tongue.

Cardin opens the door and holds it for them all. Kassius walks through last, following Coco, Velvet and Emerald at the front as they walk across the hallway as Cardin locks their apartment behind them. “So…what’s the plan here?” Coco inquires to Kassius.

“Well, we know little to nothing about this city. At a party like this there are gonna be a wide range of people we could talk to or overhear. Maybe we can narrow down the search for this Activation Tower we need.” Kassius explains as he walks past some of the guests in their dresses and suits, watching everyone dancing down on the dancing floor.

“Well and have a bit of fun.” Cardin adds.
“Yes, but remember. We have a mission here, party boy.” Coco reminds as she points at him, making Cardin chuckle.

“Don’t worry, I know.” Cardin promises as he walks with them.

The constant cascade of glasses clinking, overwhelming voices and conversation mixed with the booming music is very difficult to comprehend. However, this is the perfect location and event to find information, however they cannot notice that some of the people are still acting a little strange. They were expecting more people on the dance floor but really there is precious little. Then again, the party has just begun, and it is likely that most of the guests are far from drunk enough yet to be dancing down there.

“So…anyone gonna comment on those weird receptionists earlier?” Cardin asks curiously.

“Yeah, that was a bit strange.” Velvet agrees.

“Can’t say I blame them. Working day and night in a hotel with minimum pay? Wouldn’t be surprised if that is the reason why.” Emerald says as she walks along, and Kassius looks at some of the staff members that walk around, offering drinks to people. They seem better now, better than they were before. Kassius nods his head, starting to agree with Emerald, it is possible that after Salem and everything they have experienced, they have just been jumping to conclusions too fast.

The smell of food and liquor is strong down here as well, walking down the rest of the steps and moving past some of the people that converse. Kassius leads them to the bar where they can see the waiter washing the polished wood with a cloth after getting some people their drinks. He looks at them with a smile, resting his arms against the table as he sees them, eying up Velvet but not in a creepy way. If anything, it seems so supportive and kind the way he does it.

And what he says strengthens that. “Hello ma’am, looking beautiful today. Nice to see more Faunus coming out of their shells nowadays.” He says to her with a smile, a Human and he is actually happy to see a Faunus who has made the effort to look presentable.

“You get many Faunus here?” Emerald asks the waiter as she leans against the bar as well.

“Yeah, we get a lot around here at Queen’s Cove, but very few tend to come to parties. They either stay at home, only go out for work or are more private people. Nice to see things are improving though.” The Waiter says as he finishes the clean up on the table. Obviously, that is not completely true, considering what has happened to the White Fang, but none of them feel the need to correct the man on his compliment. He slaps the cloth down and he looks at them. “So…what can I get you all?” He asks them.

“I…will have the Rose Petal Dark Beer.” Kassius orders with a smile, and the Waiter snaps his fingers with a smile.

“Very good choice sir.” He replies.

“I’ll have the same.” Cardin agrees as he nods his head.

“Of course! I do love this particular drink, not too light but it won’t knock you on your ass.” The Waiter describes, making them all chuckle as he pulls the two dark beer bottles from the fridge, taking the bottle opener and pulling the caps off, sliding them down to them. Kassius catches it in his cybernetic hand and he raises his bottle to the waiter in appreciation. “What about you lovely ladies?”

“Ooh…” Coco coos as she looks at the many drinks available, and Velvet deep down can already
tell what she is going to get due to how well she knows her.

_Gonna be a cocktail_

_Gonna be a cocktail_

_Gonna be a cocktail_

“I’ll have the Almond Six, please.” Coco orders, and Velvet smiles.

_Cocktail._

The waiter approaches the ingredients and he pours the alcohol then the Almond and Apple juices into it, shaking it all together and forging this strangely delicious cocktail. He finishes it off by popping a lemon on the side of the glass, sliding it across with an umbrella in it as well. She catches it and winks at the Waiter in appreciation. “I’ll have a Lavender Wine please.” Velvet requests with a smile, and Coco pauses with shock, looking at her friend.

“You? Wow…You nearly never drink…especially after that party at Beacon recently.” Coco comments.

“Oh yeah…you really did drink a fair bit, didn’t you?” Kassius asks her, and Velvet groans, giggling as she covers her face in embarrassment, but Cardin stops them there.

“Hold on…Velvet Scarlatina…the timidiest and kind girl I’ve ever seen at that school bar Ruby and Pyrrha…got wasted?” Cardin asks with disbelief.

“Oh yeah…totally wasted.” Kassius clarifies with the nod of his head.

“I was hoping you’d forgotten it.” She groans.

“How could I ever forget you trying to dance with a statue?” Coco questions, making Emerald chuckle as well at the mere image of seeing the beautiful and graceful Bunny drunkenly trying to dance with a statue.

“We talking about the Fountain Statue?” Emerald asks.

“Yep, she then fell into the fountain and claimed she was a _Bunny Mermaid._” Coco remembers vividly with a smile and Velvet groans with embarrassment at this story being retold.

“I wish I was around to see that.” Cardin chuckles.

“It was something.” Coco agrees.

“You are all terrible.” Velvet groans with embarrassment, pressing her head to the bar with a heavy sigh. The Waiter comes back, and he sets her glass down and she lifts her head and picks it back up. “I’m gonna need this to forget that.” Velvet says as she takes a sip from her wine glass.

“And you, my dear?” The Waiter asks Emerald.

“Um…I’ll have the Cranberry Ale please.” She requests.

“Coming up.” The Waiter assures as he goes to fetch that drink, and Cardin leans over and looks at Coco.

“By the way…I know you guys weren’t there…but back in that party when Jaune and Pyrrha finally
got together that time…was there meant to be alcohol there?” Cardin inquires, and Coco raises a brow.

“Not to my knowledge.” Coco responds as she looks at him, the Cranberry Ale Glass sliding past her and to Emerald’s hand, she catches it instantly.

“Oh…I guess someone spiked my punch then.” Cardin realises, biting his lip as he tries to remember.

“How bad was it?” Coco asks.

“I can’t remember the last half of that night.” He clarifies, making Kassius chuckle. “What about you, Kassius? Any cool End of Year Dances at Haven?” He asks him, and Kassius taps the top of his bottle with his finger as he remembers.

“Oh…yeah, kinda. I mean it wasn’t on a scale like yours was, but my team and I went to a Dance Club and got wasted.” Kassius explains as he remembers that one extremely well.

“No dance?” Velvet asks.

“Uh…yes, kinda. I mean it wasn’t on a scale like yours was, but my team and I went to a Dance Club and got wasted.” Kassius explains as he remembers that one extremely well.

“Of course, you need to know a certain location?” He asks her.

“Sort of. We’re looking for some old Towers, saw some of them on the way in. But one of these towers is important…I can’t say why because it's classified…but what I can say is that it draws power.” Kassius explains, which is a very wise thing to say. The Waiter stands there with a clean cloth as he cleans out one of the glasses in his hand. The Waiter contemplates and he looks across the large room at the people in here as an idea comes across his mind.

“Well I personally cannot comment on anything like that, however there are some people here today who work on the power grid of the city. If anyone would know about that, it would be them.” The Waiter says.

“Where are they?” Coco inquires.

“Right over there.” The Waiter answers, pointing to a booth that has some men with some pretty ladies chatting with quite a few drinks on them. Velvet looks at them and then at Kassius and Coco.
“Okay, thank you so much.” Velvet thanks with a smile and Kassius pays the bill with the lien he managed to cash out from an A.T.M Machine. They all step away from the bar and they look at the men, and they look at each other.

“Be a bit suspicious if we all went there, wouldn’t it?” Cardin asks.

“Yeah it would. Velvet come with me, we’ll have a word with them. Rest of you, blend in, hear what you can, have fun.” Kassius says to them, and Cardin grins.

“Can do that.” Cardin agrees, and he walks away from them, drinking more and more of his beer, approaching the dance floor. Kassius looks at Velvet and he nods, she nods back and they both approach the many people that’s it there with their decks of cards, making jokes and playing with the women. Clearly, they have been paid for their time here, since they are also clearly strippers. Definitely a strange Hotel, not many Hotels hire strippers unless they are personally paid for.

As they approach, one of the drunkards looks at them as they approach, eying up Velvet…not as nicely as the Waiter did. As his eyes focused on her round breasts and her curvy body. However, as Kassius stands beside her he seems to stand down for now. The men turn and they look at them.

"Can we help you?" One of them asks.

"Yeah…" Kassius says as he pulls out his wallet and he shows some lien. “…We’re Hunters, and we think you could help us out with something.”

“Oh yeah? And what might that be?” Another man asks.

“Well, I know you all work on the power grid, and since you are all here, I’m guessing you came here to unwind, right?” Kassius asks them as he walks around their table, and they look at him constantly.

“I guess you could say that.” Another man responds.

“Your point?” Another adds.

“My team and I have an important mission, one that links to those old abandoned towers around the city. Now one of these towers is extremely important and draws quite a lot of power from somewhere, now surely you may know which, wouldn’t you?” Kassius asks them.

“Oh, fuck off, we’re having fun.” The drunkest says, standing up and approaching Velvet, smacking her butt and she jolts, her knees beginning to shake as he smells her neck. “But this pretty girl… maybe we could go upstairs…I could really make you feel good darling.” He whispers to her.

“Get off her, Bill.” One of the men demands.

“Find your own.”

Suddenly Kassius’ titanium hand clamps down on his shoulder and slowly pulls him away from Velvet, crushing down onto the shoulder and he gasps in pain as he pulls him from her. “Look Billy…I don’t wanna cause a scene, but if you do that again to my friend…and I will crush your shoulder into dust.” Kassius warns as he glares at the man.

“Whoa man, alright…just…your girlfriend’s cute is all…” Bill stammers.

“She isn’t my girlfriend, she’s my friend. But that is not okay.” Kassius states. “So, apologise.” Kassius demands.
“I’m sorry.” He stammers and Kassius releases him, he staggers away from the two Warriors, massaging his shoulder.

“Sorry about him, he’s an idiot. Sure, we could help you out, but the problem is there are more towers that seem to draw power than you think.” One of the men tells him.

“What do you mean?” Kassius asks.

“Well we found a stream of energy from an unknown source when fixing the grid one time, and it connected to three towers, I think more of them were connected but collapsed years ago. All of them are on the cliffs nearest the sea.” The man explains, identical to the Towers at Argus when it comes to how close they are to the ocean itself. Meaning that it must be one of those three towers.

“We can work with that; which ones are they?” Kassius asks.

“The three ones closest to the sea, only three remain down there. As I said, all the others collapsed centuries ago.” He says.

“Alright…thank you for the information.” Kassius says with the nod of his head, walking away from the group, and as Kassius walks around, he notices that Velvet has veered off from them. He looks around in confusion, until he finally finds her, and she has wondered towards someone.

Someone…

…very worrying.

He is sat down at a table with two elderly women, wearing a white shirt and a wreathe of flowers around his shaved head. His brown eyes look at them as a couple of Crystal Beaked Crows watch them from beneath. Velvet stands near, listening curiously…completely unaware of who that person is.

It’s Vir Nominis Umbra.

“Yes, the only ingredients I read were that there are honey eggs and spices.” The woman says.

“I beg to differ, madame.” Vir Nominis Umbra replies with that kind yet sinister smile on his face. “You omit the most important ingredient of them all – Time.”

“Time? What do you mean time? As an ingredient?” The other woman questions in total confusion on the matter.

“Time gives the proper consistency. Time provides that ideal crunch on the outside, and the delicious moistness within.” Vir Nominis Umbra describes as Kassius tries to get past the people in the line so then he can get to Velvet to warn her of who this man is. Because the man she saw in the vision did not look the same, it was a different form.

“So how much of this time does it take?” The other woman asks in curiosity.

“That you will not find in any recipe, my dear. You must surrender to your senses, for they are the key to the lock you have been fumbling around. Let all your senses lead you so close to time that you can sniff, taste and even stroke it. Time…time is the key.” Vir Nominis Umbra says as he clasps his hands together with a smile, turning and walking towards Velvet as he leaves the women totally bewildered.

Velvet looks at the Soothsayer as he approaches her and she kindly smiles. “Greetings Velvet
Scarlatina. Allow me to introduce myself – Vir Nominis Umbra.” He bows before her, and her eyes widen when she hears his name, taking a step back and into the arms of Kassius as he finally gets to her. Kassius stands between Umbra and Velvet, staring at the man, yet that does not even seem to stop the entity as he walks straight through Kassius, looking at Velvet’s blue dress. “My, what an absolutely exquisite dress. The colour suits your figure beautifully.” Vir Nominis Umbra says to her with a smile.

“T-Thank you…I’ve heard a lot about you.” Velvet says to him, still acting all polite to their arch enemy.

“I doubt it was anything good.” Vir Nominis Umbra chuckles as he looks at Kassius who glares at him with a clenched fist.

“Of all the things though…cooking was never mentioned.” Velvet softly says, and Umbra smiles with a soft chuckle.

“Quite frankly, I know quite a lot about everything.” Umbra admits, rather braggadociosly. But as they converse, that man named Bill returns as he tries to flirt with Velvet again, sounding more slurred than before now.

“H-Hello darling, lemme try again yeah?” He asks her curiously, but she backs away in repulsion from him, in which Umbra glances at the man with a scoff. Kassius never forgot what Oscar told them, about how Vir Nominis Umbra aged that person to death right in front of him for getting in Oscar’s way.

“Please leave me alone.” Velvet requests.

“No…no…I didn’t do it right.”

“Like most things in your life, William Ranch.” Vir Nominis Umbra suddenly says, naming him not only by his surname but also by his full name. Bill turns and stares at Vir Nominis Umbra, completely unaware of what he truly is at heart. And that he is a very dangerous person to get on the bad side of.

“W-Who are you? What do you know about me?” He slurs.

“That you’re a terrible husband, slept with your son’s girlfriend and you pray on young women because you have sick perversions at heart.” Vir Nominis Umbra lists extremely quickly, as if he has known him for years, yet they have only just met. The man stares at him with total disbelief in his eyes.

“H-How could you k-know that?” He stammers.

“Just…who would I be, if the true nature of people remained hidden from me? Someone like you? Meaning no-one.” Vir Nominis Umbra says with a smirk and shaking his head with disappointment.

“I would not want to get blood on this beauty’s dress…but insult me once more, and I’ll…”

“Do…what?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks him with a smirk as he holds his hands together, turning to face him. “I know you want to be like you mother, show how manly you are…but let’s be real here – nothing will come of it. You’re simply not like your mother or your father – just a sad perverted man left alone with nothing but the delusions of alcohol.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains, able to read him exactly like a book.

“Rubbish! I don’t pray on girls!” Bill argues, and Umbra scoffs.
“Really? Then why have you been fantasizing over what you want to do to Miss Scarlatina over here? I have done some atrocities, but never have I committed acts as cruel as sexual abuse.” Vir Nominis Umbra snarls at him with viciousness. “Perhaps, that is why your friends treat you with no respect. Because not only do you want to try…but you have never succeeded…just like every other moment in your life.” Vir Nominis Umbra describes.

Velvet and Kassius have learned more about this creep then they ever wanted to, he is nothing more than a drunk failed sex abuser. “Your lying, my friends don’t hate me! They are always beside me!”

“The question is…have you ever been sober enough to hear the words that say around you?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks him, and Bill stammers as he stands there, before turning and stumbling away. He looks at Velvet and Kassius and he smiles before bowing his head. “I shan’t keep the two of you any longer. Have a splendid evening for time…time is short.” He says with a smirk, before he walks away from them.

“That…that was…”

“What the hell is he doing here?” Kassius questions as he watches him vanish into the crowds of people as if he were not even there.

“I didn’t…I could’ve…if you hadn’t…” She holds his hands and looks up into his eyes before releasing him and looking away with concern. “C-Can we…go outside? I need some fresh air.” She says to him, and Kassius nods his head and he follows her outside. None of them aware of how much Cardin has been drinking right now as he stands at the bar. Something is very wrong with him, he has always been one to enjoy a good amount of drink, but this is something else entirely.

They both walk outside and Kassius crosses his arms, looking back at where Umbra just was, those women had no idea. And that is what makes him such a frightening adversary. “You alright?” Kassius asks her.

“I can’t…those ladies had no idea.” She stammers, as it is all hitting her now. Hearing about Vir Nominis Umbra is one thing but seeing it with your eyes is something else entirely. “How are you meant to fight something that can blend in like that?”

“Yeah…that’s what we’re trying to figure out. So far Ruby’s eyes are the only thing that managed to actually hurt him.” Kassius explains as he keeps an eye out for him, those damned Crows are most likely watching them right now. He steps round and leans against the railing beside her.

“This…is worse than I thought.” Velvet admits.

“Yeah it is.” Kassius agrees as he stands there.

“I…I wanna…” She stammers as she closes her eyes, blushing hard and trying to not look at Kassius. But he notices and he raises his brow.

“You alright?” He asks her as he reaches out to her, but she suddenly turns and grabs onto his shoulders…and kisses him. Right on the lips, it was short and sudden, and she steps away from him with a look that really looks like she is scared. And Kassius is just shocked, looking at her with confusion – but the more he looks at her he figures it out. “Velvet…was that…what I thought it was?” Kassius asks her with concern in his voice.

“I…I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t have done that, oh gods!” She descends into a form of panic as she presses her hands to her head, realising she just kissed Kassius – a man who is already in a committed relationship.
“Do you…have feelings for me?” Kassius asks her, and then he remembers back to the looks she gave him and how she would blush whenever he would laugh at her jokes, even some of the bad ones. Always wanting to go with him on missions together, especially back at Fallingwater Estate. He sighs, pulling his tie off as he stands there, unbuttoning the top button so then he can breathe easier. “Now it all makes sense.” Kassius sighs.

“I’m so sorry, I really am! I…please don’t tell Yang, she’ll hate me…I…” She stammers, sounding like she is about to cry, but Kassius immediately calms her as he approaches her and he gently caresses her shoulders, looking down at her.

“It’s alright…You don’t have anything to worry about, it was a kiss. Just a kiss, it didn’t mean anything.” Kassius tells her, but even those words hurt for her, because there is honestly a part of her that wants it to mean something. “Where did this come from though? How long?” Kassius asks her with worry for her.

“A few months now…you know when we all went on that camping trip? To Patch?” Velvet stammers as she looks at him. Kassius remembers, a few months ago…nearly a year now…they all went on a huge camping trip to Patch to see Taiyang and potentially help build a brand-new home where the old one fell. They were going to begin construction this year, until everything happened. “When you and I were fishing…we got talking…it started there…I just couldn’t stop thinking about you…” She nearly breaks down into tears from the embarrassment and heartbreak of how it has come out. It was like an overwhelming pressure that was building on her at all times. “I…I am so sorry, I…”

But before Kassius can calm and help her, they turn to hear the infuriating voice of Bill – AGAIN. He staggers towards her, pressing his hand to the tree as he points at her. “Now…you leave buddy…lemme talk with her.”

“WILL YOU LEAVE ME ALONE?” Velvet screams with anger at the man, but he grins as he stumbles towards her anyway, and Kassius stands in front of Velvet to protect her. Even after that revelation he still defends her, but hers has not been like the others trying to steel him away from his true love. Hers was simply an accident built on pressured nerves she couldn’t control.

“If I have to kick your ass, then I will.” He slurs.

Until…another voice returns.

Stood by the tree with all the fruits and flowers is Vir Nominis Umbra, not looking at him as he holds an apple in his palm. “William Ranch – this is your final warning. Leave Velvet Scarlatina alone, please.” Vir Nominis Umbra commands as he stands there, holding the apple to his mouth. The drunken fool glares at Umbra and he growls, going to swing his fist at him, only for Umbra to roll his eyes and bite down onto the apple.

Bill suddenly collapses to the ground and shrieks in immense pain as he feels a searing burning pain in his skull, like someone had just bitten a chunk from his brain. He presses and smacks his hands against his head repeatedly. Both Velvet and Kassius stare at Umbra and then at Bill with fear in their eyes. “Get ye hence, or I will take you with me, and that grimy tent of yours will look like paradise in comparison. The choice is yours.” Vir Nominis Umbra says before he bites another chunk out of the apple, making him screech again, and Velvet turns when she sees Coco and Emerald turning the corner as they heard the screams.

“What’s going on?” Coco asks, but she pauses with fear when she sees him…she did not even need to ask who that is. The description and his reputation was enough of an answer. The man continues to scream and Kassius stares at Umbra.
“Stop torturing him!” Kassius begs, but Umbra just grins.

“As you wish.” Vir Nominis Umbra says, looking at a plant pot and whistling to Bill. He screams in agony, and he picks it up and smashes it against his own head so hard that a shard of it stabs straight through his eye. Killing him instantly, causing him to collapse to the ground, and Vir Nominis Umbra smirks menacingly as he turns to Kassius. “Now he no longer suffers.”


“What you think and what I think are two very different things, dear boy.” Vir Nominis Umbra states as he taps his nose with his finger with that same grin ever present.

“W-Why did you do that?” Velvet whimpers with terror.

“I disposed of a pest, you needn’t suffer his perversions any longer.” Vir Nominis Umbra says to her. “And besides…now the two of you can continue.” He says to her.

“How do you…”

“Velvet, darling…would you ask a bird how it knows how to fly?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks her curiously, and the scared girl looks at the suicidal corpse of William Ranch on the ground. “What matters is that William Ranch shall interfere no longer.” Vir Nominis Umbra concludes. Kassius turns to them and he looks at Velvet.

“Get back to the apartment.” Kassius orders, and they nod, he does not even mention Velvet’s confession, for it is not his place to do so. Coco nods and Velvet follows them to the stairs that head back to the apartments. As they make their return though, they notice there is something wrong with the people yet again. So many people do not seem to even care about the screams outside…hell there is no emotion at all among any of them. They are just sat there in silence, none of them speaking with each other.

Cardin stands there, looking just as lost as them, and Coco yells. “Cardin!” Coco yells, and that makes him slowly lift his head to look at her. “Come on.” Coco says, looking at everyone again, and he stumbles after them, and Coco glares at him for getting this wasted. Especially when this Hotel has something very weird happening inside of it right now.

Kassius remains outside with Umbra, thinking of everything…but it all comes back to some kind of guilt for Velvet. It is unfair for her, because she knows she shouldn’t have these feelings, but she does, and he does not replicate them for her. “Ah…there it is. The race of a man who’s failed to understand a woman.” Umbra says with a soft chuckle at the end of his statement. Kassius turns to him, seeing Vir Nominis Umbra leant against the tree with his arms crossed.

“You think you understand women, do ya?” Kassius questions, since that is a problem man has been unable to solve from the dawn of time. But Umbra nods his head as he answers.

“Of course. Men and Women are easy to understand because both sides are the same. You are both hopeless fools who cannot bring themselves to confess how you feel.” Vir Nominis Umbra states, and Kassius cannot even argue with his logic because he is right on that regard. Kassius stands there, finding himself confused on what to do now. “Dear Velvet, Scarlatina is going to make a show of being hurt, so bring her some flowers or something and be kind. She’ll get over it in a snap.” He says.

“Not that simple.” Kassius says, since it has become very complicated now.

“Is it not? Or maybe…it could be simpler?” He suggests, pushing himself off the tree as he
approaches him.

“What are you getting at?” He questions.

“Think about it...beautiful girl and a handsome man...could be a recipe for a magical night.” Vir Nominis Umbra suggests, and Kassius glares at him.

“Yeah, no.” Kassius replies.

“You surely cannot deny her beauty…” He whispers.

“Enough.” Kassius snarls.

“Many women clearly cannot resist your charm, why not let her be the first?” He asks him...then Kassius realises and his eyes widen. He turns and stares at the entity with his hands held together and that sinister smirk on his face.

“It was you...you’re the reason all these women have been trying to sleep with me...you’re trying to break my bond with Yang, aren’t you?” Kassius questions as he walks towards Umbra, staring him right in the eyes as he stands there. Umbra holds out his hands with that grin still on his face.

“Guilty as charged.” He replies and Kassius grits his teeth.

“Why?” He questions.

“Well...look at the situation. All these beautiful women to satisfy you...might need it when she is gone.” He coldly says, and Kassius retorts with rage, pinning Vir Nominis Umbra against the tree with gritted teeth and glowing orange eyes, both he and Hyde sharing this rage. Umbra however...let him pin him...because he smiles as he looks back at him.

“Don’t you dare ever threaten her again.” Kassius snarls. “And stop putting these thoughts in Velvet’s head.”

“What makes you think her feelings are my doing? That is merely coincidence this time...I mean sure I forced some emotions to make her kiss you earlier, but other than that...all those emotions are her own.” Vir Nominis Umbra explains with a smirk still shown on his face. He then turns ethereal, walking straight through Kassius and he stumbles into the tree as the entity walks behind him with his hands held together. He really did let him do that, otherwise he would be dead. “I like you Kassius Locke – I promised I would take care of you. If I were you...don’t mention it to Yang. Seize your chance with Velvet...and have fun.” Vir Nominis Umbra states, and he turns to walk away.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” He questions, and the entity stops, looking back at him.

“More than you could ever know.” He replies, before fading away into the crows, flying away from him. Kassius watches him leave and he clenches his cybernetic hand into a fist, his body flickering for a second between his own and Hyde’s. Something is happening between them...something new.

And only one thought echoes in Kassius’ mind.

*I will never betray her...I love her.*

**Velvet**
She stares at herself in the mirror with total embarrassment, much different to the excitement she felt before they went down to the part. She scrubs the makeup from her face violently, whilst Coco and Emerald are out right now, checking on the Hotel due to how strange things are. Speaking with the Police Officers about what happened to William Ranch and what they saw him do. Velvet cries out with heartbreak as she takes the flannel and throws it across the room, nearly hitting Cardin as he walks round, hitting the wall. She looks at the drunken fool as he stands there, holding a beer bottle in his hand and reeking of booze.

“Not so hard…” He slurs as he staggers about and she looks away from him with an audible groan of disgust, continuing to get rid of the makeup from her face.

“Go away.” She demands, but Cardin walks into the room she is in and she stares at him as he stumbles in. “Wrong room!”

“I like this one…just fine…” He groans as he stumbles around and sits down on the edge of her bed, looking down at his broken hands from how many times he has swung that goddamn mace. She stares at him, and after the night she has had she is right to worry about him. He looks at her and he rolls his eyes. “Oh, for gods’ sake, don’t worry…I’m not interested.” He tells her as he sits there, so she just ignores him and continues to remove the makeup on her face, washing the once pretty eyeshadow from her face. As he sits on her bed, he slumps and catches himself, nearly hitting his head on the bedside table.

He chuckles softly. “If I faint…try and catch me…I’d rather not die of a broken neck or something.”

“You had full control of your drinking, Cardin. Also, why should I give a damn of how you die?” She snarls, showing a side of her that very few people have seen before – her anger. But it is clear that most of her anger is not even pointed towards Kassius, but more at herself and how she is loathing herself for kissing Kassius the way she did. For falling in love with a man who is in love and in a committed relationship with a close friend of hers.

Now she knows why she should have kept it to herself.

*Maybe helping Kassius was a stupid idea*

Cardin looks at her and he does not even respond to her question, he just looks down with grief for how he treated her. “I was unworthy…I don’t want your forgiveness, a fucker like me doesn’t deserve it.” Cardin growls at himself as he sits there, and Velvet pauses when she hears him say that. It is like someone else is in his skin, because the words that come out of his mouth are unlike anything, she remembers the Cardin Winchester of old saying.

She looks at him, but every time she sees his face, even with that long hair and that beard he has grown…she still sees that nasty guy that bullied her every single day. Made her feel worthless, made her feel like the whole world hated her and that nobody would ever love her. And after Kassius…it sure as hell feels that way. Cardin catches her stare and he scoffs. “There it is…there’s the look – seen it every single day of my entire life…from Coco, from Pyrrha, from Ruby and Yang…you all despise me. Hell, even Kassius does.” Cardin chuckles, remembering how he was judged immediately by Kassius when he first saw him in that cell.

He then starts listing the names he was given. “Cardin Douchebag…Honourless Huntsman…Murderer…” He lists, his voice breaking on the word Murderer as he stares at the bottle in his hand. He then looks at Velvet who puts her flannel down, listening to him a little but looking away from time to time. The drunken man then continues to speak.
On something she is not prepared for.

“You know about Vacuo? What happened there?” Cardin asks.

“Of course…whole world does.” Velvet answers and Cardin softly chuckles.

“Not the whole story…they don’t know about what dear old Professor Theo did. Tell me…did you know that Theo was the one that uncovered the first strand of Horridus Morbus in the Vault of Shade?” Cardin asks him curiously, and Velvet turns her head with total disbelief at that. Because that was the very last thing, she was expecting him to reveal right there.

“He had it in the Vault?” She questions.

“Mhm…a strand of it…modified over the years, lethal…and easy to replicate.” Cardin continues to speak of it, slurring at times but never before has he sounded so honest. “So that’s what he did…had his Pyromancer create more of it, wasn’t his speciality but he had other scientists to help him.”

“Why?” Velvet asks Cardin.

“Well, you see, good old Theo decided he would rather believe the voices in his head than the word of his advisers…or even me. A Huntsman he took in after I escaped Beacon with my team. He started seeing enemies everywhere, first it was Ozpin and Ironwood…then it was all of his Inner Circle Buddies like Lionheart and Glynda. Then it was the Huntsmen, the police force, even the civilians themselves.” Cardin explains, and she can hear the sound of his inner pain as he talks about this.

This is what happened...

He is telling her the truth of what happened at Vacuo…the truth he never told Kassius.

“I saw him test it on someone, and he…he became obsessed with the shit. I loved to watch people mutate and wail in pain. His Pyromancer killed the captured prisoners who started to change before they could attack. And because Theo saw traitors everywhere…he had that same Pyromancer head out every night and place caches of Horridus Morbus underneath every single house and building in the city.” Cardin explains to her, which explains why those caches detonated for absolutely no reason. It was not Merlot, it was not the Acolytes of the Coin, it was not even Umbra.

It was a paranoid madman.

Nothing more.

“He kept capturing and taking prisoners, at first they were from the Asylums, for his own enjoyment to see them suffer. But in time…families…started losing loved ones. And he wanted me to see it all…and stay silent. To prove my worth to him.” Cardin explains, and clearly since nobody knows about this, he kept his word.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Velvet questions.

“I…pledged my services to him.” Cardin answers, showing that he does have honour…it was just pledged to the wrong man. “But when more innocents started dying…I couldn’t…so I took precautions and I sent the word out from a different name. And then…the day of reckoning came. Theodore shut off the C.C.T for fifteen minutes when the people started rising up against him for what he did, preventing the Atlesians to stop him.”

“I remember the C.C.T going down…” Velvet softly says, it was wide panic for a full fifteen
minutes because people thought it was yet another attack on one of the Academies. But wasn’t, it was Theodore losing his mind due to the Relic of Choice manipulating him.

“I was with him…him and the Pyromancer…when people were calling for him to be put in prison for punishment for his crimes. Even his guards abandoned him for what he did, it was just the three of us in there. Theodore looked me in the eye…and he told me…to slaughter them all. To activate the caches and watch them all choke and suffer before turning into monsters.” Cardin explains, shuddering as he remembers him ordering that. “He would have watched children suffer…I couldn’t have…”

“I knew what I had to do…the people of Vacuo tend to forget things quickly…once the threat was eliminated…they would immediately go back to their normal lives. But I also knew that a Huntsman murdering his Headmaster is punishable by death…and a bounty would be placed upon my head.” Cardin explains further, and Velvet looks at his face as he continues to speak, seeing the pain in his eyes.

He then looks her right in the eye. “So, I made the call…”

“I swung my mace into the face of the Pyromancer and killed him instantly…and just as Theodore tried to activate his aura…I…cracked his skull open with a downward strike.” He tells him, the sweat dripping down his face reminds him of how much blood poured through Headmaster Theodore’s hair and skull from that strike. “He tried to speak…but couldn’t…all he was pointing at was the detonator. I couldn’t risk him getting it…so I beat his head…until stopped…” He breaks down, whimpering as he sits there, crying heavily as he stares at his scarred palms, scars from swinging the mace so hard it split the skin over and over again. And all he sees is blood covering his hands, blood that cannot be washed away.

Velvet stares at the man who once bullied her…a man who is actually a hero.

But there is one thing that still remains. “If this is true…then why did you kill them?” He grits his teeth with anger at that question. “Why did you kill your team?”

“My Team? You think…the honourable…Team C.R.D.L…wanted to hear my side?” He asks her as he looks at Velvet’s innocence. “They judged me…and said they wanted the bounty on my head…and they attacked me.”

Her eyes widen as she hears the heartbreak in his voice, revealing that his own team betrayed him. For a Bounty.

“I killed them…because they left me no other choice. I crushed their skulls, because they betrayed me. And I left them for dead…because they broke their honour.” Cardin growls in anger as he remembers it so well.

Cardin breaks down into tears, covering his face as he cries. She sits there, and reaches out to him, so then she can comfort him. But suddenly he lifts his head and yells with pure rage.

“YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT IT’S LIKE TO BE BROKEN INTO A THOUSAND PIECES AND TO BE FORGOTTEN!” Cardin bellows, his face morphing into a dark monstrous roaring face, one that causes Velvet to scream with terror as his eyes for a split second turn red…

…and he passes out on the bed.

Velvet stares at Cardin with wide eyes, and in the reflection…something is looming over him.
A monster.

A Lesser Demon.
The night sky…so beautiful, and thanks to the Dust Usage for power, the skies are absolutely stunning. Thousands of twinkling stars stretching out across the endless canvas of beauty. A few colourful auroras in the sky where stars are being born. Even though some of these stars are indeed starting to fade away due to the coming annihilation…it feels good to just look at them. The ones that are left in this beautiful night sky.

That is precisely what Weiss and Neptune are doing, laying down in the grass on a soft blanket together, eyes gazing up at the endless stars. Weiss is wearing a comfortable fluffy brown hoodie that her beloved boyfriend bought her one Valentines Day, something she still wears on occasion now. Neptune has one hand behind his blue hair as he looks at the stars with her, feeling so peaceful with her at his side.

Only the two of them, and the occasional sounds from crickets in the grass, but they do not disturb them. It reminds them in fact of how beautiful the world is, and she reaches down and holds her boyfriend’s hand as she looks at them. When a Shooting Star darts across the sky, and she gasps with excitement, extending her hand and pointing at the sky where she saw the twinkling projectile. “Shooting star!” She calls out, and he nods his head with a smile.

“I saw it! Quick! Make a wish!” Neptune says to her with a smile on his face, and she snuggles up to him and closes her eyes as she makes her wish. However, she does not say a word, she just smiles as she nuzzles herself into him, her arms gently wrapped around him, feeling so at home with him as he gently puts his other arm around her and kisses the top of her white-haired head.

“Made it.” She says, and he raises a brow as he looks down at her.

“Gonna say what it is, or you gonna just keep me guessing?” He asks her, and she smiles as she looks up at him.

“We’ll see if it comes true, won’t we?” She asks him with a smile, and he can’t help but smile back at her beautiful grace. She holds onto him, never letting go as they continue to spend time together. The Undertaker stands alone in the distance, keeping his eyes on them as they have time together in the garden. It does not interfere, it does not even seem to move or look directly at them, it just stands with the beauty of nature. Easy to forget how perfect the world can be when you block out all the chaos and Human Intervention.

Ever since the Witches gave them that concoction they made together, the Afflicted have been out and about constantly, taking in the air. Even though Horridus Morbus is still in their bodies, but the spell cast with the potion is one hell of an impressive masterpiece. It might not cure them but gives the body the strength to fight it for longer, and the protective barrier prevents the plague molecules to spread further. It does not even get into their clothes, meaning they can still wear them – however there is still a downside to it. They can be touched but any kind of bodily fluid transfusion, be it kissing or even intercourse, it can still spread, because that is directly traded.

But in a strange way, Weiss and Neptune are safe in every way from that account – because they are both infected. So…it can’t possibly get any worse. “It’s crazy…” Neptune softly says as he lays there with Weiss, and she glances up at him.
“What is?” She asks.

“How far…we’ve come…you and me…” Neptune admits, and she turns to look at him completely, resting her head against her supported hand, her other hand gently laid upon his chest.

“What do you mean?” She asks him curiously, her long locks of white hair falling down the side of her head and onto his shoulder. He caresses her white hair gently with his hand, as he speaks.

“Well I doubt seventeen-year-old me would have expected us to have been together this long…I was an idiot back then.” He admits with a heavy sigh, remembering how much he would flirt with the ladies but would never act on it. Or more importantly his fear of dancing and embarrassing himself.

“You were…but I liked that about you. And let’s be honest, you’re still an idiot.” She assures, making Neptune chuckle.

“Was that a compliment or an insult?” He inquires.

“Eh, bit of both.” Weiss answers with a shrug as she giggles. She then rests her head back down onto him as he holds her close, gently caressing her hair.

“I’m just…I’m proud…of you.” He says to her, and she pauses and looks up at him with ardent curiosity, her blue eyes meeting his similar blue ones.

“Proud? Why?” She asks him, and he chuckles nervously.

“Do you really have to ask? You’ve faced your father more times than you can count, had enough of being his plaything and became your own person. A beautiful person…one I could never imagine my life without.” He tells her with pure love in his voice as he caresses her cheek gently with his hand, his thumb rubbing his cheek ever so gently, feeling the smooth skin on her face.

“Nep…I…” She stammers, he has always been a wordsmith at making her blush, and she has always struggled at taking such kind words.

“I love you, Weiss.” He tells her, and even though they have pledged their love for each other many times over, it never seems to stop surprising them. Her heart flutters with joy when hearing those words coming out of his mouth. “I just wanted to say that, we don’t know how things are gonna turn out. But no matter what, I will be here. I’m never leaving your side.” He promises, and his love brings a tear to her eye, and she gives in, leaning down to kiss him full heartedly on the lips, her hands gently around his neck.

Their kiss breaks and she presses her head to his with a smile, holding each other close. “I love you too, Neptune.” She softly says with a shaky breath, before her eyes fall upon the medallion around his neck, the same one that they retrieved from the remnants of his home town at Mistral. That Watts destroyed in one of the first attempts to cripple the Kingdom, with a Great Flood. Poetic as it seemed, but the plan failed due to the uphill nature of the city, only the lower portions were affected and abandoned.

She gently touches it as it sits around his neck, caressing it as she holds his hand. “Feels like a lifetime ago…when we went to your home to find this.” She says to him and he smiles, sitting up slowly and she does the same, gently sat on one of his legs as she holds it, before shuffling round to sit directly in front of him.

“I still can’t believe it was Watts who caused it…” Neptune says, and Weiss nods her head.

“It’s all connected, right?” She asks him with a playful smile, making him chuckle.
“I guess it was just wrong place wrong time, wasn’t it?” Neptune sighs as he takes the Medallion off, holding it in his open palm as he looks down at it. Weiss lifts her eyes to the crown she has sat on her head, since she decided to do her hair up again. The motivation to…live again…that concoction did more than just get them on their feet, it helped them get back to being who they used to be.

And no longer have to sit around in the same hospital gown for weeks on end. Feels better to wear something comfortable, and Neptune looks at her with a soft smile. “I’m glad we went back for it though…have something to remember my parents by.” Neptune gratefully says to her, and she smiles.

“Wish I could’ve met them.” Weiss says, and he chuckles.

“Oh, they’d have loved you, my mom always liked a girl with bite.” Neptune chuckles, and she giggles as well, blushing.

“I think my bite has mellowed in the years.” She sighs as she softly taps her nail to her pearly white teeth.

“Oh, I doubt that…unless you wanna be an accountant or something…” He suggests, egging her on, and she just gives him a glare that he immediately backs off from. “There it is…”

“Am I really that scary?” She asks him.

“Oh yeah, not gonna lie I may have acted all cute a flirty towards you when we first met…but you scared the shit out of me.” He admits, making her chuckle softly.

“Really? Did I have that effect on everyone?” She asks him.

“Sure did with Sage.” He reveals.

“Sage was scared of me?” She questions, in total disbelief at the mere idea of that since he could have snapped her like a twig back then. The way that Neptune mentioned Sage there, also shows that he and Sun have both indeed moved on from his tragic death at the hands of Lionheart. They never forgot about what happened to them, and like Kassius they sometimes get the odd bad memory of seeing Scarlet get stabbed through the back by the Knight of Death…but they have accepted it and moved on. Cannot let the past control you, otherwise you’re not really living.

“Oh yeah. Gotta remember, Weiss you were pretty mean back in the day.” Neptune reminds, and she scoffs.

“I mean…I wasn’t mean…I was…”

“Cold.” Neptune answers and she pauses, and sighs.

“If you make an Ice Queen joke, I will choke you.” She warns, and he slowly forms a grin and is about to say the words, until his girlfriend slaps his shoulder and he rolls onto his side with a laugh, making her laugh as well. It has been a while since they felt the urge to laugh, to smile and just have fun. And even though Horridus Morbus continues to plague their hearts, they still are fighting strong.

“Speaking of choking!” Neptune says, and Weiss raises a brow in confusion.

“Strange segway.” Weiss comments at the odd choice of transition of topic as Neptune sits back up and looks at her.

“Thanks to this potion the witches gave us, we could start training again.” He suggests and Weiss
looks at him with curiosity, and then she realises how right he is.

“That’s a good idea, actually.” She agrees.

“I know right?” He asks her.

“Because we don’t know if they are gonna need our help when we’re cured. They have Raven, remember? She could teleport to us with the Aphax Violet and give it to the Witches. They could use our help.” Weiss deduces as she nods her head, and Neptune smirks as he nods his head as well.

“My thoughts exactly, better be strong and ready to fight.” Neptune says to her.

“You are a genius!” Weiss squeaks as she kisses him on the lips, and as she parts from him, he chuckles.

“Genius and an idiot? Man…I’m perfect.” Neptune gleefully comments as he flicks his head back, his blue hair barely even moving. Weiss giggles as she flicks her tail and sits against his chest, leaning back and they both lie back down onto the blanket as they look up at the stars.

“Yeah…you are.” She softly coos.

“It’s nice.” Starla’s voice emerges from out of nowhere, and their eyes widen, and they spin round, grabbing their weapons immediately and aiming them at her. They movements are faster but still not fast enough to be able to stop her. However, Starla does not attack, and even though this is more expected from her than the other Knights of Grimm, it is still terrifying to hear her voice.

The Undertaker glares at Starla and draws the Shovel, and charges towards her with a roar, but Weiss looks at her face, and knows she is not here to hurt them. She holds out her hand, the other grasping Myrtenaster with a quiver. “Wait!” Weiss calls out, standing her ground beside her boyfriend. Weiss coughs, her breathing still hurting due to the infection. The potion may have stabilised them for the most part, but it is still killing them, just at a slower pace now and less painful all the time. But every now and then some pain comes along to remind them of their mortality.

The Undertaker stops but is simply awaiting Weiss’ command, who keeps her sword pointed at Starla. “Why are you here? Do you mean to attack us?” Weiss questions and Starla slowly shakes her head as she looks at her long distant niece.

“I have not come here in seek of harm, in fact I have come here for a similar reason as your lover.” Starla states as she holds her hands behind her back with professional etiquette. She glances at Neptune and then back at the Knight of Loss who stares at them both.

“What does that mean?” She questions.

“My curse does not forbid me from looking after you, only when Umbra commands me to kill you.” Starla explains, as she walks around them.

“What do you mean? You lose control?” Neptune questions.

“Yes, quite precisely. Imagine remaining conscious but you cannot control your own body, watching it slaughter people, and you begging it to stop. That is my curse…I take life…but I never choose to do so.” Starla explains, looking down at the floor with great sorrow. What shocked the two of them most is that they felt no sadness whatsoever, meaning that Starla must have hidden her ability to bring grief to those around her for a few moments to prevent ruining their happiness.

“Sounds horrible…” Neptune says, and Starla gently nods her head with a deeply saddened smile.
“Yes…but it is my punishment and I accept it. But all of you…you never asked for any of this. And Weiss…I may not deserve it for my crimes, but you are still my blood, my sister’s grandchild yes…but still my blood.” Starla explains as she draws one of her tonfas, matching the style of all Schnee weapons of old. Neptune keeps his rifle on her, but Weiss slowly lowers her sword as she listens to her ancestor. “Dear Neptune, is correct, training will help prepare you. And I have noticed in your style of fighting, that there is a lot more you have to learn.” She says as she looks at her.

“You…wanna teach me?” Weiss questions.

“I do…call it…making up for lost time.” Starla says.

“But, won’t you get in trouble?” She asks.

“I will face the consequences for my actions with grace, my dear. And besides, it is as I said. Umbra never said anything about me being forbidden to help you. If he can pull that with wordplay, then so can I.” She says with a smile, making Weiss softly chuckle.

Starla stands before her with her Tonfa at the ready. “So…do we have a deal?” She inquires, and Weiss looks at Neptune and he shrugs his shoulders.

“If she's being legit.” Neptune says.

“Oh, worry not. I do not want any of you to die, if anything I want you to win. And besides…you all can improve.” She says, even offering the training to Neptune as well as her Sister’s Distant Granddaughter.

Weiss raises Myrtenaster and looks her Ancestor in the eyes.

“Deal.”

**Kassius**

Not every memory fades away with time…

And pain is just the same, even when you think you have moved on, the power of a single memory can bring it all back. Kassius is sat down outside of the hotel with his metal and human hands held together as he stares out at the place. He glances and sees some people falling asleep at their tables, not the first people he has seen falling asleep so suddenly. Then again, these same people have been drinking a little bit much alcohol to be considered…conscious. Where Kassius sits is a small table with a metal chair supporting him off the ground and a book set upon the table, a book told by a man who tells tales of his many schemes to overcome the odds. A very impressive man as well, his methods were madly deceptive and worked every single time.

Not all of them worked in his favour though, as it always is with these tales. Like the one of the Grand Lord of Redcrossing.

*Why, oh why must I bow down to you.*

*A group of measly peasants?*

*Spoke the Grand Lord of Redcrossing,*
Demanding his people work harder and harder – for his own goal.

Gold, women, food, wine and power,

Tis all the reward he knows for his effortless acts.

Though judgement comes for all men,

No matter wealth, age or gender.

When he comes – one should allow him entry with kindness,

And think carefully on their wishes.

"Riches, food and power...this is what I demand"

Spoke the Grand Lord of Redcrossing.

But now the ashes lay on the once green fields,

With only one body residing.

Wishes be granted...

But not what he wanted.

And with all he asked...

He be left behind with not a soul to share with.

A tale remembered by those who read it, one that sends a very powerful message – to be grateful with what you have, and to be careful of what you wish for lest your wish be granted. The Grand Lord of Redcrossing failed on both accounts and thus was left behind with absolutely nothing, although there has always been the question if Redcrossing ever existed and who this Grand Lord was. The story had to have come from somewhere, the question is where did it all begin?

Kassius however is not asking such questions as he sits there, until he turns to another one of the tables nearby to see only one other person here. Mr Hyde himself, appearing inside of his head with his hands on the table, leaning back so then he can cross them. “It wasn’t real…” Hyde assures as he looks at his host.

Something happened.

Between now and when Velvet witnessed what happened to Cardin, Kassius was on his own, and something happened. Coco and Emerald are elsewhere, probably getting some drinks and snacks for the two of them, unaware that he is currently knocked out with a Lesser Demon in his head. Kassius saw something, something that clearly has really messed with his head in a very bad way.

“I know…it felt real though.” Kassius says as he closes his eyes with a heavy sigh.

“I know it did, I felt it too. But I can promise you that you did not really see what you thought you saw…there is something with this place…something very strange. You spoke with a few people and they gave us…vague…answers. It’s like nobody cares about anything in this hotel.” Hyde says as he looks at the many people who are just sitting around, most of them not even saying a word. Just staring down into their glasses of liquor endlessly. Kassius sighs heavily as he stares at the bottle of scotch on the table next to him, left behind.
Hyde stares at Kassius and raises his voice. “Can’t say I blame them…” Kassius heavily sighs with sunken amber eyes, and Hyde raises a brow with confusion.

“Huh?” Hyde questions.

“After everything…it really is hard to see the point in all this.” Kassius sighs as he sits there, and Hyde rises up slowly from where he is sat and approaches Kassius, leaning down and staring at him.

“Did you hit your head or something?” Hyde questions. “You know why we’re doing this, to save you damn girlfriend from dying. So, then you can get back to her, you can find answers about your dad, hell we’re doing this to stop him.” Hyde repeats, listing their objectives one by one, turning to stare at him. Kassius eyes the bottle, and Hyde catches onto his eyeline. “Do not drink that, it will not help. You do remember I can hear your thoughts, right?” Hyde asks him curiously.

“Just leave me alone for once.” Kassius grunts as he gets up and reaches towards the bottle, when Hyde suddenly grabs onto Kassius’ hand and holds him back. He is not actually holding him, but his soul is stopping him from grabbing and drinking that alcohol.

“Leave. The. Scotch. Alone.” Hyde demands as he glares at him, acting like a metaphorical figure in his mind to keep him from making any stupid mistakes. Kassius keeps trying to reach it, but Hyde steps in front of him and pushes him back, but it is just Kassius staggering away from it to realise he should not be doing that. But Hyde still can be seen through Kassius’ eyes as he staggers, and then sits back down at the table, looking away from the scotch.

Hyde sits down beside him, purposefully blocking the view he had of the scotch, so then all he can see is his face. “Listen to me…whatever is up with this hotel, it is messing with your head. And we need to leave.” Hyde states as he stares at him.

“I can’t…I saw her here…I need to… I need to tell her I found someone else. She always told me that if anything ever happened to her, I shouldn’t get stuck in a hole because of it.” Kassius stammers, and it is quickly made clear who he thought he saw. It was Vetra – the woman he once loved and was killed years ago.

“Vetra is dead. She’s been dead for nearly seven years now. You need to let her go.” Hyde tells him.

“I…I’m trying…”

Earlier,

Kassius was walking around the same library before he went out to that balcony outside of it. The Library – for a Hotel – is actually quite impressive. From successful published fictions across the world to inciteful encyclopaedias – and then there are the many diaries and biographies stored here to be remembered. One of which being the one that he uncovered.

A Collection of Inspiring Schemes That Saved the Day

Bartleby Brunswick

Kassius was reading through it after he pulled it from the shelf, learning of the many things he did. For example, the farms had a fishing issue where the fish were all getting poisoned by the farm. The food poisoning spread, and he determined what caused the poisonous fluid to enter the stream – it was a dead pig, and its bloated corpse had sent diseased bacteria and maggots into the water supply. So, he got his son and daughter to help him, the daughter would ask them all to pray and drink some
holy water – that was spiked with a cure for their sickness. Whilst Bartleby and his Son went out and pulled the pig out and burned the body, using a purifying machine to fix the water supply.

Why did he have them pray to the gods?

To fix their faith, because that always kept their mood strong and the Grimm at bay. No god saved them, it was merely his genius scheme, and their faith was restored. Sometimes a good lie can help people, there are two kinds of lies at the end of the day. Selfish ones for personal reasons, and ones more serious, like to keep people calm in times of crisis.

As Kassius read his many genius ideas and schemes he used to keep his Farm going, he set himself down, and glanced across the table, seeing some people talking, looking exhausted in many ways. But as he stared, one of them stared back. Her long beautiful brown hair and brown eyes on her slightly darker skin to his. Kassius jolted, for he could remember her face anywhere, nearly falling from the chair after seeing her.

The people looked at him for a moment, but they quickly stopped taking interest in his concern, he stepped back and spun around, seeing her standing behind him. “Hey Kas…I’ve missed you.” Vetra said to him, her gentle and alluring voice reaching his very core as she looked into his eyes. He stammered as he looked right at her, and it was so vivid as she walked towards him, so close that he could smell her perfume. Or at least what he remembered of her perfume, sunflowers and lavender.

It has been a very long time since these hallucinations have been this vivid…even when he has been with Yang, he has had Vetra on his mind. But it is not just the fact he once loved her, but most of all – that he failed her. That he was her leader, the leader of his entire team and he is the only one left alive out of every single one of them. And on top of all that baggage Yang has always been there, to help him calm down, to help the hallucinations fade away.

But without her here…and the fear that he will lose her too…it is all coming back again.

And he really believed earlier that it was all gone, that he was finally over her. But clearly, Kassius was wrong, and that shows how quickly it can change. How fast his mind can go from happily talking about his long-passed team, to dreading the idea of opening his eyes because he will see her. “I’ve missed you so much, Kassius…” Vetra softly says to him as she reaches her hand to his cheek, the untouched side, but he shakes his head, and tries to look away from her.

“You’re not…you’re not real…” Kassius stammers as he closes his eyes as he tries to look away from her, but his eyes open and she is still caressing his cheek.

“I can be…I still love you and I always will. Come back to me…my love…come find me.” She whispers softly as she gazes lovingly into his eyes. He shakes his head and he grabs the book, storming away from where he saw her, only to see her sat on one of the tables, looking at him. “Still in denial!? Still trying to believe that maybe you are free?” She asks him as he walks past her. “You will never be able to move on from me, my love. Even if you try to find someone else, I am your first love. The one you will always remember.” She says to him.

This is what it is like, she acts like the Vetra he once loved but she is so antagonising, getting into his head constantly and trying to make him be alone. But it is all his brain, trying to make Kassius come home to her, longing for that connection with her specifically, even though he does not want to and all he wants is to move on with his life. And the fact that Hyde is not the one doing this as well is even more frightening, meaning this is not something one can convince to stop.

This takes years of grieving.
He has been through the many stages of grief, denial and acceptance are ones he has already gone through. The last one he needs though – is to find his closure. Burying their bodies helped him get over denial, falling in love with Yang helped him find acceptance…but letting it all go away and moving on?

That is much harder.

And she always returns when he is not expecting it, as soon as he feels he has forgotten her for long enough, with the snap of someone’s non-existent fingers she is back. She reaches out to him as he walks past and finds that very same table he is at now.

Now that he is in the present, trying to forget what he saw, his eyes turn when Hyde looks in the same direction. “Are you ready to talk now?” She asks him curiously as she reaches her hand out to him. He looks at her hand, still wearing a ring he bought her once, not an engagement ring but something sweet he wanted to do on a Valentines Day. A beautiful golden ring with an Emerald inside of it. Yang is not one for Jewellery, never has been, but Vetra always has loved a bit of jewels in her life.

“Why? So, then you can drag me down again? Like you did on that night I had with Yang?” Kassius asks her, the night he is referring to was actually on his birthday, when she was getting a little cute with him. As they were getting ready to have a little private fun together in their room, she appeared again, in the bed where Yang was laying. Yang left just to get unclothed and into a dressing gown for *theatrics*. But as soon as he saw Vetra again…he froze…then got up and left the room.

He broke down, into tears – this was a year after they saved Ruby and destroyed the Volcanic Chain Isles. When Yang came in to undress in front of him…Kassius was gone, so she looked for him and found him crying in the living room. She immediately realised what was wrong and sat down on his lap. And instead of having a romantic night…she spent the night comfort him.

And yet that was one of the strongest nights of their relationship, because Yang never left his side, and looked after him. “I never wanted to ruin your night…I just wanted to see you again. I missed you.” She says as she reaches out to him.

“And I miss you…I always will. You never deserved…you never deserved what happened to you.” Kassius says as he clenches one hand into a fist as he stares out across the city.

“None of us really get what we deserve in our lives…” Vetra tells him as she slides her hand across her bare leg, rubbing the skin. “…but we can try…try to be together again.” She whispers as she reaches out to him, but Kassius looks to Hyde, someone he never thought he would look to. In his life Kassius has always felt like he should be the one to help people – he helped and protected Cinder when they were young, he helped Vetra escape her family of abusers, and he helped Yang come to terms with her condition.

But…when he needs help…he never says a word.

Allowing himself to wallow in his own suffering.

In truth, he needs help more than any of them ever did. You never feel more alone than you do when you are hurting, and do not know who to turn to. Hyde looks at him and he just nods, and Kassius nods back. But before he can start going through his procedure to get this hallucination clear from his mind.

His scroll vibrates in his pocket, and the three of them look at his pocket. He reaches down and pulls the Scroll from his pocket, lifting it out and staring at it, rubbing his tired eyes. It is Velvet, calling
him, so he answers it, holding the scroll to his ear. “Yeah?” He groans, not realising that this is the Group Call. Both Coco and Emerald can be heard answering the call as well, and they all hear Velvet panting in terror. Kassius narrows his eyes as he sits forward, starting to focus more. “Velvet, what’s going on?” Kassius asks.

“Velv?” Coco calls.

“Something’s wrong with Cardin! He’s passed out, he’s gone pale…he…i saw something… something was wrong with his face!” Velvet cries out and Kassius stands up from his chair and looks at Hyde, only to find he is gone, back inside of his head now. But Vetra is still there, looking at him. There is indeed another reason behind what could have triggered these Hallucinations…

Kassius has always said that Velvet reminds him of Vetra, her hair and her eyes and even her personality – hell even her name is not that far off. “We’re on our way, Velvet. Just hang on.” Kassius says to her, and he hangs up the scroll, shoving it back in his pocket. He goes to walk away but stops as Vetra reaches out to him.

“Kassius…come back to me…” She softly says, desperately wanting him, but Kassius closes his eyes with a sigh.

“I can’t.” Kassius tells her, walking away from the Hallucination as she fades away behind him. It will never be as simple as just walking away from her, he has done it many times before in the past, but she keeps on coming back. But as Kassius keeps walking through the Hotel he sees that more and more people are acting strange…and even stranger…the lights are faintly blinking at times, like the power is going haywire. There is most certainly something very concerning about this Hotel.

Is it Haunted?

Is it Umbra?

No time to figure it out, they simply must get up to their room as fast as they can. Kassius opens the elevator and he commands it to head up to their room. He paces back and forth inside of the Elevator, and Vetra forms yet again beside him, looking around with her arms crossed. “It was not your fault, what happened to me…or Draven or Rajah…it was always going to happen. You shouldn’t blame yourself.” Vetra says to him gently, and Kassius looks back at her.

“Who says I am?” Kassius questions.

“I do…because if you didn’t…we wouldn’t be having this conversation.” She states, and even he cannot deny that, because he does still feel responsible. He will always feel like it should have been him, he was the leader – and he feels he should have died in their place. A Team Leader keeps their team alive, no matter the cost.

The elevator finally dings, and he runs out of the doors, seeing Coco and Emerald on the other side inside of another elevator, running towards the room where Velvet and Cardin are. They left them for a few seconds, and this has happened. Kassius opens the door and the three enter fast, and they turn the corner, seeing Velvet stammering and hyperventilating as she stares at Cardin’s body on the bed. His skin really has gone pale, almost ice white and his skin around his eyes has bruised quite badly. “I…I don’t….” She keeps breathing in but not out, unable to breathe properly, but luckily Coco is here and she approaches her, gently squeezing her shoulders to sit her down beside Cardin.

“Shh, Shh…it’s alright…remember what you do when you breathe? In…” She says as she inhales, and Velvet copies her, then Coco gently exhales. “…and out.”
She repeats it for her whilst Kassius and Emerald walk towards Cardin, seeing his body. Emerald presses the back of her hand against his head…and…he is scorching hot. But not like he is drunk, it is more like he is under some kind of fever but unlike anything they have ever seen before. Fevers take time to build, they do not happen inside of a second like this one did. “This…I’ve never seen anything like this.”

“Velvet…I need you to focus, okay?” Kassius asks her, as she starts to breathe normally again. She looks at the man she has been crushing on for quite a while now with concern, but he does not even bring that up. It is not his place to do so, those are her feelings not his to worry about. He crouches down in front of her and listens to her every word. “What happened?”

“He…He told me everything…” She stammers.

“Everything? Whaddya mean everything?” Emerald questions.

“He told me about what happened at Vacuo…everything, uncoloured. His team tried to kill him all for a bounty.” She tells them, and their eyes widen, and they all look at the man laying there. “He saved Vacuo from the Headmaster, he was going to kill them all.”

“And they put a bounty on his head?” Coco questions.

“They branded him a traitor when he should’ve been a hero.” Velvet stammers, her breathing returning to normal relatively fast all things considered.

“Poor bastard…” Emerald says as she looks down at him, rubbing her eyes again as she stands there.

“But at the end he yelled at me…saying that I don’t know what it’s like to be broken into a thousand pieces by everyone you cared about. But when he said it…his face…it wasn’t his face…he changed for a second and passed out.”

Kassius looks at her, and there is some kind of recognition in his mind – but not his recognition, and that much is made clear when Hyde suddenly takes control of Kassius right then and there, his eyes glowing orange. “I saw something that mirror too…looking down at him.”

“What did it look like?” Hyde questions, and they all stare at Kassius, hearing Hyde’s voice coming from and not their friend’s. It still surprises them when they experience him doing that out of the blue like that. But Velvet stammers as she looks at Hyde controlling Kassius and her description is enough.

“It was…dark…it had curved horns and red eyes. Like it was made of smoke.” She stammers, and Kassius nods his head.

“He’s been possessed by a Lesser Demon.” Hyde reveals.

“Whoa what?” Kassius questions inside of his own head to Hyde who is still in total control.

“A Lesser Demon?” Emerald questions.

“A Hym.” He reveals.

“Whoa, hang on. How do you suddenly know this?” Coco questions, and Hyde answers.

“You know I’ve been getting these memories coming back lately?” Hyde asks them and the two women nod their heads to him, whilst Velvet is still too shaken to really respond to Hyde. She presses her hands to her head as Hyde speaks to them all. “Well I have also started to understand
“So…what is a Hym?” Emerald asks curiously.

“From what I remember – a Hym is a Lesser Demon that feeds off someone’s guilt, those who have immense guilt over something are food sources. They possess them and force them to do dangerous things to themselves. Giving them nightmares, self-harm and even leading to suicide. They feed off suffering through loss.” Hyde explains to them as he paces around the room in Kassius’ body.

Coco looks at his sleeves and she ever so carefully slides one of them up and she closes her eyes with sadness for the man she was showing so much contempt for. There are scars on his wrists…and it hurts to see them. It means this Hym has really been causing harm to Cardin, putting these dark ideas into his mind.

Hyde approaches the unconscious body of Cardin and he just looks at him and is able to deduce what is happening to him. “The Hym is killing him, slowly – it is shutting down his organs one by one.” Hyde tells them and their eyes widen with terror.

“Well…is there a way we can save him?” Velvet asks with concern in her voice, the old Velvet never would have expected the day would come where she would be scared for Cardin Winchester’s life.

“There…are two ways if my memory serves me correctly.” Hyde tells them, and they all look at each other with a sigh.

“Alright…what are our options?” Coco inquires.

“First one is that we trick the Hym. We come up with an elaborate scheme to bring guilt upon someone else to attract the Hym to haunt them. But it is just a trick, and there is no guilt at all. Meaning it will starve the Hym out.” Hyde suggests as he looks down at his dying body on the bed.

“That will take time, Cardin may not even have an hour.” Coco says.

“What’s the second method?” Emerald asks.

“Kassius connects his Aura to Cardin’s and I go in and kill it myself.” Hyde tells them and their eyes widen.

“You can do that?” Velvet questions.

“My memories tell me that a Higher Demon can kill a Lesser Demon, but it will put up a fight. I do not have the strength the Ebony Berserker had so it may be a hard fight.” Hyde explains.

“Seems faster though.” Coco assumes.

“Yes, but there is greater risk. You see if I fail and the Hym kills me, it will leave both Cardin and Kassius clinically braindead.” He reveals and their eyes widen, and they realise they have a very tough choice to make.

“Shit…and if we mess up the trick, we will end up making someone else get oppressed by a damned Demon.” Emerald sighs as she connects her fingers behind her head as she paces back and forth.

“Both have dangerous risk to them, but they are our only choices. So, which do we go for?” Hyde asks them as he stands before the three women, and they ponder as they look at each other.
“Can you do it? Can you kill the Hym?” Velvet inquires and he shrugs his shoulders.

“I don’t know, I’ve never faced one. But I can give it my best shot.” Hyde admits, and Coco sighs.

“I was kinda hoping for something a bit more reassuring than I hope so.” Coco states as she plants her hand on her hip.

“It’s better than nothing.” Hyde states.

“If you kill it, will Cardin be okay? There will be no side effects?” Emerald inquires.

“Well there will certainly be parasites, that much is obvious.” He states and they all look at him with annoyance at how he says that like it is common knowledge. “The side effects will simply be…well like you have pulled a part of yourself from your body. Hyms are basically parasites.” Hyde explains, and Coco presses her back against the wall as she thinks on all of this. This is a very risky decision, but they have faith in Hyde.

They all nod to each other and then Coco looks at Hyde.

“Give it hell.”

“Well, we cannot do it here.” Hyde tells them.


“Because the process will affect the real world you see, the energy could cause malfunctions. We need to be in a room with as little electricity as we can. Somewhere dry and dark preferably.” Hyde tells them.

“Where would that be then?” Coco asks.

“The Wine Cellars. Every place like this has one, there was one at Fallingwater Estate.” Velvet remembers.

“Alright…let’s head down there.”

**Velvet**

Some time has passed, and they have managed to get Cardin down to the Wine Cellars, and the aroma of grape fermented alcohol fills the air of the room that they have found themselves inside of. They lay Cardin down on the ground and they all sigh as they stand there. “Gods…it feels like everything is trying to stop us from getting to Arkhonex.” Kassius sighs as he presses his hand to his head.

“I know…first Salem and then the nightmares and now this. I’m so tired…” Coco groans as she leans against one of the kegs.

Emerald sits down on one of the barrels and she stares down at the floor. Kassius stands beside Cardin and he looks across the room, seeing the creepy image of Vetra watching them with a smile. He looks away and he sighs. “Come on, let’s get this over with.” Hyde says in Kassius’ head, but as soon as Kassius goes to sit down, Velvet speaks up.
“Before we…do this…I need to ask you something.” Velvet says and Kassius stops as he looks at her, and the others lethargically look at her as well.

“What’s wrong?” Emerald asks her, and Velvet closes her eyes and she lets out a shaky breath.

“I couldn’t stop thinking about how…easily I approached Umbra. It made me wonder…why are we even bothering with trying to stop him?” She questions, and Kassius sighs, looking down at the ground.

“I know what you mean…it all seems hopeless.” Coco agrees.

But in the background of all of this, Hyde is observing everything from Kassius’ head, and he cannot help but feel concern. Their motivation has been rapidly decreasing ever since they arrived at the Stanley Hotel. That is definitely suspicious, but Kassius lays down beside Cardin, their heads meeting perfectly and Kassius grabs into Cardin’s arm. Emerald watches as she crosses her arms, looking around at the place. “Alright…wish Hyde luck guys.” Kassius says as he lays down with a heavy sigh and they all get ready.

Kassius closes his eyes, and the feeling of binding his aura with Cardin’s is quite disconcerting – note this is not like when someone binds their aura to someone they love. This is temporary, opening a bridge for Hyde to get into Cardin’s head.

And then…the bridge opens.

And Hyde heads in.

**Hyde**

He emerges from the darkness that plagues his mind, looking around at the pain that torments this man every single day. He keeps his fists clenched as he looks around, walking in slowly as he hears the distant voices of his team members all crying out his name as he murdered them. They begged him for mercy when they never would have showed the same level of compassion for him when it came down to all that lien.

Hyde looks around more and more, knowing the entity to be in here somewhere…

Then…

**Lo and Behold.**

It forms, the black smoke rises from the invisible ground, forging into the dark demonic body that Velvet saw. Standing extremely tall with a pair of jagged curved horns and blood red horns. It roars viciously, flames igniting inside of its jagged smoky jaws. “There you are, you evil bastard. Wanna have Cardin have something to mourn? Guess losing you will have to do.” Hyde snarls and the Hym roars as it charges towards him, jumping up in the air and slashing its razor-sharp claws down at him with great force. He rolls out of the way and swings round, forming the Crooked Man’s Cane as he smashes the hook across the side of its face. The beast roars in pain and staggers back, growling as it stares at him.

It suddenly blasts towards him and stabs its claws into his shoulder, dragging him across the ground before through him across the endless domain of infected aura. Black smoke billowing up around
him as he tumbles, but jumps and lands on his feet, sliding across the ground. The Hym roars at him with a devilish howl, a thousand tormented screams echoing at once inside of its lungs as it throws its arms back, eyes glowing with burning red hatred at him. Before it charges once again, running on all fours like some kind of humanoid beast. Hyde roars in return, swinging his Cane with both hands, smashing the creature down into the ground. Hyde jumps up and he punches it downwards in the face with great force, and it bellows with anger and pain from every single strike as the pure aggression of Hyde is unleashed upon his enemy. But when he goes to punch the Hym in the face, it vanishes into smoke, disappearing into the realm of smoke around him.

He backs up, keeping his Cane in his grasp as he backs up, waiting for the monster to emerge, and he keeps hearing the pained cries of those he lost around him. “Cardin please!” Russel shrieks until the sound of the mace colliding into his skull silenced him with a bloody squelch and crunch of bone collapsing.

“Kill him! The reward will be generous!” Sky’s voice echoes in his mind, the very people he trained with, thought he could trust with his life. Hyde stands his ground, not being deterred by the voices of his regrets, remembering that there is indeed a hideous monster in here. Suddenly the Hyde erupts from behind him and slashes the claws straight at Hyde, but he blocks the attack with his cane, sparks bursting out from the impact. Hyde jolts back and he uses his cane like a sword, parrying every single strike from the beast as it slashes at him repeatedly, roaring and grunting with every attack.

He then deflects one of the attacks so hard that the Hym staggers back from its enemy, giving Hyde the chance to jump up in the air and swing the Cane downwards against the top of its head. The Hym growls and when Hyde goes to bash its head in with the Cane, it catches it and throws it away from his grasp. It then slashes Hyde up his chest, before grabbing onto his leg and smashing him down into the ground with great force. The Hym presses its body down against his, pinning his arms against the ground as it snaps its deadly jaws at his throat over and over again, the metallic bangs are deafening to even Hyde.

But the Higher Demon grabs the Hym by the throat and holds it back, delivering punch after punch after punch into its face. The Hym roars in pain and anger from every single painful strike delivered by Hyde, and he rises up with it in his grasp, before he punches it down into the ground. As soon as it hits the ground, however, it jumps back up and grabs Hyde, biting into his shoulder and dragging him across the ground, savagely shaking him around like a dog. It rips a chunk from him, and he roars in pain as it throws him, and it suddenly changes forms before him, its roar turning into something more human.

The voice of Russel emerges from its lungs as it stands before him and it laughs devilishly as he draws his weapons. “What a freak!” Russel’s voice echoes in his mind, the memory of when he abused Velvet and his so-called friends were cheering him on for it. Calling her a freak because of her ears. The Hym blasts towards Hyde, spinning like a circular saw blade to cut straight through him, but Hyde swings his fist aside and punches the beast out of the air. It crashes down into the ground and glares at him.

“You would do well to remember, beast! I hone my skills from the genes of Vir Nominis Umbra!” Hyde threatens, since now he knows he is a monster created by their enemy, but that does not mean he cannot use it to strike fear into the hearts of his foes. The Hym gets back up and it charges towards him again and he raises his fists, and he backs up, dodging the many slashing strikes by the Hym disguising itself as Russel. The attacks are pinpoint accurate to how he fought in real life. However, that is not a good thing, because Russel was not a legendary warrior, meaning Hyde can indeed beat him in combat. He thrusts forward with one of his blades to stab Hyde, but he steps aside and grabs into Russel’s forearm, and swings round to punch him in the face so hard that it knocks
him off his feet. As he collapses to the ground, Hyde goes to crush the beast’s skull with his boot.

But it jumps up in the air and slashes across his face, knocking him up in the air, and the Hym throws one of the daggers and it stabs into his shoulder, pinning him against the smoky dome wall. Hyde growls in anger as he grabs onto the blade that has him stuck against the wall, looking ahead to see it changing again, into the form of Dove and he jumps towards him with great speed, thrusting his sword forward to stab him. Hyde rips the blade from his arm and throws it into the chest of the Hym, knocking it out of the air. The Hym crashes down into the ground and pulls the knife from its body and it roars.

Hyde paces back and forth, he knows that Lesser Demons are like Grimm when it comes to beating them with force. Beat them until they fall, and if he keeps up his game, he can do it, he just cannot risk getting cocky and jeopardising the futures for both Kassius and Cardin.

The Hym snarls, still in the form of Dove but pacing back and forth on all fours like some kind of Beowulf, growling viciously and snarling at him. The only thing that shows that these are not really the members of Team C.R.D.L are the eyes. They are glowing red with fury. Hyde waits for the beast to make its next attack, and just as he expected it lunges forward with the sword, jumping and swinging through the air, firing the bullets through the blade just as Dove did. Hyde jumps back and flips through the air, landing on both feet as he ducks and avoids every single fast swing from the impersonating Hym as it makes its vicious attacks at him. It snarls constantly as it keeps attacking, and Hyde growls with his own vicious demonic nature.

As it swings the sword towards him, he bites down onto its arm, and shows another side of the Ebony Berserker he never knew he adopted. The Ebony Berserker was the most aggressive of the Higher Demons and would even devour its victims with its razor-sharp teeth and monstrous mouth. He bites down onto the arm and the Hym shrieks in agony as he rips the black smoke from its arm and steps back with a mad grin on his face. Easy to forget that yes Hyde has started to strive for Redemption, but his nature is simply savagery. The black smoke and blood pours from the arm of the Hym and it hisses as it stares at him.

“Time for you to leave his soul, Lesser Demon.” Hyde snarls as he paces around the creature, and then it jumps towards him, returning back to its true Demonic Form, tackling him down against the ground. It presses its hand against Hyde’s face as it tries to break his neck, but as it does that, Hyde snaps his own neck and his bones begin to break in horrific ways. His arms become crooked, and he rolls over the back of the Hym, snapping his arm around its throat and then lands behind it, throwing it over his back.

The Hym stares at him, seeing the Crooked Man rising back up and he smirks. “There was once a Crooked Man…and he hunted down the rest of his crooked family!” Mr Hyde laughs monstrously at the Hym as he stands before it, lunging towards the beast suddenly and punching it in the face repeatedly with broken nails, cutting deep into the shadowy flesh that makes up its body. The Hym cuts the claws deep into his body and the Crooked Man growls in anger as he bites down into the side of its neck, making it roar in agony. It pushes him away and he rises back up, showing off his deformed version of his body that Kassius mostly sees.

But as he stands before the Hym, his attention is caught by something odd…

…a scream…

…Velvet’s scream, and this is not in Cardin’s head. That is happening right now, outside, and both Cardin and Kassius’ bodies are moving.

“What’s happening?”
The three Huntresses sit around the two unconscious Huntsmen as Hyde battles against the Hym that is affecting Cardin in this way. But as they sit there, Hyde’s warning becomes a reality, for during their vicious battle it starts to affect the lights in the room. Velvet looks up at the blinking lights and she sighs, looking at them. “Guess Hyde wasn’t kidding, huh?” Velvet asks and Coco nods her head slightly.

“Hopefully the power doesn’t go out.” Emerald says, and literally on cue, the lights switch off and the three of them sigh in annoyance.

“You had to say it didn’t you?” Coco groans as she sits on the barrel with her back pressed against the support.

“Give me a second…I’m just gonna look for the switch.” She says, wandering around, she saw the switch nearby anyway. She wanders around and reaches out her hand, feeling the air getting colder and a creepy breath behind her as she finds the switch. Her finger clicks it and the lights come back on.

A horrifying screaming roar erupts in Velvet’s face as an absolutely horrifying Creature of Grimm reaches out to her. These monsters are humanoid in shape, somewhat similar to the Imps that ride the Nuckelavees, but very tall, with long arms that reach down as far as the ground and extremely long fingers. They have hideous faces, resembling skulls, with some even lacking nostrils, and low-hanging jaws. They shriek, and there are…so many of them, hidden behind the many massive kegs of Wine that this place is a maze filled of. It reaches towards Velvet and she screams louder than she has ever screamed in her entire life.

“AAAAHHHHH! HELP! HELP ME!” Velvet screams with absolute terror as she tries to flee from them, but the long-clawed fingers of the Creature of Grimm grapple onto her long brown hair and one of them actually stab through her ear. “AHHH!” Velvet shrieks in agony as blood pours from her punctured bunny ear where the Creature yanks her towards the horde. Coco and Emerald snap out of their Apathetic States, and they turn their heads with widened eyes.

“VELVET?” Coco screams with terror, grabbing her bag and transforming it into Chaingun mode immediately and Emerald draws her Sickle, aiming the Revolver at the creature and firing it instantly. She nails the creature in the head and Velvet crawls away from it with widened eyes as it staggers back. Coco aims her Chaingun and unleashes a full storm of bullets towards the huge group of monsters that have been hidden down here all along. Some of them grab onto the kegs to pull their slow bodies around the corner, whispering groans surrounding them constantly.

The creatures get shredded until they all shriek at once, a shriek so loud that it brings the girls to their knees. “What…is this?” Emerald groans as she feels Silent Judgement suddenly become extremely heavy in her hands. And even Coco can barely lift the barrels of her Chaingun towards the horde of monsters headed towards them.

“We’ve got to…go…” Velvet groans, turning to their two unconscious friends. Coco turns to Cardin and she deactivates her Chaingun and attaches her bag to her belt since she got changed back into her normal outfit opposed to that dress, unfortunately Velvet never got the chance. Coco picks up Cardin with all her strength, straining as she does it, carrying Cardin on top of her back. Velvet and Emerald lift Kassius up onto both shoulders, carrying him as they follow Coco as they flee from the
creatures that pursue them down here in these endless mazes of Wine Kegs.

They turn each corner, only to find more of them shambling round the other sides, reaching out with their creepy whispers. But the further they keep trying to run, the creatures shriek and they nearly collapse to the ground.

“Hyde! Hurry up! We need Kas and Cardin!” Velvet cries out.

Hyde

“Hyde! Hurry up! We need Kas and Cardin!” Her voice echoes inside of Cardin’s head and he turns, staring at the Hym as it gets back up, snarling as it stares at him. Hyde glares his eyes at him and his body snaps and crunches back into the Crooked Man and he holds out his bent arm, challenging the beast.

“Come on then! I haven’t got all day!” Hyde bellows, and the Hym roars in return, charging towards him and jumping towards him, only for Hyde to grab the monster by the throat and swing him downwards into the ground with all his force. The Hym roars in anger and rage as it slashes its claws at him, dragging them down his face at one point. Hyde wraps his arms around the neck of the creature, but it breaks his arms with a roar, but the action does not really have much of a painful effect on Hyde. He just cannot grab onto him any longer, he rises back up and snaps his arms back into position.

Hyde stares at the Hym as it backs up and snarls, transforming into Sky right in front of him, the Halberd in his grasp. He sprints towards him and swings the huge weapon at him, Hyde ducks down and dodges the powerful swing from the Lesser Demon. He punches it so hard that he actually blows a hole in its body. It recoils back and throws the Halberd straight at Hyde, but he jumps in the air and catches it in his hand and swings round, launching it right back and it stabs straight into its chest. The impact throws the beast back and he tumbles across the ground, slamming his curved claws down into the ground to slow itself down. It stares straight into Hyde’s burning eyes and goes to lunge forward once more, only for Hyde to knock it out of the air.

It keeps making the same mistakes, just attacking and not thinking – but Lesser Demons are like animals and cannot make the same logical decisions as Higher Demons can. It crashes down into the ground and slides across the floor, and Hyde dashes towards it, grabbing it by the head and smashing it into the ground over and over again. It reaches up at him, but he snaps the arm with great force, ripping the hand from the wrist and listening to its roars of immense agony.

The Hym tries to flee, but he grabs it again, grasping it by the back of its neck. He drags it back and pushes his fingers into the jaws of the monster. He roars as he pulls its jaws open slowly, forcing them further and further apart. He roars with fury, and he rips the bottom jaw from its skull, making the creature shriek and howl in agony. Finally, Hyde grabs it by the throat, and he yells with anger.

“You time ends now, Lesser Demon! Begone from this one!” Hyde demands as he ignites the unstable form of the entity, and it roars in agony as it tries to writhe free from his painful imprisonment. The black smoke ignites and crumbles away, the beast’s howls fade away as Hyde finishes it off, eviscerating its unstable aura.

And killing it.
Freeing Cardin from its cruel intentions.

And now, Kassius and Cardin can wake up.

Kassius

His eyes burst open and he gasps, feeling his soul returning to his body, and the same happens for Cardin, blood rushing back into his body and he coughs as his organs start back up again. But they do not have time to do anything, he looks around and he sees the Creatures of Grimm closing in on them, surrounding each and every single one of them. They shamble round the huge Kegs with disturbing whispery groans as they approach. They all stare at them, but the shrieks keep on bringing the fighting Huntresses to their knees every single time as they continue to circle them.

Kassius stumbles to his feet and he swings his fist towards one of the creatures, only for it to grab him by the throat and lift him off the floor with a snarl. Kassius’ eyes widen as the creature changes before his very eyes, the skinny humanoid and deformed Grimm body changes into the beautiful body of Vetra. She yells with anguish at him, her words cutting deep into his heart, her voice amalgamated from the Grimm.

"Moment of truth, Kassius! Who am I? Am I your friend? Your lover? Your one shred: one light: one bright, shining star you clung to in this universe? Or am I your guilt? Crushing the life, you because you can’t get over the fact that I'm dead, that YOU feel responsible. Who...AM...I?? Why do you keep fighting me? Why can't you let go?" Vetra yells as she holds him off the ground, towering above Cardin as he tries and fails to get back up.

Kassius stares at her and he grits his teeth with anger. “I DID let you go! You’re the one that can’t let me go!” Kassius roars as he swings his cybernetic fist straight into the face of the Creature of Grimm and it releases him, breaking the connection it had with him. He draws Lash Equinox from his suit, and he points the blades at them as they keep shambling round the corners, their mouths glowing as they shriek again.

That was the one.

It knocks them all to the floor, and Kassius can hear Velvet groan with defeat. “I can’t…do this…I can’t…”

Kassius lays on the ground, defeated as he stares up at the ceiling as they approach, hearing Hyde’s words echoing in his mind. “What the hell are you doing, Kassius! Get up! This is not how your story ends! I forbid it! Get up!” Hyde yells, but Kassius just closes his eyes as he lays there.

“No…it’s okay…” Kassius softly says as the creatures approach him, and one of them slowly reaches its hand to his face, about to push the claws into his eyes to slowly kill him.

“Get up…”

“GET UP!”

“I SAID GET UP!” Hyde’s voice roars inside of his mind, when suddenly his hand erupts from Kassius’ arm…but it is not Kassius’ body moving at all. The arm is burning, and spectral and his eyes widen. The huge crooked arm grabs the creature by the throat and they all back off with fear as they see him rise from Kassius. His burning Spectral image rights himself up and stares the creature
in the eyes.

Hyde…

He just rose from Kassius…

He just separated his body from Kassius completely, staring the Creature down to protect him. And
then he speaks with that demonic grin on his face. “Apathy…such a poor physical design.” Hyde
says with a mad smile on his face as he glares at the creature known as the Apathy. He suddenly
grabs it by its shoulder, and with the throat still in his grasp he pulls the Apathy apart, ripping the
black membrane apart with ease. Another Apathy slashes his back and he barely even flinches,
turning and glaring down at the creature and it shrieks at him.

But he is not human, so it has no effect on him.

Hyde’s jaws split and the jagged molten teeth form, and his tongue licks his lips before he opens
them and bites down onto the Apathy’s skull, crushing and ripping it from its head. The two Apathy
fade away and Hyde unleashes the most terrifying roar they have ever heard. He turns and charges
towards the rest of the pack, smashing and slashing through them with his demonic claws he thought
the Hym with. He crushes them, beheads them, dismembers and tears them apart, even eating some
of then with those damned jaws of his. He grabs one of them and smashes its head straight into the
wall with all his might.

The Apathy shamble towards Hyde but are immediately knocked down, he grabs one of them by its
skinny leg and swings it around like a bat, smacking it into the other Apathy like a weapon. They die
from every single impact, so physically weak that they cannot withstand even the slightest impacts
from their enemies.

Kassius gets up and watches with total disbelief…feeling like…he has lost an organ or something as
he watches Hyde decimate the Apathy like that. But he turns when he senses another behind him,
shambles towards him. Its body changes into Vetra again, who reaches out for him as she shambles,
barely even disguised as her anymore. Their effect on the Hotel has weakened tremendously now to
the point where Kassius is not fooled.

It speaks to him in her voice, attempting to lure him in. “I wished you would care for me like I
did…” She says, reaching her hand out to him, the hand of the Apathy getting close and closer. “…
that we could be together…”

Kassius stares at her and he raises Vulcan Nox.

“We were once…but not anymore. Goodbye Vetra.” Kassius says to her, pushing it away and firing
the round through the Apathy and Vetra’s head, killing them both. The hallucination fades away, and
the Apathy does as well.

Leaving them all stood there with disbelief as they see Hyde finish off the rest of the Apathy, ripping
the last in half with his bare hands.

He growls like a rabid dog, until his crooked bones snap back together into their normal human
looking shapes. He stands before them all with disbelief, looking at his hands…for it was the
Crooked Man side of him that emerged…but now all of him has. He looks at Kassius and he looks at
him.

Both sides are completely lost for words.

They have managed to be free from one another for the first time.
Hyde has some serious answers to give…if he has them.

But now…the Apathy that plagued the Stanley Hotel and the Hym that plagued Cardin are no more.
It lingers in all their minds…

The Apathy…monsters that were lurking inside of the city, and nobody even knew about them. The six of them – Hyde still extended from Kassius’ body – are all sat outside the Hotel on the step. Luckily everyone is asleep now, but the situation is starting to secure itself once more. People are talking more often than not, and that constant feeling of defeat in their hearts has finally subsided. Velvet has a bandage wrapped around one of her ears that they got from the first aid kit inside of the Cellar, her aura slowly healing the puncture inside of her bunny ear. Coco is sat beside them and Emerald is stood up with her back to the wall, arms crossed as she looks at Hyde.

Kassius is sat beside the Demonic Entity that has become like a brother to him, and Cardin sat on the path, still feeling strange after losing the Hym. Not like he misses it, but like an organ has been ripped out of him, at the end of the day the body is going to notice that something that was inside of him for so long is gone suddenly – it may take him some time to get used to that. The six of them all sit there in a pregnant silence as they all contemplate on the monsters that lurked down in that Wine Cellar.

Velvet stammers as she asks the question. “W-What were…those things?” She questions, and Hyde gives them a very detailed answer, showing to them all that the memories of the Ebony Berserker are coming back for him.

“The Apathy.” He answers as he looks across the path at the houses where so many people are sleeping, and cars parked outside them. The distant lapping waves of the ocean being the only sound that they can hear apart from the occasional gales from the sea itself. “They’re not strong or ferocious like Beowulves or Ursae…no…” Hyde explains, looking over his shoulder slightly at Velvet. “…they drain you of your will to go on.”

Cardin looks down at the ground and he squeezes his eyes shut with a heavy sigh, realising that they must have been the reason why the Hym’s hunger increased to such an explosive stage. “They…make you give up?” Coco questions with disbelief and Hyde nods his head.

“I have seen cases…or…the Ebony Berserker did…entire cities claimed by the monsters, all of them just shambling around an underground Metro Tunnel. They spread their curse throughout the entire city, causing their Apathetic Thoughts to claim everyone inside…millions died in their sleep at the exact same time.” Hyde explains, shuddering as he remembers some of the memories of his past life, ones he never wished he could have – hell he never expected to have memories of his own that he never experienced with his host.

“How the hell did they get into Queen’s Cove? This place is secured, there’s no way in hell the Grimm could have entered this place and not one person noticing.” Emerald states, remembering how difficult it was for her and Cinder to infiltrate this city years ago when they were still working for Salem.

“My honest guess?” Hyde asks them, and they all wait for his answer and he looks at the book sat on Kassius’ lap – the one about Bartleby and his many ideas. “I think this was a test by Vir Nominis Umbra.”

“He wanted to test our valour, our determination to keep going despite knowing what he is. He likes playing games with his enemies, forcing them to make difficult choices, tear them apart from the inside. More enjoyable than just killing them.” Hyde explains, and Cardin scoffs as he looks at Hyde where he sits.

“You get these from your memories too?” Cardin questions, clearly still struggling to trust Hyde right now. They have so many questions to ask him, but they simply need to know what the purpose of those Grimm could have been.

“No, this is simply from experience with Kassius. Most of the Ebony Berserker’s memories of Vir Nominis Umbra…are…oddly hazy. They’re coming back slowly, but they’re the hardest.” Hyde explains, looking at Cardin. “I am on your side, I may have once been one of his disciples, but I am not that monster. And even then, the Berserker betrayed him. But either way, I am with you.” Hyde promises.

“Sorry, Hyde – but after what you and Kas told us about what happened at Beacon? Umbra took you over with ease.” Emerald comments as she looks at him.

“Yes…I know. But that was different, I just found out I was a Demon, one of his Higher Demons to be specific…I didn’t want to believe…I made myself vulnerable. I will not make that mistake again.” Hyde states as he looks at Emerald and they all look down at the ground. “I also don’t think he wants to control me again.”

“What do you mean?” Kassius asks him curiously.

“Well he could have done the same to me again if he wanted to…you guys were being affected by the Apathy, I wasn’t. He could have taken me over, used your body and used us to kill all of you.” Hyde explains as he looks at them, all, and they ponder on that fact – because he is right, Umbra has the power to do exactly that, but he doesn’t. The reason why?

They know why, because that would be too easy and thus boring.

This is all like some kind of disgusting game to that Soothsayer, all they need to do is learn his weakness, whatever that may be.

“The other reason behind why I believe he was behind all this, is because he appeared here a couple times. Following us, blending in with the crowd – hell I bet he was the one who specifically placed that book Kassius has so then he would read it. Remember, he can affect our choices.” Hyde explains, and Kassius opens the book as he reads it.

“What book is it?” Cardin asks.

“A Journal, he found it in the Library. It’s about a man called Bartleby who owned an estate of Farmland called Brunswick Farms, it was a recorded history of it…and how it all ended.” Hyde explains, then Kassius begins to read the book as he reads it.

“What book is it?” Cardin asks.

“Bartleby’s Estate was haemorrhaging money towards the end, he was always quite the schemer to come up with ways to beat the odds. And in every single way it worked…but this one was not the way he had hoped.” Kassius explains. “He wanted to cut costs on Huntsman Protection, but in such dangerous territory in the mountains with scared family and workers – Grimm would locate them almost every single weak, attacks growing in size ever single day. So, he deduced the only way to fix the problem was to keep everyone calm…always.” Kassius explains as he looks at what Bartleby
wrote all those years ago.

Velvet listens and she nods her head.

“I think…I may know where this is going.” She sighs, since they have been talking about the strange links, they experienced between Vir Nominis Umbra and the Apathy’s Presence here. Kassius begins to read out a specific extract from Bartleby’s Journal.

“I managed to get two of them away from their pack, ride home was miserable, but I got the bastards in the cellar. Wife thinks I was out sealing the waterway entrance, I’ll do it tomorrow and tell her the truth after these things take the edge off everyone…I’m…tired…” Kassius reads, the words give them all chills, and Hyde continues to explain about the Apathy to them all.

“The next page proved he did, but not before the rest of the pack followed their missing pair all the way back to Brunswick Farms. They made their way under the estate and into the sewers through the Waterway Tunnel…that Bartleby sealed up the following morning.” Hyde explains, knowing exactly what happened and they all look at Hyde as he says it, and Velvet sadly closes his eyes.

“Bartleby’s plan worked.”

Hyde looks up at the Fractured Moon. “No-one was angry, or sad or scared…no-one was anything…and then…no-one was left.” Hyde concludes, and Kassius sighs as he looks at the book, closing it, and concluding the story of Bartleby, Brunswick Farms and the Apathy in general. He sets the book down at the foot of the stairs and they all look at Hyde. They have to ask him now, it has been racing in their minds.

“Hyde…”

“I know what you’re gonna ask me…and I don’t know how to answer you.” Hyde tells them as he looks at his hands, they are no longer enflamed, in fact he looks almost human. The only part of him that does not look like he is human at all is the fact he is partially translucent. When he erupted from Kassius he was engulfed in the Ebony Berserker’s Flames, and he looked more like the Crooked Man that Kassius would see in his early nightmares. “It just…happened…I tried to take over Kassius’ body but I couldn’t. The Apathy had their hold on him…so I tried to stop the Apathy…and…well you all saw.” Hyde explains, remembering it all so well. The way in which he rose from Kassius’ body and ripped the Apathy apart, one by one…

…if he were there enemy it would have been terrified.

“But I guess it means I could one day…free you…” Hyde says to Kassius, looking at his host and he softly smiles.

“Never thought I’d say it…but I dunno if I’d want that. I’d miss you.” Kassius says, and Hyde chuckles.

“Oh, worry not, I’ll still bother you. But for once…maybe I can finally have my own journeys…my own stories.” Hyde says to them all as he sits there, then he looks at the stars, more of them fading away every single night that passes by. Entire Solar Systems being extinguished one at a time, running out of time with every chunk of the moon that breaks away. “If we survive to destroy him first.” Hyde states.

Bringing him up again…it makes Velvet look at her knees, she does not bring up her confession to Kassius to everyone, and neither he or Hyde do either. It is simply not their place to do so, but she says something else. “I’m…sorry about what I said earlier…about giving up.” She says, and Cardin stands up before them all with his fist clenched.
“No…you’re right. We can’t give up, otherwise it’s all over.” Cardin says as he looks across the place, turning to look at them sat behind him.

“Cardin…I’m so sorry.” Coco says to him.

“Don’t, please. I know you know now…but it doesn’t matter. What I did, it happened…I get that.” Cardin states, killing the Hym will not relieve him of his grief and regret for doing what he had to do, but by telling Velvet and in turn allowing them all to know – they now understand and respect what he did. He did not do it out of some sick blood lust like the world, he is a hero, and was betrayed.

“I…I don’t just mean for that, Cardin. I judged you…before knowing the truth.” Coco apologises as she looks at him, and Cardin scoffs.

“Can’t say I didn’t deserve it, especially after how I treated Velvet back at Beacon.” Cardin says as he looks at her, and then he looks at his mace leant against the wall.

“Even still…” Coco says as she looks at him, but he shakes his head.

“Don’t worry yourself, Coco. What happened…it happened. All we need to worry about now is stopping our enemy.” Cardin says as he approaches his weapon. “So…we gonna…get going?” He asks them, his determination has always been the factor that has kept Cardin going, and despite feeling like a part of his body has been forcefully removed from his system…he knows they cannot sit around any longer than they must.

Umbra is not going to wait.

“Alright…let’s find these towers.” Emerald agrees as she stands up, and Kassius stands up as well. Hyde looks at him and they both agree before they even need to say it.

“Probably arouse less attention wouldn’t it?” Kassius asks him, and Hyde nods his head.

“Read my mind.” Hyde says, as his Spectral Body passes towards Kassius and fades back into him. Kassius does not flinch, if anything it is a symbiotic relationship between them now unlike the Parasite that haunted Cardin. “C’mon, brother…let’s do this.”

Whitley

Unaware of the arrival…

A trio of Acolytes of Lien Dropships soar across the night sky towards Queen’s Cove, their thrusters glowing a bright blue as they propel them over the oceans from Atlas Borders. Inside of it are mainly Mercenaries, but sat down in some seats are very important individuals.

Kannix Volantis.
Neopolitan.
Whitley Schnee.
Donovan Gele.

And Kelham, his real name completely unknown to the world. Everyone has just named him
Kelham for as long as they can remember.

Whitley – now a mind inside of a mechanical body – is experiencing something he has never known, something that he may never get used to. Whenever he has been on an Airship, flying to different locations across the world for business deals and sorts…he had thought he would grow accustomed to it. But now that he is no longer a human being, a machine with a human mind instead, he has realised he has lost one of the most fundamental senses a living thing has.

Touch…

He cannot feel anything anymore, he cannot smell or taste anything. All he has now is hearing and vision, whilst everything else is gone. He cannot feel the constant thrumming vibrations through the floor as the Airship soars across the sea. He will never be able to feel the warmth of another person’s skin again, taste or smell the luxurious delight of food and drink. Something that Kannix is clearly making use of right now, as he eats some noodles he warmed up with his flamethrower, eating them in front of Whitley and exaggeratively exhaling in delight as he swallows it. Whitley stares at him, with a face that carries with it no real features.

Just a visor that glows…that’s it, he does not even have emotion reactive panels like the robot that the Architect is inside of. He is just a plain old Atlesian Knight that has been modified for the Transcendence Project his Uncle has been working on. Who has not said a word this entire trip, he has just been looking out the window whilst some of the soldiers talk. Kelham has been sharpening his red claw blades he has on his wrists, similar to those that Militia Malachite use, however these blades are Blood Blades – like Adam and Raven’s.

Neo is sat beside her fellow Assassin with one leg crossed over the other as she looks at her nails and her scroll in the other hand, scrolling through the C.C.T network and the many things that pop up. Whitley stammers as he sits there, he never really thought about these things, how different things would be now that he is a machine. He expected they would be better, because he is stronger now and could actually pose a possible threat to Weiss and Winter…unlikely…but in fact he has never felt so dead than ever before.

Kannix finishes up the noodles and he sets it down on the floor, kicking across to Whitley’s metal feet. The Silver Eyes Assassin scoffs as he looks at him, and Whitley clenches his hand into a fist. “Got a problem?” He questions.

“Me? Why ever would I?” Kannix asks, and Whitley just shakes his head and looks away.

“Stupid Assassins…” Whitley mutters and Kannix pauses and so does Neo who just glances at him with her bright pink and brown eyes.

“What did you just say, boy?” Kannix challenges as he gets up and he walks towards him slowly, and Whitley stares up at him as he approaches. He snarls within that mechanised body and he stands up as well.

“Uh-oh, fight on deck.” One of the soldier’s chuckles as they watch it happen, Donovan and Kelham don’t do a thing. The Doctor does not even break his look out the window, whilst Kelham looks just as intrigued as the rest of the Mercenaries in here. Even though Whitley is in a Robotic Body, Kannix still towers above him, staring right into that visor with his silver eyes. Neo watches but she also does not step in, she just looks back down at the floor as she waits for the Airship to finally land.

“You keep looking down on me…thinking your so much better.” Whitley snarls at him, and Kannix scoffs.
“Yeah, funny enough that comes from experience.” Kannix replies. “What experience have you got? Other than being just a talking oven?”

Whitley yells in anger and he swings his metal fist towards his face, only for Kannix to catch his hand in his own cybernetic one, twisting his arm round and slamming him down on the ground and throwing him over his shoulder and down into the deck. The Mercenaries cheer with excitement as the fight continues, and Kannix presses his boot against the neck of the Atlesian Knight, pressing the barrel of his cannon against his chest.

He leans down as he pushes the weapon against his chest, right where his power core is resided. “What’re you gonna do now?” He asks him, and Whitley writhes desperately underneath the Spectre’s weight.

“G-Get off me!” Whitley cries out desperately, trying to move his cybernetically enhanced leg, the man is more machine now than man.

“There it is…the little shit who thinks he’s top dog…realising he’s nothing more than an ant under our boots.” Kannix scoffs, making the other Mercenaries laugh at the boy at his mercy. He continues to desperately writhe, and Kannix stares right at him. “Tell me…can you cry in there?” He asks him.

“W-What?” He whimpers fearfully, staring right at Kannix in return.

“You heard me…you’re nothing more than a walking refrigerator now. Must drive you crazy, mustn’t it? Realising you can’t cry in one of these things.” Kannix chuckles menacingly atop Whitley as he pushes him further against the ground. Kelham smirks monstrously with the rest of the soldiers as they watch the Businessman’s Son being abused this way, despite everything he has been through – dying and coming back…

“Stop!” He cries out.

“All you are is a weed to me…and weeds should be ripped out, root and stem. You have all the bark, but you have no bite to back it up…you pay us soldiers to do your dirty work, but you look down on us like you’re better. But kiddo, I could kill you right now if I want.” Kannix says, and then he brands a grin across his face as he charges up his cannon. “You know what…I’m gonna.” He says as he prepares to fire.

“NO! Please! I don’t wanna go back! Please!” He cries desperately, he can hear the attempted sniffles but there is nothing, no real tears, just whimpers as he tries to cry. But there is nothing at all, he is just terrified, heartbroken – and cannot cry. Whitley’s number one fear…is returning back to the nothingness of death…

“I’m curious…are you even human? If you can’t cry? Or Sleep? Or Dream?” Kannix continues to ask him as he questions the young man’s existence one question at a time, breaking his resolve once and for all. The boy who initially thought he could challenge the Spectre of Arkhonex now is a snivelling wreck on the ground. “Can you even feel the heat of the barrel on your chest?”

Whitley cannot even find the answers, and Neo is the one to stop him. She grabs his arm and pulls him back from the boy, staring him in the eyes with anger. Her presence stops him from doing anything, and despite the fact that she does not reciprocate the feelings he has for her, it does not change the fact he cares about her. He stares back at Whitley who is curled up on the floor, his metal hands held close together, and Kannix scoffs. “What kind of a man are you?” He questions. “Good thing she has more mercy…because the only reason I wasn’t gonna kill you was so then these boys get paid.” Kannix informs, deactivating his Cannon and approaching his seat, sitting back down.
Whitley staggers back to his feet with the help of Neo, but then he pushes her away. “Get off me!” He cries out, all the Mercenaries looking at the Businessman’s Son. Kelham turns when he sees in the window that the pier of Queen’s Cove is approaching, so he stands up and he clears his throat.

“Alright boys, enough of the entertainment. We’re about to land at Queen’s Cove.” Kelham tells them as he grabs onto the handle above his head, Donovan looks at his nephew and he just scoffs and rolls his eyes.

“Of all the people that technology could have saved…we gave it to a coward.” He states, and Whitley stares at him – he heard every word – but he does not react. But there is a flicker of red inside of his visor, and his voice crackles for a second as well. His fist clenches and twitches as he glares at his Mad Uncle, and he sits back down, his fists shaking as he sits there.

The Acolytes of Lien Dropship approaches the docks of Queen’s Cove, passing by another beautiful statue of the King and Queen, held in each other’s arms, his arms around her waist and her eyes gazing up at his. Lips nearly touching and her dress swirling around the two of them like a cloud. The three Vessels descend down towards the landing pads on the docks, their landing gear folding out and the huge thrusters rotating round into a Landing Formation. The dust and litter get blown from the surface of the pad and into the salty water beneath them.

Stood on guard are many more Acolytes of Lien Mercenaries, armed to the teeth with Military Vehicles everywhere, including some Gunships that are currently landed. They have missiles and machine guns at the ready, fuelling up on Dust provided to them by the Schnee Dust Company. The side door of the Dropship opens up and the Mercenaries exit with their weapons, from Juggernauts to Seekers to Whiplash Marchers. Even some Tremor Troopers and Gliders are on the field with the normal soldiers.

They are ready for a battle, no doubt about that.

And with morning soon approaching, and nobody aware of the Apathy being cleared out of the Stanley Hotel – that brewing battle is most certainly on the way. Whitley emerges from the ship last, behind his Uncle who walks with his arms behind his back, looking around at the city. “This place…everyone here calls this place the land of romance.” Donovan scoffs as he glances at the beautiful statue of the King and Queen of Vale, and he rolls his eyes. “What a childish belief.”

Whitley looks around, seeing some Faunus and Humans happily coexisting, even a couple together as they walk around. Neo looks at the mechanical man who glares at them and she narrows her eyes in disgust. She walks with Kannix towards some of the other soldiers, following Kelham. Whilst Whitley remains with his Uncle, showing his disgust for the Faunus that he has obtained from his father.

Donovan stares at him and he scoffs. “What? You as weak as your Father?” He questions, and Whitley flinches when he hears his sharp voice. He rarely ever saw his Uncle but every single time he ever did, mainly when he was in prison, he would be met with some rather harsh words. As would his sisters – it was one of the few things that they could relate to on the matter. “Children are supposed to be better than their fathers, did I save a Racist as well as a coward?”

“After all the things you’ve done…racism is where you draw the line?” Whitley questions, his voice softer spoken than before when Kannix put him in his place. And Donovan shows no compassion, no pat on the back and to tell him that Kannix is a dick. No, not a word – if anything he just expresses his own disappointment towards the young man. Donovan stares him in the eyes and a smirk brands his cheeks.

“I care not for someone’s race or sexuality…all are good test subjects, boy. Their screams all sound
the same to me.” He says, and it gives Whitley the shivers when he hears him say those words. Very few people would speak so callously about another individual like that…but there was a good reason behind why his Uncle was put in a Supermax Prison.

He is a monster.

Whitley stands alone, feeling his mind racing, like something biting into his brain at all times. Something is happening and he clenches his hand into a fist, his optics flickering between blue and red constantly, staring at everyone around him.

But then he hears the voice of a Mercenary behind him, and then the motion of him being shoved. “Lookie here, it’s the baby Businessman. Gonna start crying again, little baby?” The Mercenary questions, and Kelham glances at the soldiers picking on the mechanical man. “Thought you would be a big strong robo-man? You can’t even fight back.” The soldier scoffs as he punches him again. The impact cracks against the visor, making it flicker constantly now and his voice crackles as he speaks.

“I-I a-am war-ning you…” Whitley crackles with anger, his head twitching and his fist tightening, the other mercenaries laughing at him.

“O-Or what? Gonna cry to daddy? Little zombie coward? DADDY AIN’T HERE!” The soldier yells, swinging at him, when suddenly Whitley’s optics flick from blue to red in an instant and he catches the armoured fist of the soldier and his eyes widen, then he shrieks in agony as he feels the robotic hand of Whitley crush his human one. The skin splits and the bone shatters and snaps, breaking all the fingers, and blood runs down his steel hand.

The soldier screams desperately, until Whitley punches him in the face extremely hard, knocking him onto the ground. “N-No! PLEASE!” The soldier screams in horror, only to be silenced by a deafening crunch as Whitley punches him in the head over and over again, so hard it cracks the concrete ground with every strike. Even after the Mercenary is killed from the punches, he keeps hitting him, causing the skull cavity to collapse, and blood to splatter everywhere, across his metal body and his visor.

The soldiers have fallen silent in terror of Whitley, from what he just did. He has a bloodlust in him, an anger he can only take out by killing someone. His metallic panting screams continue as he punches the splattered brains and skull on the floor, completely unrecognisable as a head anymore.

Kelham walks towards him with a smile on his face, and Whitley eventually stops, covered in the man’s blood. Kelham smiles more, and he claps his hands as he looks at Whitley, and when he stops clapping, he points at him. “That’s more like it, son.” Kelham tells him with a smile.

And all that revolves around his mind…

…are these thoughts.

*I’m not a coward.

*I’m not weak.

*I will prove them wrong…*I will prove him wrong…*I will prove her wrong.

Weiss
Weiss stands firmly with Myrtenaster in her hand, it has been quite a while since she has had the pleasure of holding her weapon again. The others have all gone to rest – and Weiss asked Neptune to get some sleep, to which he reluctantly agreed – for this is a moment for just the Schnees to share together. But the Undertaker watches Starla nearby as she holds her two Tonfas in her hands, walking around Weiss as she keeps the tip of her sword pointed at her ancestral Aunt. “Your stance is well centred, I see that our family has not forgotten the finer styles of combat – even if you are all much smaller.” Starla comments as she slowly circles Weiss with her blue eyes fixates on her little nephew. Weiss looks at her body and then at Starla.

“Is…that a bad thing?” Weiss asks her curiously as she circles her.

“Not at all, if anything it makes you harder to strike. Smaller the target, the nimbler you are.” Starla states as she walks around Weiss.

“Is that what made you a great fighter?” She asks curiously, and Starla chuckles, before suddenly thrusting forward and striking, their blades colliding in a spark. She scrapes her blade across Weiss’ fencing sword, and she slides past her and kicks her in her lower back. She falls to the ground, and Weiss groans with a thrown as she pushes her hands against the soil of green blades. She looks back with that frown still gracing her face as she stares at Starla who smirks playfully behind her.

“Interesting theory…but in Arkhoni Terms I am actually quite small.” Starla states, despite being actually six feet tall, which dwarfs Weiss in comparison.

“How big did your people get then?” She questions, and Starla taps her chin as she thinks.

“Most men reached Seven Feet. It’s why Krekras, Rylen and Axzura dwarf you lot.” Starla explains as she walks around her some more, as Weiss pushes her diseased body back up with Myrtenaster. They are unaware that despite the fact they are meant to be sleeping, everyone is actually watching them right now – guess they are just wanting to see two Schnees training. “I enjoy these talks.”

“This is what you call talking?” Weiss questions, flicking the dirt from her sword as she points it at Starla again.

“We can talk while we work.” Starla replies, her footwork is absolutely inspiring, most warriors tend to keep their eyes on the ground for a second to make sure their feet are going in the path they want. Starla however does not, her years of training have really made her quite the graceful combatant, even when she has become a Knight of Grimm…disgraced of all honour.

Even though all four tend to show more honour than most of their enemies they face.

“Y’know…I don’t think it’s particularly clever to train your enemy.” Weiss tells her, when Starla suddenly rushes forward again, jumping in the air and spinning round with her Tonfa arched back, slashing down towards her. Weiss gasps and she parries the strike with a metallic twang, stepping back before twirling on the spot and jabbing forward. Starla slides aside and she kicks Weiss in the chest, knocking her back down. Weiss grunts as she hits the floor again, her long white hair falling on her face as she sighs.

“In all honesty, I do not see any of you as my enemy. It is as I have told you, my curse forbids me from controlling my own body when the time comes. I always try and try to stop my own body, but it is like someone has me shackled. If my training will help you defeat him, defeat me when you have to fight me…then it is worth it.” Starla explains, since she has made it very clear that she wants them to win, and she wants Vir Nominis Umbra to fail. At heart she is still that kind woman, and despite
the mistake she made for cheating on her husband – she is still a good human being.

“Then why do the others not always kill us on sight? Krekras hasn’t…Fury hasn’t…hell even Fear hasn’t. Why bother?” Weiss questions.

“Because we see that the eight of us are not so different. Have you ever noticed that there is a familiar trait that seems to bind us all together? The Knights of Grimm and your team?” She asks Weiss, and the Schnee raises her brow.

“Well you’re my ancestor, so I guess there is that.” She states.

“No…think deeper than that. What are the things that our curse links us to?” Starla asks Weiss curiously, and then she strikes once more, but Weiss rolls out of the way, and Starla slides her heels across the ground, cutting deep slashes into the ground beneath her. Weiss stops and she keeps her sword pointed at Starla as she continues to circle the child.

“Death, Loss, Fear and Fury.” Weiss comments, and Starla nods her head.

“I believe Vir Nominis Umbra cursed us for more than just our misdeeds in our lives – I believe he did it because he knew the four of you would play a major role as his antagonists. So, he required a counterforce – Four Knights that represent the darkness that hides in all of you. The darkness that forged you…but not the light that refined your beauty and your kindness.” Starla explains as she walks around her.

“Meaning?” Weiss questions, with a sigh.

“Well, Ruby Rose has one goal in mind, doesn’t she? To save people from dying terrible deaths, to save the world and assure everyone gets a happily ever after?” Starla asks her as she walks around, Weiss glances and sees the rest of the Afflicted now walking outside and sitting down as they listen to what Starla has to say. Since it is actually quite intriguing when they think about it.

“The Knight of Death…” Weiss deduces.

“You…you fight against your own sadness that has smothered your life. From your abusive father, to your alcoholic mother and the pre-decided future that was planned out for you. Opposed from your own decision…meaning I am the embodiment of your inner conflicts – against your sadness and loss of freedom.” Starla explains, and Weiss uses her powerful intellect to figure out how Fear is linked to Blake.

“Blake was always afraid to open up to people about being a Faunus, she was scared of the White Fang, of Adam and everything she did when she was younger. So, Rylen is her Dark Side?” Weiss assumes and Starla nods her head, and then Weiss looks at Yang before turning her eyes back to her mentor.

“And Yang Xiao Long has been filled with rage, why her very semblance and beloved have possessed similar traits around this emotion in that regard. Her inner anger for her mother abandoning her as a child and losing her stepmother. Finally meaning the Knight of Fury is Yang’s shadow.” Starla explains, and Yang looks down at the floor as she realises this fact – the Knights of Grimm are Team R.W.B.Y’s dark side.

Starla strikes once more, and Weiss backs up, blocking the strike with Myrtenaster, and Starla scrapes her curved blades down the long and pointed blade of her needle. Weiss uses the strength of which that magical potion the Witches concocted to her best usage against Starla, she drops and rolls past Starla, swiping her blade across her legs, knocking her down to the ground. She then goes to
stab her in the heart, but then she feels the sharp point of Starla’s blade against her belly. “Dead.” Starla tells her, before kicking her in the chest instead, and as she falls to the floor, she spins round and kicks her once again in the belly, sending her crashing and rolling across the floor.

Weiss groans. “You see now? We are the same, not on the outside but on the inside. We once yearned for the same goals as you, until our mistakes caused us to become the monsters we are now.” Starla explains, but Weiss stubbornly shakes her head.

“We’re not the same.” Weiss tells her with a groan as she tries to get up.

“Perhaps not…we did once have different ideals to you. I have noticed the motivations of your generation vary but none are like that of the Vanguard.” Starla explains, mentioning the ancient name the Huntsmen once had, before they became what they are now. When they were respected and given everything – treated like warriors or even Gods. Starla lowers her blades and she looks up at the Fractured Moon with a sigh. “Do you know what a Vanguard’s most vital possession is?” She asks her.

Weiss gets back up and flicks her tail of hair back over her shoulder. “Uh…her blade?” She asks as she looks at Starla’s Tonfas. Starla scoffs, looking back to the little Huntress before her.

“Her honour.” Starla answers as she looks at her. “A Vanguard can pick up another blade, or repair their bow – but if one loses one’s honour…that is much harder to repair.” Starla explains as she looks at her, and Weiss exhales through her nose.

“How did you lose yours?” Weiss inquires, and Starla sighs.

“I was…young…and naïve.” Starla tells her. “I was unhappy in the marriage I was in, I loved my children with all my heart…but my husband? I never realised what I had until I could never see him again. The things I complained about…he never gave me enough attention, he’s never in the house, I do all the work.” Starla mimics her own younger voice as she gestures her arms around, and then she sits down on one of the old broken stones by the colonnades, and she looks down at the ground. “I fell for another man – Krekras – and every mission we went on, he and I would sleep together.”

Weiss looks at her and lowers her head. “I remember hearing Ruby mention something like that, something she saw in one of the Visionary Books.” Weiss says – if her memory serves her correctly it was the one at Vacuo, in Professor Theodore’s Vault.

“On our way to the Volcanic Chain Isles…yes…” Starla sighs, sounding so disappointed in her life choices. “There were many unforgivable sins in Arkhoni Culture – Rape, Adultery and Drug Abuse.”

“No, at the end of the day it was…expected.” Starla scoffs, shaking her head. “If a Vanguard dared to commit one of these sins, even a Knight – and their honour would be pillaged if the truth came out. It was so bad that there were those who would spread lies of their rivals to break their honour…out of spite.” Starla explains as she looks at her, and Starla stands up tall again. “I broke my oath to my husband, because he simply did not sleep with me enough. That is how much of a child I am.”

Weiss looks at her and she shakes her head. “That shouldn’t determine why you were cursed.” She states.

“Oh, but it did, Little Flake. Umbra enjoys punishing those on their smallest mistakes.” Starla tells her, something Sun knows all too well. His attempt to lighten the mood when Umbra arrived lead to
the deaths of four good people – not his fault, but it still feels like it was his fault. Hazel watches them from afar and Glynda walks up to his shoulder, watching Starla speak with them.

“I can’t believe we’re allowing this…a Knight of Grimm…right there.” She says with her head shaking.

“I know Starla – if she was gonna kill them they would be dead already. And she doesn’t want any of this…” Hazel assures, since out of all their enemies, Starla is the one they can trust the most.

Back at Starla and Weiss, she looks at her descendant and she sighs. “And for my adultery…my weapons were rewarded with these…” She says as she lifts her Tonfas that also connect together into a Bow.

“Are they…better?” She asks curiously, and that seems to trigger an anger inside of Starla, something rare. Her eyes flare and she grits her teeth.

“You tell me!” Starla yells, swinging forward and punching Weiss in the chest, launching her back again. Starla glares at Weiss as she gets up, and then she continues. “These blades…cursed…caused us to become the monsters we are today. And for my naivete, my children and my husband died… and when I tried to drown myself to join them…my body died but I continued to go on.” Starla explains as she stands before her, and it explains why her skin is a pale blue as well.

“I’m sorry…I didn’t…” Weiss softly says as she gets back up, and Starla shuts her eyes with a sigh.

“I know of your insecurities Weiss – but please…go easier on yourself. Because at least you didn’t lose your honour, and in turn lose everything you loved. Because that is the hardest thing of all… learning to live with it when they are all gone.” She tells her, she then swings her blades round and aims them at Weiss and the younger Schnee readies her sword as she stares at Starla.

The Knight of Loss charges forward and she swings her Tonfa across where Weiss’ head was, but she ducks down, and she jabs her blade into Starla’s kneecap. She then slides aside from her own attack, stabbing at where Weiss’ leg was, and then she slashes Myrtenaster up her back. Starla asked her to go all out on her, with all her strength, but to be ready for an injury if she fails.

End of the day, when you are already dead…

…you do not fear dying anymore.

Weiss bounces back and she arches Myrtenaster back and she thrusts towards Starla, stabbing into her shoulder, pulling it out and kicking her Tonfas from her hands, and pressing the blade against her enemy’s throat. Starla holds her head back and she softly chuckles with a smile. “That’s better.” Starla tells her, but then her face turns mischievous. “However…”

She then takes her hand and tickles a point on her leg that has always gotten her to yelp, and it does exactly that, causing Weiss to fall to the floor. Starla chuckles as she stands back up, rolling her stabbed shoulder as she looks around. “Your skills are vastly impressive, sweetheart. Especially when infected with Horridus Morbus – still can be improved, next time I will teach you on how to meditate.” Starla tells her, and Weiss raises a brow.

“Next time?” She asks.

“What? You didn’t expect this to last one night, did you?” She chuckles, but it is more that she did not expect Starla to be so happy to teach her. But at the same time, she is essentially having time with her family – something she has not been able to do since her family was alive.
“And…meditating?” She questions.

“Seriously? Spectre of Loss standing before you and you’re questioning the point in meditating?” Starla questions with a scoff, something that Weiss can’t even argue against. She crouches down beside Weiss as she sits on the grass and she crosses her legs. “I must return to him though.” She says

Weiss looks at Starla with worried eyes, she knows that Umbra will most likely punish her for this… and now she does not want her hurt. “Don’t go… stay with us.” She begs, and Starla smiles, caressing her cheek gently. Her hand is cold, yet not repulsively so.

“I wish I could, darling. But it is my duty…and I will accept whatever punishment he decides to inflict upon me.” She says with a sigh, standing up as she prepares to go. “Get some rest… you’ve all earned it.” Starla requests as she walks away from them, but then she stops when she hears Weiss.

“Wait…” She says, and Starla stops, looking back at her. “…you didn’t lose your honour… not to me.” She says, and Starla smiles, for that really touched her soul. She does not say a word, she just turns and transforms into her Spirit Animal Form – the Mourning Dove, flying away into the sky.

Starla

The sky is as blood red as ever, the moon broken apart and infinite screams filling the wind as the Mourning Dove glides across the Charred Forest. She descends down towards the broken remains of Beacon Academy, some kind of dark reflection of what is coming to their world, or an alternate universe, where Beacon fell, and the rest of the world followed. As the Dove descends, she transforms back into her Knight form and she lands on her feet, walking across the shattered ground where she sees him standing, exactly where Weiss was standing. The ashes falling from his hand and a broken crown – Weiss’ crown – in his hand. Clearly, he has destroyed a version of their universe in the past, and Weiss and the rest of the team did not survive.

Vir Nominis Umbra lets the crown fall and it clangs against the ground, before he speaks. “What is it you hope to achieve by helping her, Starla?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks her. “By helping them?”

Starla stares at him and she answers him honestly, for she knows he will already show more respect for her if she tells him the full truth. “Because I believe they deserve to win.” She tells him, and he turns to look at her, and as she predicted he is indeed honoured by her honesty. Then she adds another part. “Well… that and you never said I couldn’t.” She says, and he pauses, and realises she is one hundred percent correct.

“Fair enough… but even still… you know that they cannot stop me… so why are you trying?” He asks her curiously. “Arkhonex fell… countless others tried and failed.” He states as he walks towards her once more.

He holds his hands together as he stands in the ashes of what could possibly be Team R.W.B.Y. “They did not make the same mistakes as the Arkhoni did, they do not have to suffer the same fate.”

“The Arkhoni… the new world… it doesn’t matter anymore. They must face the same fate as the rest of Universes that came before you joined the cause.” Vir Nominis Umbra tells her, and she scoffs.

“Joined? We didn’t join anything, you corrupted us.” Starla states, and he chuckles with that
terrifying smirk on his face, his eyes faintly glowing red behind those brown irises.

“And yet, you believed you could get away with all your misdeeds without necessary punishment waiting for you?” He asks her.

“I knew the truth would come out…and I hated myself for what I did. But my family did not have to die as well.” She states with a snarl, gritting her teeth as she glares at him. She is no fool, it was the curse of her weapon - Arcus Autem Trisitia – that is responsible for her family’s death.

“Death is a natural part of life, as is fear, sadness and anger. There is no point in trying to deny their existence…at the end of the day…their fate was decided long ago.” He says as he walks around her, the caws of the Diamond Beaked Crows echoing for miles as he circles her. She closes her eyes and sighs.

“If you’re going to punish me…then just get on with it.” Starla demands, tired and just wanting him to do it already. Vir Nominis Umbra looks at her and his eyes narrow – there is something happening, and he knows it. People are…not being manipulated as easily as they once were. It is not just the Four anymore, there have been so many moments when his enemies have managed to get round his plans…and they have had nothing to do with it.

What is happening?

Vir Nominis Umbra sighs and he walks past her, looking at the destroyed remains of Beacon, and then he looks back at her. “You may go.” He reveals, and her blue eyes widen with disbelief…she was expecting agony…not for him to just let her go.

“Wait…you’re…what?” She questions.

“As you said – I never said that you couldn’t help them. So, you technically never went against my orders.” Vir Nominis Umbra states as he shrugs his shoulders. She is filled with distrust towards the entity, but she turns and is about to leave.

“But remember, Starla…when the time comes…you will have to kill them.” He tells her, and she closes her eyes with the glimmer of tears.

“Then I pray that time never comes.”

Ruby

The Asylum…

As they make their approach it already has one hell of an intimidating feel to it, the size of it and the huge walls. It makes sense why going through this place is faster than going around, it is huge after all, and also has a huge roof, covered in barbed wire, meaning that going over would be just as difficult and dangerous. They make their way towards the entrance, seeing the guards stood outside – luckily, they are neither Atlesian nor Acolytes of Lien. They are simply hired Security Guards, who ask them for identification before entering. “Halt! Identification.” The Guard demands, it is as if they are robotic in nature from how they act. All four of them hold up their Hunter Badges that they have from Beacon, and they let them pass, scanning it and stepping aside.

Pyrrha looks around as she walks with Jaune, Oscar and Ruby, looking at the many cells occupying
countless inmates. They can hear some of their mad screams from hear as they walk into the place. “Yeah this ain’t sketchy at all.” Jaune comments beside Pyrrha as they walk down the stone steps, seeing the Warden approaching them. For a Warden she is much smaller than they were anticipating, almost as short as Ruby in fact, and she smiles and bows her head to them.

“Hello, Huntsmen and Huntresses. May I ask what your business is here?” She asks.

“We simply need to get through here, ma’am.” Oscar replies. “There’s a location nearby and this is the fastest route there.”

“I see, alright then. Well follow me, I will show you the fastest way through. Luckily I know this place like the back of my hand.” She says as they walk through the huge place. They can hear some of the cages rattling where the crazed inmates are trying to break out, some of them are almost feral. Pyrrha is the one to bring up the first question on all of their minds.

“Ma’am, I have to ask…but why does Argus still have an Insane Asylum in operation. I thought they were demolished years ago for unethical treatment of patients.” Pyrrha asks as she walks through the place, when suddenly a hand erupts from one of the bars, almost grabbing hr and she yelps, stepping aside when she sees the woman inside, trying to grab her long red hair.

“You…You smell nice!” The woman laughs as she tries to sniff her hair, when a guard slams his baton against the iron bars.

“Get back!” The Guard yells angrily.

“Apoloises, Miss. Some of the inmates are a bit energised today. And to answer your question, yes this was put out of commission a long time ago. I have been working here for many years, and I remember all the patients. We looked after them as best as we could, but other Asylums across the world were not the same. Now it was retrofitted into a Supermax Prison.” The Warden explains as she takes them along, and Ruby looks at the many people in here, seeing Roman inside of one of the cells, laughing as he paces back and forth, in a jumpsuit too.

“Wow, Red! Look at this! Better than some of the apartments I’ve lived in. Come on!” Roman calls as he looks at her, grabbing onto the bars as he stares at her, but she ignores the annoying hallucination as they turn a corner, when they see a large book on a pedestal by one of the walls. Not a Visionary Book – unfortunately – but a ledger of all the inmates who have been admitted to his Asylum over the years. She stops by it and looks at the many names.

“How many people have been here, miss?” Ruby asks her, and the Warden stops and sees her standing there and she walks over to see the ledger.

“Around two hundred thousand a year.” She answers, and Ruby’s eye widens with disbelief when she looks at her.

“Two Hundred Thousand per year?” Oscar questions.

“Yes…we did good work here for a while but there were some patients…some we could not cure.” She explains, which is when Ruby stops on a certain name and her eye widens with disbelief.

**Patient Number: 2728**

**Name: Tyrian Callows**

**Race: Faunus, Scorpio**
Age: 13

Admitted here for: Son of the Fractured Moon, aggressive tendencies, arson and the killing of a pet dog

Ruby cannot believe it, it is Tyrian Callows’ name…and she nearly staggers back, and the sight of his name causes him to appear in her mind. He walks over to the ledger and then looks around at the many cells. “Ah…good times…” Tyrian’s Phantom says as he looks around at the place. “They’ve changed it up a bit though, I don’t like it.” Tyrian says as she looks around, and then she starts to focus on her breathing.

“Oh gods…” Jaune shudders.

“Is there a problem?” The Warden asks with a worried tone.

“Um…” Oscar looks at her, as she covers her mouth, feeling like she is about to be sick, until she swallows it and builds her courage.

“He…kidnapped…and tortured me.” She answers and the Warden’s eyes widen, and she sighs.

“I’m so sorry.” She apologises as she looks at her, and she walks over and gently squeezes her shoulder.

“What’s this? Son of the Fractured Eclipse?” Pyrrha asks, since even she has not heard of this, however Oscar has heard of this old legend.

“It’s a Myth. During a Fractured Eclipse, if a baby is born in the shade they would be cursed with madness.” Oscar says, remembering some of the stories that his Aunt read to him when he was a little kid. Jaune scoffs as he scowls at the name, even though he is long dead now, the very sight of the name makes them angry.

“Well that clearly was true.” He snarls, wanting to spit on the name, until the Warden says something, something none of them were expecting.

“It wasn’t…it’s is just a myth. None of it was true.” The Warden states, and all eyes fall upon her.

“There was no curse bestowed upon those who were born under this curse, people just assumed he was.”

“How do you know this?” Pyrrha asks her.

“You remember I said I’ve worked here for most of my life? When I was younger, I worked as his Psychiatrist. He was one of many patients I wanted to help, and he told me he just wanted someone to look after him. Everyone in his village shunned him for a non-existent curse, he was beaten, yelled at, named names, shunned. He had nothing – and so when they all hated him, he decided he would become the very thing they hated.” The Warden explains as she looks at the name and there is a glimmer of pity in her eyes.

She sighs. “I had such high hopes for him…but then he started killing again…and nobody could catch him.” She explains, then she looks at Ruby and she gently caresses her shoulder. “I am so sorry…that I didn’t do better.”

“Don’t apologise…it wasn’t your fault. This…actually explains…a lot.” She says, since at the end of the day he looked up to Salem like mother. Perhaps she was the one person in his whole life that actually looked after him, raised and spoke to him when nobody else would. None of this excuse the horrors he committed, but now they know.
Tyrian Callows was a Son of the Fractured Eclipse.

The Fractured Eclipse is an event where the Fractured Moon passes in front of the sun, but instead of blocking out the sun completely, pockets of light shine through. But most of the sky is darkened. Ruby walks back to the book, looking down at his name and she inhales a shaky breath.

“Can I…is his cell…occupied?” She asks her, and the Warden looks at her friend.

“Ruby?” Oscar asks her.

“No, the entire wing has been abandoned after an outbreak of Black Mould killed most of inmates. Now it is just left alone. His cell is still left exactly as he left it.” She tells her, and Ruby nods her head as she fiddles with her fingers.

“Can…Can I see it?” She asks her.

“Ruby?” Oscar asks her.

“I need to see it…I need to…I don’t know why, I just need to.” She stammers, and the Warden nods her head and they walk down the hallway towards the stairs towards the skybridge. Ruby follows and the others follow her as well. The skybridge stretches across the courtyard outside and into the second building, the one that is locked up tight. She unlocks the door and they all walk inside, and the place is horrific to look at. Black mould everywhere, but luckily, they will not be here long enough for it to affect them.

The paint has peeled away over the years, crumbling off and falling onto the floor, breaking into a hundred pieces. Graffiti tattooed everywhere, some of it beautiful and some of it absolutely horrendous. Ruby follows her, and then she stops by one of the cells, the door still open…and Ruby feels everything fade around her. The scratches on the walls and the drawings made of old blood – his blood.

He was an extremely troubled individual, this much was clear. Ruby walks inside slowly as she looks around, and Oscar stands behind her. “Do you…want some time…alone?” Oscar asks her, and Ruby looks back at him and she smiles with a firm nod.

“We’ll be right outside.” Oscar assures, walking away with Jaune, Pyrrha and the Warden so then Ruby can have a moment. Oscar may have been tortured as well, but not on the same level as Ruby was – he hurt her because of his tail, because he was meant to capture her the first time. Because she was smaller than him and younger and a girl – weaker than him in his eyes. As Ruby walks into the room though, the hallucinations return, seeing Tyrian sat down on his old rusty bed with his arms resting on his knees by the busted window that still has some old hairs stuck there where he must have smashed his head into it.

“Hasn’t changed a bit here…look at that…all the tallies. Of how I would picture killing people, every dream was something new. All those little brats who hurt me for when I was born…I made sure they paid…she gave me that.” Tyrian says, and that is all Ruby needed to hear to know that the people that he killed that the Warden mentioned must have been the little village he was born at. The ones who treated him like dirt because he happened to be born under the shade of the Fractured Eclipse.

Tyrian is not the only one appearing either, as Roman appears as well, leant against a wall with his arms crossed as he looks at her. “I remember being in cells like these, grimy as hell. Ever think you would be here, red? With us grunts?” He asks her.
“I’m not like you.” Ruby hisses.

“Oh, come now red, how long are you gonna hide from the truth?” He questions, pushing himself from the wall as he walks towards her.

“I… I do not kill people for no reason.” She states with anger in her silver eye as she stands there, staring at the mirror that was smashed by Tyrian when he was a kid.

“Tell me, Little Red – how many people have you killed now?” He asks her curiously as he crosses his arms. Ruby does not answer, and Tyrian stares at her with that sinister smile on his face, the one Ruby had wished to never see again. “I know how many – two hundred and seventy-six people. That’s how many you have killed, chopped them up with that oversized gardening tool of yours.” Roman answers with a smirk, staring at her reflection before he walks aside.

“Shut up…” Ruby softly says.

“Remember back when you reunited with your beloved Team R.W.B.Y? In Mistral? How you cut off that Mercenary’s head with absolutely no hesitation? You were treating it like it was all a game…and you look at me and him like we’re the monsters.” Roman scoffs, and Ruby shakes her head.

“Accept it, my little flower. We’re the same.” Tyrian whispers.

“I’m not your little flower…you’re dead.” Ruby snarls with anger as she looks down at the ground. She then looks back up at the broken mirror, seeing his face looking at her, standing right behind her. “The Hero of Beacon Academy murders a mentally challenged patient. Won’t that make for a fine title for the next paper about you?” Tyrian asks her, remembering how she dropped him and watched him fall to his death all those years ago. She exhales through her nose as she looks at the reflection.

“You made your choice.” Ruby tells him.

“Yet you did hesitate before you did it.” Tyrian points out. “What were you waiting for? That your mother would descend from the heavens to stop you from killing a defenceless man? Were you disappointed your mother never arrived to save you…or relieved, to finally spill more blood to smudge those hands of yours in?” Tyrian asks her, and she closes her eye and turns away from the mirror and walks towards the bed he slept it, sitting on the edge of it, hearing him again.

She may not look at him, but he is sat atop the windowsill with his leg bent up and his tail wrapped around his knee. “You’re not strong enough to defeat Vir Nominis Umbra. You’re not strong enough to kill Salem. You couldn’t do it alone, you couldn’t do it with your friends. Your father, never knew when to lay down…he was too proud, and like Ilia Amitola…you will die the same way.” He tells her, and with every word she clenches her fist and stands back up, trying to escape the voices that keep speaking to her.

She walks towards the open door…

…but she stops, and parts with some last words to him.

“Then I’ll die if I have to. That’s the difference between you and me, Tyrian. I’m not afraid to die, if it means it will stop him. I will do whatever takes…no matter the cost.”

She walks away from his cell, leaving it behind.

And nothing more than dust and silence settles upon the Son of the Fractured Eclipse’s Cell.
The Activation Towers - Pt. 1

Blake

She walks carefully, feeling like every eye in the city is watching her. Judging her, plotting against her...it feels just like how things were back when she was hiding who she was to the world. Except this time, the world actually has a piece of evidence to shove in her face for why they hate her. Even if it is false, created by Vir Nominis Umbra when he murdered Sienna Khan in Blake’s appearance.

The fact he managed to mimic her personality, her entire body, her clothing...he most likely has the scar from when Adam stabbed her. The smallest scratch on her finger, the creases around her waist from her trousers she wears. It scares her, it scares them all, of how perfectly Vir Nominis Umbra can change into somebody. There is literally no telling that it is not them, until it is too late. As Sienna found out the hard way...but even then, she died before he even changed forms.

Her last thoughts were the idea of Blake betraying her so then she could take over the reigns of the White Fang and kill every last Human that stood in her path. And now...it has all fallen apart, everything they worked so hard to build, nothing more than broken shards of glass being crushed under every footfall taken by those who go about their business. Her black feline ears twitch to every comment, all of the words though have nothing to do with her. Some of them are talking about the increased military presence in the city at the moment, others are talking about what they had for dinner last night, and others about the chaos that has been spreading across the world.

As Blake walks, she feels the gentle squeeze of Ren’s hand on her shoulder and she gasps, turning to see him walking beside her. “You doing okay, Blake? You’re quiet.” Ren asks her as he walks beside her with his arms moving behind his back once more. Blake stammers as she lowers her head.

How can she answer that question? Of course, she is stressed out and scared right now. They have seen first hand what Umbra can do, the White Fang is worse than ever before, Sun is dying, and she cannot help him apart from looking for a Violet and to top it all off the world is nearing its end and everyone hates her.

There’s that inner feeling to just let it all out, to scream her anguish away to the clouds where nobody can hear her. But they have a duty, a mission, and they must accomplish it, so she swallows her inner pain and she answers her good friend. “I guess...just got a lot on my mind y’know?” She says to him as she glances back to his eyes, and he nods his head, agreeing and understanding. It is easy to forget how many of them were at the roundup, when Vir Nominis Umbra killed them right in front of them all. None felt more horrified than Penny, especially when Umbra flicked Oobleck’s blood across her face. She too is quiet as she walks with them, keeping her head low as she thinks, and Nora walks beside her.

“I understand what you mean.” He says to her, and she scoffs.

“How can you answer that question? Of course, she is stressed out and scared right now. They have seen first hand what Umbra can do, the White Fang is worse than ever before, Sun is dying, and she cannot help him apart from looking for a Violet and to top it all off the world is nearing its end and everyone hates her.

“I understand what you mean.” He says to her, and she scoffs.

“Do you? The world wants me dead for that video that Umbra made...hell I’m surprised we haven’t been jumped yet. The man I love is dying from a disease that will turn him into a feral monster if we don’t cure it, and the very Organisation I was once a part of has fallen further than ever before.” Blake explains, listing the reasons behind her stress levels are skyrocketing right now. Ren looks at her and he sighs, looking down at the floor as they walk down the paths, the outskirts of Sanctum Academy.
“I guess I don’t…but I do know how you feel…that feeling of just being lost and stuck in a rushing river. When we wanted to be Huntsmen and Huntresses, we never signed up to fight a monster that destroyed entire Universes. It frightens me, our odds are not looking good and that is what scares me.” Ren admits as he walks with her, then his eyes move to Nora as she walks with her Grenade Launcher in her hands, and she watches the many people that are walking towards them.

“I just… I want this to be over. I find myself hoping all of this is a bad dream, that this all ended at the Volcanic Chain Isles. But I know it’s real…and that makes it even worse.” Blake stammers as she walks, and Ren nods his head.

“I know – but, I believe we can do it. Vir Nominis Umbra is powerful, but whatever Merlot found spooked him, spooked him enough that it could kill him. Whatever he found in that city, it could explain why he destroyed it before us.” Ren explains, and he brings up a very, very good point. Why destroy an entire Empire when he did, it is not like their technology could rival him, he is beyond anything they can ever imagine. So why did he decide to end the Empire when he did?

Perhaps Ren is right…

Perhaps it is because the Arkhoni found something, something that could actually defeat Vir Nominis Umbra once and for all. It is just a theory now, but it is the best kind of theory they have had than the number of defeated events in recent days. Blake looks at him and she opens her mouth to speak, until suddenly a gun fires and the bullet just misses Blake’s head and she gasps in shock, from how close that was to killing her. They scatter to see a Faunus holding a handgun and he fires it again at her, but luckily her aura has been activated, blocking the shot from harming her. Purple energy crackling around the points of which the aura got hit.

The Faunus keeps firing his pistol, screaming with rage at the young Belladonna Warrior. “Traitorous Murderer!” The Faunus screams, and Blake figures out why he is attacking immediately, either he is a White Fang Supporter or merely wants to try and avenge Sienna Khan’s passing. Her work touched so many people in great ways, and after changing the ways of the Fang from violence to peaceful approaches as her father wanted – she was revelled as a hero.

A Hero that the world believes Blake Belladonna murdered all for power.

Blake deflects the incoming bullets with Gambol Shroud, slashing them out of the air, before she blasts forward and kicks the man in the head, extremely hard. He crashes to the ground, knocked unconscious from his attack, and the scared people stare at Blake – in fear. They all know what she did, and she pants with fear in return, scared that they will attack her. “I…I didn’t kill her.”

“Liar…” A Faunus woman snarls, and her eyes turn to her, and it stabs hard when she sees the striking resemblance. It isn’t her, and she never had any surviving relatives – but the Chameleon Faunus stares directly at her as she stands tall, her fists clenched, and she points at her. “You murdered her…you murdered Sienna Khan, and you dare think you can walk among us?” She yells with anger, and Penny stares at the Faunus who yells at Blake, who lowers her head and closes her eyes.

“I swear…it wasn’t me…it was someone else, who disguised themselves as me…” Blake whimpers fearfully of them.

“You’re nothing more than a murderous bitch. I hope every single human who ever sets their eyes on you will attack you. None will ever lay a table for you, and I pray that not even your ashes will remain for people to remember you by.” The Faunus snarls viciously, until Penny suddenly does something very out of character. She takes her clenched fist and she swings it right round the jaw of the woman, knocking her down onto the ground, and she yells in immense fury, something that they
also have never seen before.

“LEAVE MY FRIEND ALONE!” Penny screams in anger with her fists clenched, and the woman – now brandishing a dark bruise on her face – crawls back from the young Android.

“Freaks! The lot of you!” The Faunus screams, getting up and running away from them, and the rest of the crowd part. They all give Blake a sinister glare as they walk away, and then they leave. Blake drops her sword and her emotions well up, and she collapses to the ground, crying as she covers her eyes with her hands. Nora holsters her Grenade Launcher and she crouches down beside the crying Blake Belladonna.

“It’s okay, Blake. Just ignore them, they don’t know the things we know.” Nora says, and Blake’s words are utterly heart wrenching.

“He died…for NOTHING!” Blake cries out, and they all know who she is talking about. Adam Taurus…

Ren lowers his head sadly for her, because in a way she is completely right. “That framing Umbra did! It broke Adam away from us, and I killed him because of it…he died for no reason…all for Umbra’s cruelty!” She sobs as she covers her tear eyes with her hands, and Nora gently massages her back. Penny turns and she looks at Blake, and that rage fades away instantly and she crouches down in front of Blake, and she holds her hands gently.

“That isn’t true.” Penny tells her, and Blake pauses for a second, sniffling as she slowly lifts her head and looks at Penny.

“W-What do…do you mean?” She stammers through harsh breaths.

“Adam…I didn’t know him very well…but he struck me as a man that wanted to do the right thing. He may have fallen for the lie, yes…but he has not died for nothing. Nobody has died for nothing – because we can still remember him. He has helped us get this far.” She says to her, and Blake looks at her large green synthetic eyes as she stammers.

“B-But…he deserved…”

“He deserved better…I know. We all do…but we don’t always get what we deserve.” Penny says as she looks at her hands and she sighs. “I know…I know what I am, Blake. Pyrrha told me about it, what she told all of you? About Ortega and me?” She asks her and Blake looks at her and then at Nora and Ren. They both sigh as they look down, since it is a sad story – a story that changed their view on Darren Ortega forever. “I know that…I’m not real, I’ve always known. I know now that I was his daughter, and that I’m that experiment he and Merlot have been working on. I also know I’m a failure – but I’m still here. And she isn’t.”

“What are you trying to say, Penny?” Blake questions.

“That we don’t always get to choose how our stories start or end…but that what matters is how we deal with what we are given.” Penny explains, and those words really sit with them, because she is right. They do not get a choice in how they are born, and nobody really chooses how they die, even suicide is driven by something beyond their own control. Whether it is their mind, being forced by another or maybe because there is no way out and it is the most painless solution.

Real greatness is to deal with the hand you’re dealt. “And for those we lose…it is our job to make sure that they don’t die in vain. This fight isn’t over, Blake. And until it is – Adam has not died for nothing, and we will make sure it stays that way.” Penny explains, leaving Blake dumbfounded at
her words. None of them expected something like that to come from the sweet and adorable Penny Polendina. But she has grown, just as she said.

Penny stands up and she holds out her hand with a smile on her face as she offers to help Blake up to her feet. “You’re a good friend, Penny.” Blake sniffs as she wipes her tears from her bloodshot eyes, rising back up with Penny’s Android arm pulling her up with ease. Blake looks at the unconscious Faunus who attacked her and caused her to have a bit of a mental breakdown – she blows out a breath and musters her courage. The four of them continue on their path towards the Tower.

Which is around the now Acolytes of Lien controlled Academy of Sanctum. As they walk past the many houses and restaurants, barber shops, tattoo shops and countless other shops…Nora looks at Penny and she walks right beside her. “When did Pyrrha tell you?” Nora inquires, since she was at Atlas when Pyrrha found this out. None of them even noticed that Ortega managed to infiltrate the Atlesian Facility completely undetected.

Either that shows his skill, the incompetence of Atlesian security – or both.

“Before we left Beacon. She stopped me and wanted to talk to me about what Ortega told her – she sat me down and told me everything.” Penny answers, and Nora chuckles.

“I must admit, you’re taking it better than I would.” Nora states as she shrugs her shoulders. “I’d be freaking out.”

“It’s…puzzling…but I have always known I am not real. I mean I know I am still a person, Ruby taught me that a long time ago. But I am still not like you…I’m a machine that was built. But I never realised I am a pale imitation of another man’s daughter.” Penny explains, and those words make Nora feel sad for her. It is not something that she can relate to, not something many people can relate to.

“You’re no pale imitation…you’re a hero.” She assures.

“Well that’s a bit much.” Penny giggles.

“If it weren’t for you, Yang would’ve been killed by Brawnz. If it weren’t for you Ruby would have been hit by a truck. You’re a hero, Penny.” Nora assures as she bumps her shoulder with a smile on her face, and Penny smiles shyly to her friend.

“I guess. I still may not be the original Penny…but…I am okay with that. End of the day, this is a second chance that the old Penny never had. So…I guess I can make it right. To make sure she didn’t die for nothing, y’know?” Penny asks Nora, and the Valkyrie smiles and nods her head. Then she chuckles as she listens to how sweet and kind this little android is.

“Do you ever think about yourself? Like ever?” Nora inquires. “Because even now you’re thinking about the old Penny.”

“What I want doesn’t matter, seeing other people happy…that’s what matters.” Penny tells her with a smile on her face.

That is what makes Nora think of a pair of words to describe Penny.

Pure Good.

She literally is a good person, who could never do wrong. It is incredible and shows that when there is Pure Evil like Vir Nominis Umbra – there is also Pure Good as well.
The four continue walking down the street, and as they turn, they all stop, and their eyes widen when they hear… and feel something. The reverberating rumble of some kind of massive vehicle, and they all dive to take cover, hiding in the alleyways and crouching into the shadows. Nora and Ren hide behind the right alley by a dumpster, whilst Blake and Penny take cover behind some boxes, weapons at the ready.

The Convoy approaches, and they are armed to the teeth. Acolytes of Lien, and there must be at least forty-foot soldiers. Gliding above them is a Glider Jockey, with his hovercraft beneath his armoured legs, blasting green energy down from its thrusters as it hovers above them. There are lots of heavy troopers here as well, Tremor Troopers, Whiplash Marchers, Juggernauts, Seekers and countless others. Then there is the massive Tank that drives along, with a huge Railgun Cannon atop the armoured body. Black and Red with golden accents across the thick armour, Blake’s eyes wide as she stares at the level of weaponry these mercenaries have now.

They have heard of this tank before – Hellfire Tanks – they are terrifying weapons used by the Atlesian Military. The reason why they are so huge is because the treads can transform into legs, so then it can shift into a Mortar or Anti-Air Cannon. But at the moment it is only using the huge treads, which a poor abandoned bike gets completely crushed and ripped apart by the treads. The metal snaps and bends inside, hardly even effecting its path.

More Acolytes of Lien pass by the alleys as they hide, feeling the vibrations through the stone as it passes. Penny holds two of her swords in her hands, ready to fight if she must, but only if. There are also some Marksman inside of some Bullheads that follow the convoy, long red beams of light shooting down from their rifles as they search for their targets. They must be searching for them and have their names on their list of High Priority Targets.

One of the Juggernauts walks towards their alleyways and he extends his huge mechanical machine gun and the three barrels push out from the armoured arm, and he aims it down the path, slowly spinning the barrels. But luckily, they keep their heads down, to avoid him spotting their positions. Ren grits his teeth as he grasps Stormflower firmly, about to attack if it goes wrong. “Clear.” The Juggernaut says, before deactivating the machine gun and moving off.

They wait a little longer as the Convoy moves off, through the District, leaving them behind. The Marketplace awaits them, alongside the Tower that they need to get inside of. But they also need to get around Sanctum as well. They get out from cover as the Convoy is far enough away. “Gods… those Mercs were packing some serious heat.” Nora says as she looks back at the soldiers’ path, tread marks imbedded in the tarmac and the crushed bicycle.

“Atlesian Technology…we should’ve expected their weaponry to improve after taking over the Kingdom.” Blake sighs as she stands tall, her weapon still unsheathed. Ren walks down the path and he listens through the walls of the Academy. He peers through one of the cracks, and he can see something quite worrying. Huntsmen and Huntresses, being taught by Acolytes of Lien – meaning that they have Huntsmen on their side now as well. If they have Huntsmen, that will make battling them a lot harder.

“Come on…we need to keep moving.” Ren says as he aims Stormflower, carefully walking round the walls before he aims them both as he emerges from cover. They are clear and the rest follow him, and they walk down the pathway towards the market. The many voices can be heard as they exchange their products for lien, so they holster their weapons as they enter to prevent further problems from occurring. Nora walks past some of the people as they stand at the stalls, the delicious smell of food filling the air and countless different products being sold to people.

Blake’s eyes widen and she gasps, staring at a grilled fish on a barbecue – if it wasn’t for Nora
pinching her ear and pulling her away, she probably would have eaten it. “Aw c’mon…” Blake groans as they keep their eyes focused on the massive tower that stands before them. The interesting thing about these towers is that despite the time that they have been standing, they all look identical. Massive towers with an almost Lighthouse like shape to them. It is odd, but at the same time ingenious.

You place multiple towers that look the same and only one can open such an important transportation system. Makes it harder for enemies to infiltrate, and easier for those protecting it to shut the system down if they attack the wrong tower. They push through some of the crowds, from food to clothing and some even seem to be shady Black-Market dealers – but they finally get to the unoccupied doors. End of the day the Arkhoni Guards are long dead now, meaning they can get inside of the building without any trouble unlike ancient raiders.

Ren and Blake look at each other and they nod, whilst Penny and Nora stand guard as they watch the crowd, but most importantly for Acolytes of Lien Mercenaries to attack them. “I wasn’t expecting the presence of Acolytes of Lien here to be…this serious.” Blake strains as she slams her shoulder against the wooden doors, and it jolts, nearly opening, but the lock is still in place.

“I know, Umbra must have…informed…them.” Ren grunts, slamming his shoulder into it as well. They both back up then they rush the doors, smashing them open and they swing open and stumble down to the ground, rolling across the old dusty floor. Blake lands on her back and she sighs, blowing her long black hair from her face. Ren gets up and pulls her back to her feet as Nora and Penny walk inside, looking around at the place.

Ancient High Arkhoni Hieroglyphics everywhere.

Nora looks at the bracelet she has on her wrist, so she holds her hand to the markings, and she scans them to learn what these symbols mean. The database of Arkhoni Language inside the bracelet analyses the symbols – and then they get the words translated for them.

*None forgot about the Bloody Epoch. After hundreds of years of building Civilisation from the caves we were born, we fought over the trivial. Spilled blood over gold and oil and killed for nothing more than things we wanted.*

*These are things we must never forget, if we forget our past then we are destined to repeat it.*

Blake reads Nora’s Bracelet and she softly chuckles a smile. “Oobleck would be smiling now…to know that ancient Doctors like him had the same mindset.” Blake says, remembering what Jaune told her about Oobleck’s statement about learning from history. And it is so true, if you never learn from your missteps then you will be forced to make the same mistakes again and again until you fall.

Or make things right.

“Obviously they didn’t…otherwise maybe they would still be here.” Nora sighs as she lowers her hand, looking around at the place. Ren listens and he sighs.

“The Architect told us we would feel an energy source inside of these towers…but I don’t feel anything.” Ren says.

“Let’s still check.” Nora says with the shrug of her shoulders.

But after they investigated every nook and cranny…they conclude that this Tower is not the one they are looking for.

One down, three more in Argus to go.
His amber eyes stare at the map that they have placed atop the bonnet of the car that they rented. He keeps pondering as he scours the different paths and locations to the towers, the different layers and possible Acolytes of Lien Patrol Patterns in the city. They know they are here, but not the extreme amount that have just arrived. If they are not careful, they will end up having an intense battle on their hands. Coco walks over to him with her fully loaded Chaingun in her hand and now dressed back up into her combat gear, just like everyone else. “Can’t help thinking there’s something we’re missed.” Kassius sighs as he stares at the three circled locations of the towers. Just as Ruby’s Team did, they have taken pictures of the analysed map with their scrolls for reference in the future.

“Don’t think about it.” Coco advises as she pulls her sunglasses from where they were snugly fit into her bosom. She flicks them open and fits them over her nose and before her eyes, looking at him as she blows the long quiff of caramel hair from her eye. Kassius exhales, knowing she’s right and that it would all be better if they agree to not overthink the plan.

“Alright, are we ready to decide how we do this?” Kassius asks her, and she nods her head with a smile.

“Ready, boss. Yo, underlings! Get over here.” Coco chuckles, and Velvet raises her eyebrow and Emerald scoffs as she approaches.

“Alright Salem.” Emerald scoffs, making Coco chortle as she thinks on that. Kassius pushes his hands against the bonnet, causing the vehicle to softly bounce due to the pressure on the suspension. He looks at the four of them and he looks back to the map that has the details marked out.

“There’s five of us and three towers, remember what the guy at the party said last night?” Kassius asks them, and they nod their heads.

“Yeah, they detected some kind of power reading throughout these towers, but we know only one of them is the one we’re looking for.” Cardin says with his arms crossed, leant against the side of the car.

“Meaning we need to check all three out.” Velvet adds.

“Exactly – now I think I have come up with a good plan. We don’t have time for all of us to investigate the three towers, two of them are on opposite sides of the city and the other is slap bang in the centre of the Market Town. So, this is what I propose.” Kassius begins, picking up the red capped pen and pulling the lid off with his teeth, creating a satisfying pop. He marks down the names of which he has chosen to investigate certain towers.

They all look at the map and they then look at him. “Cardin and Emerald, you two check out the one in the Market Town. Coco and Velvet, the two of you will head to the one up there.” Kassius says and they turn to see the cliff face.

“You mean climb up there?” Coco asks him with a raised eyebrow.

“You guys can handle that, right?” Kassius asks her, and the two women grin, and they look at each other.

“Of course.” Velvet agrees, but Emerald is the one to notice something rather concerning in the plan
– but it is indeed something they cannot avoid.

“Wait…you’re going solo?” She asks Kassius and he nods his head.

“Yeah.” Kassius says as he sets the pen down on the table, and then the concern spreads to Velvet’s face as well.

“Kassius, you can’t. It’s too dangerous to go alone, you know how many Acolytes are in this city.” She states, but Kassius sighs and he shakes his head.

“I know that, but it is the only option we have.” Kassius says.

“You’ll be alone!” Velvet argues.

“I take offense to that.” Hyde says inside of Kassius’ head as he hears her completely disregarding his existence just then.

“I won’t be alone, Velvet. I’ve got Hyde with me. We’ll get to the Tower, investigate it and see if there is anything of interest inside of it. If there isn’t, I head back to down, head for the Ship. One of these Towers is the one, we know it couldn’t be the one that collapsed because the Tower would be open. As the Architect told me, they are locking mechanisms, not used to open them.” Kassius explains as he walks around, but Velvet still seems extremely worried, until Coco stops her.

“Velv, he’s right. We don’t have time to try and figure this out. Splitting up is our best option.” Coco states, and Velvet sigh.

“Damn it.” She says.

Kassius walks back over to them and they all look at him. “Alright…alright fine…just be careful. There’s not many of us.” Velvet reminds, and she is right. Unlike Ruby’s end of the spectrum they are only five, whereas Ruby’s team have sixteen people on site.

“How’re you planning on getting to that tower anyway? It’s pretty far.” Cardin asks Kassius, and the Stetson Wearing Huntsman smiles as he turns his attention to a motorcycle. It might not be his, but it is close enough. Meaning he knows how to use it, so he looks back and he shrugs his shoulders.

“I’ll do what I do best…I improvise.” Kassius says with jazz hands. Kassius approaches the motorcycle and he searches through the wiring so then he can hotwire it the same way a car can. Luckily it works, bring the engine to life and Velvet stands beside him, looking at him as he sits on the seat. He looks at her and he nods, there is clearly a few mixed feelings surrounding Velvet’s confession. But neither comment on it.

“Okay, if you run into any Acolytes, you’ll let us know, right?” Velvet asks him.

Kassius nods. “See ya soon.” Kassius assures, he spins the wheels and he rides off, driving up the roads that head to the upper levels that will eventually lead him to the tower in question. Coco and Velvet head towards the cliff face where they must climb to get to the Tower, whereas Cardin and Emerald are left with the car. Cardin taps her arm to get Emerald’s attention.

“C’mon, Em. We gotta hurry.” Cardin says to her and she nods her head, following him to the truck so then they can get to the Market District.

Yenna
The sound of crashing waves never stops being so soothing for the warriors, and their path has led them to the Eastern Cliffs of Argus, overlooking the city and the ocean itself. Yenna stands by the face of the cliffs, looking down at the city that looks so peaceful and she sighs, knowing that all this could be just ashes in the wind if they do not find a way to stop him.

But even still…it is a beautiful view.

The air is so clean here, and the smell of the sea water always brings such serenity to all those who come here. Yenna turns her gaze to see Ozpin, doing the same thing. He holds his cane in his hands as he stares out at the seemingly endless ocean before him, his cloak blowing in the wind as it passes up the face of the hill. He then turns after his contemplations, walking towards the Tower that stands at the head of the cliffs. The Tower is indeed gorgeous, and perfectly intact after all these years.

Quite astounding in fact.

Yenna blows out a breath through her nose, before she follows the old man and her beloved husband as they approach the tower. But as she walks towards it, Winter walks over to her as well. She has her arms behind her back as always, maintaining that formal stance she always has that desire to hold onto every single day. Even though her place in the Atlesian Military is well and truly diminished now that the Kingdom is infested with Mercenaries. The Spring Maiden walks alongside the Former Atlesian Specialist, and Winter finally speaks. “Yenna…can I ask you something?” Winter asks, and Yenna raises her dark brow, looking at her with her violet eyes.

“You’re already working your way around to it.” Yenna states as she walks beside her, and Winter sighs.

“When we were in the mountains…the Whisperer…it said something to you. I saw a woman’s face, she looked like you but older. Who was it?” Winter asks her, and Yenna slows down as she closes her eyes, remembering her face all too well. She sighs sadly as she stares down at her feet.

“That…was my mother. The Duchess of Azula.” Yenna explains as she stands there, remembering what her mother said to her all too well.

Daughter…what a disappointment you really are

Winter looks at her, seeing that pain in her eyes, and she sighs as she scratches the back of her head as she starts feeling the memories start flushing back. “She wasn’t…a kind mother. My cold nature, it came from her.” Yenna explains, turning her eyes back to Winter, leaving her surprised since it was her father who was the cruel one in the Schnee Family. But even then, Willow Schnee was no sain, she just drowned herself in wine and never helped raise her daughters and son, leaving that all to Klein. “The Azula Name…it wasn’t as well known as Schnee, or Nikos or Arc. We were rich, but we never had any qualities that made us memorable. My mother was the strongest of the family, my father was a weak-willed man who was easily swayed. She was a very cruel woman, if anyone was not the way she wanted them to be, she would change you. Like a clay maker…she would beat you down and reform you. I cannot count how many times I woke up with bruises because I wanted to be…different.” Yenna explains with a sigh as she rubs parts of her body where phantom pains faintly return before fading away once more.

All this…it is scarily familiar, just the parents have been switched around. “I’m sorry…if this is…”

“Don’t worry about it. She’s long gone now.” She assures with a smile, and Yenna walks with Winter towards the edge of the cliff. She sits down and her long black hair blows in the wind as she
sighs. “My mother wanted to be like the Schnees, she learned how to remove all pigment from her hair so then it would be white like theirs. She wanted their riches, and their strength. But her Semblance? It was nothing more than a weak form of Telekinesis – she could barely even lift a coin with it.” Yenna explains, remembering how many times when she was a little girl, she witnessed her mother trying to use her semblance.

“Did it never strengthened?” Winter asks.

“No, and that angered her. So, she liked to take it out on me, burning me with candles, beating me in the corner…ripping my dresses in front of me and making me feel completely useless.” Yenna sighs as she rubs her knees, remembering the sight of her mother humiliating her in front of her family every single day.

“I’m sorry, that couldn’t have been easy.” She says to her with a sad voice.

“I once wished to be a Duchess like her…a fucked-up idol I know. But I wanted to be better than her, marry a powerful man and crush her down like she did to me…but then the Congregation of Dawn came along.” Yenna explains with a heavy sigh.

“What do they have to do with this?” Winter inquires.

“Well…you know my mother was a cruel woman, and anyone that she deemed different was a target in her eyes? Well the Faunus were included, anyone who had a different sexuality to her? They were abominations. The man I fell in love with – before I met Kragen this is – he was a Faunus. When my mother learned of this…she called upon the Congregation and she tied me to a chair…and made me watch…watch as they strapped him to a stake…and burned him alive…right in front of me.” Yenna explains, and Winter’s eyes widen with horror.

The words her mother said…they still linger even now. *If you cannot follow me to the path of enlightenment, then you can join your disgusting friend.* “I wanted to kill her…I tried to on multiple occasions, took a knife and went to stab her, but she would always stop me from doing so. She would have her guards watch me…every night…I was only nineteen when this happened. In a way I kinda…welcomed Arkhonex being destroyed. My Father vanished, I never did learn where he went, but my mother ran after the Father of Dawn killed himself upon forming the Mountains. I lost sight of her, and I had to fight and climb my way out of Arkhonex. Escaping the monsters as they ate people alive, men women and children. It was a nightmare…but it gave me freedom.” Yenna states, and then she sighs with a smile as she looks at Kragen.

“That’s when you found him, wasn’t it?” She asks her.

“It was…he was a young man then, like me. Everyone described him as a wizard, but he wasn’t. He was just alone…and when I found him, with three other surviving women…we helped him. And in the end, he used the Relics to grant us the Powers of the Maidens. Cynthia Nikos was one of them, she was inside of the city when it fell as well.” Yenna explains, looking at Winter and the Schnee chuckles.

“Tough girl.” Winter says.

“Very tough.”

“She started the Silver Eyed Warriors, didn’t she? I mean there were Silver Eyed Fighters before, but it was her original idea, right?” Winter asks, remembering the story that Kragen told them all when they first met him in Dragonspire Keep.
“Correct. It was after the city fell, and many Silver Eyed Warriors either died inside the walls or ran. But when Kragen and I had to part ways from that skirmish that hit us…I was alone again. The world was in total chaos after the city fell the way it did, it wasn’t fighting for nations or Family Houses like in the past. It was mainly violent and wild fighting for survival, all sense of loyalty disappeared, and civilisation turned to savagery in months. Soon it turned to years.” Yenna explains, shuddering as she remembers those dark years.

“How long did it last?” Winter asks her.

“Eighty-six years.” Yenna answers, and Winter’s eyes widen with horror. “It nearly ended Humanity and the Faunus. Countless Family Houses were lost and forgotten, the Varr Skaal never made it back to this generation like the Schnees Nikos and Arc families. But luckily many survived the eighty years – you need to remember, because of the advancements our people had we actually managed to live up to two hundred years. The Eighty Years though, it did wither that away. It’s why your ages are now mainly limited to eighty to one hundred years.” Yenna explains – two hundred years people could live to back in the ages of Arkhonex…that is a scary long time. But people simply aged different, lives were doubled, meaning that childhoods were doubled, and adulthood the same.

“What happened to your family? The Azula?” Winter inquires, and Yenna chuckles.

“Well my Father was never found but considering the thousands of years that have passed since he disappeared from us…I can assume he is dead too. But my mother? Well I learned where she had disappeared off to.” Yenna explains, and Winter looks at Yenna as she sits there, tapping her fingers against her knees.

“Where did she go?” Winter asks her.

“She located an ancient fortress, one that was used during the Bloody Epoch – a long horrible war over the trivial years before Arkhonex fell – so she amassed the last surviving members of the Congregation of Dawn – and she created a new following. The Resurgence of Dawn.” Yenna explains, she picks up a stick on the ground and she draws their symbol from memory – a sun made of blades and the broken antlers of Faunus. A cruel symbol, but perhaps it is best that they were forgotten.

“You went after her, didn’t you?” Winter inquires.

“I couldn’t let the Congregation of Dawn come back, when Kragen and I were together in that hut for a few years before the Skirmish struck our lands – we talked about what would happen now. He always said that this mindless chaos would end someday, when all the violent leaders of these factions are dead and their names buried in the ashes, a new world would be born from all the death. I couldn’t risk the Congregation of Dawn return and control you all, the Faunus would be extinct, and you would be forced into a single way of living.” Yenna explains to Winter, clenching her hand into a fist. “And…of course I had my personal reasons behind it.”

“Did you find her?” Winter inquires.

“Eventually, but I wasn’t alone. My journey lead me to find an old friend – Cynthia Nikos. She and I worked together, and we agreed the Congregation of Dawn must be stopped.” Yenna states.

“Cynthia was with you? What about the rest of her family?” Winter inquires.

“Most of her family name died out, her father…well he committed some terrible acts to try and save the world. Her mother was killed by a Swarm of Grimm in the attack on Arkhonex and most of her bloodline were wiped out. Except for her brother, who survived and helped carry the Nikos
bloodline into the new world.” Yenna explains to her. Winter sits there as she comprehends this unknown information, but all of it makes sense.

“Did you have Silver Eyed Warriors at your side?” Winter asks her.

“No…no…the Silver Eyed Warriors she was training at the time were wiped out. The old fort – Dragonspire Keep – was decimated in an attack. It was only when Kragen happened upon its years later did he repair it with the Architect’s help. He rebuilt it all, and slowly reformed the Warriors.” Yenna states, and Winter sighs.

“The Silver Eyed Warriors didn’t have the greatest luck, did they? Got wiped out in Arkhonex, then got wiped out again after Arkhonex fell – and now they are being hunted like flies by Umbra and Salem.” Winter lists, making Yenna chuckle.

“Yeah, they really were dealt a pretty harsh hand, weren’t they?” Yenna agrees.

“At least they managed to pull it back.” Winter says as she watches a Seagull fighting against the powerful winds from the ocean beneath it. It glides beneath their feet as they dangle over the edge of the cliff.

“Yes, they did. Cynthia fought hard, especially when she had to suffer with the corruption from within.” Yenna states, and Winter nods her head as she remembers.

“Salem…” Winter says.

“Did Kragen tell you about her? The fact she was once a Silver Eyed Warrior like Cynthia?” Yenna asks her curiously.

“Yes, back when we first met him. He told us that she had a hunger in her, always wanted to find something – and that lead to her destroying the Silver Eyed Warriors from within.” Winter remembers, and Yenna nods her head.

“Well, Cynthia was lucky to escape. She told me about what happened…it must have been terrified. But even then, she had grown up a whole lot since the early days. I forgot that a couple times – until I saw her in action.” Yenna explains, and then she closes her eyes as she remembers it. “We hit the old Fortress together, promised we would use our powers to stop the evil once and for all. And we did exactly that, we blew through my mother’s soldiers, and burned the whole place down.”

“And your mother?” Winter inquires, and Yenna looks at her.

“I found her…sat on a throne…and Cynthia let me do the rest. I looked into her eyes as I killed her, and I let her know that this one time – I was better than her…that I won.” Yenna explains, remembering it all so well as she took the sword on the ground and stabbed it straight through her mother’s heart. Winter looks at Yenna, seeing a bit of that enjoyment in her eyes – the Spring Maiden may be on their side, but there is a bit of a sadistic side to her. At least to those who are her enemies, luckily, they are her friends.

Yenna sighs. “And that was the end for them…when I killed my mother, the Resurgence of Dawn was forever destroyed, and because nobody was around to remember it…or hated them…the religion faded away into dust. And new ones formed, some good and some bad. Funnily enough without records history tends to repeat itself. The Great War, Humanity and the Faunus Wars…it just never ends.” Yenna sighs as she stares at the sea.

“What happened to Cynthia?” Winter inquires, and Yenna looks at the Schnee.
“Well…I do not rightly know for sure, but I know she died fighting at least. She told me she had her own mission – she was looking for someone in Arkhonex, and I assume it must have been Salem. She was filled with anger, I could see it in her ferocity when she fought. She told me she wanted to find her brother…but he was with Vyrryk, and she trusted him to do the right thing for her family. She lost everything…so she went to try and kill Salem.” Yenna explains, and she sighs, bowing her head.

They both remain silent until Winter speaks. “At least she tried.” Winter says.

“Yes…yes she did.” Yenna agrees, since that is all you can do at the end of the day.

“Her brother was with Vyrryk?” Winter asks.

“I heard many stories on my long road, and I heard about Vyrryk. He got a lot older from before Arkhonex fell, and he was saving everyone he could find, different family bloodlines protected. He was protecting an Artefact…and I am guessing it must be Crocea Mors.” Yenna explains.

“Do you know where his sword came from?” Winter asks, but Yenna shakes her head.

“Vyrryk and the surviving Arcs kept their secrets well. Perhaps it was for the best.” Yenna says as she continues to look out at the ocean. She exhales, before she gets back up.

“Ozpin said the Winter Maiden powers disappeared…Kragen once told us that Salem had the power.” Winter questions.

“She did, she took Cynthia’s power. But when Ozpin and Kragen worked together a few centuries ago, they managed to rip the power from her soul with a similar idea as Cinder’s with the Scarab. They took it and gave it to another, and hid it from Salem. And now it lost once again…perhaps one day we may find it again.” Yenna states as she shrugs her shoulders.

Yenna stands up and she sighs. “Come on, let’s go look at this tower.” She says, offering her hand to Winter. The Specialist nods her head and accepts the Spring Maiden’s hand, standing up with her.

The two of them walk to Kragen and Ozpin as they approach the closed doors of the Tower. Ozpin slams his fist straight into the doors with a grunt, his powerful magical energy helping him retain the power he once had. He walks into the Tower and they all look around, Kragen entering behind him, until he winces in pain and grabs his side where his wound is still healing.

Ozpin spins round and catches Kragen by his hand, stopping him from falling. “Are you alright, Kragen?” Ozpin asks him, and Kragen coughs, nodding his head, and Ozpin huffs. “Sit down for a second, you should be resting.” Ozpin states.

“I am not going to sit around…a second longer. I’ve been waiting for thousands of years…I am not about to give up.” Kragen strains.

“You’re no help if you’re dead. Take a second.” He states, and Ozpin looks around as both Yenna and Winter enter the tower.

“Been a while since I’ve been inside one of these Towers.” Yenna comments as she looks around at the markings on the wall. As she stares at the silhouettes, she is able to translate them without the need of the Architect’s technology. “Too much blood was spilled, for something so materialistic…the Bloody Epoch.” Yenna says, and Winter raises her brow.

“You keep mentioning it.” Winter comments.

“It was a war that surrounded the ownership of a painting.” Ozpin states, and Winter gasps with
disbelief at how…petty…such a war truly is.

“A Painting?” She questions.

“I’m afraid so…two nations torn apart and they fought over who better owned it. Arkhonex won, and the other city was left in the dust…do you remember the Library we investigated?” Kragen asks Winter, and she looks back at him.

“I do.” She replies.

“Well that building was one of them. The city was called Sunhelm – they were not as powerful as Arkhonex or Ephai, but they believed they deserved it. The War ended with the entire city being wiped out.” Kragen tells her, and she looks utterly shocked.

“Innocents died…for a painting?” Winter questions, Ozpin turns to face her.

“It’s as we said…Arkhonex was far from perfect. Millions died over that war…for nothing.” Ozpin states, and then he walks to the other side of the room as he searches for any possible clues to see if this is the right tower. But as Winter walks around, they all jolt when a ghostly apparition appears before them all. His body is fractured from the echoes of time, but it is just like what Kassius and his team saw in Vytal – an echo in time.

The voice is also speaking in their tongue so then they can understand. “Sunhelm Ships incoming! Prepare the Shields! Raise the Walls! Ready and Steel Yourselves Men! A Siege is about to begin…let’s show these Sun Worshippers what happened to those who challenge our might.” The Commander cheers, the distant cheering roars of his soldiers echoing in the distance as he fades away. Winter looks at the ghost of the man as he stands there before he finally fades away.

“We were so confident…we never realised that everything we worked so hard to build would be torn down in a single night.” Ozpin says with a heavy sigh as he walks around the room more. Yenna looks around, when she sees something tucked underneath an old crate left behind. She crouches down and pulls the slip of paper out, and she reads what is written upon it.

Day 12

Barnes is certain now, more certain than I have ever seen the man. He knows that we can finish her work at long last, finally locate the Fountain that she found in that book. We are all so proud of him to make it this far, it is what she would have wanted, she did trust him with this expedition after all.

I wish Robin could be here to see how far we have come with this, but there is a slight problem. We have been searching the entire city for these stupid towers and not one of them has opened this – bridge – that the books have been talking about. We have not located anything that looks like a control…just a book in the middle of one of these Towers, that’s it.

But Barnes is a crafty man, and I trust him. He has a new plan, one we argued against, but we could do it. We checked the map and we could fly there if we have an airship.

The problem is…the Acolytes of Lien have custody of all airships now.

Not like that’s gonna stop Barnes…damn it Robin…why did you have to die on us? We’ve tried contacting Ortega, but nothing has come through.

He could be gone too.

The world is going to hell real fast…we need to find this Fountain.
Gods watch over us all.

- Janice

“Guys?” Yenna says as she holds the letter in her hand and Winter walks over to her, and she reads what it says.

“Ortega?” Winter questions.

“I thought I saw his name.” Yenna agrees.

“The hell’s he got to do with this? Who else is looking for Arkhonex?” Kragen questions.

“The Fountain…I’ve heard stories about it. Surely it can’t be the same one.” Ozpin wonders as he walks around, and the three of them look at him for answers.

“Come again?” Yenna questions.

“The Fountain of Creation. I’ve heard stories about it being in the Embered Grove somewhere… hidden really well. But I have been there countless times and never saw any fountain, just a lake.” Ozpin explains as he stands before them.

“Well…let’s hope we can turn up something they missed.” Winter says.

“Hate to say it, but this definitely isn’t the right tower. It’s gotta be one of the other ones.” Kragen states as he gets back up.

“You’re right. Let’s head back to the others, hopefully they can turn something up.”

Winter keeps reading the letter.

Ortega…who are these people?

And why are they trying to finish your wife’s work?

Author Note - Hey guys! We are now completely up to date on everything I have written so far! Thank you all for your current support on Knights of Grimm coming here as well, from now on the series will be updated as I create chapters (usually aimed to be one chapter per week. One chapter for KoG and one for Eclipse in one week) Thank you all for reading so far! And let's keep going!

If you would like to join my Discord to chat about my stories, your ideas or random stuff then please go to my Profile and use the link on there! It will send you straight there :)

- Matt
The Rogue White Fang Bullhead soars across the sky, and inside Corsac is sat with his head lowered, his eyes staring down at the photograph that he has always carried on his person. In the picture – is both him and his brother Fennec Albain when they were children. Once they were happy, even when covered in grime, with bruises and cuts on their cheeks back in the Poorer Lower Districts of Mistral.

The memories are still so strong…even now…

When Corsac was Eight Years Old…

Fennec was always the one that had the more violent tendencies compared to his brother. Holding a knife, he stabbed at the small ants that crawled out from the nest that was outside of his house. Whereas his brother Corsac would always be by his dying Grandfather – Demetrius Albain. The Leader of the Faunus Militia during the Great War that Ortega saw slaughtering his people and even other Faunus. The Humans were attacking the Fortress to save the Faunus that were captured there with humans, being tortured every single day.

He was a different man then…a younger…and violent man.

But in his age, he became wise, and learned of his mistakes and all he ever wanted was to make things right. For both the Faunus and Humanity at first, but Mankind would never cease their efforts to harm his kind. So, the White Fang were the best possible chance for true equality between them.

But here…Demetrius was just a dying man, bedridden and barely able to keep his eyes open. And the only family he had left were his Grandchildren – that he truly loved. Corsac held his grandfather’s much larger yet frail hand as he sat beside him. He had been in this state for so long, he could barely even open his eyes as he laid there. Corsac turned his gaze, all those years ago, seeing his younger twin sat down as he held the knife in his hand. He kept stabbing the ants, his anger grew, and tears welled up in his eyes as he kept stabbing them with the blade, chopping them up into little pieces.

Corsac sniffled as he looked to his younger brother, until he felt the gentle pressure on his shoulder. He turned, seeing his grey grandfather looking upon him. The two of them had nobody, just him – an old Warmonger that now had absolutely nothing left to block out his past he so desperately wanted to hide. His daughter died a long time ago and their father died as well, killed by Humans. “You…must look after him now, Corsac.” Demetrius whispered to Corsac as he looked upon him, and the young man sniffled again, wiping a tear from his eye as he stared at Fennec, seeing – no, feeling – the painful anger that just builds in his brother’s heart every single day that passed by.

“I don’t know how, Grandfather – he never listens to me.” Corsac whimpered.

“Yes, you do…bring him over here. Get him to stop harming the ants.” Demetrius asked him with
his raspy voice. Corsac nodded his head and he got up, he walked to Fennec as he kept stabbing the dirt where the red ants kept crawling.

“Fennec?” Corsac softly cooed as he touched his shoulder, but the younger brother growled at his contact like a Vampire would at the Sun, his ears hardening as he slightly turned his gaze with gritted teeth.

“Go away.” Fennec commanded.

“Grandpa wants to see you.” Corsac softly said to him, but the tears kept welling in Fennec’s eyes, and he stabbed harder and harder into the ground. The only way Fennec could ever display his own internal grief was through anger. He would hit people, hit himself or break the things that surrounded him. He could never ever show his emotions, it was seen as weakness in his eyes. “Brother please.”

Fennec spun around and he pointed the tip of his knife to Corsac’s throat with fiery eyes and gritted teeth, his tears glistening in the sunlight that shined down upon them. Corsac fell to the ground with a yelp, crawling back from his brother, whilst Fennec just stared down at him with anger in his eyes. Then the anger shifted from rage to heartbreak, dropping the knife and sobbing, falling to his knees as he cried. “I’m sorry…I didn’t…I never meant to.” Fennec whimpered.

Fennec suffered from a rare emotional condition, known as Fire’s Scar. Ancient Legends once claimed that those with the Scar of the Flame would be prone to rage every day of their lives. It was never made clear if that was the case, for he would never attend any meetings – Oscar and Ruby cut that opportunity short for him. But he always showed signs of it, flipping from happiness to rage in a matter of seconds. The two of them approached the dying old man and they held his hand together as they sat down next to him. “The two of you…you are strong. You may be small, but you are destined for greatness. This I know.” Demetrius wheezed as he looked upon his Grandsons.

“B-But…without you…” Fennec sniffled.

“You will go further then I ever could have hoped for…in my own life. I made so many mistakes…I let my enjoyment of war corrupt me – I do not want the two of you to lead a violent life…” Demetrius begged them.

*But we could never keep his promise…we tried…but as the years went on, and the Humans who started entering our land and started building houses…*

*Things changed.*

When Corsac was Fourteen…

Fennec took a hard punch straight to the jaw, staggering back into some boxes and his blood poured with nose. He massaged his jaw as he stood there, his hand slowly clenching into a fist, as Corsac got back up as well, his fists at the ready. Their enemies were Human, three kids the same age as them with smirks on their faces as they get ready to fight them. “C’mon you mutts! You think you can live on my dads land? I’ll teach you a lesson!” The boy yelled, he and his muscle rushed towards the two Albaín Brothers.

*The humans who migrated to our home, they started tearing up the fields we would make wine with to make a town. It was built over the years, and our home was completely scavenged and destroyed. Our Grandfather, our Father and Mother’s graves were destroyed as well. Their coffins thrown into the river because of our ears and our tails, leaving them all to be forgotten.*

*But we never did.*
We had hopes that we could go to the Town Council, to beg them to give back our land and let us bury our dead.

Instead, they threw us into the streets, and had one of the councillors had his sons beat us.

But…our Grandfather taught us how to fight.

How to survive.

The boy swung straight towards Corsac, but he ducked down, and Fennec took his strike. The two of them worked together as if it was as natural as water flowing through a riverbed. His punch was so hard it caused the son to stagger back, and his buddy went to attack Fennec, but Corsac slid under his brother’s legs and he kicked the other guy in the leg. So hard it brought him down to one knee, and as he passed by as he leapt up in the air and slammed his kneecap right into his jaw. Saliva sprayed from his open mouth, and he landed down before the brawler, punching him right across the face so hard that it knocked his tooth from his mouth.

His incisor tooth clattered across the floor, then he crashed down into the muddy puddle. Fennec jumped and he kicked himself off the wall of the building and spun through the air with one powerful punch into the head of one of the other boys. He crumpled down to the floor with a heavy thud whilst Corsac rushed yet another grunt, slamming him against the wooden pillar holding the entryway to one of the houses open. The human slammed his elbow downwards into Corsac’s back before he kneed him in the face to get him off. “Get off me you dirty dog!”

“Fox!” Corsac corrected, sliding underneath his fist as he swung at him, and then Corsac grabbed onto a rope on the floor, throwing it up to the flagpole and he then wrapped it around the ankle of the man. Fennec grabbed onto the other side of the rope, and he hauled the boy up, so then Corsac could kick him right in the mouth so hard that it knocked him out immediately. Fennec grinned, until a sharp pain suddenly rushed across his body as he hears a snap and a blade of glass cuts through his long ear. Fennec howled in agony, grabbing his heavily bleeding ear, and glaring at the boy. He lunged towards him and rips the knife of glass from his grasp, cutting his hands.

Fennec held the knife above his head, and Corsac’s eyes widened. “No, Fennec!” Corsac begged, reaching out.

But he was too late, he stabbed the boy in the throat, watching as the blood began to pour out from his neck. Then he ripped the glass out and stabbed him again and again in the neck, screaming with rage with every single stab that he made into the boy’s neck. Blood splattering against his face with every single strike made. Corsac ran to his brother, and he grabbed his shoulders, pulling him away from his corpse. “Get off me! He needs to pay! They all need to pay!” Fennec howled with anguish.

Fennec panted, and Corsac’s eyes were wide with disbelief at what he just did. All the blood…they only knocked out the others…but Fennec just butchered the Village Elder’s Son. Screams can be heard as they witness his body and two Faunus Children covered in blood before his bleeding body. “We need to run! C’mon!”

Fennec lost control, like he always did. I tried to stop him, but it was too late, and he murdered the boy in front of the entire village.

He was always filled with hate for the Humans, and so have I…but I could restrain my hate. What Humanity did to my Grandfather and our parents’ graves…it was cruel and unnecessary.

So...we ran...we ran and ran for days, weeks and even a few months.
“My name is Adam Taurus.”

Months after the incident.

The two of them stood before him, Adam Taurus and a younger Blake Belladonna. Adam was around sixteen at this point and already has the mask over his eyes. He has already lost his parents from the attack lead by a previous Onyx Phantom that lead to his eyes being scorched. Both Corsac and Fennec were covered in grime, bruised from fighting countless humans who attacked them in this deadly land for people like them.

Blake was tiny in comparison to now, but still very clearly her, with her black hair and bright amber eyes and bow that hides her ears from the Human Populous. “What’s your names?” Blake asked them curiously, and Corsac looked at his brother before looking at her and her teacher – Adam. He was stood with his hand near his sword, looking in their general direction, still learning how to see without his eyes.

“My name…is Corsac Albain. And this is my brother – Fennec Albain.”

“Why are you out here alone?” Adam inquired, before Ghira approached with Kali, as she gently caressed her daughter’s hair and ears.

Ghira crouched down before them – unaware that in the future they were plotting to have him assassinated.

Only for Fury to beat them to it.

Ghira spoke gently and kindly as he looks at the young men that stood before him. “Hello…my name is Ghira Belladonna. And beside me is my Second in Command, Sienna Khan.” Ghira spoke, as the Tigress approached with her chain wrapped around her arm, looking no different to how she did many years ago. “Were you kicked out of your town by humans? We have heard there are some dangerous men and women around these parts.” Ghira asked him.

“Yes…they tore down our home and desecrated our Grandfather and Parents’ graves, threw their coffins in a river.” Fennec answered, and Sienna gritted her teeth and clenched her fist, her ears tensing with her fiery eyes.

“We should punish them for this.” Sienna hissed.

“No…Violence shall only breed more violence.” Ghira argued.

“They took everything from these boys.” Sienna reminded.

“I know this…but I do not want to start a war.” Ghira stated as he stared at Sienna, then she looked to Kali, only she seemed to share Ghira’s way of thinking. She scoffed and rolled her eyes.

“Fine.” Sienna agreed, looking at Ghira who felt as if her way of thinking was right. Ghira turned back to the Albains, and he offers his hand to them.

“Would you like to come with us? We can offer you safe refuge. We have food and water.” Ghira promised with a smile.

“W-Who are you?” Corsac asked.
“We’re the White Fang.”

After all that…now the White Fang is barely holding itself together.

Corsac’s eyes continue to stare down at the photograph that he and his brother took when they joined the White Fang. Long before they became the Loyal Fanatics, they are…or were…now. He sighs and shoves the picture back into his breast pocket, looking up to see Kardas looking at him as he finishes that story. “So that is how my brother and I joined the White Fang.” Corsac tells him.

Kardas picks his teeth as he looks at him, before he answers. “Why?” Kardas asks him.


“Why join them? Why not just eat your fill and leave? Why not honour your Grandfather by avoiding the chaos?” Kardas questions, and Corsac scoffs.

“Because we are Albains. We don’t hide and we don’t back down from a fight. But…we never wanted to seek them out…at least not at first.” Corsac sighs as he looks down at the floor.

“So, you failed him.” Kardas states.

“We didn’t fail him.” Corsac replies.

“Didn’t you? He wanted you to avoid the violence? To live a peaceful life? And here you are.” Kardas states with a smirk as he leans back, and Corsac glares at him.

“Maybe…but what about you? Why are you doing this?” Corsac questions, hoping he can deflect the attention from his eyes to Kardas. However, trying to intimidate an insane convict is like trying to shape water.

“Because I enjoy it…I like hearing what the last thoughts of my victims are when I kill them. Sometimes it is their hopes and dreams being dashed by a knife…others wishing they could kill me…others see a pretty girl or charming man. Doesn’t matter in the end…we all fall.” Kardas states, staring straight at Corsac as he activates his semblance, affecting his mind, and his eyes widen as he sees his body change before his very eyes.

Into…Fennec.

He smirks sinsterly as he stares at his partner in this Rogue Operation. “Your semblance is to look into people’s minds?” Corsac questions.

“It is very interesting to see what people think. Some people are lustful, and others are full of wrath…like you. All you want is to make Ruby Rose feel the same pain you did…yet she was not the one who dealt the killing blow.” Kardas reminds with a smirk.

“She attacked him…and Oscar Pine only defended her. But even then…killing Yang Xiao Long will hurt more than just Ruby. It will cripple their hearts.” Corsac states with a scowl.

“Coming from the one who claimed that he was honouring his father – and here you are…hunting a girl to kill her. What a disappointment you really are.” Kardas laughs as he stares Corsac down, but he just glares right back at the Hyena Faunus.

“We tried to avoid Conflict…for many years…but once we started fighting…we could never stop.”
He says with a sigh.

“Once a shark tastes blood they are ready for more…I guess Foxes are the same.” Kardas states, as he shifts back into his normal form before Corsac, no longer making him look at the image of his dead brother.

“Perhaps they are…all that matters now…is that I deliver justice for my brother. That is all that matters to me now…I failed him. I promised him that I would take care of him – and now he is in a grave. If you choose to leave and start killing, then that is your choice. But this is important.” Corsac states, and Kardas smirks.

“I could never say no to killing the weak…especially Humans.” Kardas chuckles into a cackle, and Corsac now stares down at the ground, sighing as he closes his eyes.

**Cardin**

With their car parked nearby the Market, Cardin and Emerald get out of the vehicle and they approach the hand rail that overlooks the many people speaking and trading their goods with lien being exchanged everywhere. Cardin steps out and he looks ahead, seeing the large tower at the very end of the marketplace, but to get there they need to navigate through the hardest challenge of all.

People.

“Alright, we’re here. And there’s our tower.” Cardin says as he looks up at it.

“You really think this Tower could be the one? One chilling out in front of a huge marketplace?” Emerald questions.

“I…don’t think the Arkhoni anticipated that a city would be built around what remained of their old one, Em.” Cardin states.

“Eh.” Emerald scoffs.

“Besides, wouldn’t be the craziest thing we’ve seen.” Cardin states.

“Ain’t that the truth? I never thought I’d miss the old days of just pickpocketing fat merchants.” Emerald chuckles as she and Cardin walk down the stone steps towards the marketplace, then Cardin glances at the green haired master thief.

“Oh yeah, about that. Try not to steal.” Cardin asks.

“Oh ha-ha.” Emerald rolls her eyes as she walks alongside him into the town where all these people are exchanging goods. The smell of countless different aromas in the air of cuisines as delightful as stir fries to roasting meat on barbecues. And the squeaks of little animals that are being sold to anyone who has the Lien to purchase them. Jewels and scents, this is one hell of a diverse market, with people from all walks of life here purchasing whatever they can get their hands on in here.

“Wow…some really nice jewellery here. I must admit if we weren’t on a mission…”

“Dirty thief.” Cardin scoffs.

“Oh c’mon. A girl’s gotta do something, why not what she’s good at?” Emerald asks as she politely
pushes past some of the people that are talking. Which is when she feels a hand tuck into her back pocket, and then she spins round and grabs the little hand, staring at the kid who attempted to pickpocket her. The boy stares up at her and she stares at him. “Nice trick, but gotta work on it. Now…hand off my ass please.” Emerald requests, and the boy quickly pulls his hand from her pocket and she gestures the I got my eye on you move on him.

He runs away, probably off to rob someone else who is not as skilled in the art of pickpocketing as her.

“Oh, I would have loved to see you as a kid doing that.” Cardin chuckles.

“Hey, just cause I’m a thief doesn’t mean I was born as one.” Emerald states as she walks beside him, her hands constantly near her back so then she can draw her weapons.

“Oh…sorry.”

“It’s fine. My family was put in severe debt by the Vacuo Mafia a long time ago. I learned how to become a thief there as well, my mentor taught me a few things.” Emerald explains.

“What things?” Cardin inquires.

“That the female body is sexy as hell and you can use it like a flashbang sometimes to distract people.” Emerald states with a wink as she looks at Cardin, then he pieces it together as he looks at her rather revealing outfit.

“Oh! So that explains the…yeah.” Cardin stammers as he looks at her choice of clothing and how much of her skin is on show.

“Well that’s half of it – that and I’m from Vacuo. Not exactly a shirt and tie kinda place.” Emerald states, ironically the exact same thing that Sun said once, making Cardin chuckle, since it seems that it must be a saying.

“Is that a saying in Vacuo?” Cardin asks her.

“Pretty much. People don’t tend to wear much because of the heat.” Emerald states as she walks past some kids – the non-thieving kind.

“So, what happened to the Mafia? Never really heard of them when I was in Vacuo.” Cardin states.

“They were wiped out a long time ago. Deal went bad and the Acolytes were hired by a few others to ambush the leaders. Killed all of them, and their followers quickly dispersed. Sadly, my family’s money was never returned.” Emerald explains as she shrugs her shoulders and looks at the ground. Cardin glances at her.

“Your family…are they…”

“Yeah.” Emerald answers.

“I’m sorry.” Cardin apologises.

“It happens. In Vacuo, if you’re homeless, you don’t last long unless you learn to break the law and steal. I did…but they never could bring themselves to do so.” Emerald says, it is clear she has moved on from the loss of her parents, it must have happened a long time ago now for her to be this chilled out about it.
The two of them keep moving through the market, hearing the moos of cows being sold and the clucking of chickens with their eggs being sold. Men on huge speakerphones promoting the products that they are trying to sell to the vast number of customers here today. They both keep getting closer and closer, when suddenly a little monkey jumps up onto Cardin’s shoulder and he chuckles as he looks at the primate. “He! Em! Check it out!” Cardin laughs as he looks at him.

“Wow, real naturalist, aren’t you?” Emerald comments with the shake of her head after crossing her arms.

“Hey buddy, wanna hang out?” Cardin asks, until the monkey retreats and leaves him, running off. “Aw man…I was starting to think we had a connection.”

“What? Like a Monkey Whisperer?” Emerald scoffs.

“Hey, if this Huntsman Business doesn’t work out then why not?” Cardin chuckles. The two of them finally get through the crowd and they approach the closed doors of the Tower. Cardin pushes his hands against them, but the doors have been barricaded. He then looks back and he sighs. “We can’t risk it…not with all these people here, Emerald.” Cardin states.

Emerald looks around for another way around, and she sees what appears to be a way up onto a building by using some crates. And if they swing across, they can get through one of the windows. “Follow me.” Emerald says, she runs towards the crates that have been stacked beside the shed and she climbs up them with great agility. She clambers up to the top, then draws her Sickles and swings the chain round, before through it so then it wraps around one of the pipes that have been left open. The hook connects to the concrete perfectly and it is secure, meaning that they can use it to swing. “Do as I do.” Emerald says as Cardin gets up behind her.

He watches as she runs and grabs onto the cable of her grappling hook, swinging across the open space and then jumping towards the window. She lands right onto the wall, grabbing onto the loose bricks, and then she pulls the window open so then they can get inside. She slides inside, as if she is a fluid and she sticks her green haired head out the window to him. “Your turn. You weren’t just staring at my ass, were you?” Emerald questions as he looks at her.


Emerald stares at him with doubt in her eyes. “Besides, thought I wasn’t your type.” Cardin grunts as he jumps and grabs onto the line, swinging across the gap and landing onto the wall like she did. He holds on and then pulls the cable, detaching her Sickle and passing it right back to her. She catches it and she scoffs.

“Doesn’t stop dudes from wanting to sleep with me, Cardin.” Emerald states.

“Yeah well…I wasn’t. Not exactly looking for anything serious.” Cardin states as he climbs and jumps through the window, landing with a thud on the dusty floor.

“Doesn’t need to be serious for someone to have sex, Cardin.” Emerald reminds with a chuckle. Cardin stares at her with confusion.

“See this is the shit that makes women so hard to read. Because to me it sounds like you wanna.” Cardin states, and Emerald rolls her eyes as she walks past him.

“You’re such a dog.” Emerald states, leaving Cardin totally flabbergasted.

“What just happened?” He questions, before shaking off Emerald’s teasing as he follows her towards the base of the tower. They both look around with awe at the size of the tower, and the withering
wooden stairs that lead all the way up to the very top. That is not the only thing here of interest, but it is some of the paintings on the wall as well. “Whoa…this is way bigger on the inside than I was expecting.” Cardin chuckles as he looks up at the towers.

“Who are these dudes?” Emerald wonders as she approaches the paintings, staring at their many faces. All of them are different, a couple are Faunus but most of their faces are human. But over time the paintings have faded, so it is hard to tell who they are. And without the visions that Jaune has been seeing from the Visionary Books, he would never know anyway. But what Cardin notices…is a symbol.

“Wait a second.” Cardin says as he approaches one of the paintings, and he wipes the dust off the crest.

And it is a Crescent.

It is the Arc Symbol.

“Arc…that’s Jaune’s family.” Cardin says as he stares at it.

“Jaune said he was following his ancestors. But what the hell does this due have to do with this?” Emerald questions, and they both stare at the painting. What they do not realise is that this man is Ezekiel Arc, Vyrryk and Constantine Arc’s father. They both look at the other faces on the walls, trying to determine which are which. Some of them are completely mysterious but all of them look like incredibly powerful and influential people, at least back in Arkhonex.

But some of the faces to have interesting resemblances.

There is a man with pure white hair but not due to old age, for he looks like he is the youngest of them all. Must be around twenty years old, and with his blue eyes he must have been a Schnee. One of them is a large muscular man with red hair, and his name is also obscured. And underneath the Ten Paintings is a set of Higher Arkhoni Hieroglyphics. “If Kassius was here, he could use that Bracelet of his to translate this shit.” Cardin sighs, but then Emerald thinks up a plan and her red eyes light up with realisation.

“He still could…remember it examines images too. So, if we take a picture…” Emerald suggests and Cardin chuckles, nodding his head as he pulls out his Scroll so then he can take a picture of it.

“You’re a damn genius, Em.” Cardin congratulates, snapping a picture of the Hieroglyphics and sending it to Kassius.

“Alright, good work. We’ll wait on him until he gives us something.” Emerald says, she walks around, unaware of Cardin starting to get light headed.

“Whoa…” Cardin groans, stumbling forward. Emerald spins around and she catches him just as he is about to fall. He nearly knocks her over, but luckily, he regains consciousness, and she looks at him.

“You alright?” Emerald asks him with worry as she sits him down against the wall.

“Yeah…just give me a minute.” Cardin groans as he rubs his head, feeling a throbbing pain. He sits down and sighs as he presses his back against the wall, rubbing his head. Emerald crouches down, looking at him and she presses the back of her hand against his forehead but luckily there is not another fever like last time.

“What was that?” She asks him.
“I think…I think that was my body coping with the…Hym…not being in me anymore.” Cardin tells her. Emerald looks at Winchester as he lays there, his eyes closing as he thinks on that. “I’m grateful to you…all of you…you could have just left me.”

“What? Why would we do that?” Emerald questions.


“Okay sure, but apart from that – we weren’t gonna let you suffer, hell even when we weren’t ourselves, we wanted to help you.” Emerald states as she gently squeezes his knee.

“How can you guys trust me…after what I did?” Cardin questions, as he remembers how he murdered his teammates with his mace, murdered the Headmaster of Vacuo and his Pyromancer.

“I could ask you the same thing.” Emerald says, and he looks at her. “You and I…we’re more alike than you think.”

“No, we’re not.” Cardin states.

“No? I caused Beacon to fall, Cardin. I caused Pyrrha to kill Penny. And I couldn’t save Mercury. I am no less guilty than you, and even then…you did what you did either to save lives or out of self-defence. Me? I got people killed because I was following orders…orders I could have gone against.” Emerald explains as she looks at him, remembering the pain she felt in her heart after watching Pyrrha tear Penny apart the way she did. Both may be alive now, but it all still happened because of her part in it all.

“You were working for Salem, it’s not like you had a choice in the matter.” Cardin states.

“My point is…I know how you feel, Cardin. And I am grateful to Kassius just like you, and to you.” Emerald states. “You two could’ve left me to die in that swamp when you found me, I actually thought you were gonna before I passed out. But you didn’t, you nursed me back to health and helped me.”

Cardin stares at her as she softly chuckles with a smile. “Like it or not, man…we’re in the same boat.” She states with the shrug of her shoulders.

Cardin looks down at the floor and he chuckles. “A pair of guilty fools who just want to make things right?”

“We’ll never know if we don’t try, right?” Emerald says, offering her hand to him and he accepts it, rising back up to his feet. “End of the day, having the chance to make things right…to atone for our mistakes? It’s the best gift we could ever deserve.”

“Yeah…it is.” Cardin agrees with the nod of his head.

Cardin feels the vibration of his scroll in his pocket, so he pulls it out and hands it to Emerald, seeing that Kassius has responded with what his Bracelet translated for him. “Whoa, a bit of text here.” Emerald chuckles at the meaty message he responded with.

Made it to the tower, huh?

Alright, well my Bracelet managed to decipher the hieroglyphics on the wall, and it says – Lords of Arkhonex. Didn’t make sense at first until I sent this picture to the Architect, and he told me something.
These guys? They took over the role of the Council after the old ones were killed in a Terrorist attack by the Congregation of Dawn. The Lords of wealthy Families came together and took leadership of the Politics. The White Haired One was called William Schnee, the youngest of the Schnee Children, he was in charge of the economy. Red Haired Guy is Ares Nikos – he was the leader of Military, and apparently, he did some scary stuff to keep people safe when the War was raging. And then the Arc is Ezekiel Arc, Jaune’s ancient ancestor, that Vyrryk dude’s dad. He was in charge of the leading political Campaigns and Schemes. He worked closely with all of them, especially Ares and William.

There are a few others there as well. Wulfwin Winks, he was in charge of civil rights. Isabel Cox was in charge of Culture and Fertility…a bit strange. There was another, and he said this was Yenna’s dad – the Spring Maiden.

Godwin Azula.

Godwin was a Lawmaker, and he had to control the people. The others were in charge of different things, he never mentioned their names.

That could be important guys, good find. I’ll keep searching, let me know if you find anything else there.

• Kassius

Emerald scoffs. “Damn…these dudes are some important guys.” Emerald says.

“He said they did scary things to keep people safe…what kind of things?” Cardin wonders, and it also leaves Emerald just as stumped.

What secrets are the Lords of the Houses hiding?

Qrow

Back at Argus…

Qrow stands beside his sister as he looks around the cliffs of the Northern Anima Seaside. The Seagulls cry out constantly as they glide across the sky where the wind blows hard and aggressively against their feathered wings. He cracks his neck and he follows his sister, the Architect and Cinder towards the edge. But the Architect holds up his fist to stop them, holding his rifle in his hands like a soldier would. “What’s up, Architect?” Raven asks him.

“The ground’s unstable. Looks like the erosion is causing this Arch to collapse over time. We need to be careful.” The Architect tells them all as he looks at it all. The huge chunks of rock are mainly held together by some roots, but there are lots of holes, holes that they could fall to their deaths through. The sharp rocks in the water beneath are not to be underestimated. Even a fully charged aura could not save you from an impact quite like that.

“Well…any ideas?” Qrow asks, and Cinder cracks her neck and flicks her long black hair over her shoulder.

“Something like that.” Cinder says, crouching down and pressing her hands against the soil, her eyes ignite, and roots spread through the ground. Thanks to some of the teachings by Yenna, she has learned how to summon nature itself with her power, and she forms the roots to create a bridge that
they can use to cross. The roots gently pass over the chasm of air that would lead to a bloody demise at the bottom, and then she looks back at the others. “There we go.” Cinder says with a smile, and Qrow nods with a smile.

“Nicely done.” Qrow says, and the four of them walk across Cinder’s bridge of roots that she managed to form.

Cinder walks and her long black hair blows in the wind elegantly as she moves, her eye looking around as she admires the beautiful view as the sun shines upon the beautiful blue ocean that stretches out before their very eyes right now. She follows the Branwen Siblings as they approach the Tower, seeing it is also surrounded by some ancient Arkhoni Houses alongside some abandoned houses from Argus. The different of Architecture is very clear, for not only were Arkhoni houses bigger but they also are more streamline, whereas the modern generation are blockier.

Like the armour of a samurai, the bricks overlap each other, meaning no water gets trapped inside. Most likely the reason behind why they have managed to remain standing for so long. No water getting trapped inside, meaning it cannot freeze and thaw, slowly breaking the bricks. A genius idea, and it is made clear the Arkhoni were always ready for the future. However, when looking at the state of some of these houses, it is quite clear that they could not make them completely invulnerable…especially from Grimm attacks.

Cinder walks over to one of the houses and she looks back at the Architect in curiosity. “Architect, what exactly attacked here?” She inquires.

“By the looks of the damage, it could have been a Royal Manticore.” The Architect says, and Raven shudders.

“Tough bastards.” She comments.

“Yeah, the ones we fought in the mountains are small fry in comparison to one of those things.” Qrow remembers. The Royal Manticore is almost mythical, there are not many of them in the world, but the few that do exist are absolutely lethal. Manticores are deadly alone, but Royal ones are massive, around the same size of a Nevermore or a Sphinx. They breathe fire like normal, and their attacks are similar to the Lesser Manticores. The difference being it is much bigger, much stronger and its attacks are far more powerful.

The bigger they are the harder they fall.

Cinder turns and she asks a very good question to him. “What happened to Argus, Architect? This place was once a city in your Empire, did it suffer the same fate?” Cinder inquires.

“Yes, but it did not fall immediately like Arkhonex did. Argus managed to survive a few years before it fell. There were not as many Grimm and Argus’ people were able to take them down before they decimated the city. But one day Salem unleashed her forces…and the walls could not survive the attack. They killed everyone inside. It was a bloodbath, fires spread everywhere, and the sea turned red from corpses.” The Architect describes as he stares at the now blue sea, that once was choked with claret from how many savaged corpses floated inside of its habitat once.

“Gods…that’s horrible.” Qrow says.

“That’s what happens when you let your own arrogance get the better of you. It was our biggest mistake, we grew so large and powerful that we thought nothing could stop us. But when Salem took control of the Grimm that day…well you know now. The Grimm we thought were under our control turned on us…and killed everyone inside the cities that were not inside secured bunkers.”
The Architect explains, and the mere idea of being trapped inside of the Grimm infested city with no way out…it is like being trapped in a room with a pack of dogs. You would be eaten alive, screaming in agony, and nobody would save you.

It makes them shudder to imagine what that would have been like.

How terrifying it must have been for millions of people.

The Architect approaches the doors of one of the Towers and he aims his rifle at the lock and fires a round. It burns straight through the wood, melting the lock instantly and he pushes the door open, checking his corners for any signs of Grimm Activity or Acolytes of Lien. End of the day, something is about to happen.

They can feel it in the air…

The Calm Before the Storm.

Raven and Qrow enter with Cinder behind them, all of them looking around to find any form of energy inside. But as they actually suspected from the state of the place…it does not seem like this is the one from the get-go. “This isn’t the place, is it?” Qrow asks, figuring it out immediately.

“Of course not. No energy signatures in here whatsoever.” He states.

“Typical. You know just once I would like something to go right.” Raven sighs.

“Worry not, Ruby’s team is still out there. They’re tower could be the one.” The Architect states, and she scoffs.

“Or maybe we are just playing Umbra’s game.” Raven states as she crosses her arms, staring out the window. The three of them look at Raven after she says that.

“Huh?” Cinder asks.

“What makes you think we can beat him? I mean seriously? We all fought him at Beacon after…after what he did. We threw everything we had at the bastard and he walked it all off like we never even touched him. How do we even know that Ruby and the other three can actually kill him? All we have seen so far is Ruby weaken him.” Raven explains as she looks down at the floor.

“Don’t start thinking like this, Raven.” Qrow begs.

“Why? I watched the man I loved with all my heart be murdered right in front of me, and that monster didn’t even seem to care!” Raven cries out with tears in her eyes, just wanting to feel Taiyang’s warm embrace again, to hear his silly voice once more.

Now she never will.

“We were gonna get married…” She sniffles.

“I know…and I’m sorry. We all hurt from it…but we have to keep moving forward. Because if we just give up now, then we’re just making Umbra’s job easier. And if we do lose against him, then the least we can do is try.” Qrow explains, and she stares at him with pain in her eyes.

“I lost my fiancée…I can’t lose my daughter too.” She states.

“You won’t. We will kill him.” Qrow promises.
“Ruby weakened him enough for Oz to hurt him. If you can hurt something, then it can be killed.” Cinder states, and Raven looks at her and she sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose.

**Mazen**

The White Fang are preparing for a full-scale assault on the Acolytes of Lien.

Mazen holds his Chainsword in his hand as he narrows his eyes and he sighs, pulling his scroll from his pocket. There is something that has been on his mind, something he cannot stop thinking about. He does not want him to die…but he also does not want her to die for nothing either.

So, he sends a message.

*From – Anonymous*

> There is a Rogue Squad of White Fang soldiers headed to Beacon right now to kill Yang Xiao Long. The leader of this group of Corsac Albain, and his heart is plagued with grief after the death of his brother. He wants revenge, but I hope you will be able to convince him.

> But if he leaves you no choice…then you know what to do.

He sends the message, and a few moments later the user responds.

*Who is this?*

Mazen looks at her name.

*Glynda Goodwitch*

He managed to find her name on the Contacts List on the Beacon Website on the internet. He responds with a simple message before rolling out with his men.

*An interested party.*
The Activation Towers - Pt. 3

Coco

The wind whistles through the canyons of Queen’s Cove whilst the two members of Team C.F.V.Y clamber their way up the face of the cliff. Reaching out their hands to grasp onto the handles of stone that stick out from the rock. They both lift their light bodies upwards as they make the climb, looking around before jumping to the next. Velvet’s legs swing back and forth after jumping, and she turns her gaze to Coco and who looks at her with a nod, climbing up higher and higher towards the edge of the cliff. “You good, Velv?” Coco asks her as she keeps climbing, her sunglasses somehow still over her eyes even now. Velvet pulls her body up once more, her foot finding another ledge of stone and clay to support her light frame upon.

“Yup! Just…making sure I don’t…fall to my death.” She strains as she continues to climb higher and higher to the top of the cliff face. The clouds floating gently in the sapphire blue sky. Coco chuckles, for she seems to be enjoying the thrill of this little escapade a little too much. But as they keep climbing up, they both gasp and they stay still, hugging the cliff as their hair gently blows in the breeze.

“Don’t move.” Coco whispers, as an Acolytes of Lien Gunship soars across the sky, descending across the city with a scanner, luckily it did not notice them, but it is most certainly searching for them. Whitley knew who was at the Fallingwater Estate, and they are also not blind. There are some holographic posters around the city with all their faces upon them. Coco glances down and she sees some soldiers on one of the openings beneath them with a holographic projector in his armour, asking civilians.

“Have you seen these men and women?” The Acolyte of Lien asks a romantic couple, they look at the five images that appear, but they luckily have not encountered the heroes yet. Coco scoffs as she looks down at them.

“Could’ve gotten a sexier image of me.” Coco comments, and Velvet groans with the roll of her eyes.

“Please, your vain enough as it is.” Velvet states, making Coco chortle.

“Oh c’mon, Bunny. Always room for improvement, even for perfection like me!” Coco giggles, only making the innocent and modest Huntress groan even louder. If she groans any louder, she most likely would have alerted the Acolyte beneath them. They both continue to climb up the cliff face, when they finally reach the summit. They both reach out and grasp the sand and rocks, nearly sliding off at one point before throwing their bodies atop the surface of the ground. They both roll onto their backs and laugh with amazement as they stare up at the sky, their brown hair splayed out across the sand. “Wow…can’t believe we did it.”

“You? I’d have pegged you to be certain we’d be fine.” Velvet chuckles.

“Eh, fifty-fifty.” Coco says as she gets up and she crouches down and pulls Velvet back up to her feet. They both wipe the dust from their bodies, but suddenly Coco pushes Velvet down to the floor again, and she plants her body atop hers. Velvet yelps, but then Coco shushes her with her palm to her lips. “Quiet…incoming…” Coco whispers as she holds Velvet close, luckily, they are behind a parked car. They then shimmy their way underneath it, and Coco stays atop her smaller friend,
protecting her as always. They both look under the car to see what is incoming.

Another one of those massive Tanks, the eight treads crushing the sand and stones beneath its weight. And there are many Acolytes of Lien walking alongside it, the downdraft from an Aircraft of some kind – they cannot see it under the car – and quite a few trucks. Some of them are Jeeps like the one they have but more militarised and one of them looks like it is a huge truck, alongside an Armoured Truck as well. Probably has a high calibre machine gun attached to the top, which could deal some hefty damage if it needs to.

The two of them remain together underneath the car, and Coco looks down at the beautiful Faunus girl beneath her, slightly blushing before she whispers down into her ear. “We wait for them to pass, okay?”

“Hold up!” The Commander orders with a powerful voice – their blood runs cold and their pupils dilate with fear. Coco leans down to hide her close friend, glaring with gritted teeth as the man jumps down from the truck. They may not have recognised his voice – but Kassius and Cardin would have.

It’s Kelham.

He walks across the road with those red blades extended from his gauntlets, he must have customized the old sword he used, breaking the blade into six pieces and turning them into claws. However, they will still be able to open portals, since like Raven’s it carries the blood of the same warrior who used hers.

A man named Crimson Dawn – he was the Blacksmith who forged the Blood Blades, the only man in the world who could. Raven went to him and bought one, her Odachi and she asked for his semblance to be imprinted into the blade. His Semblance was to open portals, and thus his blood was imprinted into the blades so then others could harness his incredibly useful gift.

Hence why they are named – Blood Blades.

Clearly, they can be changed as well.

Although. Crimson Dawn died many years ago, murdered by an assassin who sold his weapons to the Black Market. Meaning that Adam Taurus’ sword was made by him too, however his blood must have been taken by his father after an accident – since he was given the sword when he was ready. After his parents were murdered in fact. The blades used by Junior’s Thugs are not the same, just replicas with red blades – because anyone he sees a Blood Blade is immediately terrified of them.

Raven however was smart, she has the Blood Blade but also many others to replace them for other uses.

Coco and Velvet stay as still and quiet as they possibly can, breathing quietly as well. Kelham may be a Faunus but they never expected his hearing to be that good – she was whispering. He looks around as he stands there, his tail flicking slightly as some warm sand settles upon it. He clenches his hand into fist as he looks around, when his eyes turn to the car. They narrow and he approaches it slowly, about to check under it, when another familiar voice calls.

“Kelham!” Kannix yells, and he turns. “C’mon, there’s no one there.”

Clearly Kannix just wants to get on with his mission, and Kelham stands by the car that the two Huntresses are hiding beneath. Kelham clears his throat with a soft growl in his sigh, looking back at the car before he returns back to the truck and clambering aboard. “Move out!” Kelham orders with a booming voice, followed by the roaring engines of his convoy as they move forward once more. The
huge armoured trucks and Tank roll past the car, making the ground and the car itself shake. They both close their eyes and pray that the tank does not run over the car they are hiding underneath.

But luckily for them, their prayers are answered, and the convoy continue away from where they are. The massive tank drives away with a deep growl, and Velvet glances past Coco’s hand to see Neo is also in the truck with Kannix with her Umbrella resting on her shoulder, pink and brown hair blowing in the wind. The two of them remain underneath the car as the convoy heads down the street, Coco pushes herself off her friend and she rolls out from under the tank. Velvet looks around and she clicks her tongue to Coco so then she follows. The two of them rise up and they blow out a sigh of relief. “Gods…did you see the heat those guys are packing? This could get hot real fast.” Velvet states as she stands up, looking around even now to make sure there are no stragglers from the convoy.

“Let’s hope they don’t find us then.” Coco states, and Velvet nods her head as she walks ahead of her friend.

“I guess the good news to this is the fact that they are actually behind us on their search. Or at least they haven’t figured out the towers.” Velvet shrugs as she and her friend walk towards the towers, surrounding by some deployed metal walls. Distant voices cause the pair to nod to one another and they get behind the walls to take cover. Coco peers round the wall, carefully, and she sees them.

“Acolytes…shit…they must have more of them. They look like they are trying to demolish the towers.” Coco whispers as she stares at the soldiers, slightly pushing her sunglasses down so then she can see them and their operations. There are quite a few of them, one of them is a Seeker. He walks around the perimeter whilst the Acolytes are planting the bombs on the base of the tower, slowly beginning to set the timers so then they can blow them up.

“Idiots…don’t they realise explosions could destabilise areas of the city?” Velvet whispers as she looks at the architecture. Yes, it is impressive and beautiful, but she is correct – all it would take is a well-placed explosion to spread seismic activity throughout the entire canyon. But as they watch the crews, the Seeker opens up a holographic connection to someone, and they hear his voice. Jacques Schnee.

“Have you located our targets?” Jacques asks the soldier as he stands there as a holographic image.

“Negative, however we have started demolition protocols on the towers. Sooner or later this tunnel will be open, and we can safely send our men through the tunnels.” The Seeker explains, helping them realise that this is not just to stop them – but to secure the tunnels. Destroying the towers would merely unlock the tunnels, but this would make gaining entry extremely difficult.

“That must be what the tanks are for…to shoot us down if we try and make a break for it.” Velvet presumes.

“Just what I was thinking.” She agrees.

“Good. Proceed with the demolition. And if you locate Kassius Locke and his band of rogues, you have permission to execute them without mercy.” Jacques tells them, and the Seeker chuckles.

“I was hoping you’d say that. Charlie Seven out.” The Seeker responds, closing the holographic feed and turning to his men. “Alright everyone, stay sharp! If any of Kassius’ team show up here, kill the bastards on sight!” The Seeker commands. The Demolition Crew continue to plant the bombs, wiring them together and loading the fire dust cannisters to the devices to add an extra boom to the explosion. Coco examines the area and luckily there are some conveniently placed crates and bushes
around the area, meaning they can sneak inside and take them out quietly.

“Alright, we need to do this as silently as we can. Can’t risk reinforcements.” Coco says to Velvet, and she nods her head. Her ears drop down behind her head in a sneaky position, and the two of them sneak into the bushes to go after the soldiers.

Six Troopers and the Seeker, along with the four demolition workers.

Velvet crouches and she moves swiftly through the bushes, where one of the Troopers is stood with his rifle, looking around through the glowing red visor. Velvet uses her box, conjuring a stun gun and she activates it. She rises up and she grabs the soldier by the throat and jabs the stun gun into his neck. He strains for a second but too quietly for the other soldiers to hear his groans of pain. She drags his body into the bushes, and she looks down at his visor, seeing he is out cold. Coco on the other hand has a weapon of her own she rarely uses – a baton.

She sneaks up behind another soldier walking around the area, so she softly whistles from the bush, he stops and turns, raising his rifle in that direction. Coco emerges, grabbing the barrel and pulling the whole weapon from his hands, smacking the baton across his helmet. It hits so hard it cracks his visor, and he collapses into her arms. She drags him in just in time as one of the six Troopers looks in that direction.

Four Troopers left.

Velvet picks up a rock and she taps it on the ground to get one of the guards’ attention. The Trooper turns his helmeted head and he approaches the bush, aiming down into it carefully. “Show yourself…better not be another kid sneaking around.” The Acolyte says, as he walks into the bush, Velvet has her legs spread across the area to remain low. Which is when she kicks the soldier in the back of the leg, so he falls to one knee. She then swings round and slams the back of her heel right into the centre of his visor, causing him to collapse down into the grass. She then drops back down as the soldiers start to appear more concerned as more of their men seem to be disappearing.

“Shit…we could have company.” One of the Troopers says as he looks for them.

“Daniels! Daniels, report.” The Seeker commands as he looks around, one of the radios goes off and Coco winces just as she switches it off. But it seems the men did not hear it. But that does not help their concern as they stand there.

“Alright – everyone spread out. Search for the culprits.” The Seeker orders as he draws his Submachine gun and walks down the stairs, his backpack activated and glowing bright orange as the dust flows through it. He is ready to use it if he must, and has his Red Sword sheathed on his hip like the Thugs who work for Junior do. The soldiers spread out and one of them deploys a drone from his backpack, and the small thrusters burst into action, allowing it to hover around whilst the Trooper crouches down and uses his holographic pad on his arm, searching the bushes.

“Shit…that’s an upgrade.” Coco whispers as she sneaks through the bushes, avoiding the blue ray of light that scans over the bushes for any signs of activity inside. She rolls through the bushes behind one of the crates, peering round to see the soldier with the pad. She then glances at the bushes to find Velvet’s ears. Velvet focuses her hearing to hear the very faint whispering of her partner. “I’ll take out the soldier with the hologram, you take out that soldier nearest to you. Wait til the Seeker and the furthest Trooper are far enough away.”

Velvet nods her ears and they drop back down, and she clenches her fists, ready to take down the next Trooper. Coco reaches up to the crate and picks up a wrench. She emerges from cover slowly, using the shadows to her advantage, difficult to notice in the soldier’s peripheral vision due to his
helmet. Velvet waits for the right chance, and Coco rises up behind the Soldier with the pad. “Hey handsome.” She whispers with a smirk. The soldier gasps, and she smashes the wrench into his face with all her might, so hard it actually shatters the visor upon contact, and he collapses to the ground. The Drone pauses in the air and she then uses his pad and aims the shock rounds at the backpack of the Seeker, and fires a round straight into it.

Velvet jumps up just as the electrified volts shoot overhead from the Drone and she grabs the Trooper by the neck, and she slams his head down into the ground with all her might. He grunts in pain, and just as he tries to get back up, she takes her fist and punches him in the head. The Seeker yells in agony as the volts course through his armour and his body, overloading the backpack and causing it to explode. The explosion blows the soldier off his feet and Velvet springs like a rabbit from the bushes, grabbing the Sub Machine Gun that flies through the air from the explosion, and she smashes it right across the face of the soldier, knocking him out. The explosion from the backpack of the Seeker causes him to collapse to the ground and turns the eyes of the Demolition Squad.

Coco turns and she throws the Wrench straight between the eyes of one of them, knocking him out instantly. She jumps and vaults over the stone railing and kicks one right in the chest. He staggers back but draws his knife and swings it right at her face. Coco ducks down and swipes him off his feet, before she kicks him in the head so hard it takes him out. Velvet rushes towards the last two Acolytes of Lien. She slides underneath the first one’s legs and bounces off the Base of the Tower, flipping through the air and slamming the toe of her foot downwards atop the helmetless Demolition Man. He crumples to the floor, and as Velvet comes down, she wraps her legs around the last one’s neck in a scissor lock, swinging her body downwards and slamming his head into the floor.

All of the Acolytes have been non-lethally taken down.

Kassius on the other hand would have most likely killed them, with his pretty cold way of looking at the world than even Yang cannot agree with. But he cannot change his ways, he simply believes that killing your enemies is better than letting them live so then they can stab you in the back another day.

Coco looks around and deduces that they are in fact clear, and there are no reinforcements inbound either. “We need to warn the others, so they know what the Acolytes are up to.” Coco says as she pulls out her Scroll from her pocket.

“Good idea.” Velvet agrees as she flips back up from the floor, looking around as she walks across the floor, crouching down in front of the Bomb. She taps it, and luckily, they stopped them before they could finish the arming procedure. She starts to defuse what they did as Coco sends the message.

Guys, just ran into the Acolytes of Lien at our Tower. They’re demolishing them to unlock the Tunnel so they can secure it and stop us from getting to Arkhonex.

Expect some headed your way soon.

- Coco

“Alright, hopefully that’ll help them.” Coco says to Velvet as she disarms the bomb, and the Bunny Faunus gets up almost lethargically.

“Mhm.” Velvet softly says, and Coco looks at her as she sets the bomb down. Coco is not blind, she knows something is up with Velvet, and from the way she has been acting around Kassius is enough reason for her to guess.
“Pretty tense back there too…with me and you…under there…” Coco chuckles as she walks up to Velvet, but she does not look at her, she just stands there with a sigh. “Velv?”

“Huh?” Velvet questions, turning with stress ever present in her eyes.

“You alright?” Coco asks her, and she sighs.

“I’ll be alright once we get that Tunnel open and get out of this place.” Velvet states as she walks towards the Tower. Coco scoffs and she shakes her head, hand on her hip and the over pressed against the bridge of her nose.

“Okay.” She chuckles, Velvet pauses and looks back at her – she knows her mannerisms so well that it angers her.

“What?” Velvet questions as she walks towards Velvet.

“I said okay.” Coco replies.

“No, no, no, no – your okays are never just okay, they usually mean the opposite of okay.” Velvet states, and Coco chuckles as she shakes her head, looking down at the floor. She takes off her sunglasses, meaning she is about to get real with her.

“You told him, didn’t you?” Coco asks – revealing she has known about Velvet’s feelings for Kassius the whole time, of course.

“What’re you talking about?” The shy and nervous Velvet Scarlatina asks her.

“Oh c’mon, don’t be coy with me Velv. I know you when you are trying to hide something, I remember when you failed to hide your comics from me that one time back at Beacon.” Coco comments as she points at her.

“They’re called Manga.” Velvet corrects as she crosses her arms.

“Whatever. Point is – I know your panto face, and its shit. So, c’mon spill it…you told him, didn’t you? You told Kassius how you feel back at the Hotel. You two have been acting weird around each other ever since the Stanley Hotel and the Apathy.” Coco explains, and Velvet closes her eyes with shame.

“I…kissed him.”

Coco sighs. “Gods, Velv.”

“I didn’t mean to, I swear! It just happened…Kassius protected me back when that guy was being creepy, and he protected me from Umbra…I…I panicked, and I didn’t know what to do…” Velvet stammers as she lists the events that spiralled out of control in her head. She sighs, looking down and resting her elbow against her other arm around her waist, touching her lowered forehead with her fingers. “I know it’s wrong…to love a man who is already with someone else, especially a friend of yours…but…”

“…but you can’t shake it.” Coco says as she looks at her. “I know what you mean.” She says as she looks at the beautiful Faunus girl, looking away from her for a second. “What did he say? After you kissed him?”

“He was shocked…and he said he was sorry that he didn’t feel the same way. He hasn’t really said much else to me.” Velvet softly says, and Coco nods her head.
“Well that’s a good sign. Let him think about it, end of the day it shocked both of you. Let him have some time. Kassius is a good guy, and he won’t leave Yang – we both know that. But we also know he wouldn’t be able to sleep at night if he knew you were struggling over this.” Coco reminds, and she looks back at her. “Plenty more fish in the sea, Velv. Especially for girls like you and me.”

“I haven’t felt that way about girls in a long time.” Velvet sighs.

“So? I go back and forth as well. What’s the point in staying as the same thing? Seems pretty boring if you ask me.” Coco chuckles as she leans against the tower with her arms crossed. Velvet softly giggles, and her smile makes her partner smile right back. “That’s better. C’mon, let’s go see what we can find in here.” Coco says to her as the two of them enter the tower.

They look around at the place, but there are no signs of power from in here either. Velvet even goes beyond as she takes her scroll out and scans the area for any energy signatures but there is absolutely nothing being detected inside of this place. Even the markings on the walls have faded away in time, and this tower is hardly even holding together. They both sigh and leave the tower, Coco looks at one of the unconscious men. “Sorry, buddy. Wrong tower.” Coco says with a sigh as they walk down the street.

As they keep walking…

…a worrying scent fills the air.

A fire…there is a fire raging nearby, and the sirens of nearby fire engines can also be heard. Coco and Velvet both run towards the direction they can hear distant screams and their eyes widen when they see an Apartment Building on fire. “Oh no! We’ve got to help them!” Velvet cries out.

“Oh, but how?” Vir Nominis Umbra suddenly appears behind them with his hands held together and a smirk plastered upon his face as he stares at them. The two of them spin round to see the entity looking at them, and Coco grits her teeth and clenches her fist, ready to fight. He raises a brow at her determination to fight him. “Really?”

“The fuck are you doing here Umbrella?” Coco questions, mocking his last name.

“Wow. Never heard that one before.” Vir Nominis Umbra sarcastically remarks as he looks at the two women. “And to answer your vulgar question my beautiful friends…I believe you have an interesting challenge ahead of you. Do you really think you can save them? All of them?” He asks them, what Vir Nominis Umbra was not expecting however was the question that Velvet pins on him.

“Do you?” Velvet questions, and he turns his head to look right into her soul.

“I…have never been asked that before.” He chuckles.

“Have you ever tried to help someone? Just once?” Velvet asks him, and he stares at her and Coco.

“Why would I?” He asks her.

“Because it’s the right thing!” She argues with disbelief at how callous he is.

“The right thing is all a matter of perspective. Who is to say that my campaign is not the right thing in my eyes? How is a cat killing a bird not the right thing to the cat?” Vir Nominis Umbra asks her as he walks around the two Huntresses.

“Then just once – try. That’s all I’m asking. You started that fire, yeah?” Velvet asks him, and he
looks down at the flames.

“I can’t confirm or deny.” Umbra says, which may as well be a yes.

“Then just once…help us save them. Maybe you may learn something new.” Velvet swiftly suggests, and Vir Nominis Umbra looks at her like she is some sort of alien. He has never known anyone to ever try that method – to actually ask him to help them help someone else before. He has the power to do so much good, but he chooses to go for the evil methods. He looks at her and then at the raging flames again.

“Fine…this once. Let’s see if your little campaign is any more interesting than my own.” Vir Nominis Umbra says to her.

When they get down there, Coco kicks the burning door down and they rush inside. Vir Nominis Umbra on the other hand just walks behind them, walking straight through the flames like they mean absolutely nothing to him. Velvet uses her ears as best she can but the constant crumbling wood and raging flames is making it difficult for her to narrow down the locations of the civilians that are trapped inside of the burning building. “I can’t find them!” Velvet calls out.

“Third floor, family of three.” Vir Nominis Umbra softly says with the roll of his eyes, like a child being made to do something he does not.

“We need to get up there.” Coco states.

Umbra clenches his fist and he blasts a bolt of black and red energy up through the floor and the entire building. He grabs the two girls by their wrists and he suddenly blasts through the hole and lands right onto the floor. His power could make him a beloved hero…so why has he never tried doing this? Being a hero for once? Why does he always choose destruction over creation?

It cannot be as simple as evil.

His hatred for the Gods is enough proof of that – something made him this way.

The question is what?

Before the two heroes and their ultimate enemy are the family in question, a mother with her husband and daughter. Covered in black dust and the father’s arm burned badly from the flames. “Worry not, people – super girls are here.” Vir Nominis Umbra sighs as he walks towards the three, picking up the little girl whilst the two Huntresses help the adults up. Umbra opens his hand and his eye ignites, Coco stares at the Summer Maiden power that he has consumed. He blasts ice from his hand around the room, extinguishing the flames in seconds, and then he forms a slide made from ice that he lets the little girl slide down. The parents follow and the firemen catch her with ease.

Velvet and Coco slide down the slide of ice he formed, and they look back to see him drop down, and the ice shatters as he lands behind them. They stand up and they follow him, Velvet faster than Coco. Vir Nominis Umbra has a cold stare on his face – unlike the cunning smirk he normally brandishes. “Look what you did! With your power you can do so much good!” Velvet is desperately trying to see if Vir Nominis Umbra can actually change, but as he stares at her…

…he looks…

…there is no real word to describe the look on his face. It is like he is – tired, not so much bored – but like all of this is just the same. Nothing he does ever seems to be different. “What difference does it make? All we did was prolong their inevitable deaths.”
“Yes, we all die eventually. But don’t you realise you have given this family more time together to spend in happiness. All the survivors can go home to their loved ones now, thanks to what you did!” Velvet points out, she looks at the building that is starting to be extinguished. He then looks back at Velvet.

“It still changes nothing.” Vir Nominis Umbra states.

“Why do this then? Why use this power that can save millions – billions – to kill them instead? Why?” She questions, and Vir Nominis Umbra stops walking away to look back at her.

“Don’t waste your time, Velvet. This heartless bastard doesn’t even know what love feels like.” Coco states with a scowl in her eyes, and Velvet looks at her – like she is about to tell her to stop. But Umbra’s words…are almost tragic.

“She’s right.” Umbra states, and Velvet looks back at him.

“I don’t.” He answers, before he walks away and disappears into a flock of black crows with red eyes and diamond beaks.

Leaving them with those last words.

I Don’t.

Kassius

His borrowed motorcycle roars as he rides across the roads that cross the canyon space, dodging the many cars that are in his way and even some massive eighteen-wheeler lorries that drive past. Some of them with the Schnee Dust Company Symbol Painted on the side of their armoured hulls. His amber eyes are focused as he drives past the many cars in his way, swerving back and forth to avoid them.

His windswept hair – even more so now – blows heavily, with his stetson hanging over his neck by the string as he stares ahead with intense focus. The Tower not far from his location as he keeps driving as fast as he can. Cars beep at him but he cannot hear them as he drives, he mounts the curb and just misses some walking pedestrians who yell at him in anger. But he still is not listening to them, his mission is clear, and he roars right up to the base of the tower. He grits his teeth when he sees them, Acolytes of Lien investigating his Tower.

His amber eyes narrow and they turn their gaze upon hearing the incoming motorcycle, with a truck with a cannon on the back. It swivels round and fires at him, launching a shell that explodes right at the side of the bike. The impact blows the wheel off, but Kassius slides down and scrapes his hand across the floor to drift what remains of the motorcycle. He then grabs onto the bike with his hand and he swings round with a roar. He launches the motorcycle with all his might, and it blasts straight into one of the soldiers. The impact causes the bike to explode into a ball of fire, launching debris and shrapnel everywhere, puncturing the armour of the truck as well.

Kassius jumps up and draws Lash Equinox, flicking it upwards so the blade extends and throwing it down into the sternum of one of the soldiers. It pins him to the ground, killing him instantly and causing his blood to pool out under his impaled corpse. Kassius lands, rolling across the ground, swinging round and punching another soldier in the face and firing at the same time, just like Yang.
The impact blows the armoured helmet apart and blood sprays from the back of his head, all over the truck.

Kassius turns to one of the soldiers who aims his Assault Rifle at him, and he unloads, launching multiple bullets at him. Kassius rips the sword from the corpse of the soldier and he starts deflecting the bullets as they fly his way. They deflect and shoot off into the distance. His eyes widen upon hearing the sound of a shell loading into the huge barrel of the cannon aimed in his direction. He spins round to see it aimed at him, and it fires. Kassius slides out of the way, seeing the shell explode behind him, so he rushes forward, and he jumps towards it, firing Vulcan Nox behind him. The action blows him further as he learned from his girlfriend, and he grabs onto the barrel. His cybernetic arm roars as the pistons and gears kick it, crushing the barrel down as he twists the cannon around. He howls as he does it, then he final snaps the mechanism, causing the cannon to fall.

Kassius leaps up in the air, and he flips over the opening, seeing one of the shells falling from the compartment and landing onto the lap of the soldier. He looks up with horror, realising he is about to die. “Oh…shi-”

The Huntsman fires Vulcan Nox and the bullet impacts the warhead and detonates it, blowing the whole Truck apart, flames erupting from the fuel supply, throwing chunks of metal into the tower and blowing sand everywhere. Kassius lands before the last soldier, and he swings round, throwing Lash Equinox into his chest, killing him as it pins him to the wall. Kassius rises back up and walks to the dead soldier and pulls his sword from his chest, seeing Hyde stood there in his head. “So much for borrowing that motorcycle.” Hyde comments.

“Yeah, yeah.” Kassius sighs, walking towards the demolition man who draws his pistol at him, but Kassius stabs his sword straight through his hand, making the man scream in terror. He takes the gun from his hand and presses the barrel to his head. “Which Tower is the right one?” Kassius questions.

“W-What?” He stammers.

“Your demolishing them, which is it?” Kassius questions.

“The M-Market One…” He stammers, and Kassius realises that is the one that Emerald and Cardin are at. Meaning they are at the one that will open the Tunnel.

“Thank you.” Kassius says, pulling the trigger and firing a bullet straight through his head, killing the soldier instantly. His body collapses to the ground and he drops the gun by his hand. He walks into the tower and he looks around, sighing as he sees the defunct tower. Kassius stares at everything in here and he clenches his hand into a fist. “Damn Arkhoni…why can’t anything be simple?” Kassius questions, as Hyde appears yet again in his head.

“I believe that was the point.” Hyde states.

“Huh?” Kassius asks him.

“Think about it – they have all these secrets, useful ways into the city. Gods forbid there was an attack being planned and they knew which tower to hit. But make twelve towers in each city that look exactly the same but only one is the real one? Makes their job harder and gives them more time to stop the terrorists. Simply genius.” Hyde states, and Kassius scoffs.

“Yeah well, maybe they could throw us a bone. Dunno why the Acolytes feel so inclined to blow up every Tower though if they know which one is the right one.” Kassius says with a sigh as he runs his hand across the old dusty wall.
They’re mercenaries. They probably set the towers up for detonation so as soon as we arrive at one, they set them off. Killing us.” Hyde assumes, and Kassius nods his head.

“Clever bastards.” Kassius says with a sigh. Kassius walks around and he looks at Hyde as he stands there. “You learn all this stuff from your past life? Or that just from being with me?” Kassius inquires.

“Professor Cronwell, class on strategy if I remember?” Hyde asks him as he leans against the wall with his spectral arms crossed.

“Oh yeah… I remember that one. About messing with the enemy, right?” Kassius asks.


“That’s it. Clever old man.” Kassius says, remembering the old days when he was learning at Haven Academy with his team.

“I still remember everything I learned with you, Kassius. I may have been a bit…let’s say feral… back then. But I was still learning with you.” Hyde states.

“I know…it’s just strange now. Knowing you once had a past life as a Higher Demon.” Kassius says as he sits on the crate the Acolytes put in there with some ammunition inside. Hyde nods his head in agreement.

“Believe me, you’re not the only one. Every memory I have returning…it makes me reel to imagine what I was once like. I may not be the Berserker…but the memories…they make it feel that way.” Hyde scoffs.

“So, when you broke out of me? Against the Apathy. That just came out of nowhere? Another memory?” Kassius inquires, and Hyde pauses as he stands there.

“There’s more to it than that.” He confesses, and Kassius looks back at the entity that lives in his head with him. “It’s…odd…it is like it wasn’t really me. I mean I was in partial control, but the rage and the hunger I felt…it was not my own. I would never just bite a Grimm’s head off like that.” Hyde explains.

“You mean to tell me that…”

“I think there is still a part of the Berserker in me than I thought – but maybe the best of it. I don’t feel any evil schemes building in me…just memories…and knowledge. So much I can hardly make sense of it all. But when that happened, I just felt this urge to protect you – but instead of taking over like usual…” Hyde explains, and Kassius finishes the sentence for him.

“You broke out of me instead.”

“Precisely.”

“What did it feel like? To be…free from me?” Kassius asks him, and Hyde looks at him and then at the spiralling staircase in the tower. Listening to the wind that whistles through the tower. But as he stands there, Kassius feels it for himself. As Hyde emerges from his body and Kassius gasps, staggering off the crate, seeing Hyde emerging in his Astral Body. Not engulfed in flames or crooked like before – normal, like he was when he spoke with them all. Kassius looks at him with disbelief, seeing the creature he always drew when he was little, the monster from his nightmares – standing before him.
Only now he is no longer afraid of him.

“It’s…unlike anything I have ever known. I just feel…alive.” Hyde states as he looks at Kassius, and he chuckles.

“It’s weird for me too – like a weight’s been lifted off me.” Kassius chuckles.

“I’m gonna choose not to take offense to that.” Hyde states with a smirk, making Kassius chuckle.

The two of them look at each other, then Kassius gets quite serious with him. “We’re in our debt to you, Hyde. If you had not broken out of me…we would all be dead.” Kassius tells him, but Hyde shakes his head.

“You don’t owe me a thing.” Hyde says. “All I want is for you and Yang to live a long and happy life together…because you’ve earned it.” Hyde says to him with a smile. Kassius smiles back and he nods – Hyde walks back to him as his spiritual body enters Kassius once more and that natural weight he has felt returns. Kassius looks around at the false tower and he sighs, walking out of it.

“Well…guess we’d better call the others.” Kassius says, as he takes out his scroll so then he can inform Cardin and Emerald that they have located the right tower. He brings his scroll to his ear and nobody answers. Until there is a deep rumbling sound from the ocean, so he turns, and his eyes widen when he sees the water beginning to part. The huge tunnel entrance emerges before his very eyes, towering high above the water, tonnes of sea water plummeting down from the mouth of the tunnel, revealing that entrance that have been searching for.

Kassius chuckles. “There it is…” Kassius says.

“BEHIND YOU, BROTHER!”

Suddenly Kannix Volantis slams his cybernetic fist straight into Kassius’ face and he tumbles across the floor, and slides his fingers across the floor, staring at the Spectre who stands before him.

“Well, well, well…lookie what we have here.” Kannix chuckles menacingly as he stares at him, and Kassius narrows his eyes and grits his teeth.

Neo isn’t here, and neither is Kelham.

They must be after the others.

Kassius draws Lash Equinox as he stares Kannix down, ready to battle, and Kannix laughs menacingly. “I have been waiting for round three.”

“Man, shut the hell up.”

Cardin

Earlier...

The two of them keep searching around the Tower, using their senses – unknowingly standing inside of the correct one. As Emerald looks around, she runs her fingers across the wall – then she stops when they feel something. A draft coming through between some of the bricks. Her eyes widen and
she presses her ear to the wall and knocks her knuckles against it. There is an echo inside, meaning that it is hollow, and there is some kind of secret passageway. “Cardin.” She softly says, and he turns his gaze to her as she listens.

“You found something?” He asks her.

“Yeah – sounds like there’s a secret passage through here. So how do we open you?” She wonders as she feels the many bricks, searching for a loose one or some kind of panel. Until suddenly Cardin swings his mace and the crystal inside detonates, creating a powerful explosion that shatters the bricks into a thousand pieces. Emerald staggers back as plumes of dust settle from the impact of his mace, then she stares at him with a heavy sigh. As the Painting of Ares Nikos slants down – and a button is revealed.

“Oh…” Cardin says as he lowers his mace, looking back at the rather disappointed looking deadpan of Emerald Sustrai as she plants her hand on her hip. “Sorry?”

“You have no respect for history, do you?” She drills, shaking her head. Cardin shrugs his shoulders as he connects his Mace to the clips on his back.

“Eh, whatever. Door’s open, c’mon let’s see what’s down here.” He says as he walks down the stone stairs, pulling out his lighter and igniting a flame so then they can see where they are going. Not like he has any cigarettes to smoke, he just has that lighter – because why not? Emerald huffs as she turns to follow him.

“Total meathead.” She whispers before deciding to follow him down into the mysterious side room buried underground. She walks behind him, and they look around at the dark room – finding some old torches on the walls that they can light. Luckily for them, Cardin’s lighter is exactly what they need. So, he takes the dancing flame and he ignites the torches one by one to light up the room. In the centre of the room is a lever.

And that’s it.

No paintings.

No Hieroglyphics.

Just a normal looking lever.

They both stare at it with caution, since it is a bit odd and suspicious to just have a lever just hanging out in the centre of a pitch-black room underground with absolutely nothing else in here. “Well… that’s totally not suspicious in any way.” Cardin comments as he looks at it, and Emerald walks towards it with him, her hands holding onto the grips of her revolvers.

“Yeaaaah…not sketchy at all.” Emerald agrees in a sarcastic tone.

“Do you think it could open the Tunnel?” He asks her.

“Why would it be underground? Would make more sense if it was at the top.” She states, and the two of them sigh.

“We already checked the top of it out – but there is a weird feeling in here.” Cardin states as he rubs the goose skin on his arms.

“I know, I can feel the energy inside this tower. Especially in here.” She agrees as she looks around, even though there are no lights in here. Cardin then has a theory, as he stares at the lever and then at
the floor, noticing there is a slight marking on the ground, one that they noticed on the floor and on the walls. It is literally a floral line, and then he notices there is a faint light inside of the base of the lever, crouching down to see the faint glimmer.

“Unless this Tower was locked down first, prevent people from activating it?” Cardin suggests.

“Could be possible…but even then, the Arkhoní could have put a trap in here.” She states.

“Why?” He asks her.

“Look at it. It’s like a candle to a moth.” Emerald says as she gestures her hand towards the lever just sitting here.

“But why bother putting a trap here when maybe you need to unlock it?” Cardin asks her.

“Maybe to stop enemies from doing it? The Arkhoní seem like a pretty paranoid people.” Emerald states. “And maybe only specific people can reactivate these towers without setting off traps.” Emerald suggests as she starts to step back and draws her weapon.

“Well – we have to see.” Cardin says as he looks at her backing up. He sighs as he sees her standing back at the steps and swinging her chained sickle through her fingers, just in case if he falls so then she can save his life. “Yeah?”

“Pretty sure.” Emerald shrugs her shoulders.

“Pretty sure will have to do.” Cardin sighs, reaching his hand out to the lever slowly, closing his eyes fearfully as he grabs onto it. “Please don’t be trap.” He whispers to himself, pulling it with force, and a loud mechanism can be heard activating beneath him. Then a beam of blue light shoots through the floor beneath them. It courses up the whole tower, following those markings all the way to the very top, and something can be heard being constructed all the way up there. “Ha-Ha! You see! No trap.” He says.

Just as the floor opens up beneath him.

“SHIT!” Cardin screams like a little girl as he plummets down towards a series of razor-sharp spikes where around six other unfortunate souls met the same fate. Clearly, they must have found the button instead of blowing the door down. Emerald throws her weapon and wraps it around his waist, catching and pulling him against the wall. He reaches and grabs onto the edge of the floor, looking down at the spikes which have impaled many adventurers.

“Told…You! God you’re a fat bastard!” She strains as she pulls him up with all her might, her muscles tensing with every yank.

“Oh thanks!” Cardin sarcastically replies, using the chain to climb back up himself. Cardin gets up, and he pushes his knee down against the floor, and Emerald grabs his arm to pull him back up to his feet. He stands tall, towering above her and she pats his back.

“You good?” She asks him.

“Yeah…nearly shit myself…but good.” He admits with a chuckle, and Emerald laughs.

“I heard something at the top of the tower. C’mon let’s go check it out.” Emerald says as she walks out of the little chamber. Cardin blows out a breath and he looks back at the floor that starts to slide back out from the walls to where they were. So, he flips them off with his middle finger at how they nearly killed him. All because he did not have the correct fingerprint.
A bit extreme.

The two of them take the long spiralling staircase back up to the very top of the tower. Such a long journey, one they did not want to have to make another two times. But in times of need, you do the things you don’t particularly want to do. The pair of exhausted Hunters arrive at the top of the tower, pressing their hands to their knees as they shake it off. “Gods…why is this so exhausting?” Cardin questions.

“I’d make a fat joke if I wasn’t exhausted too.” She says with a chortle.

“Why’re you so mean?” Cardin questions.

“Coming from the Ex-Bully?” Emerald scoffs, and Cardin pauses at that.

“Fair enough.” He agrees to disagree, and he rises back up, and his eyes widen as he sees the view again. The city expanding across the canyon, ingenious architecture and use of their surroundings. And of course, the stunning sapphire blue ocean that stretches out for as far as the eye can see. “Whoa. Second time around, still doesn’t get old.” Cardin says as he stares out at the beautiful world before his eyes.

Emerald turns her gaze to what came up from the floor, and she touches Cardin’s arm to get his attention. The two of them stare at the terminal that has risen from the ground, and there is some information inside of it. They look at it, and as their hand approaches it – the hieroglyphics of High Arkhon translate down into their tongue. It is another list of events.

- More stars begin to fade, leaving Astronomers completely befuddled at what is causing these stars to fade away – they are not even going through the supernova phase…just fading
- Moon destabilisation has increased, followed with increased Grimm activity, becoming more aggressive and harder to tame
- The Congregation of Dawn disperse after the death of the Father, whose actions caused global destruction after forming a mountain range to bury his secrets: Earthquakes, Volcanic Eruptions band Tsunamis
- The Vanguards returned with Azura Vex in their custody, with very few Silver Eyed Knights returning
- Vyrryk Arc continues to defend both his own family and the Varr Skaal Tribe from supporters of the Congregation of Dawn
- Ezekiel Arc and the other powerful Lords of Arkhonex take charge of the Politics after the deaths of the Councillors
- Head of Scientific Affairs – Sylens Emerais – learns of a new disease unleashed by the Congregation of Dawn on the island of Menagerie, codenamed: Horridus Morbus

The terminal closes the information displayed, and Cardin looks at Emerald and she sighs. “Looks like our Arkhon buddies had problems with the same disease we are.” She says.

“Kassius told me about some stuff his buddies told him – apparently the new one is not the same to the old disease. That one killed people and broke down their organs…it never turned them into Grimm Zombies.” Cardin explains as he sees the holographic screen close, revealing a glowing orange panel inside, one that his hand can fit into.

“Well, let’s hope we can cure it. Been enough death lately.” She says with a sigh.

Cardin opens his closed fist and he goes to press his hand against the panel, before he does it though he looks at Emerald. She nods her head supportively and he blows out a shaky breath – hoping this does not have yet another trap in it. Cardin stares down at it, then he pushes his hand against it, and
there is a sudden quake in the distance, white foam building up in the ocean. The two of them stare and they gasp, eyes widen as the water level begins to drop as a huge metal structure rises from the murky blue. As it rises the water level rises back up, some of it falling into the tunnel until another piece of metal emerges, stopping the water from flooding it.

The Tunnel Entrance is massive…but as they stare at it, they know that this means the Acolytes and the rest of the city will see it too. “Nice job, c’mon. Let’s get down there. We need to get back to the Ship.” Emerald says as she starts walking down the stairs. As she does it, she pulls her Scroll from her pocket and contacts the Group Chat they have set up contact everyone at once.

“Guys! Great news.” Emerald begins.

Until a different voice chuckslees on the other end, hacked into their feed. “You know, I’m surprised a petty thief like you has made it this far, Emerald. I’m impressed.” Whitley says, and she slows down with widened eyes, and Cardin stares at her with concern, her red irises dart to Cardin’s.

“Hey, Whitley.” She nervously greets, and he mouths his name with disbelief, and the two of them keep walking down the stairs. “I’m quite interested, buddy – how’d you get our numbers? Coco leave it on a cocktail napkin back at Fallingwater Estate?”

“He! Yeah, I wish it was that easy. Nah, I had to pay top price for this kind of hacking tech to chat with you.” Whitley says.

“Well, gotta be in it to win it right?” Emerald asks him as she walks down the steps.

“I’m always game.” Whitley chuckles, as they keep walking down the stairs of the tower, Emerald knows she cannot risk pissing him off – so she plays it cool.

“Well I hope you haven’t spent too much on this whole Arkhonex Adventure, heard the competition’s fierce.” Emerald states. “Wanna bet on who’ll get there first for Archer?”

“Yeah you pulled off some clever moves back at the Estate. It pissed me off, Buuuut as I said – I’m always game.” Whitley chuckles as he sits in the truck with Donovan Gele, his robotic body tapped into their network. “But at the same time, some of my partners in this endeavour would rather mitigate unnecessary risks.” Whitley states as he glances at his Uncle, thinking of Kelham, Kannix and Neo as well.

“Wow – a Schnee taking orders from somebody else. I must be dreaming.” Emerald chuckles.

“Well sometimes we businessmen do what we need to so then we turn a profit. So…I have an offer for all of you.” Whitley says as he looks ahead at the towers. “Drop all of this, leave it all behind and live your life.” Whitley offers, getting a hard glance from his Uncle, but he holds up his hand to stop him from saying a word. “I’m willing to let bygones be bygones.” Whitley states.

“Tempting offer Shitley – but we’re not really the kinda folk who quit whilst they’re ahead.” She comments with a grin, making Cardin chuckle.

“That so? I guess then you know about Kelham standing outside your tower with a full force of soldiers right now, right?” He guesses, and Emerald stops with widened eyes. Cardin stops as well, and he looks back at her.

“How the hell did you track us?” He questions.

“How do you think? The amount you use your scrolls to chat with each other – I can hear every word. Bit of an upgrade thanks to Ortega’s shot.” Whitley chuckles – he can hear everything they
say because of his connection to the Cross Continental Transmit Network. Emerald closes her eyes.

“Wait…what? What the hell happened? What’s wrong with your voice?” She questions, because for a split second when he said the word shot, his voice crackled.

“You can thank Ortega for that. Bastard shot me in the head, now I am a machine because of him. Now though – I can hear every conversation you have. We’ll see you soon, Em.” Whitley says, ending the call, and leaving the Thief shocked.

“Emerald?” Cardin asks her, but she quickly sends a message to the rest of the gang.

“Guys! Quickly destroy your scrolls! Whitley is here and he is hunting us, he’s been turned into some kind of machine, he can hear everything we say! Destroy your scrolls!” Emerald demands, before sending the message and closing her scroll. She turns and holds out her hand. “Scroll. Now.” She demands, so he pulls his scroll out and gives it to her. She takes both hers and his and throws them down to the floor and shoots them with Silent Judgement, shattering them, causing Cardin to jolt.

“That cost me so much money.” Cardin jolts.

“I’ll buy you a new one.” Emerald promises, but after shooting it – they learn Whitley’s words were no idle threat.

“I was hoping I’d get to find your hide again, Winchester. And what do you know, another bounty as well. The beautiful Emerald Sustrai. Was hoping I could find you, a pretty girl like you would make a fine slave.” Kelham chuckles sinisterly, and Cardin grits his teeth in anger, approaching the closed doors, he peers through the gap to see them all aiming their rifles. And stood atop one of the trucks is Kelham, his clawed Gauntlets in his hands.

“Hey Kelham, long time no see.” Cardin greets.

“It has been – and it seems you’ve been busy since.” Kelham says as he stands there.

“Could say the same of you. When the hell did you join up with Ortega?” He questions, since he knows about him thanks to stories from Kassius and Emerald.

“Oh, he excommunicated me years ago for being too extreme. Now I’m in charge of this fine Company, after Ortega’s transgressions.” Kelham states with a chuckle in his voice.

“Ortega would never betray without good reason.” Emerald whispers, she did not know the man well but when she was with Salem, she knew he was a man of honour.

“Is he dead?” Cardin asks him.

“Ortega? Dunno, little rat scuttled away before we could kill him. Could be anywhere now – doesn’t matter though, I’m in charge now. That’s what happens when you let unrealistic dreams of saving a dead daughter control you. Better to let the past burn if you ask me.” Kelham scoffs, and Cardin looks at Emerald – for even she never knew about his dead daughter.

“How would you know? From what I know about you, you ran from Beacon and became a killer.” Kelham scoffs, and Cardin grits his teeth.

“You don’t know a thing about me.” Cardin states.
“All I need to know is that there’s a tasty bounty on your head boy – and I can’t wait to collect it.” Kelham snarls with enjoyment.

Cardin looks at Emerald and she nods, readying Silent Judgement, and he charges up the Crystal in his Mace so then he can engage his semblance – the Wickerman’s Fury.

“But I’m afraid I’m tired of chat. Kill Cardin but keep the girl alive, been wanting a pretty girl back in my bed.” He chuckles, and Emerald scoffs and rolls her eyes.

“Three!”

They both stand at the ready.

“TWO!”

Cardin’s semblance activates and there is a screech from Emerald’s semblance, a short pulse into all their minds.

“ONE! FIRE!” Kelham bellows, and they all fire.

Cardin and Emerald charge forward, and the battle begins.
Ruby

Argus might be a very beautiful city, however once you enter the back alleys it suddenly looks quite intimidating. Trash thrown everywhere, showing that the pretty clean streets on the surface are actually just dumped between the buildings where only the homeless survive. One of which they can see, sat against the wall with an old trash bag wrapped around him like a sleeping bag. A thick beard filled with lice and dirt stuck to his face, bags hanging under his exhausted eyes, bloodshot from either lack of sleep or heartbreak.

This city may be nicknamed the Sleeping Angel of Remnant, but it is completely known that the city has the highest unemployment and homeless levels in all of the cities of Remnant. Vacuo has less homeless people than Argus even before the attack that killed millions of people that day, infected by the disease. Pyrrha looks at the man and she smiles, crouching down and she pulls some lien from her pocket and she puts it in the man’s hand. He looks at the money and then at her with a truly appreciative smile on his face, like he is about to smile. “Thank you so much…you are better than most.” The Homeless Man says to her with a grateful smile on his face.

“Please, find a soft comfortable bed to stay for the night. And if you can find an Employment Centre…” Pyrrha requests and he smiles, weakly standing up. His body frail and almost bone-like due to how little nutrition he has been getting. The man looks so happy and grateful for her gift – for it was enough to keep him going for around a month. He leaves and Pyrrha smiles, her heart warmed by his reaction.

Ruby looks back at Pyrrha, she loves how kind the red headed Spartan is…yet…Ruby saw the man, and completely side-lined him. Did not even notice him, or did she? Did she even care for the poor unfortunate man, she does not realise it, but her kindness is slowly stripping itself away? That kind girl would have once helped him up and taken him to the nearest homeless shelter where he could be safe, but she did not even seem to care. They may have more important matters at hand than just the welfare of a homeless man they have never met before…but it worries her that her compassion is slowly fading away.

Oscar’s hazel eyes focus on her as she walks away from them, straight past Jaune who waits for Pyrrha. He looks at her, but Oscar follows her as she keeps walking ahead. “Ruby.” Oscar calls out.

“No time to wait, let's go.” Ruby says, still quite visibly shaken from what she learned and experienced inside of that Insane Asylum.

“Ruby, stop.” Oscar asks her.

“No, we need to get to the tower.” She repeats.

Oscar reaches out and grabs her hand, she spins round and stares at him after hearing him have to raise his voice so then she actually listens to him. “Will you just stop and look at me?” He exclaims as he spins her round. Pyrrha and Jaune both look at the couple as they have a small argument with each other, glancing at one another.

“What?” She questions him, staring right back at him with her last remaining silver eye.
“You can’t keep marching off on your own like that, you’re gonna get yourself killed.” He reminds, remembering the countless times she has pulled a stunt like that.

“You have I ever done that?” Ruby questions argumentatively.

“You stormed off when Weiss got mad at you, nearly getting killed by Neo and Salem. You ran off to try and save Gray, Vos and Serena – alone – and almost got killed by Death. You went after Fennec, alone, and nearly got killed by Corsac. You keep shooting off without waiting for backup!” Oscar lists with frustration in his voice, since Ruby looks like she is about to do the exact same thing once again.

Ruby sighs with annoyance at him as he holds onto her, not tightly but tight enough so then she does not walk away. Both Pyrrha and Jaune keep their boundaries as they witness the two of them arguing. “Alright… alright… what’s your point?” She questions.

“I can’t lose you… not after everything we’ve been through, so please – stop running off on your own. You’re a team leader, my girlfriend… and you have a family who would die for you.” Oscar reminds. But those words may not have been the best ones that he could have chosen, as it seems to detonate something inside of her.

“DON’T YOU GET IT YET? I DON’T WANT PEOPLE I LOVE TO DIE FOR ME!” Ruby explodes like a volcanic eruption, her voice echoing like the cataclysm that rages in her heart. Both Jaune and Pyrrha step back, shocked from her sudden outburst at her boyfriend, her eyes glowing bright silver as she stares right at her with closed fists. But as she pants, she closes the white flames and exhales heavily, releasing the tension in her heart.

“You think we want to die, Ruby? We don’t… but as he said. We’re family, and we protect each other.” Jaune states.

“Then stop protecting me. All I bring is death, everywhere I go.” She turns away from them all, crossing her arms and turning away from them.

“I heard what you said earlier, Ruby… and it scared me.” Oscar says to her.

“What’re you talking about?” Ruby questions, unaware that Oscar was actually stood quite nearby the room where she was speaking with the hallucinations of Tyrian and Roman. But she starts to figure it out from the welling tears in Oscar’s eyes.

“I heard what you said – about dying if it will stop Umbra.” Oscar tells her, and her silver eye widens, and she shamefully hangs her head and closes her eye.

“Oscar… please… I don’t wanna talk about it.” Ruby begs.

“Well I do, because I have not fallen in love with you for five years, survived in Salem’s cage with you and been by your side through all of this to lose you. Because even if we do win this fight, it won’t be worth living in without you.” Oscar tells her, gently cradling her cheeks in his hands, and she holds onto him, tears beginning to stream down from her eye.

“But what if I don’t have that chance? That choice? What if I have to die?” Ruby asks him, he steps closer and gently presses his forehead against hers affectionately.

“Then don’t.” Oscar replies, making her scoff.

“Oscar, it’s doesn’t work that way.”
“I don’t care – don’t you dare even think about dying on me. It is not what Scarlet died for, not what Sage died for, not what Ilia died for…and not what Tai died for. Everyone that has died has done so…so then you could get here. I know you don’t want that to be the truth, but it is, and that is because they believe in you. And so, do I, so stop getting these ideas of sacrificing yourself in your head. Because it may end for you, but what about us? What about me?” Oscar asks her as he presses his hand to his chest.

She cannot even find the words; he may sound harsh with the way he said it but, in a way, it is the best way to get this idea in her head. Jaune and Pyrrha both gently squeeze her shoulder. “We’re here for you.” Jaune promises.

“Every step.” Pyrrha promises with a smile. Ruby sighs and she wipes a tear from her eye as she looks at Oscar.

“Always know how to make a girl cry, Oscar.” She giggles, making him chuckle.

“What can I say? I’m a romantic.” Oscar says.

The moment crashes hard when there is a mysterious paroxysm nearby, but there is something strange about the blast. They can hear the sound of rubble being thrown from the explosion, but then it sounds like it is being reversed or rewound. Then it explodes again, and the same thing happens. It keeps repeating this pattern, over and over and over again. Unlike anything they have ever heard before, and obviously out of curiosity they have to investigate. They turn around the alleyway to find a collapsed tower, blocking their path to the one of which that they are investigating.

The tower stands tall with some cracks spreading up the ivy-covered bricks, forging its superior architecture. And lo and behold: the broken loop in time. An explosion detonating over and over again, happening and reversing, looping round and round in an unending fashion. “What the hell is this?” Jaune questions with confusion, and Oscar looks around…and he sees a date that has been written on the wall.

“It’s me…” Oscar realises.

“I’m…sorry? I don’t understand…” Pyrrha timidly asks as she fidgets with her fingers, confused as to what Oscar means by all this. At the end of the day, she has never seen the effects of Time Travel like this before, only Ruby has physically experienced it – apart from Ozpin of course. And the Visionary Books are not the same in this case, because you are not physically travelling through time itself.

“Oh, sorry Pyrrha. Y’know my semblance is manipulating time?” Oscar asks her.

“Yes.” Pyrrha replies.

“Well that also means I can actually travel through time as well – although I have been learning on how to improve. It is still quite dangerous…and I have never travelled this far back on my own before.” Oscar says as he stares at the date.

“How far back?” Ruby asks him.

“Two thousand and three hundred and seventy-six years…” Oscar replies, and their eyes widen in shock. “Around thirty years after the first time I ever travelled, with Ozpin…come to think of it.” Oscar chuckles.

“Wait…I can see you on the other side.” Jaune tells him, so the three of them look through the looping explosion, seeing that there is not just Oscar on the other side but also Ruby.
“The date is in my handwriting too.” Pyrrha comments, so Oscar looks at the ink and realises that it too is flickering. Meaning she needs to write down the date so then he can begin the travelling process. For that is how time travel works, the loop shows hints of what he must do so then he can close it. Oscar looks around, for the pen this was written in must be here as well – because it literally is just a black marker pen. And of course – there is one literally right next to them luckily, looks like a rat has been eating the end of it though.

“Heads up!” Oscar calls out as he throws it to Pyrrha. She catches it skilfully and pulls the lid off, gagging as she feels the saliva of the rat still on the torn-up plastic. However, she has seen and experienced much worse when in the Charred Forest, so she swiftly recovers from it and she pulls off the cap.

“So…do I just…” Pyrrha wonders as she waves the tip of the marker around curiously.

“Yep, just write over it.” Oscar says, so Pyrrha does as the Last Traveller says. She writes upon the markings left behind by her future self, and the crackled moments in time slowly fade away with every letter she writes down. It is amazing, seeing how time works like this, like shattered glass melding back together after her ink is cast upon the concrete mortared bricks. Time being rebuilt with every single curve of her letters, it is something to behold, something very difficult to describe in words exact.

Jaune chuckles as he watches her practically fixing time. “Never thought we would be doing this back when we were getting bored out of our minds at Oobleck’s classes did we?” Jaune asks them, and Ruby softly chuckles – despite still heartbroken that they lost him – they can still honour his memory by remembering the times that they had with him.

After Pyrrha finishes writing the date into the wall, the four of them look at the looping explosion and Oscar deduces what is going on here. “Well…it looks like this tower collapsed and we needed to get some explosives back here to blow open a hole.” Oscar says as he crosses his arms.

“And Ruby’s with you.” Jaune adds.

“Yeah…so we need to go back…to that time?” She asks curiously.

“Uh-huh…further back than we’ve ever gone before.” Oscar grumbles as he stares at the fractured moment in time that he needs to complete the loop.

The two of them blow out a breath of nervousness. She holds his hand, remembering how they did it before back at Vacuo. And Oscar holds her hand tight, then looks back at them. “Wish us luck. We’ll be back in no time.” Oscar assures.

“Ha! Saw what you did there.” Jaune chuckles as he snaps his fingers at him, and Oscar just rolls his eyes at his own completely unintentional pun. Good thing Yang was not there, otherwise he would be in a headlock right now.

The two stand there, and Oscar raises his stop watch around his neck, he has never had to travel this far back, but he switches the clock so then it shows the days, and he multiples the year by the amount shown there. He holds onto Ruby and she gently holds his hand. Then…they fade away from Pyrrha and Jaune’s eyes, but in Ruby and Oscar’s, the word begins to reverse. The clouds zooming across the sky, buildings being deconstructed over time. Watching as the entire city of Argus is completely torn down and the annihilated buildings of Arkhoni Old start rising back up, the howls of Grimm surround and the unending screams of so many innocents.

The sky even seems to change, as the Moon starts to come back together more, and the stars start
reappearing as the years pass. It takes a few minutes of waiting in this time, their auras connected together, protecting them from the harsh power of time itself. Eventually they arrive at their point of time that have set, but as soon as they land, there is a powerful pulse of rioting warriors that pulls the couple apart. “OSCAR!” Ruby cries out, as she gets thrown into the dirty as soon as she appears, her face crashing into the mud. The man standing before stammers as he stares at her, holding an axe in his hands.

“The fuck? Where’d she come from?” He questions, strangely enough speaking in the Common Tongue. However, Ozpin did tell Oscar back on his first trip that his semblance translates the tongue of old languages into that which he can understand, meaning the same must be available for Ruby. She rolls onto her back as the man roars and he swings his axe over his head to split her skull. She rolls out of the way and kicks him in his leg to bring him down to his knee. She swiftly grabs onto her knife sheathed onto her boot and drives it right up his jaw, his eyes widen as blood pours down the blade and her hand that tightly grasps it.

Her eyes widen from realising what she just did, feeling the warm sticky blood covering her hand. However, when that happens...something quite chilling happens...there is a flash between moments in time. From then and back in the present, seeing the man’s corpse as he falls from her body, landing on the ground. As he lands, she sees the ground now...and most likely...his bones buried under the ground over time.

Then it all comes back to now, she killed a man, and his body was just left behind...how many others are like that now?

She pushes herself back up, looking around to see violence spreading like a disease across the Old Argus. People with axes and swords, this is clearly after the fall of Arkhonex, because they are fighting so savagely against one another. Men and women stabbing each other with swords, spears and splitting skulls with axes and hammers. No firearms whatsoever – these are the Dark Ages that fell across Remnant after Arkhonex was destroyed.

Blood…and ashes...

Nothing more.

A horrifying age that lasted for eighty years, children were probably born and never grew old enough to see the end of it. It is easy to forget that the Arkhoni can live up to 200 Years, meaning that these people who survived...must have been the same equivalent to fifty- or sixty-years old judging by Vyrryk and Claudia’s ages. Ruby looks around desperately at the chaos. “OSCAR!” Ruby cries out again, drawing her knife once more and raising it, the blade sharpened and coated in the blood of her enemies. Another swings at her but she dodges his attack and pushes the knife into his head with gritted teeth, killing him instantly, dropping his corpse to the ground.

Another man leaps at her, but she dashes through the crowd, and she cuts through them with ease, slashing their throats open and jamming the blade into the eye of another. Mud stuck in her hair and blood mixed with the clay across one side of her beautiful face – she looks through the chaos. There is an opening in the violence, and she makes a break for it, rolling under the swing of a man’s hammer, then jumping over the swing of another’s axe. His blade lodges right into the stomach of the Hammer Swinger. Ruby keeps moving, hearing the only gunshots, which causes the dispersal.

“Back off!” Oscar bellows as he aims his Duel Revolvers at the warriors that surround him, their eyes wide at the firearms at his disposal.

“Where the hell did you find a gun…they have not been used since Arkhonex was destroyed.” One of the men whimpers, and Oscar keeps them all at bay with the barrels of his modified pistols.
“Keep back or I will kill you all, do not test me.” Oscar warns.

“OSCAR!” Ruby cries out, running to the love of her life, and relief fills his heart as he catches her, kissing her lovingly, before they swiftly break and turn back to the many Skirmishers that surround them. Ruby draws Crescent Rose and the huge weapon transforms into her arms as she watches them with her glowing silver eye.

The many Skirmishers stare at their weapons with disbelief, then the two Travellers start to move back carefully away from them. “Follow us and your dead. Keep killing if you want…just stay away from us.” Ruby demands, and the farmers and random individuals watch them, until the fighting starts to continue from behind, men and women being stabbed. So Ruby and Oscar make a break for it, sprinting down the Alleyway of the building, when suddenly a bolt of lightning cracks into the tower above them, sending it crashing down into the ground, right in front of them. They look around and realise what it is...

It is the same ruin that blocks them now.

The two of them look back to see the Skirmishers charging towards them, so Oscar takes the chance, grabbing Ruby’s hand and he sends them back forward in time, and they vanish before the Skirmishers. They stop with disbelief as they fade away, before hacking and slashing at each other in the tight alleyway. They travel through time again, seeing that collapsed tower remaining there over the two thousand years that it had fallen there for, vegetation growing over it. Animals making homes inside of it, habitats forming too, and civilisation forming around it as well.

The two of them look at each other with disbelief at how close that was...they could have been killed...or worse...split up in a long distant time. Ruby hugs him into a kiss, so loving and forceful that he pushes his hand through her hair. Their kiss breaks after a minute, panting with relief to be able to do that. “I thought...”

“You lost me?” Ruby chuckles shyly as she looks into his eyes. He gently presses his head to hers and she does the same. “I’m sorry…I won’t do it again…or I’ll try not to.” She giggles, making him chuckle as well.

Finally, they arrive, a few moments before they found it, and they look at the other side of it. Ruby taps her lip as she looks around, confused since there were no explosions there to speak of for them to use. So maybe there is another way...

Then she realises...

It might not be an explosion at all, there were not real flames there, they were glowing white, blowing the debris out of the way. It is entirely possible that the broken moment in time that they saw was in fact her using her Silver Eyes to clear the path. “I have an idea.” She softly says, and she lifts her hands to her precious eye patch, over the blinded eye. She gives it to the man she loves, and he stands back, looking at her as she closes her eyes. She exhales as she focuses, having a target in her mind – to move the debris out of the way, to clear a path. Her eyes open and her silver irises glow bright, and suddenly she blasts a powerful ray of light from them.

The ray does exactly that, shattering the rock and launching it across the ground, and not only that it hardens stone around the edges, creating a perfect circular hole for them to enter through. As the bright light of Ruby’s silver eyes parts, even though one is blinded by the arrow, they see Jaune and Pyrrha dodging the rocks that were launched out the way. They turn their gaze to see the two of them standing on the other side, and Ruby covered in mud. Both of them look totally shocked.

“What the hell happened?” Jaune asked.
“We landed in the middle of a warzone…nearly got killed.” Ruby says as Oscar pulls out a cloth and he starts cleaning up her pretty face, wiping off the mud and blood from her cheek and her neck. The feeling of his hand on her smooth neck does really make her feel good, but she does not let him know that. The four of them continue on their path, heading up the stairs to the tower.

“What was it like?” Pyrrha asks.

“What was what like?” Ruby asks in return.

“Arkhonex? Or that time?” She clarifies, and Ruby sighs sadly.

“Bad…people were slaughtering each other. It sounds like the Dark Ages that Ozpin and Kragen talked about…the Eighty Years?” Ruby asks them.

“Gods…that’s terrible.” Pyrrha sadly says.

“It nearly wiped out all life on Remnant…I guess it was expected to be bad.” Ruby says as she pushes the doors open…which were not locked for some reason. The four of them look around as they enter the Tower, seeing the markings on them all…but what stands at the very middle and the centre?

A Book…

A Visionary Book.

It’s whispering voices are all calling out to Ruby, and she looks at them. At first, they assume it is one of Vyrryk Arc’s…but as Ruby and Jaune approach, it opens up and the symbols around the handprint…are not what they expected.

A Rose.

A Snowflake.

A Nightshade.

And a Bell.

Ruby knows those symbols very well. “It’s…Team R.W.B.Y…” Ruby stammers as she stares at the book.

“What? Why the hell has it got your symbols on it?” Oscar questions, and Ruby has many ideas…but she does not raise any of them.

“We need all the help we can get…” Ruby says as she extends her hand. “Search for the panel, Oscar could you stay with me?”

“Always.” Oscar promises with a smile, Jaune and Pyrrha nod as they search for the Terminal to unlock the Tunnel System.

Ruby lifts her hand and pulls the fingerless glove off with the other, looking at her boyfriend, who supportively nods and smiles as he stands behind her so he can catch her when the book sets her free. Her hand hovers over the book…then she presses it down onto the palm. The magical ice forms around her body and she gasps and as the energy courses through her body and into her brain.

However…
She does not realise this book is different, and it has caused the rest of the team to collapse into a temporary seizure as the information is sent into their minds as well. Yang and Weiss too, causing both Neptune and Sun to panic when they see their bodies writhing around on their beds, eyes rolling into the back of their heads.

Ruby opens her silver eye, finding herself in a blank realm, and she turns to see Weiss, Blake and Yang there as well. “Guys? What’re you doing here?” She questions, and they just look stunned.

“What’s happening?” Yang whimpers.

“I had hoped you would come…” The voice of Ozpin emerges from behind them. The four of them turn to see him walking towards them with his cane in his hand. “I understand this must be quite perplexing…but this is a past version of me…and it seems I succeeded in making sure you find this book.” Ozpin says to them.

“Huh?” Weiss whimpers fearfully, looking at Ruby and Blake.

“We’re in a Visionary Book…I didn’t think that it would…bring the rest of you…it had our markings on it.” Ruby states, then they all stare at him, able to come to the same conclusion.

He made this Visionary Book/

“He knew?” Blake questions with disbelief.

“I do apologise…but I have done what I did to make sure you find it.” Ozpin states. Ruby glares at him…because this means he knew this was the right tower all along, yet he did not ever say that. He just sent the others on a ridiculous goose chase…and for what? He knew Ruby’s team would find it.

What else has he been hiding from them?

“What is this?” Ruby questions. “What could be so important?”

“The truth…of how we became what we are.” Ozpin states as the electricity courses across his hand. He stares right at them.

“How we became…the Knights of Grimm.”

Ozpin

“There are three cursed emotions that plague this beautiful world of ours.

Death, Sorrow, Fear and Rage.

Anger makes us all do the things that are unwarranted, misunderstood. It makes even the best people commit acts of terrible things to let out their rage. Sorrow can corrupt the souls of the happiest of people, causing harm to themselves and eventually to other people. It spreads very easily, through families and friendship, the by-product of suffering itself. Fear can tear the bravest of men down; all
it takes is the act of one individual to ignite the fire of trepidation in a dry forest of society. And that once spark can tear down the greatest lands and the greatest people.

And all three emotions can culminate to one thing that all leads to the dark end that awaits everyone…

Death.

Death can be caused by these emotions or by the rage of a good man who seeks vengeance, as the search for revenge can cause more destruction than a man of chaos who does not. And the power of bringing death to ones’ enemies without any consequences…can breed worse consequences…to those that they protect

The Five Hallowed Curses of the world - Death, Loss, Vengeance, Fear and Fury.

These five words exist in the forms of five mysterious figures, five mysterious Knights.

They were forever known as the Knights of Grimm, but they were not always merciless entities of destruction…

This is their tale…

…our tale.”

Ruby looks around with the rest of her team, all of them bound into this realm, the white page forming the scarily familiar landscape of the Volcanic Chain Isles. She moves her black and red hair from her eye so then she can see what Ozpin is speaking of. Their Headmaster appears before them with his hands atop his cane, continuing his tale, telling it like a fairy tale.

“In the Ancient Times, before the Fall of Arkhonex that spread death and destruction across the entire planet, there were once five individuals who were stranded on an island after their ship was wrecked by hazardous waves and unsurmountable odds. The waves shattered the thick wooden hide of their boat and the remains were condemned to the deep blue, leaving them there.” Ozpin narrates as he looks upon them, and the four of them are moved in the memory towards their respective Knights of Grimm. Staring at them as they struggle through the harsh storms that hit, the same day that Kannix Volantis was lost and became the monster he is now.

“Four of the five warriors were known as Vanguards, legendary warriors who unlocked their semblances and used their aura to battle against odds that would kill most Knights. They were mostly fighters for hire, who were paid coin for their efforts in killing Creatures of Grimm or dangerous people who had high bounties on their heads. But there were times where the Vanguard were called to face impossible odds, and they would either return or die with honour on the field of battle.” Ozpin explains as he stands beside his past self and the rest of the future Knights of Grimm.

Weiss looks at Ozpin. “Like Huntsmen…” Weiss says.

“Indeed, we were the earliest version, which is why I created the Huntsmen Academies. There were not nearly enough of us to challenge the Grimm when Arkhonex attacked. If we taught people to fight like we could, like the Silver Eyed Warriors, then maybe we could stand a chance.” Ozpin states, and Yang scoffs, still looking frail and nervous as she stands there.

“Clearly didn’t work for us.” Yang sighs.

“As long as the battle rages on, the war is not over.” Ozpin reminds, and then he returns to his tale, the members of Team R.W.B.Y in this vision seeing their Dark Sides.
“The Vanguard of the Eclipse – Krekras Blackridge, stood tall and defiant in the face of danger. A Swordsman, one who was very efficient at killing, but little else in his life. He could commit himself with marriage, something he was forced into like most from our time. With raven black hair and blue eyes and a beard grown from his time away from society, he has grown used to this form of life. Lice crawling in his hair from the time in the woods and his skin hard from the rough weather. His hair wet and skin just as bad from the sea water that clings to him. Krekras wears a suit of armour that is very impressive, black mostly, with vambraces on his wrists that connect together seamlessly; huge and sharp shoulder pauldrons to deflect any weapons that come his way. His gauntlets are chunky and can crush the hands of any person that comes at him. Cuirass and Plackart intricately woven together black metal pieces that move flawlessly with his own movements and his scabbard on his back for the sword that he carries. His helmet is on the floor with sockets being the only things that show his face. Fully armoured, no blade could touch him, but starvation and dehydration are still a threat to him on this isolated island.”

It is like he is directly reading a book to them, even though they can see him clear as day…yet Ozpin continues to do so. Ruby stares at him, the same man that would later form a bow that would take out her eye. She can see the glyphs on his forearm that managed to form the dust that created the bow he shot her eye with. She always wondered how he managed to form a bow like that.

At the same though…they have never seen him in the flesh except for these Visionary Books.

He shakes the water from his body and turns to his companions on the island with him. “Well this is just perfect!” He shouts, complaining of their current predicament. He stops round, and the beautiful female Vanguard pushes her long white hair from her eyes, also soaked through. “No food, no water to drink and we are stuck here on this godforsaken island!” He roars with rage, shaking his fist up at the sky. He stops and sees the Huntress clambering out from the Shipwreck, glad to see she is alive. Weiss looks at her…but she does not have the pale blue skin, and she actually looks happier.

“She is a very beautiful woman, but her looks do not mean that she is unable, a lethal Archer indeed, with almost glowing blue almond shaped eyes and spotless complexion. Her name is Starla Schnee. Her chin comes to the point in the same shape as the lower half of a heart. She holds her bow in one hand and her quiver strapped across her body, arrows at the ready to be launched into the hide of any animal or person that challenges her. She is tall, but still shorter than the massive armoured Vanguard who stands by the wreckage whilst their other ally pulls their prisoner from the wreckage of their ship.”

This is a part of the story they never realised, that when they found Axzura Vex they crashed yet again, the storm slamming their ship back into the islands and stranding them once more, before they got back to Kragen on the Dauntless. Ozpin continues his Novel-Like Description of the Warriors.

“She wears brown leather pelt clothes around her body, the fur of a bear fashioned into a collar around her neck and the skin of a Sabre Tooth Cat covers her body, an animal that once roamed our lands before war caused them to be extinguished. She wears leggings made from similar pelts; she has not had to worry about the clothes of society since she has fashioned them herself.” Ozpin describes as Starla speaks to the other Knights of Grimm.

“We will have to find shelter fast, before that storm kills us.” She explains, her eyes on the skies. The rain is still pouring from the dark clouds above them, forks of hot white light shooting from the clouds and into the ground, over and over again. Weiss looks at her as she ties her white hair behind her head, wringing the rainwater from the strands of hair. She seems so different, but the connection that she and Krekras once shared is clear as she stays close to him.

“The third member of the group hauls the prisoner out with his bare hands. He wears a suit of armour
as well, but there are fewer plates than that of his ally, Krekras. His hair is slicked backwards and is brown; he also has a pair of yellowish-brown eyes. He holds a crossbow in one hand and with the other he pulls their prisoner out. The Prisoner is writhing around but he does not seem too troubled by him.” Ozpin narrates as they watch the memory.

Blake looks at him, remembering the tale of the Knights of Grimm, seeing something is indeed different. “I thought Axzura went willingly, why is he trying to escape?” Blake inquires.

“He did, but in the ship, we tried to escape in, he nearly drowned in the brig, so he was still in a state of flight.” Ozpin tells her, before Rylen speaks.

“Seems to not like being out of his cell, by the looks of things.” He chuckles as he pulls him out of the ship.

“He wears a cloak of Wyvern’s Skin around his armour that protects him from the flames of another dragon or the bolts of another crossbow. He has a Spear strapped to his back that he uses in close quarters combat, scars on his chest that is visible from the less armour that he wears. His name is Rylen Vazquez, and he was once a mere actor on stage, but also was a very skilled warrior. A Vanguard just like Starla, Krekras…and myself.”

That’s when they see the fourth emerging from the bowels of the ship, all four members of Team R.W.B.Y stare at him. “The fourth Vanguard was a Captain, called Wymerus Ozymandias…or as you know him now…Professor Ozpin.” He tells them, not a twist that they are surprised at any longer, yet the story is still interesting. Ruby and Blake know of how his wife and child were killed inside of the home they lived in after the Congregation of Dawn attack. “My hate…it consumed me, a hunger for revenge, and I wanted to watch him burn, but this revenge was something I could never claim, for we sentenced a hero to a fate he did not deserve.”

Yang looks at him as he crashes down to the ground.

Rylen pushes the Pirate down onto the floor and the Pirate growls with anger, staggering back to his feet and he swings his fist at Rylen, out of anger for how he nearly drowned in the brig. He steps aside and then close-line’s him with his arm, knocking the Pirate Captain off his feet and onto the floor. Claret squirts from his nose and he lands on the wet sand. Kelham stamps down on his chest, glaring down at him with his eyes. “Wanna try it?” He scoffs. Starla gazes down the rocks that lead to a bending cobblestone path that could lead to shelter.

“Come on; let’s take the baggage over to the shelter. We still need him in one piece.” Starla ushers, pointing at the shelter with her Bow. Krekras nods and he draws his sword and starts to walk towards that direction.

“The Pirate Captain’s Name was Axzura Vex; he was once a powerful and ruthless Warlord who robbed from hundreds of Merchant Ships that he himself destroyed, but the Merchants were many things, but innocent was not among them, for they helped the Congregation of Dawn. But the rest of the world did not see with it that way, even after everything he did to tear them down. Cunning and monstrous, but was not unstoppable, for all it took were three well-trained Warriors to take him down. He is a massive man who used a pair of Berserker Axes and has more scars than he can count. He currently wears his armour that he wore when they beat him in combat, plates of metal from different types of warrior welded together on his suit. His wrists are restrained with rope, his grey eyes narrowed with anger.”

“Release me!” He demands.

“Tempting, but no.” Rylen scoffs as he pulls him towards the cobblestone path.
Axzura growls with anger, as they drag him across the muddy ground towards the shelter, it is clear that in that moment he had a desire to survive still in him.

Team R.W.B.Y watch as Ozpin continues the tale.

“Our journey continued to the shelter of stone on the Volcanic Chain Isles, where things would change us forever.” Ozpin tells them.

Ruby never realised how much time passed between when she saw the Knights of Grimm heal Axzura in that cave and here...it was like nothing ever happened in between that time. No wonder the past can be manipulated so easily, when certain memories can be removed…the question is why? They may never know…

They walk down a lonely pathway through the woods, as they slowly return to where their team are. The rain still heavily pours onto them, until a man emerges from the trees and walks towards them. Krekras stops then and he draws his sword, pointing it straight at the man that humbly approaches them with his hood held over his head. "Stop!" Krekras demands through a very commanding tone of voice. The man stops and he looks at them with his hands in his pockets. "Pull the hood down and tell us who you are." He demands.

The man takes a second, then his hands emerge from his pockets and he slowly pulls the hood down to reveal his face. His head is shaven, and he has a smile with small inviting brown eyes. "I am but a humble Soothsayer and Merchant." He tells them with a smile.

"Vir Nominis Umbra...at your service." He greets as he takes a bow before the Knight who keeps the long blade of his Isomacium Sword pointed at him.

"What the hell are you doing on this island?" Rylen questions, then flinching from the sharp pain in his back after his attack from a Noonwraith, then Umbra leans over, and he looks at Axzura Vex.

"That man there...he invited me to come along, see if I can find him a good buyer for all that gold in there." He tells them, pointing at the entrance to the Cavern where he has stored all the jewels and gold. Starla looks back at him and he sighs, water dripping from his head as he nods his head.

"I did, he was there, and he insisted on coming along." He confesses.

"You just let a merchant come aboard?" Krekras questions with disbelief.

"Believe me, this guy knows people." Axzura assures, then Krekras looks at him again, and the Soothsayer looks at the state of them all. He seems to have calmed down from his freak out of nearly drowning earlier.

"Well, well..." Vir Nominis Umbra says as he leans over and looks at them, the damage on their bodies and also their weapons as well. "You lot look the worse for wear." He points out with a smile, Krekras still does not seem to trust him. And for good reason as well, when a random merchant just appears from the woods, it is quite mysterious.

"We'll be fine." He assures, still not buying his act, but it is Starla that convinces him.

"We should at least hear what he has to offer." Starla whispers to him. Krekras – eventually – lowers the sword with a sigh, and Vir Nominis Umbra rubs his hands together, ready to make some bargains with them. Ruby can even hear the old story of the Knights of Grimm in her head that Kassius told back at Mistral, the one that clearly has been miss-told over the years. The first thing that he looks at is Krekras' Isomacium Sword.
"An Isomacium Sword? Very nice...although I feel you could most certainly improve it." He states, and Krekras scoffs.

"Oh yeah? How so?" He questions.

"With magic of course, you oaf." He replies, and he holds his hand above the blade, and he looks at him, then casts the spell upon the blade. Markings form etched into the sword itself, and he takes it back when he offers it to him. The blade feels much lighter and blade is definitely sharper. "Now, I have given your sword easier manoeuvrability in combat. And not only that, every soul you strike down will make it stronger." He states with a smile, then winking at him. The story said that his sword was fractured in the blade, clearly, they took out the part of the Isomacium in it, where that is nearly impossible. And now he has Ferrum Arctus, black energy flows through the blade and the hilt.

The birth of Ferrum Arctus.

Umbra now approaches Rylen, who is still in agony from the pain in his back. His spear is broken as well, it snapped when he fell onto the ground, which is the first thing that he finds. "You look like you good have a good pick-me-up...and a new weapon." He says, as he reaches into his bag, and as told in the Tale, he holds a small Gardening Scythe which has been enchanted with a Spell. He hands it to him, and they all look at him.

"What is this? Some kind of sick –" Before Rylen could get angry with the Merchant, the blade extends, and the handle becomes much longer. He has to hold it in both hands, then feels the displaced bones in his back shifting back in place, it grunts with pain but then feels much better, standing tall again. The hunched over act must have been used later on in his life when he became Fear. He holds Formido Falcem with awe, it too is so light and easy to swing despite the size of it. It gives them all the chills when they look at it.

"Ah...now that is what I call a weapon." Vir Nominis Umbra chuckles as he looks at the massive War Scythe that he holds in his hands. He now approaches the smallest and prettiest of the five, looking at Starla Schnee and his eyes widen with amazement at her beauty. Little does she realise that he heard her singing when Oscar was there, he watched the whole thing. But this whole act, he denies ever seeing her. "My, my...wow! What is a beauty like you doing with these grunts?" He asks her, hand on his chest, and she timidly smiles, and the guys all look at each other, feeling slightly offended by that.

"Well...They wouldn't survive without me..." She giggles nervously and he chuckles.

"Isn't that the truth?" He asks her with a smirk, then he looks at the bow and that is what catches her eye. "Ooh...you're an archer, huh?" He asks her.

"Yes, I have been learning ever since I was tiny." She admits.

"Protective Father, I presume?"

"Very"

"Well, I bet you have never missed a single shot, huh?"

"I'm good, but not that good."

"Would you like to be?" He asks the self-effacing woman, and she looks at him. She just saw the badly wounded Rylen Vazquez recover as soon as he was given that Scythe...the magic must really work. If her superior aim could help so many, then how could she say no? She does not want anyone
to suffer with sadness and loss in their lives, so if she can spare them? She will...and that is what he is counting on.

"I...I guess so..." She gently answers and he holds his hand out to her, and she gives him the bow and arrow. He holds the Compact Bow in his hand and he gently slides his hand across the wooden frame of it, then he casts the spell, his eyes glimmer red as he does it. The only one to really notice was Wymerus. The markings form on the bow and he gives it to her, all the markings are different and are of a language that is far more ancient than Arkhoni...that is something far more sinister.

She holds the bow and she smiles as she holds it and steps aside as he approaches Wymerus. He looks right at him with a neutral expression and Umbra crosses his arms. "Well, I can tell you are a man of honour like the leader over there." He says, pointing back at Krekras and he scoffs.

"What could you possibly know about me?" He questions.

"I know that you are one of the best warriors that Arkhonex has to offer, I know that you named your first son after yourself, I know that you have always dreamt of being a teacher one day, and I also know that you first fell in love with your wife simply because she was different to the other whores." He lists, and Wymerus is truly surprised...because all of that was completely true. He wife was once a Whore, and he first met her when he bought her services. He grew to like her and they both ended up falling in love. She got out of the bad job and got a more respectable one as a worker on ships, earning lots of money. And obviously she ended up losing her life because of Axzura's Raids...but it was not a raid at all...it was him fighting the Congregation of Dawn during one of their assaults. Umbra leans forward, hands still clasped together as always. "How am I doing?" He asks him with a smirk, and Wymerus stammers.

"Spot on." He admits and Vir Nominis Umbra chuckles menacingly. The Soothsayer looks at him and he can feel the want for Vengeance in him and then he looks down at the mace that he holds.

"What a boring weapon." He says with a sad sigh and Wymerus holds it up before him.

"It has gotten the job done." He states.

"Maybe, but...wouldn't you rather something more powerful than a flimsy mace?" He asks him curiously, and Wymerus lowers the Mace.

"And what exactly would you be willing to give?" He asks him and Umbra thinks...ponders actually, on that.

"Well it could be anything. Power of Lightning, fire, earth, wind...you name it. The Creatures of Grimm and any other foe would definitely see you as a force to be reckoned with." Vir Nominis Umbra explains with a smirk still on his face...the urge is there, and he cannot resist. The lyrics do describe him perfectly, a smile so irresistible that you cannot fight it. He sighs and gives him the mace, looking down at the floor. Umbra smirks as he holds it, then casts the spell, markings form and electrical energy begins to spark around the weapon. He holds it in his hand, and he looks at the Mace in his hand, it looks far more powerful now than before, like he is the hand of Zeus.

Now...he approaches the last one.

Axzura Vex.

Vex looks at him with his hands bound with rope and Umbra smirks when he looks at him. "It was fun, wasn't it? The journey and the laughs we had?" Vir Nominis Umbra asks him.

"Of course, it was." Axzura sarcastically answers with pure anger in his voice.
Which Vir Nominis Umbra senses. And he reaches into his bag and pulls out a pair of old axes that he fits into his back, of which have been already casted on with the spells. Meaning it only takes a certain event to light them. He walks away from them with a smile and they all look back. "Wait! Where are you going?" Wymerus questions.

"My time is not done here!" Vir Nominis Umbra calls, so they keep on moving. Ruby stands there and looks at them as they walk away.

Team R.W.B.Y stare at Vir Nominis Umbra as he fades away from their gaze, disappearing so suddenly. He leaves them with the same chills the Knights of Grimm did. “I was a fool…we all were…because those weapons carried more than power.” Ozpin states.

**Krekras**

The memory changes around them as Ozpin continues the tale.

“The Boat took them back to their homes, back to their society that they had missed. The Four split up, and the Pirate Captain was delivered to the Law and Order of the city, Starla went back to her family, Krekras kept on his mission across the world to collect more coin and save more lives as the hero he always wanted to be. Also visiting his wife, of which he was cheating on by sleeping with Starla multiple times on many missions. Both sides committed one of the most dishonourable deeds – Adultery. And Rylen Vazquez returned back to theatre to do what he always did, perform to people.” Ozpin explains, Ruby looks at him.

“What about you?” She asks.

“That…I will tell you.” He promises.

“On Krekras’ quest, he found himself with his sword in a Tavern, alone with his drink in his hand. He had just recently killed a Hydra with that very sword, and it was much easier than he ever expected. The blade was sharper than ever before, cut clean through the armoured skin of the Hydra, killed it in a couple of attacks. The gift of Vir Nominis Umbra was incredible, made him an incredible warrior, however every Merchant has cost for their wares.”

“And none of them realised this at the time.”

“And the cost is about to become known to them.”

“Krekras simply has been drinking his mead, when a bunch of drunken men decided to try and attack him for that sword. They could barely even stand, and they swung their batons at him, and for whatever reason, Krekras cut them down. Instead of disarming them and sitting them down, he cut their arms off and then their heads from their shoulders. Blood spraying onto the ceiling, walls and floor, shocking the people inside. He stood in the pool of blood that he just made; the power of the sword he was given had made him unstoppable. So much power that his hunger to kill had become so strong that his heroic deeds were being plagued by the ones he began to set out on doing.”

“He killed over and over and over, claiming as many souls as he pleased, killing wherever and whoever he wished. The blade was thirsty for blood, and it never stopped, he could not stop his own actions. Until the world decided it was time to end this little game of his. Hundreds of Knights and Mercenaries were ordered to strike the murderer down, his mind plagued by the power of that sword, and many of them were killed by him.”
“His killings became so passionate to him that he never noticed that he had been stabbed time and time again himself, his body began to die. Began to rot away, until he was nothing more than a skeleton trapped inside of his Isomacium Armour. His Aura bound to the powerful element. He never knew until one day he returned to his wife…and when she opened his mask…she died from a heart attack…as all that remained of his charming face.”

“Was a skull.”

“In unending torment of what he has become for his disloyalty and desire to bring death everywhere he went…he became the Knight of Death. His skull ignited with flames from his inner anguish.”

“Infinite Punishment for his Sins.”

Ruby stands there with horror, watching as he butchered people endlessly with Ferrum Arctus, all of which challenged him, and when he finally found his wife. The horror in her eyes as the skull was revealed, her heart stopping and collapsing. His skull igniting with a powerful roar.

Ruby looks around and her eyes widen when she realises…

She was here for Death…

…meaning Weiss, Blake and Yang will be seeing the moments that their respective Knights became the monsters they are now.

Starla

Weiss appears in the memories, watching as she sees the heartbreaking truth behind Starla Schnee and how she became the monster she is now.

“Starla had no idea of the curses that were bound to their gift – the Bow, and hers was about to become a reality. She finally returned back to her home, passing the grave of their recently departed child, tears still in her eyes when she sees the gravestone, however her suffering was about to become much, much worse. She opened the door to find her family, but she found something far more horrible. She opened the door and collapsed to her knees with distress when her eyes are set upon the corpses of her family. Her husband and her two children murdered in her home by the very same bandits that took her son from her. She could not move, sorrow started eating away at her like how maggots devour a corpse, and she could not even breathe from how hard she began to cry.”

Weiss tears up with heartbreak, reaching out to Starla as she wails, rocking her deceased children in her arms beside her dead husband. He may not have given her the attention she wanted and found in Krekras…but she still loved him, and he never deserved to die. Her hand fades through Starla, seeing the Bow that carries the curse on the ground – Arcus Autem Trisitia.

“The Bow that was given to her by Vir Nominis Umbra, it was cursed with Loss and Sadness. And when she returned to her home, her heart was stolen by it when her family was taken. Tears rush from her eyes, falling and bouncing off the floor as they hit the wooden ground. She holds her family in her hands, begging for this to be a nightmare…”

“...but the world of Remnant is a cruel one, and this is no dream or nightmare.”

“Her anguish lead her to a sorrowful decision, for their home was built by a deep and cold lake. She
stripped down and dropped into the deep abyss to end her own life so then she could join her family. Her body became cold, skin turned pale blue and her lungs filled with water, but she never drowned. She would look around and her naked body would not die for whatever reason. The water however began seeping into her body, until she realised that her body was in fact dead, but her soul was still bound to her form.”

“She could not die; her sorrow became so strong that she could never die.”

Weiss watches as the naked and pale blue body of Starla Schnee crawled from the freezing water, crying out with unending heartbreak as she lays on the blades of grass. All of this…because she was not loyal to her vows. Punishment should have been given, but nothing like this…she never deserved this.

Her sadness…it all makes sense now…as does the pale blue skin.

“That sorrow would cause her to become a Spectral Knight, like the others, who would come to those with sorrow in their lives and loss, and she would show them their pain. But not willingly, for she only wants to help them, but her Curse has other ideas, and it controls her body more than her own mind does.”

“And on that night, she became the Knight of Loss.”

Rylen

I have made more mistakes in one life than many others...
...all to bind our fortunes, damned what the world says!

We opened our hearts – opened our souls – to the deals of another.

You promised we could be together for years to come, but all I have seen is betrayal and envy.

A winding weaving fate of which we both atone.

And yet – despite everything I did for you – you flee from my side come the morning.

Once smelled of lavender and roses, but now I see what I've become.

My golden, inhuman, eyes glisten in the tears of yours.

I vowed to follow the crow into the storm...

...But beyond that storm, was nothing but a Merchant...

Wares and Gifts on offer, wishes granted, but not our wants.

Gifts plagued with curses, fire, dismay and loss...

When I returned to hold you in a heated embrace – you fled from my hands come morning.

Once smelled of lavender and roses, but now I see what I've become
My golden, inhuman, eyes glisten in the tears of yours.

I know I made promises – ones I will never complete as one. Or if by lies I have been punished for them.

Bound by a mistaken wish, all those years ago, all I ever wish for is to see your eyes again.

But when you see the face I've become – you will flee come morning.

My golden, inhuman, eyes glisten in the tears of yours.

“This was the song that Starla would sing whenever she would play for Rylen on his many shows, the beautiful voice that everyone would always cry when hearing.” Ozpin spoke.

Blake appears in another location, seeing her Darker Side…Rylen Vazquez.

“Rylen returned back to his home town to do what he did best, performing and making people happy. He walked back onto stage and performed, but after he touched that Scythe, something in him changed, just like what happened to Krekras.”

Blake watches, seeing that she is actually sat next to Rylen’s daughter he once had, she shared his looks and her mother who passed away not long ago. “You see…Rylen’s daughter suffered from a phobia of decomposition due to a corpse she saw when she was very young. Maggots terrified her, but her father always found a way to make terrors be funny in his performances. That was why people came to them.” Ozpin explains, and Blake watches his play when it happened.

He was performing as a silly monster, dancing and fake roaring. “However, this was not to do with what he saw, but what other people saw in him. The crowd screamed in terror at something, at him and they fled from the room, leaving him alone. People’s hairs stand on end when he is near, seeing their greatest nightmares whenever he approaches.” As Ozpin tells them that the audience screamed in terror, she sees the very moment and her eyes widen when his daughter shrieks in terror, covering her eyes and running away.

His eyes glow bright gold and his skin rotted and peeled away, revealing his horrifying features. Maggots fell from his face as he roared horrifyingly at them all, and everyone but Blake ran…leaving him alone and confused.

“Even his daughter that he cared for so much, she could not even look at him.”

“Rylen could never understand why nobody could look at him.”

“Until he looked in the mirror.”

Blake is teleported in the memory to the point of which when he saw his own reflection, the rotten monster that he has now become.

“The Scythe was cursed, just like the sword that Krekras had and the Bow Starla had…just like we all had. His skin had become putrid, torn and rotten in places. His skull partially visible and his eyes glowing a bright yellow that would give anybody nightmares. Flies and Crows congregate wherever he goes, and his Scythe became his best friend, for it would help him walk from how much self-hatred he had in himself. But he could never escape it, the curse had made him a monster and his body had died a long time ago, however the soul has still gained control.”

“After years and years of oppression from those that demanded him to leave, his very presence bringing nightmares in their sleep. Something in that once good man snap, he decided that night that
he was going to give the people something to be scared of.”

“And just like Krekras, he began to slaughter those who were afraid, their fear became some sort of hunger that he wanted to feast off. He would strike them down, feeding them to swarms of rats and flies and crows, showing them their greatest fears as they die. Over time, the man of Fear became insane from seeing people terrified of him, and he began to enjoy it. And thus, he became the Knight of Fear.”

Azura

Finally, only one recipient of the Merchant’s Gifts remained…before Ozpin…and Yang sees it.

Axzura Vex.

“The Pirate was being carried out to a pyre to be burned at the stake for his crimes. He writhes in anger to attempt to free himself from the grips of those who have chosen to kill him this way, but he cannot free himself. They strap him to the stake, and he yells with rage, attempting to break free but he cannot. The men approach with burning torches and they hold them in the dry hay that is in the wooden pyre to ignite the flames and to burn him alive. He roars with hate as he sees the fire igniting beneath him, feeling the hot flames building up and climbing up to his legs.”

“I am not ready to die today!” He bellows with rage.

“He clenches his hand into a fist, and he howls with rage as the flames start to stick and burn his skin, crumbling his muscles and destroying his hair. The wood melts with the steel, covering his body as he howls, the molten metal coating his body and forming the burning armour that his remains are trapped inside of…but he does not die…and his screams change.”

“He is not screaming in pain from the flames.”

“Axzura feels no pain whatsoever.”

“Just Fury.”

“That is when he frees himself and he crash lands before them, his body completely ablaze and his features changing into some sort of Devilish Monster with jagged molten teeth, pumice skin and magma glowing inside of his body. The fires do not stop burning and he yells with rage, as he finds his Axes that he always used to kill his enemies.”

Yang’s eyes widen with disbelief, seeing the complete embodiment of rage.

The Knights of Grimm are all four of them…the monsters inside of their hearts if they give into the very things that they fight against.

If Ruby does not remember how to take life only when she must, she will end up like Krekras.

If Weiss does not let go of her grief for her family, she will end up like Starla.

If Blake does not smother her fears, then she will end up like Rylen.

And if Yang gives into her rage…she will end up like Axzura.
“As soon as his hands touch them, they have been cursed as well, fire coats the axes as well and he starts by cutting the soldiers down aggressively, setting them alight as well. The soldiers scream in agony as they are set on fire.”

“Put him out!” A civilian cries out before also being cut down by Fury, his head being sliced from his shoulders, burning up as well.

“Soldiers and Civilians scoop cold water up from fountains and throw them at the burning being, but the flames do not go out, they seem to just burn hotter and hotter. His ribcage flays out and his burning hot heart is revealed, he charges and continues to burn them all alive.”

“A small child hides in fear of the monstrous being as he staggers away from the pyre and his glowing orange eyes fixate on the boy as he pants with a growling voice over and over, scarring him.”

“But Vex did not kill him.”

“He let the boy go.”

“He roared and fled from the city.”

“That day, the Knight of Fury was born.”

Ozpin

They feel the chills in their bones, seeing what they all became, and how it happened. They all stand before Ozpin now, the white page of nothingness returning as they stand there, then a field forms around them, and they know exactly who the last one is.

“I…was lost…because when I sent Axxura to the pike to be burned alive for his crimes, I never felt any closure. I just felt like I was just like him, burning yet another soul…it never brought back my beloved family. All it ever did was leave me with a hunt for revenge that I could never ever fulfil.”

“So, I returned to where I buried my family’s ashes, and I fell to my knees, unable to help them find their justice, holding that very same Mace that Vir Nominis Umbra had given me. And as I cried, a storm built up around me, and lightning fell from the sky, and onto my crying body, devoid of any emotion whatsoever.”

Team R.W.B.Y, reunited in the Vision, all watch with heartbreak as the lightning falls from the sky and impacts his Mace, coursing the electricity through his entire body. His skin burns away and his bones shatter like glass, but his soul remains. Endlessly crackling violently with purple, blue and red lightning that shows his many enraged emotions that never cease. His voice crackles as he screams in both pain and heartbreak at his failure to bring justice to his family that he lost that day.

“I meant what I said…when I told you that I have made more mistakes than any man, woman and child. I should have refused him…but now…all we have are our memories.” Ozpin tells them as the memory of him becoming the Knight of Vengeance fades away from their gaze, leaving them alone with him.

“I…I am so sorry…”
“I know you do not trust me, and I do not expect you to. For I have kept many things from you…but now you know what we should have known from the beginning.”

“Every choice you make…every wish you make…has a cost.”
A New Development

(Quick Author Note) Just so everyone knows, I have decided to change Hazel’s Semblance. I am going to reveal it in this Act, because the new one I have come up with is not only more fitting than just “enhanced senses”, but also improves on his character in so many ways. And the revelation of his semblance…well I cannot wait to show it. I hate doing Retcons in my stories, but I feel this retcon will be for the better.

I hope this is okay, and you understand.

Anyway! Back to the story.

Hazel

The sun may be up but it is starting to set – and the Afflicted have had quite a tiring day. Starla did not show up again to train them today, but that also may be for the best. That potion the Witches made for them has done a great amount of work for their health despite the disease in their bodies, but it is not a cure. Just a suppressent to give them more time, and that time is running out. The discolouring in their veins is still quite bad, especially on Yang.

Hazel is sat down between the beds of Sun and Yang, looking at their bodies. Sun’s discolouring around his chest is also quite bad, bruising his body – however he is physically looking better than a few days ago. He has been training non-stop in order to keep his body in prime fighting condition – not only because he has confidence issues when it comes down to his physique but also because he knows they need to stay strong. Especially in case something happens here, let alone when they need to get back into the action.

Hazel looks at Sun and he sighs, gently caressing his blonde hair, feeling such regret in his heart as he looks down at the boy. He is a good person, one of the best, and he took his mother and father away from him with no mercy. There is no surprise whatsoever for the young man’s hatred towards him – but even then, Sun has never tried to kill him since he changed sides. Because he knows he is with them for the long haul like Cinder is, but at the exact same time…how can he forgive him for what he did? He begged him to spare their lives and he did not listen, he just killed them both, right then and there.

Hazel pulls his hand from Sun’s face, his eyes closed with utter shame. Shame over his past, when he was one of Salem’s minions and nothing more. He pushes his hands against his knees and he gets back up, looking down the room to see Glynda in the other room. The room that the Witches modified into their own personal quarters. Hazel walks away from their beds, and he approaches the equally tired Glynda Goodwitch. He leans against the doorframe as he looks at her, scratching his beard. “How’re they doing?” He asks her.

“As well as could be expected. They may be immortal Witches, but they still need to sleep. They haven’t had any shuteye since they got here.” Glynda comments.

“Tough ladies.” Hazel chuckles, making her chuckle too, getting back up and putting her glasses back on.
“Very.” She agrees, walking out of their room, and as he steps aside, they turn to see the Undertaker stood by the beds. His massive weathered Shovel in his hands, pressed down to the ground and motionless. Just waiting for his commands, just like always. “He’ll keep any eye on them. We need to do something, Hazel.” Glynda says with a yawn in her voice.

“Huh? You need to sleep, Glynda.” Hazel tells her, she slows down and shakes her head, turning back.

“Even if I could get some sleep, Hazel – we can’t. The Local Council called us; they want an update on what is going on. And…they have something to tell us as well.” Glynda says, and that gets his attention. The Valerian Council rarely ever comes to the Academy for news, they don’t really get their hands involved in their matters. But after what happened at Mistral, Atlas and Vacuo, they need as many friends as they can get. Vale has become the last stronghold not occupied by hostiles, meaning that this really is the last Beacon of Hope left for Remnant.

“What do they want?” He asks her.

“Dunno, they didn’t say in their message…” Glynda states, before pulling her scroll from her pocket and reading that message that Mazen anonymously sent her way. “But I feel I should mention this message.”

“You sure you can trust it?” Hazel asks her.

“I don’t know, but Ruby and Oscar did kill Fennec Albain, not crazy to think that Corsac would come after her sister like that. The Albains were known for being quite deranged.” Glynda explains when she shrugs her shoulders. Hazel nods his head and he looks back at the Undertaker.

“Keep an eye on the Academy, Undertaker. We should be back soon.” Hazel orders, and the Undertaker bows its head to them. The Witches had the Undertaker temporarily adhere to their commands as well, so then if they are not there, they can still get some help with him. End of the day his huge mass makes him more useful than just an intimidation tactic, sometimes he can be useful for moving things with his impressive strength.

Hazel and Glynda head outside into the setting outside, the cold air starting to fall around them. They are not blind, and they are not numb, they can feel the change in the air. “Winter is coming a bit faster than normal, a bit alarming.” Hazel states as he walks beside Glynda.

“Yes…I have actually been trying not to think about that.” She says to him, sighing and shaking her head slowly.

“Forgive me…” He says to her.

“Don’t worry, I just want to focus on one thing at a time. Ozpin did say though; the Shivering Dominion will be Remnant’s coldest winter. And if we don’t stop Umbra…it will be our last.” She says with a shudder in her voice. It brings a chill down Hazel’s spine at the mere mention of that event – The Shivering Dominion – a time where ice and snow have claimed every inch of the planet. Even if the Grimm do not kill everyone first, the cold will definitely finish them off. Meaning that even if they kill Umbra…will the Winter continue?

Will their efforts still be for nothing and end with them dying from hypothermia?

Or will the Shivering Dominion die with Umbra?

Either way, Glynda is right, it is something they should not start worrying about right now. They have worse things to think about, Horridus Morbus being the biggest problem right now. “I’m
starting to wonder if we can beat him.” Glynda reveals, and Hazel’s eyes widen at hearing Glynda Goodwitch showing her doubts.

“Oh, don’t you start with this. Raven has already been showing signs of defeat in her heart, don’t join her. We can defeat him.” Hazel promises as he walks beside her, as they head towards the exit, opening the door as they walk into the streets and the pedestrian path down the road so then they can get to the Council Building with ease. The orange hue in the sky where the sun has been setting behind the horizon, turning the clouds red is one beautiful sight.

Glynda however does not share his optimism. “Hazel…Grimm and People are one thing…but we were never taught to fight Demons and Gods…or whatever the hell he is. Ozpin has experience we lack, Kragen does too – but even they are no match for him. How the hell are you meant to beat something like him?” She questions, and Hazel decides to remind her of something very, very important.

“Glynda, remember back to when we fought him at Beacon…after Tai…when Ruby used her eyes? It made him vulnerable, and Ozpin managed to hurt him. I don’t know what that silver eyed girl is, but she is different. She is able to hurt that bastard, make him feel. That may not be enough to kill him, but there has to be a weakness out there. Nothing is unbeatable…it can’t be.” Hazel states as he walks beside her, and it is clear that he is afraid just like her. Seeing what Vir Nominis Umbra is capable of has really put things in perspective for them.

He is extremely powerful and skillful, able to conjure weapons on command, use powerful magic, become ethereal, change form and on top of many other things – he is a mastermind. All of that combined can make one hell of a powerful enemy, so it is not that crazy to think he cannot be defeated. But Hazel is also right here, because nothing is ever unbeatable – it is the natural order to things.

So, Umbra must have a weakness, just like other Spectres…they just need to find that chink in the armour.

“I hope so Hazel…I really do.” She sighs. The two of them continue to walk, their footwear stepping through the thin puddles left behind from recent rainfall, the streetlights starting to turn on as the light begins to turn for the darkness. Hazel then chuckles, as he looks down at his side, remembering something that happened a few years past.

“This is giving me memories…” Hazel says, and Glynda glances at him curiously.

“What memories?” Glynda inquires.

“Oh, back when Amber was alive.” He begins, and the very name brings some form of shame upon Glynda, her eyes narrow with grief as she hangs her head. Ozpin at the end of the day was not the only one that forced the Maiden Powers upon her, by making her fall in love with the previous maiden so then her powers would go to the one he predicted it would. It wouldn’t be the first time he has done this, he has had a sister do the exact same thing, to make sure her last thoughts would be of the sister she cared for so deeply. “I once took her for a vacation to Vale, she always wanted to go to places. So, I thought that I could show her around the city, and she enjoyed every second.” Hazel describes.

In his mind he can still feel the pressure of her much smaller hand inside of his huge one, seeing her dance around him with that lovable giggle in her voice, brightest smile he has ever known. “She would always find a puddle to step in, just because she liked seeing the way that the water rippled around her shoe. That and…I specifically asked her not to.” He adds, which makes Glynda chuckles.
“She was always quite the rebellious one.” Glynda comments.

“Yes, she was.” He agrees, and then it seems to dawn on both of them the reality of the fact that she has been dead now for almost ten years. “I miss her…” He sighs, his head hanging low and his fingers finding the back of his neck to scratch the shaved hair back there. Glynda looks at the saddened father and she sighs, gently squeezing his shoulder as she walks with him, finding the words she has been wanting to say to him.

“I’m sorry.” She apologises. “I…I wish we could have found another way; I wish I could have convinced Ozpin to find another way.” She says to him, and Hazel looks down at her – he never blamed her, the only people he would ever find the blame for is the person who came up with the idea in the first place. And Salem used that factor to prevent him from killing Cinder upon learning that she murdered his daughter. Which he nearly did, on multiple occasions.

And now…he sees his daughter in the very person who killed her.

Forgiveness can be a powerful thing, especially when both sides have been under the rule of a Queen who enjoys manipulating everyone – her own minions most of all.

“You needn’t apologise, Glynda.” He says.

“No, I must…I was there when he made that decision, and I could have stopped him. But I was younger then, and more naïve than I am now. I truly believed I should believe everything that he said, and never once did I question whether or not he could ever fail.” Glynda explains, to which she slows down, and she sighs. “Look where that has gotten us.”

“For so long…I wanted nothing but revenge. To watch the likes of Ozpin be torn apart, to die slowly and painfully for what he did to my little flower. But now – I don’t even want to kill him. I want to hit him, don’t get me wrong – but kill him? No…I will never the answers I want. I just want to know…if he knew she would die or not. I want to know that he had good intentions, and that it was all Salem. Because if it was – then I know who I must kill to make sure she finds her peace. Or…who we must kill.” He corrects himself at the very end of his explanation behind his change of motives, because as he said – for so long he focused on trying to kill someone to punish them for what happened to his little girl. But now he knows something very important.

“We can’t do things alone anymore.” Glynda says, and Hazel nods his head in agreement.

“No…and I guess we never could.” He says, walking ahead. “I will never forget, and I will always miss her with every day that passes. But I am done with letting my own grief tear me apart, all I want now….is to know….why?” Hazel explains, and Glynda smiles, gently squeezing his arm again, walking with him to the building more. They never realised how much ground they actually covered but now they are just a few yards away from the Council Building.

It is quite an old building in comparison to the other houses and structures in Vale, because it is indeed one of the oldest ones here. There are a few old ones, but this was one of the buildings first constructed when Vale was first settled and founded. The Arkhoni Style is very clear but it has been renovated and maintained, meaning it is not as clear, cleaner but with some ivy and moss on the concrete in places, mostly around the guttering really.

Stood at the foot of the building and the mahogany wooden doors, are two Police Officers. They are armed to the teeth now, with high end assault rifles and riot gear on. A smart move, considering everything that has happened recently with Atlas, Mistral and Vacuo falling into enemy hands. The two of them step forward as expected, merely doing their jobs. “What is your business with the Council?” One of the Officers asks.
“We are here to speak with the Council, they have requested our presence.” Glynda informs, and the two Officers look at each other, and one of them speaks into his radio.

“Captain? We have two visitors here – names?” He asks them.

“Glynda Goodwitch and Hazel Rainart.” Glynda answers politely.

“Glynda Goodwitch, and Hazel Rainart, sir. They say they have business with the Councillors?” The soldier asks his captain.

“Granted but pat them down. I don’t want to take any chances.” The Captain orders, so the Officers turn to them. Without even needing to ask them, both the Hunters remove their weapons. Glynda pulls her Crop out and sets it down on the floor, whilst Hazel draws his impressive engraved Dagger, the light shining off the polished steel. One of the officers, clearly quite educated in weaponry gazes at it as he picks up, the other Officer starts to pat him down.

“This is some impressive forgery; did you make it yourself?” The Officer inquires.

“Afraid not, never was that skilled. It is an old Family Heirloom of mine. May not be that impressive for Huntsmen nowadays, but it has kept me alive.” Hazel states as the Officer concludes his check, finding nothing on him except for his wallet which he hands back to him.

“Well, for a dagger it is extremely well made. I have seen quite a few weapons here at the Station, nothing like this though.” He says to Hazel.

“It’s been in my family for generations.” He says.

The Officer nods his head, looking at the other to find that Glynda is also cleared, so he gives her the Crop back, and the other hands the blade back to Hazel. “Well, good luck to you both on the road.” He says to them with a smile.

“And you, Officer.” Hazel replies with a kind smile, walking to the doors as the Officer opens them for the two Hunters. They enter and look around, feeling the much warmer air inside thanks to the radiators. Lights on and a few Kingdom Department Workers doing their business, looking busier than ever with some of the things that have been happening as of late. Hazel walks beside Glynda towards the stairs, looking at the old paintings of the past on the walls. Many of them showing the old King of Vale fighting with his beautiful Faunus Wife on the field, helping his minions every step of the way.

“The Council seemed quite scared in their message.” Glynda comments.

“Can’t say I blame them, with everything going on. Vacuo infested with Grimm, Mistral and Atlas under Atlesian Command and every day that passes an entire village is being destroyed by the Grimm. Gods…it’s like when I was with Salem when Ruby was captured all over again.” Hazel sighs, remembering how many people were dying every day. “I don’t even know why I thought she wanted to win without bloodshed…I was a fool.”

“But you made it right.”

“Not yet, not until we win. I appreciate your kind words, but that is just my motivation.” Hazel shrugs, which Glynda cannot really argue with. If it keeps him focused on the mission at hand, then she cannot argue with his logic.

The two of them walk across the landing towards the closed doors that they push open to see the table of Councillors sat there, waiting for them. They turn their heads and they see them. “Professor,
Huntsman.” The Head Councillor – Ida Greene – stands tall with her ginger hair tied behind the back of her head and her large green eyes looking at her. The others rise up and respectfully greet them.

After the scumbag moron that was President Thaddeus Brimstone, this is a breath of fresh air really.

“Councillors.” Glynda greets as she enters the room with Hazel. “You asked us to come here, has something happened?” Glynda inquires.

The Councillors also tend to get straight to the point, since they know that Huntsmen and Huntresses have a job to do so they do not want to keep them waiting for too long. “Please take a seat…this…will be quite alarming.” Ida begins, which already gives them a sense of worry, so they sit down with the other Councillors as Ida sits at the head of the table. She rests her arms on the table and she blows out a nervous breath.

“You’re worrying me, Ida.” Glynda says.

“Good…because this is serious. We have been forced to Quarantine the Isle of Patch.” She reveals, and their eyes widen with disbelief, both of them looking at each other, before back at her.

“What?” Glynda questions.

“We learned recently that there was a family of survivors in Vacuo who were on the outskirts who caught this – Horridus Morbus – plague, and they fled to find the rest of their family in Vale, and they were forced to go to Patch first. The disease has spread like wildfire, and we are trying our best to contain the situation there.” Ida explains, and it really gives them a chilling realisation.

Patch has been hit with the disease…that is too close…and it is Ruby’s home, that can’t be a coincidence. It’s Vir Nominis Umbra, odds are he is trying to hurt Ruby with this.

“Gods…alright, what next?” She asks.

“That…isn’t the worst part.” Ida reveals, leaving Glynda even more tense. “One of the members of the family went looking for their daughter, and he vanished from Patch. He was last sighted nearby a ship docked and about to leave for Vale, meaning the odds are that he is onboard that boat.” Hazel stammers.

“If he gets here – the plague will spread further. It will be like Vacuo all over again.” He realises.

“Yes, and I do not want any more people to die. Vacuo was a tragedy and we cannot suffer something like that again. I have ordered every Officer I have to track him down…and…I am afraid…they have orders to shoot him on sight and burn his corpse.” She reveals, and sadly they cannot even argue against it. Pathogenic Control has been engaged across Remnant, Patch was not the first location be hit from stragglers but most of them were around Vacuo, not Vale. And if someone does bring it here, they must eradicate all traces of the disease to stop it from spreading. It is bleak…but it must be done to prevent further loss of life.

“This is bad…”

“I was hoping that you could speak with these Witches. Ask them if they would help the people of Patch…and anyone who gets infected here in Vale. They have not yet cured it; I know that thanks to your report to me. But you also said they managed to create a temporary suppressant. To buy your fighters more time?” She asks her.
“I don’t know if they will, the Witches made it clear they are only there for the four at Beacon. I will see if they will…I didn’t think it would spread like this.” She says to Ida.

“Neither did I, but unfortunately this is the dark reality.” Ida states.

“Okay…I will speak with the Sorceress, but no promises.”

“If they do not help, Glynda – then everyone on Patch will be dead by the end of the weak, and maybe the rest of Vale if we do not stop this potential Outbreak.” Ida reminds.

That just made the situation more real in their minds.

That is how much time they have.

_The Witches better help us…_

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**Ruby**

The Visionary Book blasts Ruby from its grip and right into her beloved’s hands, knocking him onto the floor as well. The two of them slide across the floor, and their eyes focus on the Book, seeing the energy drain from its form and it crumbles away into dust. They have never seen one of them do that. Normally they just close, but that one practically self destructed.

Oscar gently caresses her dark hair, and he checks her body for any kinds of burns or anything like that. At the end of the day it is still an ancient magical book with powers beyond their comprehension, lords know what that could do to the human body if used too much. “Are you okay?” He asks her, but Ruby looks at him with a worried stare.

“I saw them…”

“What? Saw who?” Oscar asks her with worry in his voice.

“The Knights of Grimm…I saw how they became what they are now…” She stammers, sitting up whilst still in Oscar’s loving hugging embrace. He listens to her. “And…Ozpin was there, he was telling us…”

“Us?”

“Weiss, Blake and Yang were there too. I saw them there, it must have brought them with me.” Ruby tells him as he lovingly strokes her long black and red hair.

“What do you mean Ozpin was in there? He knew you would find this place?” He questions.

“I think so…why would he have us go on a crazy mission if he knew exactly where to find this place?” She questions.

“I dunno…c’mon, I think Jaune and Pyrrha found the terminal. Tell me about what you saw later.” He says to her, and she nods her head in agreement. They have more pressing matters, so they look up the tower to the spiralling staircases to where they assumed that terminal would be.

“How’s it looking up there, guys?” Ruby calls up.
“Found it!” Jaune calls, standing at the top of the tower as he stopped kissing Pyrrha up there. She blushes and giggles as she looks back at the beautiful and quite romantic view. It must have gotten to them.

“So…you gonna turn it off? The Lock?” Oscar asks him.

“Yeah sure.” Jaune stammers, blushing too as he looks at his pretty girlfriend. Oscar and Ruby both looking up there come to the same conclusion.

“They were totally making out, right?” Ruby asks him.

“Yep. Could hear them kissing from down here, like a pair of pigs.” He chuckles, making Ruby giggle as well as she holds his hand. Jaune and Pyrrha both click the holographic panel and they see the huge Tunnel rising from under the ocean’s surface. It rises high up and water pours from the very top of it, funnelling down inside until the barrier prevents the tunnel from flooding.

“Wow…we did it.” Pyrrha says with a smile.

BANG!

Suddenly there is a distant flash and a tank shell whistles towards them before they hear the crack of the firing cannon. It impacts the tower right underneath them. Jaune instantly jumps and grabs onto Pyrrha, as they plummet down the collapsing tower, as more missiles and tank shells begin to obliterate it. Concrete shattering like glass, dust filling the air and flames igniting the old wood. Thousands of years this Tower has stood, and now it is crumbling because of a Mercenary’s well placed shot. Pyrrha gasps as she sees a spike falling beneath Jaune, one he is about to get impaled on. She pushes him away with her Polarity, and she bounces her body off the falling debris, just missing a shell that shot straight past her, and explodes outside the tower. As Pyrrha falls she lands on her shield, and Jaune rolls across the ground, blocking more falling debris with his shield. The dust falls off the edge of his shield as he defends her from gravity coming to kill them.

The two of them look at one another before seeing Ruby and Oscar outside, beginning to battle. “C’mon!” Jaune pulls her to her feet and the two of them flee from the collapsing building as the bell gongs, crashing down behind them. As soon as Jaune escapes, his face meets the armoured fist of a Juggernaut. He crashes to the floor, his ears ringing and vision blurry from the sudden punch.

The Juggernaut laughs as his Chaingun spins round faster and faster. “Time to die, boy!” The Juggernaut laughs as he aims the machine gun directly at him and loads the rounds it. Just as he is about to fire, Oscar spins round and he launches a time bubble right between the Juggernaut and Jaune, catching the bullets in a paused moment in time, and Jaune gasps, shaking it off.

“Go!” Oscar calls, as a missile explodes right in front of the man, blowing him across the floor, dust covering his face. Oscar flips over and he spins Traveller’s Atrocity through his fingers. Ruby blasts towards the forces of Mercenaries that fire hundreds of bullets at her, but she transforms into a spiralling tornado of petals towards them. Dodging them as they fly past her, shredding the last pieces of debris that come crashing down into the ground around them. She dives down and she slams her knee into the head of one of the soldiers, sending his head crashing into the soil with great force. He grunts in pain from the impact as the visor shatters, laying there, and she swings round with Crescent Rose, slashing the curved blade across the chest of another soldier. The impact shatters the armour plating, golden sparks flying through the air and he yells in pain, thrown back with some blood leaking through the surface damage done to the armour itself.

Ruby kicks the soldier her knee is still pressed down onto the head of, and proceeds to kick his head so hard it knocks the helmet from his head, knocking him out. Suddenly she is punched in the face.
by a Seeker which dashes towards her, the dust charging his backpack and armour so then he can move extremely fast. Ruby looks up, her long hair falling over her one good eye as the soldier draws his red sword and blasts towards her with great speed, slashing right at her face, until Oscar dashes through time itself and shoulder charges the Seeker down the hill. Ruby spins round and her eyes widen as a Gunship comes roaring her way, firing all cannons at her, shredding the grass as it moves towards her. She gets up and sprints away from it, blasting away in a storm of red petals, just missing the bullets as they shred the unconscious body of one of his own men.

She slides across the ground and Pyrrha gets thrown against the wall next to her by a Tremor Trooper who pounds his gauntlets together. “Something isn’t right, Pyrrha! These Mercenaries never attack like this, Ortega would never have his men attack with such a high civilian population at risk.” Ruby comments as Pyrrha flicks her long tail of hair back over her shoulder, pulling Milo back into her hand.

“I know, there’s something going on. Let’s take them out and see if we can find out!” Pyrrha says, charging towards the charger. The Gunship banks round and it goes to fire a missile at her, but Ruby ignites her silver eye, but not to blow the ship out of the sky, just to temporarily blind the pilot from how bright it is.

Pyrrha throws Akoúo into the helmet of the Tremor Trooper to make him stagger back, which works like a treat but he still swings his fist at her. She ducks down and grapples onto his arm, dodging the powerful shockwave blasting past her, and blowing her hair like a hurricane just hit Argus. She takes her fist and punches the soldier in his abdomen, making him flinch and hunch forward in pain, she then spins Milo through her fingers in Spear form and stabs the blade right down into his foot. He howls in agony as his blood squirts through the titanium boot, and she calls Akoúo back to her, twirling round and slamming it right into his face, so hard it knocks him unconscious. “Sorry about your foot!” She apologises sweetly, running towards more, when a Sharpshooter from a nearby building fires at her, hitting her shield luckily instead of her actual body.

She glares at him, seeing the three glowing goggles glaring right at her, then the glint of scope before firing it once more. She deflects the bullet and it bounces off into the dirt, before transforming Milo into Rifle form and aiming it right back, firing multiple rounds towards the soldier. The Sharpshooter is forced to move, getting up from his position, but Pyrrha finds yet another way to take out the soldier without killing him if possible. She fires a round towards a crane which has some boxes, and they plummet as the cable in the crane snaps. The boxes fall and he squeals, hit in the head and knocked out.

Relieved that she did not have to kill anyone, she turns to see Ruby – who no longer has the same mentality. She slashes the arm off one of the soldiers and blood sprays from his elbow as he screams in pure agony. She then rises up and rolls across his shoulders, taking her knife from her boot and stabbing it right into his helmet, through the eye, and pulling him down to the ground with a heavy bang. Her eye is wide with disbelief, the girl who was once so good and pure, is now a killer – and does not even hesitate to do so.

The others still try like Pyrrha, but Ruby seems to rarely even try to keep her foes alive. But at the same time it can be understood, if she ever kept people like Tyrian alive because it was the right thing to do she could be captured and tortured once more. That is not an experience she ever wants to repeat.

Jaune blocks the huge fist from the Juggernaut as he swings right at the young man, pushing his boots against the soil and forcing his shield against the much larger Exo-Suit in front of him. The Juggernaut pushes him across the ground, until Jaune takes Crocea Mors and drives it up the forearm of the Juggernaut, and he manages to stab into the hand of the pilot, due to the size of the suit his arm
is not where the forearm of the suit is. But the hands can fit inside, meaning the mechanical hands of the suit can move like he can. He staggers back from Jaune in pain, grabbing his mechanised arm as he cannot stop the bleeding pain.

Jaune stands before him, his shield up and sword at the ready, standing in the Phalanx Position. The Juggernaut growls and the Mortar Pod opens up in his shoulder, and three mortars burst from the silo, crashing down with explosive force in front of him. Jaune holds his shield up once more. This is why he cannot use the Bastard Sword secondary form Crocea Mors has been upgraded to use, because it sacrifices his shield. But he glances at the glowing glyphs in the blade of his sword and back at the Juggernaut. He extends the huge blade in his arm and charges towards Jaune, jumping up in the air, using the thrusters that belch from his boots and back to soar over him.

He then dives down, blade first towards him, stabbing down into the ground with all his might, making the ground shudder from the impact. Jaune slides out of the way and he swings round, slamming the blade into the shoulder, which shows the sword powering up as it did in the vision he saw of Vyrryk. It cuts clean through the armour and impacts the Mortar Silo, causing it explode and blow more chunks of armour off, revealing the Endo-Skeleton inside of the Suit. Blood also leaks from a few wounds in the soldier’s body as he glares at him. “You little shit!” The Juggernaut bellows.

He immediately swings round and blasts all the barrels of his machine gun at Jaune, in which his blue eyes widen and he gasps, lifting his shield just before he unleashes the storm of burning bullets upon his shield. Jaune yells with desperation as he holds the many bullets back for as long as he can, being pushed across the soil once again, yelling with desperation more and more. He feels like he is about to fall, until that energy gets transferred from his shield, through his aura and into the blade of Crocea Mors.

And a voice whispers to him.

Now...

Something seems to come over Jaune, as his eyes glow bright blue for a split second and he roars, swinging his sword round and casting an arc of pure energy that blasts into the Juggernaut, throwing him from his feet and crashing down to the ground. Jaune swung the sword so hard he managed to fall to the floor as well, hitting his head against the dirt and spitting some grass from his mouth. “That was new.” Jaune comments.

Oscar on the other hand battles against the Seeker on his own, using his semblance to his advantage, for as soon as the Super Speed Soldier zooms towards him like a blur, he slows time down just enough, and he fires his pistols at him. The soldier rolls out of the way and swings it downwards, right at the soldier. The Seeker lifts the sword and stops his blade, staring right back, before kicking him in the chest. Both of them return back to the world of normal time, and the Seeker points his Submachine Gun and fires it repeatedly at him. Oscar dashes out of the way and he throws a time bubble that warps around his leg, keeping him restrained.

Oscar dashes towards him, and like Ruby he is not so inclined to keep his enemies alive. However he tries more than she does, and from the way that this Acolyte is fighting him, even knocking him out wouldn’t stop him. He drives the blade straight through his chest, pushing him down to the ground with all his might. The Seeker is killed instantly, and he rips the blade of Traveller’s Atrocity from his chest, looking down at him with a sigh. “I’m sorry.” He apologises, before turning back to help his friends. He rushes back up the hill to see the Juggernaut getting back up, and extending a flamethrower from his arm with the blade, and he blasts the flames towards the two Arkos Lovers.
Pyrrha holds her shield up high, the circular shield blocking the fire, flames making her red hair blow in the heat. She then uses her Polarity to restrain the arm of the Flamethrower, turning it towards the steel beams that hold the remnants of the tower up, causing it to melt.

Jaune steps back and the Juggernaut turns with widened eyes to see it begin to topple down to the ground. But he rolls aside, using the thrusters to keep him alive, and the tower collapses right next to him. “Nice try!” He yells, as he starts blasting both fire and bullets at them repeatedly. Until bullets start impacting the armour behind him, he turns to see Oscar walking towards him with a scowl on his face. He has split his sword into the Bladed Revolver Forms, firing them repeatedly as he walks closer. “C’mon then, boy!” The Juggernaut bellows as he blasts fire towards him, but Oscar launches a bubble of frozen time around the flame thrower, and he nods to Pyrrha.

She throws her shield and it clatters into his head with great force, making him stumble whilst Jaune sprints up behind the massive armoured man. He pushes himself off the collapsed tower and he sheathes his sword into the shield and he shifts it into the Bastard Sword, and he swings it downwards, cutting the machine gun clean off. His hand also gets chopped off too, and he roars in agony, staggering back as the blood spews from his wrist hidden within the armour, sparks and fluid from the machine squirting out too. Oscar looks at the tower and genius idea hits him, so he looks at Pyrrha and calls to her. “I’ve got a plan! Restrain him where he is! Jaune, get ready, he’s gonna attack.” Oscar warns, seeing the man glare at him and the flames ignite once more from the flamethrower, aimed right at him.

“Oh shit!” Jaune exclaims, opening the shield and holding it up once again to block the flames, gritting his teeth as he holds it back. That’s when Oscar’s plan activates, remembering something he saw Ozpin doing. He can reverse time for specific things and fast-forward time for them without affecting the rest of the world. So that is what he does, he holds his hand out and he holds his stopwatch in the other, reversing the collapse of the tower as Pyrrha uses her Polarity to hold the Juggernaut in place. The collapse rises into the air, and the Juggernaut stares at it with disbelief.

Then Oscar smirks and he snaps his fingers, playing time once more, and the tower plummets down onto the roaring Juggernaut, crushing him under the weight and killing him. Pyrrha releases the Juggernaut and Jaune sighs with relief, smoke trailing from his almost glowing orange shield. “Thank the gods…awesome move by the way, Oscar. Never seen anything like that.”

“Have you ever done that before?” Pyrrha asks him with a curious smile.

“Nope…” Oscar nervously chuckles, and Pyrrha shows a sign of being around her friends like Nora in the past for too long. Because she offers her fist to him, and Oscar nods, giving her a fist-bump.

Jaune looks around, and something hits him. “Wait…where’s Ruby?”

“WAAAAH!” Ruby squeals as she blasts past them, smoke trailing from her body from an explosion.

“Oh, there she is.” Jaune adds as she soars past. She tumbles across the ground, looking up with a furious glare at what just attacked her. Oscar sprints to his girlfriend’s aid, seeing her on the ground.

“Ruby! Are you okay?” He asks her as he sees the smoke trailing from her body, her aura may be in the amber but she can still fight, just needs to be more careful.

“Yup, just peachy.” She squeaks as she slowly gets back up, then her eye widens when she sees the Acolytes of Lien Gunship roaring towards her, the missiles still firing their way. “Look out!” She screams, but Oscar spins round and he casts a protective barrier of Time Energy around them, blocking the missile from hitting them.
“Go!” Oscar yells, so they all get out the way as the Missile hangs there in frozen time. They all return back to the normal world and Oscar jumps out of the way, and it explodes right behind him as the bubble of paused time bursts with the fiery explosion. He looks up as the Gunship banks around one of the towers, proceeding to hover above the ground in front of them, the machine guns spinning round as he aims at them. The Four of them stand back up, weapons at the ready as they keep apart, the heavily armed Mercenary Gunship hovering over the ground. The machine guns whirl to life and unleash a buzzing roar of firepower down at them, tearing up the terrain with every bullet that flies their way. They disperse further, Ruby sprints across the ground, firing her Sniper Rifle repeatedly at the cockpit but nothing seems to be getting through, some serious Atlesian Level Glass…and Hard Light Shields.

The glowing blue hexagonal shields flicker from every bullet and she growls with annoyance at it, for it is far too much for them to get through. “I’ve been hitting this thing constantly, the shield won’t break!” Ruby calls out, still firing.

“What other rounds have you got?” Oscar calls out.

“Just fire! I don’t have any explosive or electrical ones left!” Ruby calls out.

“Maybe we can overheat it.” Jaune suggests as he walks with his shield raised with Pyrrha.

“Not gonna overheat anything with that shield up.” Oscar states as he watches the ship as it aims at them all, now aiming directly at him, firing some hellfire missiles towards him. They explode and launch massive chunks of earth dust towards him, but he ducks down to the ground and just misses them. But then he has an idea, staring at the missiles, and then at his hand. “Wait…that’s it.” He realises, seeing the missiles being reloaded. “Ruby! Pyrrha! Think you can hit a missile?” He asks them.

“What?” They both call back with disbelief.

“If I can catch the missile with my time bubbles when he fires them, can you hit it from here? The explosion could knock out the shields.” Oscar suggests and Jaune nods his head.

“That’s a good plan!” Jaune calls out.

“Uh…I love you are so supportive of me Jaune, but I dunno if I can make that shot.” Pyrrha says.

“I’ve seen you hit a watermelon out the air before.” Jaune says.

“Yeah! A WATERMELON!” Pyrrha reminds, since that is the farthest thing from a missile possible.

“Not when thrown by Yatsuhashi it isn’t.” Jaune also reminds, and she shrugs her shoulders in agreement at that.

“We’ll try our best!” Pyrrha calls back to Oscar, before she slides out the way when the Gunship fires its machine guns at her, yelping as she moves. The Gunship hovers low to the ground so they all keep moving as swift as they can, firing their weapons at it to keep it aiming at them. It blasts the machine guns repeatedly at the running Rose, then turning to face Oscar as he fires his two Revolvers repeatedly.

“I’ll just provide morale, since…y’know…I don’t have a gun!” Jaune calls out as he stands there, a bit lost and confused with his sword and shield, looking at Pyrrha with her rifle in her hands, firing it repeatedly at the Gunship. She looks at Jaune and she smiles pleasantly at him, before her eyes widen and she rolls out of the way of incoming machine gun fire. Then it turns and stares straight at Jaune and his eyes widen as the missile reloads and aims straight at him. “Uh…Oscar? Please
catch…please catch it please catch it PLEASE CATCH IT!” Jaune screams as the missile fires as the bubble completely misses it, so Jaune has to jump out of the way of the explosion.

Jaune stares at him. “Why didn’t you catch it?”

“Not as easy as it looks, man!” Oscar yells.

“How was I meant to hit that?” Ruby teases with a smile on her face, knowing it would push his buttons.

“I missed.” He sighs.

“You trying to kill me?” Jaune adds.

“Hey, you wanna do it?” Oscar questions, in which Jaune glares at him with disbelief.

“I DON’T EVEN KNOW WHAT MY SEMBLANCE IS!” He yells.

“Just lemme try again, gods…”

“I swear to all the gods if I hear any more complaining I’m gonna butt your heads together.” Pyrrha states as she looks at the two boys.

“He-he…you said butt.” Ruby giggles, showing there is still that little teenager in her somewhere.

“RUBY FOCUS!” Jaune yells.

“I AM FOCUSING!”

The Pilot watches them with complete and utter confusion at how there is a War Machine – right in front of them – and they are bickering. How they have managed to come this far in this war is beyond him.

Then Pyrrha stares at the pilot and narrows her eyes. “Hey! We’re having a team meeting!” Pyrrha calls out, remembering Jaune’s bizarre outburst in the middle of a fight. The Pilot however does not want to play along apparently, since he is about to fire yet another missile at him. This time though he actually stops it, catching it there, and the Pilot’s eyes widen.

“HA! Got it!” Oscar cheers.

“Yeah weren’t bad…for a second attempt.” Jaune mutters.

“What was that?” Oscar asks him.

“Hmm?”

“Guys!” Pyrrha calls out, having to remind them again that they are in the middle of a fight, they can bicker later. Ruby aims her Sniper Rifle and slows her breathing as she stares at the frozen missile in the bubble, then she pulls the trigger. The bullet impacts the warhead and it explodes, bursting the bubble and shattering the shield surrounding it. It spins round and fires the machine guns straight at her, and she gasps, hit directly by them, pushing her across the floor, her aura may have protected her – but that still would have hurt. Pyrrha looks at Jaune and she nods to him, sprinting towards him and he holds his shield over his head. She jumps and he pushes her up, sending her sky high. She soars towards the Gunship and she fires her rifle at the thrusters, bursting the fuel cells into flames. She then wraps her polarity around the cockpit and she grabs the pilot, jumping out of the Gunship as it crashes down with a fiery explosion behind her. She holds the pilot and then punches him in the
face, knocking him out.

She stands up and smiles at her boyfriend. “Show-Off.” She jokes, holding her, and she giggles before they kiss.

“Anything to impress.” She smiles into his kiss, whilst Oscar runs to Ruby, checking on her. She sits up with a groan, her aura broke but luckily before she could sustain any damage.

“Ruby? Are you alright?” Oscar asks her with worry in his voice.

She sits up and gives him the thumbs up of reassurance.

“Yep…”

Then she gasps, and his eyes widen. “What?” He asks her with fear in his voice, only for her to show him her red cape, covered in black tar like mud.

“My new cape is all ruined.” She complains, and he sighs, gently pressing his head to hers, madly in love with this girl.

“Only you…could get shot by a massive Gunship…and complain about getting mud on your cape.” He chuckles.

“Eh…priorities, right?” She chuckles, before leaning up to kiss him affectionately.

“I guess that’s why I fell in love with you.” He chuckles, helping her back up. “So, what now?” He asks her.

“We need to find the others.” She says…

…which is when they realise something.

There is more gunfire going off in the city…

…and explosions.
White Fang Assault

Cardin

The Acolytes of Lien open fire on the two Warriors as they leap through the closed doors, and Cardin roars, taking his massive mace and slamming it down into the ground with all his might. The impact shatters the ground, the red dust crystal inside ignites, forming a massive explosion that blows the Mercenaries across the skirmishing landscape. One of them crashes against the bonnet of the truck, and Kelham glances down at him with a scoff.

Cardin charges directly at his former Captor with his Mace in his grasp, Kelham glares with him with a demented smirk, his scales ripple with a slight clicking sound as his muscles harden with the armour plating, and he suddenly charges straight for Cardin who runs at him. Cardin may be big, but Kelham is even bigger – almost the same size as the Bear Faunus Mazen Ursus. But Kelham, is a Komodo Dragon Faunus, and he slams straight into Cardin with all his might and he bellows lifting him off the floor with a bellow as he smashes straight through the stone wall of the tower. He then smashes Cardin down onto the ground, and Cardin looks up at him with cough, seeing those red claw blades extending from his Gauntlets once again.

He grits his razor sharp teeth into a smile, a long forked tongue slithers out from his mouth as he smirks down at him. “Tell me, Winchester – what happened to the Pretty Boy? Kassius? I could still make a killing with a fighter like him!” Kelham laughs maniacally, but Cardin grabs onto his mace and swings round, Kelham crosses his blades over one another and the impact sends him flying. He crashes against the wall with a grunt, lifting his head and cracking his neck.

“Not here, guess you’re gonna have to settle for me.” Cardin chuckles as he spins his mace through his fingers.

“I guess so.” Kelham agrees, jumping towards him and slashing the red blades downwards at Cardin. He slides back on his feet and he deflects the coming strikes from the insane Faunus, repeatedly attacking and attacking. It is people like Kelham and Kardas that make people fear the Faunus, because those that do end up losing their minds, like Tyrian, become extremely lethal foes. Kelham can move incredibly fast as well, and it is clear why he has managed to last as long as he has. He jumps and spins through the air, kicking Cardin in the face, before he slashes him across the chest. His aura protects him but the impact of those razor sharp blades sends him flying.

He crashes against the wall with a groan, looking back at the massive man that walks towards him, then he takes the blades and slashes them against one another. Sparks burst from the aggressive act of sharpening the blades one again. He slithers towards the man, who rolls out of the way from his slashing blades, and he stabs one of them right into the wall, getting them stuck between the stones. He growls with anger, glaring at Cardin who smashes his Mace into the huge Faunus’ face. The crash blows him back, and he grins, swinging round thanks to the rocks stuck to his blades, and he launches them right at him. But Cardin pushes his Mace forward and blasts a powerful beam of fire from the dust crystal inside of his mace.

The stone turns to dust before it can even touch him, but through the smoke Kelham charges him once again, charging right into his chest so hard that he knocks him onto the ground. He slows down as he passes by and he pushes the blades down to his throat with great force. Cardin rolls out of the way just in time as the blades puncture through the ground, and he kicks Kelham in the face. He tumbles away from him, whilst Cardin runs at him again with that mace in his grasp. Kelham smirks.
and he pulls a new attack on the Huntsman, as he suddenly engages his Semblance.

There is a shattering sound, like a window had been broken, and then he unexpectedly breaks into three copies of himself, like broken remnants of glass they all throw themselves into Cardin, and slash their blades at him repeatedly. There is a terrifying echoing laugh around him from the madman, but he swings round and knocks all their heads off, until Kelham catches the mace, staring at him devilishly. He pulls the mace from his hand and punches him in the chest with the blades. If it were not for his aura he would be killed right now.

Cardin rolls back from him, as the copies of him – like Blake and Sun – shatter into shards on the ground as he approaches. “The doctors told me I shouldn’t use my semblance…apparently decays my mind…” Kelham chuckles as he walks towards him, and Cardin stares at his mad eyes. “But I feel better than ever!”

He takes Cardin’s mace and he goes to slam it down onto his head, but Cardin grabs a plank of wood on the ground and he swings it right into his hands. The action knocks not only the mace from his grasp but also knocks the gauntlets from his hands, sending the blades falling onto the floor. Cardin gets back up and he swings the mace right at Kelham’s head, but the massive mercenary catches it in his hand, holding it with a pressure so immensely tight that the wood actually splinters. He rips it from his hand and throws it onto the ground, raising his fists to fight Cardin one on one.

Cardin raises his fists as well, and Kelham is the first one to swing at him, but Cardin ducks down, dodging the Faunus’ attack. He staggers past him and he laughs, his long reptilian tongue extending out from his mouth, razor sharp teeth on show. Cardin rushes him, throwing punch after punch at the huge Acolyte of Lien, knocked back from every strike, but he takes every single one of them with a smirk on his face. Kelham returns the favour with a hard forward strike with his head, knocking Cardin back. Kelham grabs him by the scruff of his neck and swings him round, smashing his head into the wall three times in a row, breaking every stone with every single hit he makes. Cardin grunts in pain from the strikes, but then he pushes his hands against the wall when he sees a broken piece of rebar protruding from the rock. He forces himself against the bricks, keeping his throat away from it. “They never said what condition they needed you in…” Kelham growls with a mad smirk on his face. Cardin glares at him with gritted teeth before he swings his head back, colliding it into Kelham’s with great force. Kelham grunts with pain, staggering back, and Cardin grabs tightly onto a steel bar on the ground that broke from the wall from his head crashing into it. He bellows as he swings it into Kelham’s face, over and over again, pushing him back with every single strike. One hit causes him to spit out blood as he grins yet again, but Cardin roars, taking that pole and swinging it right into his face with all his might.

The impact sends Kelham flying, and crashing straight through the other side of the wall, rolling across the ground with silt trailing off his body. Cardin sprints towards him and scoops his Mace into his hand as he charges, jumping out and swinging right at him, but to Kelham’s luck, he managed to pick up his claws before getting blown out of there. He crosses the blades and stares at him, just stopping the mace from striking his head. “Wanna stay ahead of me, boy? Gonna have to try better than that.” Kelham chuckles, unexpectedly gathering that blood in his mouth and he spits the metallic fluid into Cardin’s eyes, and he throws the man off him.

Kelham rolls backwards and he slashes his blades once again. “Let’s go, Winchester!” Kelham challenges, and Cardin snarls at him viciously.

On the other side of the tower however, Emerald is challenging the rest of the Acolytes of Lien forces that are battling against her right now. She sprints towards them and throws one of her Silent Judgement sickles with the chain attached. She jumps off the building and swings round the tower towards one of the soldiers taking cover behind the door of one of the armoured trucks. She swings
feet first into him, smashing him against the truck so hard that it rocks from the impact. She jumps up and cartwheels over the vehicle’s roof and she lands in front of another soldier who aims his shotgun at her face. He pumps it and the weapon ejects the empty shell still in the chamber, and then his eyes widen. She placed a hallucination in his head, very shortly he saw a girl he was sweet on many years ago, then she jumps and she wraps one of the chains around his throat, she pulls so hard that she snaps his neck with an audible crunching sound.

Suddenly a Glider Jokey comes soaring round the corner, firing three missiles directly at her. Her red eyes widen and she gasps, swinging her chain round and throwing the body of the soldier at the Jokey, but he swerves out of the way. Emerald jumps as high as she can, flipping through the air as the explosion throws the truck into a spin in the air, flames and chunks of metal and other shrapnel being thrown her way. She lands down on the ground and she spins one of the Silent Judgement Sickles round with her wrist, the chain swinging round. She turns as the Glider soars around her, firing the machine guns down at her, and the soldier using his grenade launcher. She rolls out of the way as the grenade explodes where she is, and she throws the sickle up into one of the thrusters. The blade hooks inside and jams the spinning fan blade, rupturing the metal and the pressure, causing an explosion inside of the wing. The Jokey screams as the Glider drops to the ground, jumping off to avoid his fiery death as it erupts into flames behind him.

Emerald yanks the chain and Silent Judgement back to her hand, and she sprints towards her enemy, who aims his grenade launcher right at her. He fires it but she jumps over the incoming shell and it explodes behind her, smoke and fire rising up in the air. She wraps the chain of her weapon around the throat of the soldier and she rolls across the floor, throwing him over her head, and he lands head-first into the ground, knocked out from the impact.

More soldiers start to fire upon her and she narrows her eyes at them, getting up and sprinting around them as she transforms her sickles into Revolver form. She elegantly slides across the dusty ground to take cover behind a truck, lifting her light body up and grabbing onto the door. She keeps her feet from the ground so then she cannot be hit, and her head beneath the window. They continue to fire in her direction, the sound of metal constantly being dented keeps cracking around her. She turns her gaze to something, one of the trucks is parked in their direction, all it would take is for her to shoot the breaks keeping it there for it to roll in their direction. She bites her lip and aims one of her revolvers and fires it into the wheel a couple of times, bursting the tire and eventually hitting the breaks concealed, snapping them with her compressed dust bullet.

The wheels slowly turn thanks to the incline and the truck starts to roll towards the soldiers that have been holding their position down there for a while now. They scream with terror as the truck heads towards them, so she throws her body over the car and she spins through the air, and she aims down the iron sights of her revolver, aimed at the fuel tanks on the back of the truck. She fires one hell of a well placed shot, that connects with the cannister and the spark ignites the fuel inside, causing a huge explosion that kills most of the soldiers. Those not killed instantly eventually die from burning to death, screeching in agony as they writhe around, flames cooking their flesh. She lands on the ground and spins her sickles fast by using the chains, blocking the remaining bullets from the last three soldiers.

She throws her sickle and it stabs into the chest of one of the soldiers, and she pulls herself towards him, kicking him in the head so hard it rips her blade from his chest and breaks the armour plating. Her foot presses down onto his head and one of the Mercenaries grapples onto her thin dark skinned body to restrain her, whilst one of the Acolytes draws his sword and he runs at her to run the blade through her heart. But then she jumps upwards, still in the restraining arms of the soldier, but she times it perfectly so then the blade of the sword gets driven straight through the soldier that was holding her. The soldier releases her, and she wraps her legs around the last soldier’s neck in a scissor hold, and she pulls her body downwards and throws him down into the ground, swinging her
body round as he tries to get up, kicking the back of her heel into the side of his head, knocking him out immediately.

She gets up after decimating those forces, thanks to Cardin for getting Kelham out of the picture. She blows some of her long green hair from her eyes with a sigh, turning to see Cardin and Kelham battling it out still.

Kelham swings the red claw blades at Cardin repeatedly, savagely grunting with every swing made his way. Cardin backs up, dodging the slashes made his way, and he grits his teeth, taking his mace and swinging it right into the side of his face. The collision sends Kelham staggering back, and his crackling orange and red aura shows. He sprints at Cardin, and he engages his semblance once again.

Aura Fracture – where he breaks his soul apart into multiple bodies, which has a serious concomitant on the state of his mind. Which is why he has lost his mind, because the act of using his semblance makes him stronger. It is like Flynt’s Semblance, and Blake and Sun’s, but far more unstable.

His four bodies, three copies and his real body, charge towards him, all of them zigzagging in front of his real body, leap at Cardin. Their glowing red blades slash towards him as he jumps at him, and Cardin stops the blades with his huge mace. The blades get caught in the weapon. But as he holds him back, Kelham suddenly bites down onto Cardin’s hand, and he screams in pain from the feeling of those razor sharp teeth digging into his skin. He staggers back, and Kelham swings round, slashing the blades of his gauntlets across his face, sending him tumbling into the floor. “You’re a good fighter Winchester, managed to beat Kassius. But you can’t beat me…I don’t have the morality the rest of you have.” Kelham reminds, making Cardin chuckle, staring up at him through the strands of his ginger hair.

“You think I have a moral code? Guess again…I killed my best friends.” Cardin reminds, and he roars with rage, grabbing onto a chain that lies on the ground beside him. He picks it up and swings round, smacking it across the side of Kelham’s face. It throws him onto the floor, but he gets back up, and then turns as Emerald suddenly swings towards him. She slams her boots right into his chest, sending him crashing through the debris behind him, tumbling with dust and rubble rolling from his huge body. He slides across the ground and he stares right at her as she rushes towards him.

Emerald jumps in the air and she slashes her chained sickles with great speed, like a glowing green circle of aura, she shreds through his aura, and lands on her feet, swinging the chains and the sickles at him. They cut across his arms and he deflects the second strike with the claws, but the attack is so powerful that he staggers back. Sparks fly from the impact, and he thrusts forward, stabbing at her over and over again, and he swings round and swings the back of his hand at her. Every attack made trails red energy from the broken blood blades at her, but Emerald is smaller than Cardin and faster than Kelham, meaning she is able to dodge his powerful attacks quite quickly.

She ducks down from his stab at her face, but she pushes her shoulder into his chest to push him back, before she rolls back and fires both of her revolvers at him. He grunts as the rounds impact his aura protected body, and he growls viciously from each one that comes his way. He thrusts at her and he grabs her by her throat, and that attack she could not dodge. He lifts her off the ground with ease and he slams her down into the dirt with great force. She cries out and moans in pain, temporarily winded from the impact. She gasps as she tries ton get back up, but he swings his boot into her side. “I’ve always liked tough girls – I wonder how long you’ll last?” He challenges as he kicks her in the face, and she rolls across the ground from the roll off, but then she suddenly draws both guns and fires them up at him.

The impact blows him back and straight into the mace of Cardin. He staggers back and he grins
cracking his neck as he charges towards him, jumping with both claws extended, but then the chains wrap around his arms, and Emerald slams him down into the ground with force. He crashes down and grunts in pain, rolling, then he drags the claws into the dirt, and rises back up, slashing back at Emerald, but she rolls back, and swings round, slashing her sickles at his chest, tumbling across the ground.

Kelham is now on the losing front, he could take on Cardin because he was stronger and faster, but up against the speed of Emerald and the power of Cardin, he is now at a disadvantage. Emerald looks at Cardin and she looks up and he nods in return. She runs to him and she jumps, and he thrusts her up in the air. Emerald glides above Kelham, and she throws Silent Judgement down towards him and yanks him up in the air. She kicks and slashes at him, before she wraps the chains around his shoulders and she yells. With all her strength she swings him over her head, and directly down to the dirt. He crashes down with a heavy thud, blowing dust everywhere, but as soon as he tries to get up, Cardin smashes his mace into Kelham’s chest, sending him crashing through one of the parked trucks. The impact throws him across the ground, rolling along the floor with the tumbling car.

He coughs, groaning as he looks up, seeing Emerald land on the ground, Cardin beside her, weapons ready to finish him off as his aura crumbles away. He pants as he pushes his hand against his knee, spitting blood from his mouth and laughing. “You’re both dead…you won’t survive this fight.” Kelham chuckles, and Emerald aims her revolver at his head.

“Oh yeah? Must say I can’t agree on you with that.” She says to him.

“Oh darling…I’m not talking about this fight. You won’t survive this war…no matter how it ends…you’re gonna die. Let that sink in for a second…that all this…will be for nothing.” Kelham chuckles.

“Maybe, or maybe you’re wrong. All we know for certain though is that I have a gun to your head, and you’re aura just broke.” Emerald states.

“You’re clever, honey…pretty hot too…but smart enough to notice your chamber is out.” He states, and Emerald raises a brow, and she pulls the trigger – and there is no shot. He was watching, and counting every shot she made. “Told ya.”

Kelham suddenly swings his claws in front of him, ripping a portal of black and red in front of them and he rolls into it with a laugh. Cardin roars and he slams the mace down at where the portal just closed, blasting dust in the air. “Son of a bitch! That’s the second time he managed to get away now!” Cardin yells in anger, and Emerald sighs with embarrassment as she opens the chamber, seeing that she was actually out of shells.

“Damn it…I thought I reloaded…” Emerald stammers as she stares at the empty chamber, loading some fresh bullets inside.

“Don’t worry about it, Em…c’mon…we need to keep…” He stops when he sees something and Emerald catches on pretty fast as well. The roar of a motorcycle being chased by multiple large vehicles, firing on him and one with a huge crane on the back of it.

Then they can quickly deduce who the rider is.

“Kassius?”

**Kassius**
Kassius crosses Lash Equinox over each other in an x position, stopping the incoming blade extended from the cannon arm of Kannix Volantis. He smirks sinisterly down at the Huntsman, but Kassius kicks him in his kneecap, bring him down to a kneeling position, giving him the chance to swing round and punch Kannix in the face. As he does it he fires Vulcan Nox at the same time, just like Yang does, he can see the bullet hole in his face but his fast regenerating aura pushes the bullet from his cheek, blood leaking out from his wound and it clatters on the ground. His aura makes him almost unkillable, but once they are able to break his aura and keep it broken – Eclipse Dust for example – they could finally kill him.

The issue is, the elusive purple dust from Salem’s Sanctum is practically impossible to mine because of the one location it is found in. “You keep fighting a losing fight! What’s the point? Just kneel down and die!” Kannix yells, but Kassius spins his swords through his fingers and grits his teeth, raising them up, spinning one of them through his fingers so then the blade is held backwards. He keeps his legs bent, moving constantly as he waits for his enemy to make his attack. Kannix pushes his cannon forward and he fires a powerful shot of dust towards Kassius, but the fiery round erupts and courses across the blades of his swords. But as the smoke clears, Kassius’ amber eyes widen.

Kannix leaps towards him and slams his body right into him, and the two warriors tumble down the hill towards the road at the bottom. Kassius crashes through the roof of the building beneath him as he slides off the ridge, falling right through the bedroom of a couple enjoying each other in their bed. They both scream with shock as Kassius falls straight through the floor, landing in their kitchen beneath. He looks up at them as they hold the furs to their naked bodies, eyes wide and shaking, so he just chuckles. “Sorry.” He apologises, until suddenly a cybernetic hook grapples onto his shoulder and pulls him out.

Kannix fell past him, crashing through their chimney and crashing down into the road behind him. Kannix pulls Kassius from the house and throws him across the road into oncoming traffic. The Spectre walks towards him and a motorcyclist drives in his direction, so he stabs the hook into the front of his bike, sending the rider flying from the sudden stop. Kannix swings the whole bike round – very reminiscent of how his and Yang’s first fight against him began – and he throws the bike straight into him.

The bike explodes into a ball of fire around him, and he tumbles across the road, smoke trailing from his brown duster jacket. He rolls across the ground and he groans, grabbing onto Lash Equinox and swinging round, launching the sword straight at Kannix. It was a well placed shot because the blade digs right into his cybernetic arm, pinning him against the wall of the building. Kannix grunts in pain and anger as the sparks bleed from the punctured arm, but he pulls the sword out and throws it straight back at him. Kassius jumps up in the air, catching it beneath him and Kannix fires another shell towards him.

Kassius deflects the shot with that same sword, sending it ricocheting off into the cliff face that he slid and fell from. Locke stands his ground, watching as Kannix walks towards him again, igniting the fire dust that he spreads across the long engraved blade extended from his arm, and charging up the cannon more and more. “I’ve been waiting to see you again, Kassius. We have a score to settle.” Kannix states as he charges up his cannon.

“Yeah we do, never should have hurt my girlfriend.” Kassius reminds, and he chuckles, his silver eyes glowing as he stares him down.

“Maybe I’ll have some fun with her after I kill you…think about it, her pretty blonde hair…those stunning curves…and I bet you can’t take your eyes off those tits of hers.” Kannix says, using his
girlfriend as a means to piss him off. Hyde whispers in the back of Kassius’ mind.

“Don’t give in, focus. He is trying to set you off.” Hyde reminds, something that Kassius has never been used to. Normally it was the other way round, but this time he is actually on his side. So Kassius does exactly that, he feels that building rage in his heart to fight for Yang’s honour, but he can still do that without being tricked into a moment of predictable fury. Kannix stares at him and raises a brow when he sees Kassius standing his ground and holding those swords tight.

“You’re gonna have to try better than that.” Kassius says to him, and Kannix smirks sinisterly.

“Fine.” He agrees, before unleashing the full power of silver eyes upon Kassius. The act lights up the sky and his eyes widen, as the white flames impact his metal arm, using it to protect his eyes from the blast. The white flames burn against his aura and his steel arm, yelling as he does it, then the bright sun of fire finally fades. Kannix leaps forward and punches Kassius in the face, and he rolls past him, dragging his hook hand into the ground. He storms towards Kassius and he points his cannon down at his head. The Huntsman rolls out of the failed Silver Eyed Warrior’s shot, and he fires, blasting a burning hot crater where he head once was. As he rolls across the ground he takes Lash Equinox and gets back up, spinning round and slashing the blade right across his face. He grunts in pain, getting knocked back from the impact, then Kassius leaps right back.

He spins through the air in a cyclone attack, firing both Vulcan Nox gauntlets on full auto as he spins, launching bullets everywhere as he fires. The Spectre takes the hits in some tough strides, but as he stagers back, Kassius jumps and flips through the air, sending his boot down the top of his head. Kannix stagers, just as Kassius swings round and punches metal fist right into his foe’s chest. Kannix topples back from the impact with a ground, looking up through his long strands of brown hair. He pushes his blade into the ground and ignites the blade once again, before blasting flamethrower at him.

The fire ignites the air before him, and he gasps, eyes widening, rolling out of the way just as the fire passes by him. He fires Vulcan Nox repeatedly until the magazines are left completely empty, ejecting them from the top of the bracers. The mags burst out with a trail of white steam and the steel grey metal glows bright red from the heat of constantly firing them. He holds his arms down to his belt, the magnetic pull of the magazine slots pulls the other ammunition mags into the weapons, loading some fresh rounds.

But not any old ones, he has got a few upgrades thanks to Weiss. He has loaded up the Lightning Dust Upgraded Ammo that she designed for him, and he smirks, crackling electricity coursing across the bracers. He fires them and the electrical bullets shoot towards him and they impact his arms, and he roars with agony. The electricity burns through the circuits in his arms and he is frozen in place, his aura breaking and healing repeatedly. Kassius rushes him and he kicks him in the chest, slashing the blades of Vulcan Nox across his chest, stabbing one of them right through his stomach, holding him there and he goes to cut his head from his shoulders.

But Kannix breaks free from the electrical charge that was wreaking havoc on his systems, and he catches Kassius’ wrist, stopping the blade right at his throat. He spits blood from his mouth and right into Kassius’ eyes, temporarily blinding him from the thick sticky claret. He stagers back and pulls the sword from his foe’s stomach. The blood leaks down the armour plating he managed to push the blade between, and the aura swiftly repairs the damage. Kassius rubs the blood from his eyes, and Kannix hooks Kassius by the throat and lifts him off the ground, smashing him downwards over and over again, damaging his aura with every single strike. He then holds him down and pulls his bladed arm back, about to drive it straight though his throat…

“Now!” Hyde calls out, and suddenly Kassius lets go, allowing Hyde to take over the control of his
body. His eyes ignite and he catches the blade in his hands as the cracks burn across his face, volcanic embers trailing out from his cheek bones. His teeth gritted as he rises back up, holding Kannix back, and he sighs, remembering this.

“Ah…shit.” Kannix grumbles, taking one hell of an uppercut to the jaw by the Higher Demon. He does not split from Kassius, but he is using his own aura now to protect him so then Kassius’ can regenerate.

“We take it in turns, brother.” Hyde says to him, and subconsciously Kassius agrees, both of them watching as Kannix gets back up with that insane smirk on his face.

“We can’t beat him.” Kassius tells him, since they do not have the resources to do so.

“No. But we can try and hold him back long enough for Coco and Velvet to get to the Peregrine.” Hyde tells him as he holds Lash Equinox in his hands.

“Alright…good luck.” Kassius says to Hyde, and the Demon chuckles with a smirk.

“I’ll never tire of kicking this bastard’s ass.” Hyde chuckles, standing at the ready as Kannix gets back up, cracking his neck and charging up his cannon.

“Well, look who decided to join the party – the dog who lost his leash.” Kannix chuckles, in which Hyde can’t help but give a witty come-back.

“You talking about me or yourself?” He asks him, and Kannix chuckles.

“I guess maybe that’s another thing we have in common.” Kannix states.

“And the first?” Hyde wonders.

“We’re both strays, lost in time.” Kannix states.

“Maybe, but I saw the error of my ways. Can’t you?” He asks him, and Kannix scoffs.

“Too far gone for that, Hyde. All that matters to me now, is justice.” Kannix states, and Hyde shakes Kassius’ head.

“Killing a man who couldn’t find you on an island filled with chaos does not make it justice. Just makes you a bitter little shit.” Hyde states, and Kannix scoffs.

“When did you become so philosophical?” Kannix questions, since the first time they ever really fought each other was when Kassius let Hyde loose through rage, not in a controlled way like right now.

“The moment I remembered what I truly am.” Hyde answers, and Kannix chuckles, igniting his blade once more as he stares down his foe with a sinister smirk, his eyes trailing with silver energy. He then charges forward in a powerful thrust, stabbing at Hyde, but he deflects the strike with Lash Equinox, creating a deafening metallic bang from the impact. Sparks fly, and he immediately returns that same blow with yet another, firing a round from Vulcan Nox and the electrified round just misses as Kannix ducks down. The electrically charged bullet crackles on the ground where it fractured, and Hyde slides underneath the swinging claw arm that moves his way, but as he moves, Hyde remembers that they are still on a road.

A huge eighteen wheeled articulated lorry comes barrelling towards them and his eyes widen, he jumps up and swings across the lorry as he grabs onto the wingmirror. Kannix turns and he grunts,
getting close lined by the truck, knocked over from the hard impact, but then as he slides across the
road he aims his cannon at the rear suspension of the trailer. He takes the shot, sending a powerful
dust charged shot right into the suspension. The explosion breaks the suspension and the bar crashes
down into the ground, causing it to somersault into the air, flipping forward. Hyde screams, thrown
from the truck and crash landing back down onto the ground.

He turns and stares at the wheel that broke off from the motorcycle that was thrown into Kassius
earlier, seeing Kannix getting back up and charge towards him with that blade extended. He charges
faster and faster at him and Hyde picks up the wheel and throws it straight at him as the truck crashes
down to the ground behind him, rolling onto its side with a deafening boom. Kannix slides under the
incoming wheel and fires his cannon straight at Hyde, and he takes the shot right to the chest,
crashing against the truck. Kannix roars as he lunges forward, Hyde moves Kassius’ head aside just
in time as the heated blade from the Spectre punctures the steel of the truck.

Hyde grabs onto the metal arm and he grits his teeth, forcing Kannix aside and kicking him in the
chest. Hyde holsters the swords and he cracks his knuckles, rushing towards him. He swings his fist
and punches Kannix right in the jaw, so hard that it broke it at first, but the aura quickly heals the
damage. Kannix returns the blow with a cannon shot, but Hyde ducks and he swings off a piece of
metal that hangs out from the destroyed truck, slamming both his boots into the Assassin’s chest. He
tumbles back with a grunt and Hyde lands in front of him, taking his cybernetic fist and slamming it
right into the Spectre’s ribs. He gasps, his heart stops for a full second before getting restarted by his
stubborn aura that refuses to let him die.

Kannix bellows with rage as he blasts the fire into Kassius’ face and across his sleeve, burning the
leather and he yells with anger, pulling his jacket off and throwing it down on the floor, stamping the
flames out. Kannix swings his metal fist, formed as the hook folds away, and Hyde catches his fist in
his metal hand. The metallic boom thrums through their arms, and the burning eyes of Hyde meet the
glowing silver eyes of Kannix. “You don’t deserve those eyes.” Hyde snarls.

“More than that one eyed bitch.” Kannix replies, but as soon as he goes to blast them into his eyes,
Hyde takes the chance and he punches him directly in the eyes. Kannix roars in agony, and he glares
at him. “You FUCKER!” Kannix yells, grabbing Kassius’ head and he smashes his face into the
truck three times, but Hyde pushes his host’s hands against the steel, looking back at him as he bites
down onto his hand and he swings round and punches him with his cybernetic hand once again.

Kannix staggers back, firing his cannon three times as Hyde once more, and all three rounds explode
in the centre of his chest, sending him flying straight through the container of the truck. He groans,
rolling across the floor, his aura crackling and Kassius regains control but they cannot keep this up.
They are strong and incredibly skilled, but Kannix’s semblance makes him too difficult to challenge
without that Eclipse Dust.

Or Shadow Dust.

Or whatever the hell they keep calling it.

Kassius coughs as he rolls onto his back, seeing his duster on the ground next to him and he picks it
back up. “Thanks for not tearing up my shirt again.” Kassius says, and Hyde chuckles in his head.

“Yeah…sorry about that.” Hyde recalls.

Kassius rolls back onto his front as he gets back up, turning to see Kannix staggering round the
corner as he glares at him. “We…can’t beat him.” Hyde tells him, and Kassius nods his head in
agreement. End of the day he wants to save Yang and hold her again, he is not about to die by the
hands of this evil scumbag.
“You’re right…” Kassius says and he looks at the road to see a man on a growling motorcycle. “…how convenient.” Kassius chuckles, he gets up and he shoves the man from his bike. “Sorry! I need to use this!” Kassius says as he gets onto it and he drifts round to retreat from Kannix.

“Hey!” The man yells as he gets up.

Kannix walks past the man with his cybernetic hand clenched into a fist, wiping the blood from his mouth. “I’m not done with you yet, Locke.” Kannix says, and he raises his radio to his lips. “All remaining forces. Converge on my position, target: Kassius Locke.” Kannix states, and he turns to one of the parked cars and he walks towards it, ripping the roof off with his metal hand and he sits down in the car. His multi-function metal arm opens up and he hotwires the car to turn on and he drives after his enemy.

As multiple Acolytes converge on Kassius, a couple of Gunships alongside them.

**Blake**

“Blake! Blake wake up! WAKE UP!” Ren yells.

She gasps and her ears a ringing, laying on the ground as Ren covers her, ears bleeding from the shock as her hot sticky blood covers her cheek. She looks around, vision blurred from the muffled gunfire and screams around her, the roars of countless Airships roaring overhead. Missiles and explosives of all kind being fired, one of the buildings partially explodes over her head, throwing debris all over her. “Blake!” Ren turns to her and he holds her shoulders, looking down at her and she starts to wake back up, covered in rubble.

“What happened?” She stammers with confusion and pain, her aura has been broken from something extremely serious.

“Ambush! Mazen and his White Fang Troops are here!” Ren shouts over the gunfire, turning to see Nora and Penny covering them. Nora fires her Grenade Launcher repeatedly at the Acolytes of Lien that charge round the corner, firing their rifles and missile launchers at them. Penny spins her swords round in front of Nora to protect her from the missiles, the explosive hitting them directly. Nora catches her as she staggers back, and she yells a battle cry, turning to fire another grenade behind them. Pink explosions blur with the fiery orange, whilst Penny channels the green energy through her android arms and then she blasts a powerful green laser of energy directly at her enemies, burning straight through one of the tanks, causing it to explode.

Ren helps Blake up, her arm over his shoulder as blood leaks down from her wound that she suffered. “Tank fired on us, hit the building above you, you’re lucky you weren’t killed! Gotta get you somewhere safe!” Ren says to her, helping her along the battlefield, her bleary eyes look up to see the hole in one of the buildings where the brickwork plummeted down to them. So many factors keep bouncing around her mind, wondering if Jaune’s sister and her family are okay, where the others are…what they can possibly do now.

Roaring overhead is a White Fang Gunship, firing machine guns alongside the many Bullheads that soar alongside it. They head directly for the Atlesian Facility based on the small island at the very end of the cove. Gliding alongside them is the Eagle Faunus named Arkaas, firing his rifle in his hands at the many enemies around him in their Mercenary Ships. He nails a few of them in the head and they plummet into the city below, some of them smashing into buildings and practically getting
liquified in the process. The Bullheads roar towards the facility and the massive Anti-Air Turrets open up from beneath the facility, firing their dust charged cannons at the White Fang.

As Arkaas glides with his huge feathered wings splayed out, one of the Bullheads takes a shot straight to the thruster. The wing ruptures with fire from the inside, crumbling apart and causing it to descend badly into the city. It crashes in a fireball, crashing straight through the tower of another Church, shattering the steeple and causing the bell to plummet down into the streets, gonging as it impacts the road. The bell bounces and crashes straight into the side of a Tram, toppling it over and injuring the people inside. The flaming wreckage of the Bullhead also crashes into the street, just narrowly missing a family.

Ren keeps Blake moving whilst Nora and Penny stay close to them, firing and swinging their weapons. “Look out!” Nora calls out, because as soon as they turn the corner there is a White Fang Soldier with a shotgun and he spins round, about to fire at Blake. End of the day she has a bounty on her head right now for what happened with Sienna Khan. Nora takes Magnhild in Hammer Form and with all her might she swings it into his chest. That attack sends him flying straight through a restaurant, shattering the glass instantly and smashing up the tables inside. Blake draws Gambol Shroud weakly, pointing the Magnum and firing it at some of the Acolytes and White Fang soldiers fighting each other. Gunfire fills the district as Mazen orders his attack.

It has not gone well, Mazen would have wanted as little casualties as possible, but from seeing how many Acolytes were patrolling the streets it is entirely possible that their attack was triggered from being spotted. None of the Bullheads have even reached the city yet. A Juggernaut drops down from a Bullhead owned by the Acolytes of Lien, as it crashes down with a burning thruster, crashing into the roads, crushing cars underneath its weight. The Juggernaut lands down and spins round, blasting machine gun fire at the White Fang Rebels that surround him. His bullets shred their bodies into chunks of flesh on the ground, until he notices them.

The mortar pack on his back opens up and he fires them towards the group. They explode before the team, knocking Ren and Blake back onto the ground. Blake cries out in pain as her head hits the floor, like her body is on fire. She looks at her body to see she has more bleeding areas after the collapse of that part of the building. She has a piece of rubble in her as well, protruding from her stomach and another in her arm. Blood leaking out of her body in many areas. “We need to get you to safety! Patch you up!” Ren says, picking her up now, resting her head against his shoulder.

“Take that!” Nora yells, swinging her massive hammer towards the Juggernaut but he catches it in his massive metal hand. He stares at her but the blades of Penny stab into his armour and she yanks him down to the ground with all her might. Nora blasts herself up in the air and she drops the hammer down into the Juggernaut’s chest, so hard that it shatters the armour plating and kills him instantly. She backs up with them and her eyes widen when she sees a bar, with strategic advantage. “There!”

“Good call!” Ren agrees as he carries Blake towards the door, shoving his shoulders against the double doors as he carries her. She bites her lip as the pain begins to get unbearable, blood covering Ren’s arms as he holds her. He moves fast to get behind the bar and he crouches down.

“Gods…it hurts…” Blake winces in pain as she looks at her body.

“Alright…there’s gotta be some kind of first aid kit in here somewhere.” Ren mutters as he opens the drawers, searching through them all in the hopes to find what he needs. Then he luckily finds the red kit bag in front of him and he sighs with relief, opening it to see the stuff inside. He goes to Blake and he looks at her White Coat she wears over her black crop top. “Okay…you’re fine with me taking this off, right?” He asks her as he touches her coat that covers most of her chest. She nods her
head and he helps her get that off, seeing the wounds that surround her, and then he sees one is also
in her leg, a chunk of brick literally lodged in her thigh. “Crap…one in your leg too.”

“It’s…okay…” She assures, and Ren looks at Nora and she nods. Ren gently and respectfully gets
her leggings off and carefully makes sure that he does not disturb the piece of rubble lodged in her.
He sets her leggings on the floor next to him and he looks at the blood that stains her body.

“Alright then…I need to get this out of you. Your aura won’t be able to do its work otherwise. And I
need to sew it up to make it go faster. It’s gonna hurt.” Ren warns, but then…

Bang.

Nora and Penny duck as they hear the Bullhead soaring away, then they hear the whistling of
someone, with a serpentine voice. Penny peeks around the bar just enough to see, and she sees them
entering. They may not know them, but Kassius and Cardin have seen them before.

They are Anto and Kaa, the Warthog and Snake Elite Faunus Soldiers.

With his sharpened tusks he looks around with his maces in his hands, walking slowly with Kaa
hissing beside him. “We know Miss Belladonna is in here, and we also know she is wounded.” Kaa
tells them as she looks at the large room, her daggers sheathed at the moment and her fangs extended
from her teeth. “Let us have her and we won’t kill you.”

Nora scoffs, shaking her head since they know they are here. “Yeah, sorry – not happening.” Nora
states as she defends her friend.

“She is family to us, go away.” Penny demands with her blades in her hands.

“Funny…Sienna Khan was like Family to the Faunus. And we all saw what she did on that feed.
Adam knew, Mazen knew…everyone knew. You’d defend her for that?” Kaa questions whilst Anto
snarls viciously.

“Let’s just kill them!” Anto barks with anger, just wanting to spill blood.

“Shut up, Anto.” Kaa orders with a hiss, her Viper Eyes glaring at him.

“She didn’t do it.” Ren defends, as Blake controls her breathing.

“Oh yeah? Didn’t look that way on the camera.” Kaa chuckles, every now and then an explosion
causes the dust to trail from the wood or the windows to rattle. Distant screams of people they want
to protect.

“It was Vir Nominis Umbra. Did Mazen tell you about him?” He asks her.

“Mentioned him – don’t believe a word of it though. Guy went through some crazy crap in
Menagerie, all of you did. Bet this Umbra guy is just some kind of idea your enemy planted in your
head.” She scoffs, and Blake rolls her amber eyes at their stupidity.

“If you believe that, then you’re a fool.” Nora states.

“We’ll see about that, darling.” Kaa assures as she walks closer to where they are, then Nora and
Penny suddenly rise up with weapons aimed in their direction.

“Leave. Now.” Penny orders, and Kaa grins as she aims her blades in their direction and Anto does
the same with his maces.
“I don’t think we will, honey.” Kaa says.

Ren looks down at Blake, getting the kit out so then he can heal her as fast as he can. “Trust me.” He says to her, holding her hand and she nods. Nora looks at Penny and she nods.

Blake is running out of time.

They need to protect her.

No matter what.
Coco and Velvet walk across the street together, looking around when they keep hearing the gunfire and explosions erupting around them. Which is when their eyes widen as an Acolytes of Lien Gunship roars across the city towards them and it swerves through the air, the side door sliding open, and then they see her standing inside with a smirk on her face. Pink and Brown hair blowing in the wind as she wears her Onyx Phantom armour, her Umbrella resting on her shoulder as she stares down at the pair. Velvet and Coco both widen their eyes, but then Coco sighs as she clenches her hand into a fist. “Just once…just once can things go our way?” She asks with annoyance, of which Neo jumps out from the ship and flips through the air, landing down on both feet, rising up and firing the explosive dust cannon out the same end that the blade is drawn from. She has already drawn it though, holding it in her other hand.

Coco rolls out of the way and Velvet ducks down, her ears drop down as the explosive shell soars over her head. Neo opens the Umbrella and grins as she steps back almost flirtatiously with the weapon resting on her shoulder, smoke trailing from the hot barrel. Then a group of Acolytes drop down from the ship behind her, two of them are Seekers and another is a Huntsman. Or at least one of the Huntsman that they have turned into Mercenaries, or became one of them along the way like Team N.D.G.O did.

The Huntsman – named a Zealot – has a helmet that folds out from her armour and closes around her face, the visor glowing red as she glares in their direction. And then she draws her weapon, a staff with three spinning electrified blades attached, that is also double ended. She spins it through her fingers as she walks forward, staring the two Huntresses down. Neo stares at the two women, and then she snaps her fingers with a twang in her step. The Acolytes of Lien open fire, and the two Seekers suddenly dart forward and one of them punches Velvet in the face, sending her tumbling back.

“Velvet!” Coco yells, but Velvet cracks her neck and she scoffs with a smirk, staring directly into the Seeker’s visor who attacked her.

“Nice trick, here’s mine.” She tells the Seeker, as she suddenly opens her box and she summons Crescent Rose, the holographic replica of her weapon sharpens as the hard light dust fits into her hands. She blasts towards the soldier with great speed and she spins through the air with a yell, swinging the blunt end towards him. The Seeker dashes aside with a streak of orange light trailing from the backpack of which he wears. The soldier slides across the dusty road and he draws his red sword and aims his Submachine Gun at her with one hand, firing it repeatedly. Velvet spins Crescent Rose fast, cutting bullets out the air with every well placed strike she made towards the bullets that come flying her way. She jumps and she spins through the air, firing Crescent Rose down at the soldier and it punctures his shoulder just as he dashes, and he tumbles out of the vortex of speed he entered.

Velvet blasts down towards him and he rolls out of her way, taking his sword and slashing it towards her throat, but she takes the hooked blade of Crescent Rose and stops it before it could do any lethal damage to her. She grinned and rolls across his back with his blade still stuck, she twists through the air as she jumps off him, and the action puts so much stress on the blade, causing the rigid weapon to snap into multiple pieces from the movement. As he turns, he fires his firearm at her, and she spins
Crescent Rose once more, before she leapt forward and she slams her knee up his helmeted head. He staggers back and growls with anger, drawing a dagger and swings it back and forth at her. The man is quite well trained, but he is still not enough to stop her.

She locks his knife wielding arm up and she punches him in the face, causing his hand to loosen and accidentally drop the blade of which he was using. She catches it and she stabs it straight into one of the dust coils inside his backpack, causing it to explode quite impressively before her. The eruption shatters the backpack and most of his armour, causing the Seeker to crash down to the ground with a heavy thud, knocked out from the shockwave that just hit the back of his head.

Coco smirks as she stares at the two charging soldiers with their swords in their hands – who are also thugs one might add – and they both swing at her. She ducks down and the two fools stagger past her, and she swings round and kicks one of them in the side of the head with the back of her heel. The impact makes him stumble and he tries to regain his balance, before she swings round with her handbag and smacks it down the back of his head, knocking him out instantly.

She spins around and rolls aside from the sudden attack of the Zealot who leaps towards her with the double ended trident stabbing down towards her, spreading sparks of electricity through the soil. The dirt blows across the floor as the armoured Huntress slashes her weapon again, spinning it round and round, slashing across Coco’s aura protected body. The impact throws her back, and then the Zealot charges towards her with a Thug beside her. The mercenary takes his sword and swings it downwards at her face, but she takes her bag and she stops it from hitting her pretty face.

That’s when the metal bag suddenly transforms in her hand, opening and extending into the huge gold and bronze Chaingun she always uses. She kicks him in the chest and pushes the barrel into his chest as well, firing all cylinders into him. He is killed instantly, and the many bullets throw the Huntress into the air and she tumbles down to the ground. She pushes herself back to her feet, staring through the glowing red Wasp-Like Visor at Coco as she gets back up. “Like it?” Coco asks the warrior, but she says absolutely nothing, as if she is like Neo and cannot speak at all. “The silent type, eh? Alright, let’s chat my way then.” Coco says, spinning all the barrels round and squeezing the trigger so then it unleashes the full storm of bullets at her.

The Zealot steps back and holds her Trident forward as it crackles with electricity violently, and she spins it through her fingers like a shield, deflecting the incoming bullets that come her way. The glowing gold shells bounce off into the distance as soon as they make contact with her weapon, metallic clangs from every single strike. Coco keeps firing but as she does so, the Zealot’s weapon begins to glow hotter and hotter, and then suddenly she rolls aside and points the trident towards her. A powerful beam of energy erupts from the weapon towards her, whilst the second Seeker blasts towards her, grabbing her by her throat and dragging her through the dusty ground, pounding her head into a rock next to her.

Coco grunts from the impact, before she leans back and thrusts her boots upwards into the Seeker’s chest, and she slides across the floor, transforming her Chaingun down and back into the Handbag form, swinging round and clattering it into the side of the Seeker’s head. He grunts and staggers back, firing his Sub-Machine Gun at her, but she holds the bag up like it is a shield to protect herself. He thrusts towards her again and stabs his blade towards her. She blocks the strike and goes to hit him with hit, but he bolts aside, and as soon as he moves the Zealot jumps forward and punches her in the face.

Coco crashes onto the ground with a groan, then her eyes widen as she sees her sunglasses fall from her face and onto the floor. “Oh…you’ve so screwed up now, asshole.” Coco growls, rolling onto her back and transforming her bag into Chaingun form and pushes it upwards, firing all barrels into the chest of the Seeker, blowing through him and shattering the backpack that contains the dust. With
the second Seeker taken out, the Zealot jumps high in the air, using thrusters to her advantage and she swings her Trident down towards Coco’s through.

Coco rolls out of the way at the perfect moment, causing the three bladed spear to get jammed into the ground, but then she detaches the other end and holds it like a sword, staring Coco down. “You Mercenaries are some real assholes.”

Velvet on the other hand takes care of the rest of the Acolytes, beating them down with Yang’s Ember Celica Gauntlets, punching them in the face one at a time. One of the soldiers ducks under her swing and goes to uppercut her, until Velvet rolls underneath his legs. As he turns to face her, she uppercuts him instead, throwing him up in the air, and as he comes down, she slams her fist straight into his face, causing him to smash into the ground with great force.

Velvet turns round and she gasps, as Neo lunges towards her and grabs onto Velvet’s throat with the hook of her Umbrella. Her holographic Ember Celica’s shatter like glass from her broken concentration, giving Neo the upper hand. Neo drags the young Faunus Woman across the ground before she twists round and swings her across the area, sending her crashing against a concrete building wall. She bounces off and she cries out from the impact, her hand to her side until Neo slams her knee into her arm, pinning her there. “Stop!” Velvet yells, until Neo takes that Needle-Like Blade of hers and she goes to stab her straight through her eye, until she moves her head out of the way just in time.

Neo punches her fist into Neo’s abdomen, only miss as the nimble Assassin cartwheels aside, and Neo summons the Tonfas which belong to Fox from her box. The holographic blades form around her arms and she grits her teeth as Neo paces back and forth with her Umbrella resting upon her shoulder with a smirk. Velvet jumps towards her and swings her blades that she summoned towards Neo, but she backs up with the Umbrella still on her shoulder, dodging every single strike made her way. She barely even moves away from them either, smiling as she lifts her leg up to avoid the swiping move that Velvet made in order to trip Neo.

Instead the Pink and Brown Haired Huntress swings that same leg around and performs an effective Roundhouse kick into the side of Velvet’s face which sends her tumbling back to the ground. She gasps, moving fast as Neo jumps at her again and stabs her blade downwards at where her head was. Neo opens her Umbrella to block Velvet’s punch, and then she jumps up in the air, kicking herself off a barrel as she closes the Umbrella, aiming through the folding out iron sight, and fires an explosive round towards Velvet. It explodes in front of her, but Velvet flips away from it, sliding on her feet as she keeps her eyes on Neo in the air, as she floats down with her Umbrella acting like a Parachute.

She lands and she smiles almost sweetly at her, the light reflecting off the black and gold armour that she wears on her body, very similar to that armour that Pyrrha wore years ago, very sharp with jagged triangular shaped Samurai style armour plating. As Velvet stares at her, she changes weapons in front of Neo, and she smirks with her own sinister look. One that brings anger into Neo’s eyes, as she forms a holographic version of Melodic Cudgel, aiming it right back at her. “Oh…I’m sorry, did I touch a nerve?” Velvet asks her, as she pulls the trigger, blasting the frozen Neo in the chest, sending her tumbling back.

Then she shatters like a mirror, and Velvet starts looking around with worry in her large brown eyes, trying to figure out where she just went. Then, with her large Bunny Ears, she hears movement in one of the buildings behind her, and suddenly she erupts from the window of a building behind her. She dives down towards her and she swings her sword down towards Velvet, of which she spins round and blocks the impact of her sword with Melodic Cudgel, then she smacks Neo in the face with the cane, sending her back. She cartwheels across the floor and lands back on her toes, her
sword held in her grasp.

But then Neo pulls yet another skill from her sleeve, from the Vambrace in fact, which opens up and
she blasts a swarm of tiny missiles at her. “Crap!” Velvet exclaims, as the tiny missiles buzz towards
her, so she runs away from them as best she can, switching weapons to her Gambol Shroud Replica,
throwing the Grappling Hook and swinging off the road from her, and the missiles chase after her,
some of them exploding against the lamppost she used.

Coco turns with widened eyes as she spots her beloved Velvet swinging off the bridge with Neo
firing her Umbrella at her repeatedly. “Velvet!” Coco screams, taking a punch to the side of the head
from the Zealot of whom she is still fighting against. She ducks down from her next attack, as she
stabs at her with the other half of her trident. Coco blocks her next strike with her aura protected arm,
stopping it from doing too much damage. She then jumps in the air flips backwards, her foot
connecting with the bottom of the Zealot’s jawline. She staggers back from the impact, and then
Coco double takes the other half of her trident imbedded in the ground, and then stares at the Zealot
once more.

She leaps towards her, one handed Trident pushed forward. Coco smashes the handbag downwards
at her, and that sends her crashing down to the ground. With the weapon protruding from the ground
behind her, she grabs onto the Zealot and performs a flawless German Suplex. She lifts her up and
drops down, impaling the Zealot through her side and she screams in agony as her aura breaks. Coco
rolls back to her feet, seeing the Zealot crying out in pain as her blood leaks from her non-fatal
wound. “You’ll live, calm down.” Coco assures, picking up her Handbag and running to Velvet’s
aid.

Neo keeps firing her cannon inside of her Umbrella at Velvet as she swings round, until she hears
Coco behind her. “NEO!” Coco yells, leaping towards her and tackling her down into the ground
with all her might. She and Neo both roll across the road and Coco punches down at Neo’s face, but
as soon as her face impacts Neo’s, she shatters once more. Coco gasps, eyes widening as Neo
suddenly appears behind her and kicks her in the side of her face, knocking her onto the ground. Neo
spins her sword through her fingers and goes to stab Coco in the chest.

Until Velvet suddenly swings towards her like Blake, holding onto the holographic cable of Gambol
Shroud, slamming both feet into Neo’s side. Neo spins through the air from the impact and then fires
an explosive round into the ground beneath her, sending her sky-rocketing. As she hovers above
their heads, her shoulder plates open up and reveal some built in missile launchers. They blast down
more of those tiny missiles that she fired from her vambraces, except there are far more and they are a
lot more devastating. As they explode the ground shakes from the booms, but Velvet forms
Myrtenaster in her hand and she pushes it forwards as the explosive missiles dive down towards
them, forming a barrier that protects both herself and Coco from the explosive attack.

Neo grits her teeth as she dives down towards them and she holds her sword over her head and slices
it downwards, cutting through some of Velvet’s hair just as she moves out of her path. Neo crash
lands on both feet, turning to see Coco swinging her handbag at her. Neo ducks down and jumps up,
slamming her shoulders right into Coco’s stomach. She staggers back and jumps up in the air,
wrapping her legs around Coco’s throat in a scissor hold, and she drops down, throwing Coco into
one of the cars with her legs. Coco crashes into the car so hard that the windows shatter from her
impact, and Coco groans as she rolls onto her back.

Neo stares at Coco and then turns to see Velvet casting more weapons – Lash Equinox – and she
charges forward with her crush’s weapons. She throws one of them towards her and another copy
replaces it as it cuts across her arm. Neo staggers back from the impact and Velvet spins through the
air like a saw blade as she dives downwards with his blades. Neo attempts to block but it cuts right
through her defence and knocks her back, right into the Handbag of Coco, finally landing a blow. Neo staggers back from the strike as Velvet lands in front of her with the two swords in her grasp with gritted teeth. Neo’s eyes widen when she sees Coco transforming her handbag back into Chaingun form.

She pulls the trigger, sending hundreds of bullets towards her – so Neo retreats.

Shattering…and disappearing as fast as she arrived. Coco ceases her gunfire, blowing her caramel coloured strand of hair from her eyes as she sees that Neo has completely disappeared. “Damn it… where’s she gone?” Coco questions as she looks around the area, but Velvet sighs as the copies of Lash Equinox disappear from her open hands.

“She ran, must’ve been running low on aura.” Velvet presumes.

“Alright…well the Tunnel’s open. We should get back to the Peregrine, pick up the others.” Coco says.

“Right…where are they?” Velvet wonders as she looks around, which is when in the distance they see an Acolytes of Lien Gunship crashing explosively.

“That’d be a good start.” Coco scoffs.

Qrow

Qrow swings Harbinger with all his might against the blade of one of the White Fang Soldiers, so hard that the impact breaks the sword of the soldier instantly. He staggers back from Qrow until he feels the huge sword be rammed right through his chest. Qrow rips the sword from his body and turns, deflecting the incoming bullets with his sword as a Bullhead with more White Fang banks round, firing their weapons at them.

Qrow’s team are no longer at the Tower, they are very near to the Atlesian Facility that the White Fang are assaulting right now. The Bullhead hovers above the cold Argus Water, blowing it everywhere as the White Fang militia inside continue to fire their rifles and machine guns down at him. Qrow sprints to safety and he takes cover behind a dumpster beside the Architect who fires his powerful rifle repeatedly at the soldiers that are laying down suppressing fire upon them.

Qrow reloads his sword with more shotgun shells. “What the hell just happened? How are the Acolytes always one step ahead of us?” Qrow questions.

He is right, with Kassius’ team it makes sense because Whitley is tracking their scrolls and that could not possibly work for them anymore. But they have been on the quiet end, meaning that this could mean only one thing.

“They know our every move as soon as we make them! You think it’s Umbra?” The Architect asks him as he fires another round, that hits a soldier directly in the middle of his chest, but Qrow does not seem to feel as comfortable with that idea – as his eyes focus on Cinder.

“Or maybe someone is feeding them info.” Qrow suggests, in which the Architect stares at him with disbelief at how shocking such a plot would be.

“Yeah…think about it…ever since what happened…happened…the Acolytes have been one step ahead of us, every single time. Hell even before that.” Qrow explains. “The Mountains, and here!”

“Or maybe they’re not as dumb as we think they are, Qrow! We teleported to the mountains, and the Bannermen showed up. And they were planning the Atlas invasion for years!” The Architect yells over the gunfire and then fires every now and then, but Qrow has been having some trust issues with the Fall Maiden for quite a while though.

“Yeah, and Cinder and Hazel were never around. Who’s the say they’re not moles for Umbra?” Qrow questions, which royally infuriates the Architect, since he knows that the two of them want to make things right.

“Nobody is against anybody!” The Architect yells in anger. “Cinder and Hazel are with us! Do she look like she is trying to betray us?”

Qrow turns and spots Cinder ignite her eye as she uses her Fall Maiden Powers, darkening the skies as she summons a storm and fires a lightning bolt into the Bullhead that was attacking his sister, knocking it out the sky. The burning aircraft crashes down into the sea with a heavy bang, and then she channels the fire from her shoulder down to her hand and blasts a fireball into the wing of an Acolyte of Lien Fighter Jet roaring overhead. It explodes and spins out of control, engulfed in flames as it crashes into the sea as well with a boom.

Qrow sighs and turns his eyes back to the Architect. “They are with us. The Acolytes of Lien have simply been lucky, now stop doubting your friends and fight the real enemy!” The Architect argues, as he vaults over the Dumpster and kicks his metal legs into the face of a White Fang soldier, breaking his mask apart and he swings his rifle round, extending it into a sword that crackles with electricity. He blocks the attack of a Seeker that suddenly comes out of nowhere alongside more Mercenaries, battling against the alleged Freedom Fighters, in a street once populated with civilians. He knees the Seeker in the crotch and he squeals in agony, falling to his knees. The Architect would have finished him off, but that did enough damage. “I’d apologise, but I don’t know how much pain you’re in, so nah.” The Architect shrugs his shoulders before he kicks the soldier in the head, breaking his visor and knocking him out.

He turns his shoulder into the incoming missile that explodes around him, and then he draws his rifle and fires directly in their direction. The glowing blue and burning projectile soars across the road and scorches through his armour plating, erupting out the other side and nailing a second shoulder with the same shot. Both of them collapse and he chuckles, finding a rare form of enjoyment at getting a double kill with one bullet. He keeps rushing forward and he jumps up over a car, seeing a truck drift round the corner and come charging towards him. He stands there and it roars closer and closer, but he just stands in front of it. “Come at me.” The Architect challenges, then the truck collides into his mechanical body, stopping dead in its tracks and he is not even harmed from it. The metal bends and shatters around him, he pulls himself from the wreck and rolls his metal shoulder – not like he needs to.

“Ow…” One of the soldiers groans.

“Oh quit winging, it was fun.” The Architect says to him as he shrugs his shoulders.

“No it wasn’t.” The Mercenary groans.

More gunfire erupts down the street and they can hear the screams of innocents down there too.
Qrow and Raven both sprint down there to find out what is happening, which is when they see more White Fang walking towards them. And one of them is stood at the front, firing his rifle above his head to get the civilians out of the way, and that is exactly what they do. Like a river they flow,
sprinting into the buildings to hide from the flying bullets. Qrow and Raven look at each other and they nod.

Raven draws her sword, her fire dust blade extended and ignited the whole time. They both blast forward and the White Fang attack, wearing modified Acolytes of Lien armour. The leader draws his own sword and slams it straight into Raven’s. She holds him there and kicks him in the leg to make him stagger, and she jumps over his head, flipping as she slices her sword straight through him. She then aims the sword and pulls a trigger. The blade suddenly shoots off with a bang, stabbing straight through the chest of one soldier, carrying him into their truck, hitting the engine. The truck explodes into a fiery explosion and Raven sheathes her sword, the multi-blade scabbard switches blades and she draws her Blood Blade, where she can use her portals at will.

And that is exactly what she does, she looks at Qrow and nods, opening a portal behind her and they both transform into their Corvid Forms. The portal closes behind them and they both emerge from the portal above them. They both transform back into their human forms, diving down with blades in their grasp. Qrow turns as he sees a White Fang Gunship, another piece of stolen Acolytes of Lien technology.

This war between the Acolytes of Lien and the White Fang has been raging for a few weeks now, but this is the first time they have seen a full scale battle like this. They have been assaulting their bases constantly, taking weapons, vehicles and gear every single chance they can. They have gone from a rebellion of civilians to a full scale military. Every day Faunus are joining Mazen’s cause to punish the Acolytes for how many lives have been hurt, and in turn – the Atlesians for giving up control of the most powerful technology in the world without any real fight.

But as always – most people do not know the full story of what happened in Atlas, the manipulation and the attack.

The Gunship roars towards him, so he fires his shotgun behind his body and he blasts towards the vehicle. He yells with fury as he digs the huge metal blade of Harbinger straight through the wing of the Gunship. Flames erupt from the wing as the fuel cells get damaged in the process, and also causing the missiles and armaments to detonate too. The ship explodes in the sky, and Qrow continues to dive down, and the soldiers beneath keep firing down at one another. Qrow spins through the air, and then two more portals open for him thanks to his sister.

And the other portals open up behind both sides – the Acolytes and the White Fang.

Qrow erupts out the other side and immediately drives Harbinger straight through the spine of a Juggernaut, knocking him down to the ground and the sheer speed he was moving at killed the massive soldier instantly. Whereas Raven erupts and with one hard swing she behead three White Fang soldiers, their blood splatters across her already red armour, and she slides across the ground. She spins her sword through her fingers and sheathes it, switching to an electrical blade as she spots the water beneath their feet. She stabs the sword into the ground, conducting the electricity into their bodies, cooking them inside out as they scream, before dropping to the ground.

Qrow thrusts towards the Acolytes of Lien, cutting through them like butter as they scream, severing the arm from one soldier and spinning his side round to drive it straight through the heart of another. He rips the blade from his corpse and spins round, firing fresh rounds straight into the chest of a Tremor Trooper. The impact sends the soldier flying through the window of a house, killed instantly.

The two Branwens stand tall…they grew up with Bandits, and that shows from how merciless they are when it comes to killing. Raven stands around the corpses of the Faunus Militia, flicking the blood from her blade before sheathing it again. The sky darkens once more as Cinder unleashes the power of the Fall Maiden upon those that get in her way, and they turn the corner to see.
An Acolytes of Lien tank aims up at her and fires a shell straight at her, but she holds out her hand and the wind catches the shell like she is using telekinesis, until she shoots it straight back, igniting it like a missile and it cuts straight through the tank, causing it to explode into a hundred pieces. Her eye burns bright as she turns to the Naval Ship that the Acolytes of Lien have unleashed and she holds her hands out and she smirks at them. The clouds crackle and the soldiers on the boat gasp and the clouds swirl above their heads, and the wind picks up. A funnel descends from the sky and crashes down into the ocean’s surface, forming a Water Spout. The soldiers scream as Cinder controls it to tear their Ship apart, ripping the hull piece by piece, the armaments erupt into flames, ice, earth and electrical flames. Massive spikes of rock cut straight through the ship and the ice freezes the hull, then the sudden heat causes it to shatter like glass.

The massive vessel sinks into the sea slowly, and Cinder stares at them with a scowl, until suddenly a sniper shot hits her in the side and she gasps, knocked out of the air. Luckily her aura was up when she was hit, but it was in the side of the head, meaning the strike knocked her from the sky. She plummets down, until suddenly she is caught by someone. He lands in the road, Cinder in his arms as he stares at the foes behind him, setting her down on the road as he draws his cane. Ozpin blasts towards the White Fang as he slows down time, dodging the incoming bullets and knocking them out of the air as he strikes each one with his cane. He slides under the legs of one soldier and he taps each of them with his cane. He stands behind them and time resumes, and the six White Fang soldiers fall to the floor, completely unconscious.

The Architect fires his rifle up at the Bullhead that was shooting down at them and he hits the right thruster, causing it to ripple and explode into flames. The fire ruptures through the wing and smoke trails further from it as it spins out of control and crashes into the sea alongside the other one. He turns to see Kragen, Yenna and Winter arriving at the scene, Winter helps Raven up and she nods. “Where are Ruby and her team?” Ozpin asks them as he crouches down beside the dazed Cinder Fall.

“Not sure, we were on our way back to the Prowler until we got pushed back by the White Fang and Acolytes.” Qrow tells the Professor as he walks over to him.

“Well, we realised we could already have a problem with that.” Yenna states as she walks with them, hearing more distant gunfire from the nearby Atlesian Facility on the small island. They already can tell what they are about to say.

“Ah shit, you’re right. The Anti-Air Defences.” The Architect says as he walks to the edge of the road, standing on the decorative grass on the clean pathway. The Cannons are still firing, blowing the White Fang Forces out of the sky, but they are still getting inside of the facility. Most notably being Mazen and Arkaas.

“If we do not shut that Anti-Air Defence System down, we cannot get to that Tunnel. We will be shot down as soon as we get close.” Winter explains, and Raven huffs as she turns to her.

“So what do you propose?” Raven inquires.

“I know Cordovin, she has not unleashed the Colossus yet, meaning she is probably waiting for the situation to get worse.” Winter begins.

“How do you…ow…even know she’s still there?” Cinder inquires as Ozpin helps her stand back up, rubbing her aching head from the feeling of being shot in the head. Thanks to her aura, it felt like a beanbag – a beanbag being shot at the speed of a bullet though.

“She never leaves this facility, or the city for that matter. This is her home, she will defend it no matter what.” Winter assures. “If I can get to her, Ozpin too – we can convince her to let us pass.”
“How? Anti-Air Defences are targeting whatever is in the sky.” Kragen asks her, since he does not really know how modern technology works, it is nothing like Arkhoni technology – painfully primitive and needlessly complicated.

“Not exactly, the targeting systems can be tweaked quite easily. It targets anything spotted that White Fang are using. So Bullheads, Gunships, Dropships – anything like that. But if we can get Cordovin to manually change it from attacking all air traffic to exclude our Prowler, we will be able to get through completely undetected.” Winter explains, showing her vast knowledge as an Atlesian Specialist.

“How do we know that Cordovin hasn’t changed sides completely? She’s using the Acolyte’s Colours.” Qrow reminds as he points to the facility that now has that black, red and gold colour scheme on it.

“She would do anything to keep Argus safe. It will always be her primary objective, even if it means changing colour schemes. But at heart she will always be Atlesian…I know she will. If I can persuade her, she will help us.” Winter assures, and Yenna sighs as she scratches the back of her neck.

“Well…this should be fun…we didn’t really part on great terms.” Yenna states, getting their nerves raised.

“What…do you mean?” Cinder asks.

“Uuuum…it’s possible I may have been caught stealing some stuff of hers in the past.” Yenna admits, and Kragen raises a brow.

“You…what?”

“How much?” Ozpin asks.

“Oh you know…just a few crates.” Yenna answers.

“Of what?” Qrow inquires.

“…sandwiches.” She guiltily answers, leaving all of them stunned, and of course the Architect is the one to ask the obvious question.

“Hold up…crates…of sandwiches?”

“I was hungry.” Yenna admits as she hangs her head with shame.

“You must have been super hungry to steal _crates_ of them.” Winter comments.

“They were tasty.” Yenna confesses, like a child who has had to confess to doing something bad.

“Worry not, it will be fine. We just don’t take you with us.” Ozpin states as he points at the guilty Yenna. “Winter, Architect. I want you two to come with me. Rest of you, get to the Prowler. We will call you to let you know the defences are safe.”

“You know Mazen and his White Fang are in there, right?” Qrow asks him, and Ozpin chuckles as he catches his cane in his hand, his eye flickers green ever so slightly.

“Of course.” He answers.
Emerald Engine roaring, Cardin and Emerald pursue the Acolyte of Lien that are right behind Kassius on his motorcycle right now. With Cardin behind the wheel, Emerald wields her Silent Judgement Duel Revolver Sickles, and she fires at the enemy Mercenaries as they chase after their friend. Cardin drifts round the corner as Emerald stands up in her seat, looking over the car to see the others in the distance. “We’re gaining on ‘em!” Emerald assures Cardin.

“Great! Get back in your chair!” Cardin demands like she is a school teenager.

“No!” She argues.

“Don’t make me turn this thing around!” Cardin yells as he keeps chasing after the Acolytes of Lien, who are leaving some wrecked civilian cars in their wake, alongside Kannix on the back of one of the trucks. He turns to see the pursuing Huntsman and he narrows his eyes as he glares down at them, charging up his cannon and aiming it right at them.

“Eat this!” Kannix yells as he fires the cannon towards their car.

“Oh shit!” Cardin exclaims as he swerves the car out of the way, so Emerald kicks her door open and she fires Silent Judgement up at him, and the glowing green bullets dart up towards him. One of them scrapes across his face and he snarls with anger as the hot sticky blood trickles down his cheek from the temporary wound. The shell that Kannix fired exploded right next to their car, nearly causing it to flip over, but as they are just about to get closer, suddenly multiple Bikers come out of nowhere from another road, with passengers riding with them, firing their machine guns at them repeatedly. “Cover me, Em!” Cardin asks her, and she nods her head, firing her Revolvers at the Soldiers on the motorcycles. Not an easy shot to make but she manages to hit the front tyre, causing the bike to flip forward and throw the riders from the vehicle as it crashes and blows itself to pieces.

Kannix looks back to the driver. “Stay on him! I’ve got these bastards.” Kannix snarls, and as they start smashing through traffic like they are not even there, Kannix jumps off the truck and he pushes his feet against the cars beneath him, running across them essentially. He then lands on the bonnet of their car and he aims his cannon at them, but Cardin punches him in the jaw. Kannix grunts, but the best hit comes from Emerald, who stands on the back of the car and she kicks him in the jaw. He grunts and staggers back from the impact, but then he swings round and slashes his hook blade at her face.

Emerald drops down to her knees and narrowly dodges the attack made by their foe, his curved blade just narrowly missing her throat. She then pushes her hands against the back of the car and she kicks him in the face with both feet. The impact throws him from the car and he tumbles into the road, being left behind. Emerald stands atop the car and she flips him off with her middle finger, sticking out her tongue with a giggle. Kannix growls as he punches his metal fist into the road with annoyance. “Nice job, now let’s try and keep up with Kas-”

Suddenly a massive Armoured Truck erupts out from one of the connecting roads in the Queen’s Cove highway, and slams straight into the side of their car. They both hold on tight as they spin out of control, losing sight of the convoy that is chasing after Kassius right now. When they slow down, Emerald looks back and she gasps to see the Armoured Truck behind them, reversing from the collapsed building he slammed into, and the turret aims in their direction, firing on them. “Drive!” Emerald yells, holding onto the opened door and using it as cover as Cardin drives as fast as he can. She fires Silent Judgement with such determination at the armoured truck as it chases after them.
Cardin looks back as Emerald keeps firing back and forth at the huge truck, then he gets an idea. “Em! Get in the car and hold on!” Cardin yells, so she does exactly that. She swings round and closes the door, strapping herself back in. Cardin turns and he drives down a much smaller connecting road, so many of them all connected to the walls of the cliff. The Armoured Truck keeps going, most likely missed the road and they both chuckle.

“Ha! Good thinking!” Emerald applauds as she looks around, Cardin drives as fast as he can through a small town built into part of the many hollowed out sections of cliff face.

“Alright, which way did Kassius go?” Cardin asks her, and she looks around to try and figure out.

“I dunno, maybe downtown?” Emerald asks, and Cardin huffs.

“I dunno where that is…” Cardin groans.

“Just keep following this road.” Emerald tells him, until suddenly that Armoured Truck returns, erupting through one of the alleyways with a lot of scuffs on the black and red paint. “Gods!”

“It’s that damned truck again!” Cardin yells with annoyance as he swerves out of the massive truck’s path, just missing it as it continues to chase after them. The gunner firing relentlessly at them as they keep following the road. Emerald looks back and fires her revolvers ever now and then, reloading whenever she runs out of bullets. Cardin looks around and he sees a garden in one of the houses, so he just drifts round and ploughs right through the fence to try and get away from the Armoured Truck, ripping down a clothesline in the process.

“Dude! That was someone’s laundry! It was so nice!” Emerald teases.

“They can wash it again!” Cardin argues as he keeps driving, demolishing a dog’s house in the process – luckily no dog inside.

“Aaaand now a Dog is homeless. Well done, how do you feel?” Emerald asks him curiously, just pushing his buttons further.

“Yes, yes, thank you for the commentary Emerald! It’s not at all distracting!” Cardin argues as he turns the car suddenly and goes straight through the kitchen of someone’s house, and Emerald just glances at him. “Don’t you say a word.”

I want to so bad…

As Cardin erupts from a decimated neighbourhood he returns back to the road – where a car should be – and he looks back and he laughs. “Ha-ha! Look at that! We lost him!” Cardin cheers.

The Armour Truck erupts through another alleyway again.

“Son of a bitch!” Cardin yells with annoyance, turning down one of the roads as the truck fires at him from behind. He drives as fast and as hard as he possibly can. As Emerald fires at the Armoured Truck some more, her red eyes widen when she spots him in the distance. Kassius on that motorcycle still being chased by that convoy of Acolytes.

“There! He’s down there!” She calls out, and Cardin looks at the barrier of the road, seeing there is a sloping hill beneath them.

“Hold on.” Cardin tells her and her eyes widen.

“Oh no…don’t you dare.”
“Oh I dare.”

“No, no, no, no, no…”

“OH YEAH!” Cardin whoops as he drives towards the edge of the road, smashing straight through it.

“You’re crazy!” Emerald screams, and Cardin laughs.

“You’re the one who said head straight down!” Cardin replies as Emerald holds onto her seat with her eyes squeezed shut.

“I DIDN’T MEAN THAT LITERALLY!” Emerald yells back as Cardin drives down the steep hill of dust and sand, roaring down with an almost maniacal laugh. The Armoured Truck is also not seen behind them either, and then he manages to drift the car back onto the road, and following the Mercenary Convoy as well.

“That was AWESOME!” Cardin cheers.

“Yeah…it was something.” Emerald whimpers, still shaking from how wrong that could have gone. He keeps driving and a family of bewildered people watch as the car roars down the street, and the kid cheers.

“THAT WAS SO COOL!”

Cardin keeps driving with his foot almost crushing the accelerator, and Emerald stares at his foot with worry. “Uh…you don’t have to…”

“Hey, do you wanna drive?” Cardin asks her before she can even start commenting on his driving skills.

“Actually –”

“Tough.” Cardin answers, and he looks around at how quiet everything has gotten. “Let’s see that truck pull that off.”

And lo and behold, the Armoured Truck returns as soon as he says that, smashing straight through a parked car and drifting round the corner, firing on them. “OH COME ON!” Cardin screams with anger, driving around the roundabout repeatedly, with the huge Armoured Truck chasing them, pretty much chasing them around a circle.

“Dude it’s a roundabout!” Emerald yells.

“Stop backseat driving me! You’re stressing me out!” Cardin whinges.

“I’m stressing you out?” Emerald scoffs, and Cardin suddenly spins the car around and he puts his foot to the throttle and he drives further down the road to see that there is a construction yard, one that an Armoured Truck like that would never be able to cross – but an Off-Road car?

Most certainly.

Cardin drives as fast as he can towards the dirty road and he suddenly drives across an angled slope of mud, of which that damn Armoured Truck finally hits the breaks because it cannot cross that. Cardin and Emerald both flip off the Armoured Truck driver as they escape, hearing a single beep from his horn, meaning he must have hit the steering wheel in annoyance.
The two of them are now at the bottom of Queen’s Cove and are catching up on Kassius and the Convoy. Cardin turns round the corner and Emerald gasps, seeing Kassius riding across a bridge by the harbour. “There! I can see Kassius!” She calls out and Cardin turns to see him as well, suddenly turning.

“Hold on!” Cardin calls out.

“Whaddya think I’ve been doing?” Emerald calls out as she grabs onto whatever she can, holding Silent Judgement in her hands as they draw ever closer to the convoy, following it down the muddy road that they have been forced to take. Kassius can be heard shooting – and cursing – and the Mercenaries behind him every now and then, and one of the motorcycles flips straight off the bridge from one of Kassius’ well-placed shots.

“So you think Kelham sent enough goons after us?” Cardin asks Emerald.

“Well…we’re still alive, so…probably not.” She chuckles, and Cardin turns another corner, driving as fast as the car can onto smoother territory, one that looks like it is headed straight for the sea judging by where this bridge is going, or at least across a portion of water. The bridge is connected to the other side of the cove. Emerald picks up Silent Judgement. “Alright, stay on him, Cardin.”

“Alright, but we’re running out of land here, Em.” Cardin comments as he keeps accelerating, the water getting closer and closer. “Em…” Cardin worriedly says, running out of land with every single meter that passes by them. “Em…”

“Okay, I’ll see you in a bit, Cardin!” Emerald assures as she stands on the bonnet of the car, throwing her sickle onto the crane of the large truck in the convoy, getting it attached. Cardin slams down the brakes, his eyes wide with disbelief as he watches her swing away.

“You’re crazy!” Cardin yells.

Emerald looks back and she nods to him, then she starts to climb up her cable as fast as she can, until suddenly the cable loosens and she drops down into the water, being dragged down through the salty water. She keeps climbing up, coughing up the disgusting seawater. She keeps climbing and climbing, and her eyes widen as a Sailboat starts to enter the harbour in front of her, honking its horn. She swings past it and the guy yells at her. “Sorry!” Emerald calls out, until suddenly slamming into the ground as the land begins to rise back up, now being dragged behind the Convoy. She keeps reeling herself into that same truck that Kannix was in, until one of the trucks in the convoy notices her, the driver’s eyes under that helmet widen.

“A Gunship hovers above her and starts to fire and she narrows her eyes with anger. She raises Silent Judgement and opens fire upon the large Gunship, that fires a stream of bullets towards her and the truck. The rounds cut straight through the armour and through the driver’s seat as well, killing one of their own in the process. The bullets puncture and burst the tires of the wheels, causing the truck to dig into the ground and flip. Emerald throws her sickle and holds onto the chain, jumping from the overturning truck as it topples over. She swings underneath and flips through the air, jumping up and

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landing on top of the large aircraft. The pilot double takes when he notices her atop the vehicle and he grits his teeth as he tries to shake her off. She gets thrown from it but digs both sickles into the hull, holding on as the blades cut into the internal fuel cells, igniting the fire inside.

Emerald throws herself back onto the ship and she swings round, holding onto the chains as she slashes the two thrusters to the point where they rupture and fire erupts from within. The wings begin to buckle and she runs across it, jumping in the air and flipping. She lands onto another truck as it crashes down and explodes behind her, and she smirks as her long green hair blows in the rushing wind. Turning her gaze to the Mercenaries in the truck, she kicks her body through the windscreen and punches the passenger in the head, before kicking the driver. Taking the wheel as the two unconscious soldiers fall from their seats, she drives through the convoy, luckily it is an automatic so then she can use one of the Silent Judgement Revolvers.

She rams her car into the side of another, sending the Military Truck crashing into another car, so hard that it causes it to be thrown into the air, landing in between that parked car and the other one behind it. As she drives though, a Mercenary riding a Motorcycle drives up beside her and his passenger leaps from the bike and into the car, trying to hit Emerald. Instead she takes the truck and rams it into the biker, sending his head under the wheel. The other soldier grabs her by her emerald green locks of hair, and she gets her face slammed into the steering wheel. She grits he teeth and points Silent Judgement upwards where his head is, and pulls the trigger.

With a loud crack, his body goes lifeless and she pushes his corpse from the vehicle, accelerating and firing her pistol at the other mercenaries around her. She nails one of the drivers in the head, causing him to fall onto the steering wheel, swerving the car into another one, taking not one but two of the Mercenaries out. She keeps driving, seeing Kassius directly ahead as the other riders keep catching up to him, firing their pistols at him. “Kassius!” Emerald yells, as she runs one of the Riders down with her car.

The soldier squeals as he gets crushed under her wheels, rolling down the road behind her as she keeps chasing after her friend. Kassius takes Lash Equinox and he beheads one of the riders next to him, sending his helmeted head bouncing down the road behind him and the bike flips through the air with a roar, coming apart with a burst of fire erupting out from it. Kassius turns his gaze as Emerald matches her speed with him and they look at each other. “Hey, Emerald.” He greets, dodging a tree in their path.

“Alright…” Emerald softly says, then the two of them look at each other.

“HOP ON!” They both shout at the exact same time.

“Kassius! Get in the damn car!” Emerald yells.

“No! I’m faster! Stop arguing!” Kassius argues, until Emerald’s eyes widen.

“Look out!” She yells, and Kassius hits the breaks and so does Emerald, but hers are not as good as his. The car slides to a stop, or at least it nearly does, because that same Armoured Truck from earlier suddenly slams right into the side of her car, flipping it over this time and throwing her from it. She tumbles and she groans in pain, as her green aura crackles across her body, pushing her hands against the mud, covered in bruises too. “Ow…” She groans, pressing her hand to her head as she feels the hot metallic tasting blood on her head and in her mouth as well. She spits the blood out from a busted lip, looking around and she gasps. The Armoured Truck reverses from the trees and Kassius returns to her side, drifting round the corner with his hand outstretched to her.

“Told ya!” Kassius says as he pulls her onto the Motorcycle and he takes off as the massive truck chases after them, nearly running them down from how close to them it is. Emerald keeps one arm
around Kassius whilst the other draws her pistol and she switches it to Fully Automatic. “Shoot it!”

“I AM!” Emerald yells as Kassius drives as fast as he can on this bike, whilst Emerald keeps shooting at the grill of the massive truck behind them, hitting the screws and welded nuts and bolts holding it together. Not only that but she is aiming for the engines as well, shredding them down with every shot but it is still coming. Kassius takes the bike and drives down the road, drifting it round the corner and the Armoured Truck goes straight through a building after them.

“This guy never should have passed his driving test!” Kassius yells as he keeps driving.

“I HATE THIS TRUCK!” Emerald yells, so Kassius slams his metal hand down to the floor, scraping it on the tarmac as he performs one hell of an impressive drift.

“Hang on, Em!” Kassius yells so she wraps her arms around him as he drifts the bike around the corner, and the Armoured Truck slams its side into the building, fuel spewing from its engine constantly, so Emerald keeps firing at it as best as she can. It just keeps smashing through everything, but then Emerald’s eyes widen when she spots the weakness she finally withered the engine down to.

The fuel cell inside…

…her eyes stay wide but then she smirks and she focuses her senses as Kassius keeps driving, and then she pulls the trigger. The gun fires, sending the glowing green bullet directly into the engine and igniting the fuel. The engine erupts into a blaze of glory, blowing the front half of the truck to smithereens and bending the armour plating with ease. The explosion throws the truck forward and into the air, before crashing down with a heavy thud, scraping across the ground behind them with fire everywhere.

Kassius stops the bike and they both look at it, then at each other – and then they both laugh with awe at how they just managed that. Kassius offers his open palm to her and she gives him a high five. “Good shot partner.” Kassius says to her.

“C’mon…let’s find the others.” Emerald giggles, and Kassius drives off to find Coco, Velvet and Cardin at the Peregrine.

Ruby

The Four are in a situation not too dissimilar to Kassius and Emerald, all four of them are inside of a car that they found and are trying to escape the Acolytes of Lien that are still on their tail. Firing round repeatedly at them, Ruby and Pyrrha sat in the back seats with their rifles formed and firing well placed shots at the enemy, taking them out one by one. “These guys need to just…GO AWAY!” Jaune screams, nearly having another freak out, and then he looks back at them, giving them the middle finger.

But then…

…they all just turn and drive away for no reason.

“Wow…I guess I’m really scary.” Jaune chuckles, but as he turns his eyes widen as he sees himself leaping towards them, Except his armour is black and gold, hair is charcoal black and his eyes are fiery orange, his body slowly crumbling away as well.
It is not Jaune…

…it is the Onyx Phantom.

The Higher Demon slams both feet into the centre of their car, sheering it in half like it is some kind of demonic knife, and the two halves crash into the road, throwing the four out like trash. They all roll across the ground and Pyrrha gets up first, her eyes wide when she sees it once more.

A horror she wanted to forget.

The Dark Reflection of Jaune crumbles away and is reformed – into Pyrrha’s Dark Reflection. Long uncaret for black hair, fiery orange eyes and its face crumbling away as it rises up, Milo and Akoúo in its hands. “Well, well…look who it is. Been a while, old friend. Did you miss me?” The Onyx Phantom asks her, and Pyrrha grits her teeth with anger.

“Like an old wound!” She yells, firing Milo at the entity, but it ducks down and dodges her strike, thrusting forward and grabbing her by the head, throwing her across the road with a demonic laugh. Jaune gets up as well, Oscar too and they both start to challenge the Onyx Phantom. The Higher Demon catches both their blades as they swing at it though, and then it kicks Jaune in the chest, turning to stare directly into Oscar’s hazel eyes with a sinister smirk.

“Ah…the child born without a mother…or a father…” The Onyx Phantom reveals to him, and Oscar’s eyes widen, until he takes a fist straight to the face. The impact throws him to the floor and he groans in pain, pushing his hands against the ground as he tries to get back up.

“W-What do we do?” Pyrrha stammers with terror, and Jaune looks at her, she has not seen her this rattled before, never in his whole life, even before the Fall Maiden stuff, or even in the Charred Forest. She has been scared…but never unsure of what to do.

“Pyrrha…” Jaune softly says as he reaches out to her.

“I-It’s gonna kill Oscar!” Pyrrha cries out, until suddenly flashes of light…a face…in her eyes…but not one she has ever seen.

A light…

…a golden light.

But she is not the only one that saw that face for a brief second, all of them do. For a very brief second they all saw that face, a face they have never known. But then she snaps out of her terror, as she sees Oscar being beaten down by the Onyx Phantom. It throws him up in the air and kicks him across the road and he groans, rolling over to them. Jaune gets up and he stands beside Pyrrha.

“HEY!” Jaune yells, getting the Phantom to turn and it changes form into his Dark Reflection. “Remember us? How we kicked your ass last time?” Jaune asks it as he sticks his tongue out to the entity.

The Onyx Phantom groans a soft laugh as it pinches its nose. “You’re plagued with overconfidence – I should have killed you long ago.” The Onyx Phantom snarls, as it suddenly charges towards the two of them, but they stand their ground, and Jaune draws Crocea Mors, and the glyphs on the blade suddenly glow bright, and he swings it across the Phantom, launching it back and crashing back into the road.

The Phantom rises back up and snarls as it stares at them, but as it walks towards them, a bullet shoots past the three and it turns.
And the form changes – into Ruby’s Dark Reflection.

The Silver Eyed Warrior suddenly blasts past them from a cyclone of petals, yelling with rage as she slams Crescent Rose into its side and drags the Onyx Phantom across the road, throwing it into the van left behind. The Phantom blows the van apart as it makes contact, but as soon as it gets back up, Ruby lunges forward again, but it catches Crescent Rose that time. With a truly terrifying smile on the Dark Ruby’s face, completely insane and evil looking, it punches Ruby downwards and she falls flat. The others all leap towards the Phantom but it swings round and blasts a pulse of red energy into them, knocking them back to the ground.

The Onyx Phantom chuckles as it stares down at Ruby, even speaking with her tone, just a darker and more demonic version. “The four of you…what did you think you were? Some kind of heroic band of superheroes who could save the universe?” The Onyx Phantom scoffs as it walks around them. “You are nothing – nothing more than the ashes of a forgotten people…ashes…that will be blown away.” The Onyx Phantom states as it crouches down beside Ruby, staring at her.

But then…

That flash in their vision returns…

…and one word echoes in their minds.

“Fight.”

Ruby turns and she swings her fist straight into the jaw of the Onyx Phantom, and it roars with shock, as the impact is so powerful that it creates a shockwave and throws the Phantom high into the air. It groans as it crashes down through the road, landing into its own crater.

Ruby’s eyes are just as shocked as the Phantom as it crawls from the crater. Ruby, Oscar, Jaune and Pyrrha all stare at their hands…and there is a marking.

Unlike any Arkhoni one they have ever seen, glowing with the same white energy that comes from Ruby’s eyes.

She looks at them all and then at the Onyx Phantom.

“Impossible…” The Onyx Phantom stammers.

They stare at the entity, and the word returns.

One word only.

“Fight.”
Meant For Something Greater

Ruby

The glowing white marking, like some sort of star constellation, glows bright on her fist as she stares at it after sending the Onyx Phantom sky high with her punch. The Higher Demon snarls as it stands across the road from her, the rubble falling from its crumbling body. “I have only seen those markings once before, from a time long past. What could you possibly be?” The Onyx Phantom snarls as it stands in front of her, its black shadowy cape blowing in the wind as it picks up around them. It forms its Scythe of ash and obsidian in its hand, the magma flowing through the blade as it mimics Crescent Rose.

Named Concussa Surrexerunt, or in the common tongue – Wilted Rose.

It is almost a perfect replica of her iconic scythe, except for the fact that it is nowhere near as clean and smooth as her own. Covered in cracks, scorched flames cover the blade as it spins the weapon through its fingers, staring her down as the skin on the side of its face crumbles away endlessly. Golden ashes trailing from its jet black hair. “Whatever you are…we are about to find out if you can fall like the rest!” The Onyx Phantom bellows as it suddenly blasts towards her, spinning through the air before slashing Concussa Surrexerunt down towards her, tearing through the tarmac beneath it like a hot knife through butter. Until it slams it straight into her chest, sending her flying back.

Ruby crashes straight through the remnants of the car that it severed in half with the replicas of Ruby’s black boots. She rolls across the floor with a groan, the metal shards rolling off her aura protected body. She stares at the markings on her hand and arm, it is like this glowing white energy is flowing through her veins. At first, she assumed it was linked to her silver eyes, until she sees the exact same thing on the arms of the rest of her friends. They are all too shocked to react, and they have no idea what these powers are, giving the Phantom an extreme advantage against them.

They have never seen anything like it before they fought Vir Nominis Umbra, it darts across the road like a bullet, changing form every time it changes its target. Now in the form of Jaune, and then in the form of Pyrrha, then Oscar. Oscar slows time to try and get a better hit on the Higher Demon, only for the monster to catch his forearm that grips his sword, and punches him straight in the chest. Oscar grunts, the impact blows the dust from the ground, and he tumbles across the floor, only for the Onyx Phantom to suddenly zoom towards him and grab him by the jugular, lifting him off the ground and slamming him downwards once again. He yells in pain, only for it to try and stab him.

Until suddenly Milo erupts through its ghostly chest, and it releases him. Oscar stares at the Demonic Entity as a chilling laugh leaves its ethereal lungs. The entity turns in its own skin like a honey badger, the hands and torso, legs and head all rotate round with the crackling and crumbling hot embers breaking apart around its body. “You bore me, with your primitive strategy.” The Onyx Phantom chuckles, grabbing her by the throat and lifting her off the floor, ripping the sword from its chest and pointing it to her sternum, where her scar is still embedded. “If you truly believed destroying a fragment of me would be the end…you clearly haven’t been paying attention.” The Phantom snarls, going to stab her straight through the chest, until suddenly Jaune slams his shield into the Onyx Phantom’s side with all his might.

The Phantom releases his girlfriend and she gasps for air as she collapses down to her knees, and he crouches down next to her with worry. “Are you alright?” He asks her, and then her emerald eyes widen.
“Look out!” She screams, only for him to get tackled by the entity, both of them crash through the tarmac, as it pushes his face down into the road, before pinning him against the wreckage of their car. It stares down into his blue eyes with venomous gritted teeth, the grip is ice cold, and feels like icicles plunging into his neck.

The dirt falls from his face and then the Onyx Phantom stares down at him, the form of Dark Pyrrha changing into Jaune’s reflection, staring down at him with an insane smile. Eyes burning hot with orange in the irises, and a cracked and almost deformed version of Crocea Mors. “Come on! Show me what you have hiding in you! What is it you’re hiding?” The Onyx Phantom yells, only for a bubble of broken time to suddenly surround its arm. It stares at it with confusion and anger, turning to see Oscar sprinting towards it. He jumps up and bounces off the wreck of their car and he stabs down towards the Onyx Phantom. The Higher Demon snarls and swings the back of its fist towards Oscar, only for him to dash aside from its fist. He drives his dagger up the chin of the entity, seeing the blade erupt out the other side, ashes and flames erupt out from the top of the skull. Oscar’s creepy reflection forms but only in the face, whilst the hand that holds Jaune down remains as Jaune’s copy.

“Why are you…doing this?” He strains, and the Onyx Phantom chuckles at him, the dark and demonic version of his own voice truly does terrify him.

“Why? What else is there to offer? Life is merely a stepping stone for all souls to become something more! And you stare at me like I’m the monster.” The Onyx Phantom chuckles, almost maniacally until Oscar goes to behead it with his other dagger, until the Onyx Phantom kicks him in the kneecap, bring the Huntsman down to his knee. The Phantom swings round and throws Oscar straight into his face, knocking both of them down. The Onyx Phantom cracks its non-existent neck as it stands tall, turning sharply as a bullet impacts the side of its head, getting it to turn round. As it turns, it sees Ruby blasting towards it through a pulse of red petals.

The blade of Crescent Rose impacts Concussa Surrexerunt with an almighty metallic bang, one that blasts the dust across the ground, locked together. Silver eyes meet the fiery monstrous eyes of the Higher Demon. It looks right into her silver eyes and…she sees the expression change…to something she never expected.

Fear.

“You’re different…this is more than Silver Eyes. Why are the four of you bound?” The Onyx Phantom keeps asking the question, which is when Ruby hears that voice again in the back of her mind. They all can.

“You have our strength…use it. The Phantom’s form is not indestructible, the more broken it’s image becomes, the closer it is to being sent back whence it came.” The voices say to them, two voices that seem to be merged together at once. But both of them are guiding, and the four of them all hear this voice in the back of their minds.

And so could the Onyx Phantom.

“So…that’s what you are? A servant? They never know when to keel do they?” The Onyx Phantom yells with fury, as it slashes Concussa Surrexerunt across Ruby’s aura, but she ducks down from the second strike and she swings her scythe upwards, cutting through the black clothing with great force. The Phantom goes to punch her, but she catches its fist in her hand, but…it was like something was guiding her. Not controlling her per-say, more like it was helping her. Just as Pyrrha did for Jaune back in Forever Fall with the Ursa Major years prior.

But they have no idea what…or who…is helping them right now. As she holds the Phantom’s fist, it strains in pain and anger as the white light seems to infect its hand and it snarls with rage, taking its
other fist and punching Ruby in the cheek. So hard she crashes down into the ground, sliding through the dirt. She grumbles as she shakes her head, feeling all fuzzy from the shock to her systems. The Onyx Phantom stares down at her and he snarls, the white energy leaving its ethereal form as it approaches her. “We should have known they would have planted seeds. They never relinquish control over their creations!” The Onyx Phantom yells, which is when Oscar suddenly leaps forward and stabs his sword through the back of the Onyx Phantom, making him stagger forward.

“Get off her!” Oscar yells with anger as he twists the blade and the Phantom stares at him.

“You’re really not that bright in the head, are ya?” The Onyx Phantom asks as Ruby’s Dark Reflection crumbles away and is reformed into Oscar’s again. It slams its elbow backwards into Oscar’s jaw, knocking him back and pulling the sword – blade first – out of its chest, spinning round and throwing it right back. Oscar gasps and he stops time for a second, giving him the chance to move aside and he turns the sword in the paused moment, and he slightly pushes it back towards the Phantom. Who is not affected, but merely did not expect him to be so clever. The Phantom turns and its orange eyes widen with shock as the sword suddenly shoots right back towards him, time resuming once more.

It grunts as the sword punctures through the armour forged from darkness itself, sending him crashing back, and Jaune gets up to open up his shield, running towards the Onyx Phantom with Pyrrha at his side. He looks at her and her eyes meet his, so he crouches down and holds his shield above his head, and she jumps atop it. He throws her up in the air, and Milo transforms in her hands, the blade forms into the barrel of her rifle and she aims down the sights, firing it at the Phantom. It pulls itself from the building with a growl, taking a bullet straight through the eye. It stares at Pyrrha and it chuckles at her, spinning Oscar’s sword through its fingers as it goes to throw it like a javelin at her.

“Oh darling, we could have achieved so much together.” The Phantom chuckles, and then launching the sword straight at her. Her eyes widen, but suddenly…she begins to glow the same white glow that Ruby is, and the sword passes straight through her, it never even touched her. It clatters against one of the buildings behind her, and the same energy surrounds the sword, causing it to fall and land – right next to Oscar.

Something is helping them, it is clear now.

Jaune charges forward with his shield, smashing it into the Onyx Phantom’s side, and making it stagger back. He swings round with all his might, slashing the sword across the whole torso in a diagonal slash. The impact would have cut it in half it was a real human being, but alas it just rebuilds itself. But the voice is right, because the more damage they do to it over time, the more broken apart the form becomes. They just need to keep up the heat – and pray that it does not kill them first. The Phantom forms Jaune’s shield from its surroundings, and blocks his incoming swing, but Jaune takes that opportunity and he punches it in the side with the shield still attached. The impact was also surrounded by this godly light, that deals some lethal damage to the entity, causing it to stagger back. Jaune grasps his sword tight as he sheathes it, and the blade extends and shifts into the Bastard Sword sized weapon.

The glyphs glow across the Isomacium and he roars, and he swings the sword into the Phantom. The swing blasts it, and sends the Higher Demon sailing through the air, crashing through a building. The car park begins to collapse, cars wail as their alarms start getting set off by the earthquake level rumble from the Phantom crashing straight through. Oscar turns and looks at the others, seeing them all getting ready, until suddenly a car is thrown out from the building, the horn still beeping with panic as it attempts to alert people it was being broken into. The car flies through the air before
crashing down towards Pyrrha.

She holds her hands up and the black energy surrounds the metal, and she throws it over their heads, stopping it from crushing them under its titanium weight. She spins Milo through her fingers, but then her eyes widen, as she realises how the Phantom just launched that. It was staring directly at her, meaning it can use her Polarity. Suddenly up to six or seven cars erupt through the collapsed roof and they start raining down from the sky. They are forced to split apart, and Jaune gasps as the building explodes. Through the flying rubble and pluming dust, the Onyx Phantom charges forward with a horrifying yell. Mixed with a demonic screech and Jaune’s battle cry.

It slams the shield into his chest, causing him to fall forward. The Phantom grabs onto his heel and throws him up into the air. Jaune yells as he feels the weight of gravity start pulling him down, and then the Phantom jumps up and grabs onto him. He takes his human fist and starts punching the Onyx Phantom in the face over and over again, practically punching his own face. But the Phantom and Jaune both crash down atop a building roof, and the Phantom holds him down by the throat.

“Just fall like the rest did before you, and the pain will end. And finally you can feel the freedom of the Afterlife. Is that not what you want?” The Onyx Phantom snarls into his ear.

“Not…by your hand!” Jaune yells, suddenly breaking free from the Onyx Phantom’s grip and sending his clenched fist colliding into the face of the Higher Demon. It grunts from the impact and that gives Jaune the opportunity. He grapples onto the demon and he punches him over and over again in the face as they roll across the rooftop of the building. Then Jaune finally manages to get the Onyx Phantom into a locked position, pummelling his fists into the face of the Phantom over and over again. His veins begin to glow with white energy, bestowed by whatever it is that is guiding them right now, every punch sends cracks through the ground as he keeps punching him. “IT’S! NOT! YOUR! RIGHT!” Jaune bellows as he takes both fists and he slams them down into the centre of the Onyx Phantom’s face.

The attack causes the rooftop to shatter like glass, and the layers of building materials come apart like a sandcastle, and they both crash down inside. Jaune slams down into some of the market racks, falling into the many bags of crisps that fall onto him. He groans and he looks around, searching for where his Dark Reflection ran off to. When suddenly the many aisles begin to explode, hearing the screams of people jumping out of the incoming Higher Demon’s charge. It erupts through the aisle behind him, and grabs him by the face, swinging round and throwing him straight through one of the pillars. It explodes into a hundred pieces, and he slides across the marbled floor. He groans as he tries to get back up, when suddenly Pyrrha shoots straight past him and impales her Spear straight through the Phantom. The two of them stand side by side in the supermarket, and she helps him back up.

“Jaune! Did he hurt you?” She asks him.

“No…but…I don’t know what’s happening to us.” He stammers as he stares at the glowing aura that surrounds him, looking at the same markings across her body as well. That’s when the Phantom rips Milo from its chest and throws it straight back at her, but with her polarity she slows it, and catches it with ease.

“Thank you!” She calls to the Phantom, which rolls its fiery orange eyes at her. Pyrrha looks back at Jaune and at her hands. “I don’t know either…but whatever it is…it’s helping us.” She states, then the Onyx Phantom walks closer to them, turning as Ruby slides in with red petals blasting through the aisle behind her. And Oscar zooms through time itself, on the other side of the Phantom. He draws both his revolvers and aims them at it.

“Slow and predictable…seems things don’t change with you created.” The Onyx Phantom tells them, speaking in Jaune’s voice and form still.
“The hell are you talking about?” Oscar questions, and the Phantom chuckles.

“You clearly have not been seeing it – the markings – they have been protecting you for a long time. It’s all starting to make sense…why I could never control you forever.” The Onyx Phantom states as it points Crocea Mors – which changes into Milo – and it changes into Pyrrha’s Dark Reflection once more.

“What are they?” Ruby questions, staring at the glow around her hand.

“A symbol of a long forgotten past. Clearly you are…more intriguing than we first realised.” The Onyx Phantom chuckles.

“Then who is the voice? You heard it.” Ruby grills once more, and the Onyx Phantom chuckles with a sinister smirk as it stares at Ruby.

“A mystery that must be solved…is it not?” The Phantom asks them, turning to face Ruby, spinning Concussa Surrerexerunt through its fingers, slamming the blade down behind it just like Ruby would do. “And besides – I think we’ve chatted enough, haven’t we?” It asks, before lunging forward at Ruby. It fires the rifle of fire behind its back and spins through the air, slashing everything in its path, cutting the hanging lights from the ceiling and severing the pipes of water above it as well. Ruby slides out of the way as the Phantom slams straight through the aisles of metal shelves, it turns and grabs one of them, throwing it with so much ease. These things are so much more powerful than any foe they have ever faced before. Ruby narrows her eyes, and time begins to slow down as she moves with great speed, and Oscar is seen running beside her at the same speed.

In a spiral of red petals, she manages to move straight through the rolling shelves and emerges out the other side with a powerful cry of war, Crescent Rose held over her head as she brings it down towards her dark reflection. The curved blade digs into the Higher Demon’s shoulder, nearly cutting the arm off, but yet again it does not even seem to feel pain. They are doing damage, but this Higher Demon does not have pain receptors like Umbra or the Lord of the Wood does. It just laughs at their attempts, grabbing onto Ruby’s arm and kicking her in the chest. She gets thrown back but she pushes her feet against the wall she was sent towards, and with the boosting propulsion of her petals, she blasts towards it. She zooms past the Demon, but catches onto the handle of her massive scythe, firing the rifle and riding the recoil.

The action severed the crumbling arm of ash from the Onyx Phantom’s shoulder and it staggers forward. Oscar sprints towards it and jumps up in the air, spinning round and kicking it in the side of the head. He takes his revolvers and fires them repeatedly, sending countless bullets into the Dark Reflection of himself. The Onyx Phantom recoils back from each impacting bullet. But as he staggers back, he takes one straight between the eyes, and releases a chilling laugh as he lowers his head, the bullet falling from the instantly healing false flesh. And the arm is rebuilt too, at the cost of a fully composed body.

He is slowly becoming more unstable, but he is dealing more damage to them than they are to it, due to how powerful it is. “Oh…come on…” Oscar stammers. C’mon magical powers, if you’re gonna help, help us!

The Onyx Phantom’s eyes burn as hot as a furnace, as it takes its version of Traveller’s Atrocity and returns the favour, firing both revolvers at the same time at Oscar. His aura protects him from the round, but he keeps taking aura damage from every single one. The Phantom blasts forward after connecting them together into his sword, and he slashes it with the exact same skills that Oscar uses, so he holds his sword and he tries his best to dodge and block his strikes, but the Phantom slashes his aura up, before swinging round and performing a powerful roundhouse kick on him. The attack blasts him back, and Ruby manages to catch him in the air, holding him as they both slide across the
Pyrrha sprints towards her old foe, throwing Akoúo towards it and causing it to bounce off its face, and it staggers back. She jumps in the air and she slashes Milo across its body, but then it starts to deflect her strikes. It too jumps up in the air, and throws Akoúo down at her face, and it bounces back into its hand, right off her face. It jumps at her and hooks Milo under her chin, flipping through the air and slamming her head first into the marble so hard that the ground cracks, dust puffing up from the fissures made from the attack. She groans in pain, pressing her hands against the floor to try and get back up, until it kicks her in the side. Ruby blasts towards it and digs Crescent Rose into its chest, swing it round, until it digs its boots into the ground. The marble chips and crumbles, slowing the motion down before it smacks its head into Ruby’s to stun her. Taking Crescent Rose from her grasp, it swings it round and slams the blunt end into her face, knocking her down to the ground.

“How did you come in contact in them? Why you? What makes you so special?” The Onyx Phantom snarls as it stares down at her.

She scoffs. “I dunno…I never wanted to be! I just wanted to protect people!” She yells back, pushing herself off the ground and kicking the Demon in the face with both boots. The attack knocks the Demon back and it snarls, and that snarl slowly turns into a creepy laugh.

“Such an innocent child at first, look at what you have become.” The Onyx Phantom states as it stands tall, holding Concussa Surrerexunt in its crumbling ashen hands. Ruby stares at it, and it is only at that moment does she realise that the Dark Reflection it is showing itself as to her – is in fact what she looked like when she first went to beacon. The same outfit, the same hair…and two eyes. But the difference being that it is taller than her, and much scarier.

“I’d rather be what I am now…than what you are.” Ruby hisses, and the Onyx Phantom scoffs, for it does not have the same feelings at a living person does.

“You should rethink that. It’s great fun being a Higher Demon.” The Onyx Phantom chuckles. Ruby stares at it, and it fills her with great disgust to see something act so…gleefully…about committing such atrocities. But as the Onyx Phantom keeps talking, Ruby’s eye glances up at the ceiling as a black energy starts to surround it, Pyrrha’s polarity to be specific. The supports of the ceiling begin to bend and snap from the pressure she builds, then Ruby smirks.

“Maybe…” She states, and the Phantom raises a brow. “But I’d take the stressful life of a Huntress any day.” She tells it, before she grabs onto Crescent Rose and shoots off in a spray of red petals. The Phantom looks up as Pyrrha yells with all her might, bringing the whole ceiling down atop the entity. As the ceiling collapses, Oscar slows time, and he grabs onto Jaune and Pyrrha, allowing them to move in this moment of time whilst the swarm of red petals dart out of the building and into the car park outside. Time resumes as they tumble across the ground. Scuffed and bruised from their conflict, Oscar turns to see Ruby emerging with a cough. Weakly, she walks over to her family of friends, limping on her weakened leg, Crescent Rose dragging behind her.

“Nice work, Pyrrha.” Oscar chuckles, pushing his sword against the floor as he gets back up.

“Thank you. Luckily Ruby kept it talking…” Pyrrha says with a sigh of relief.

“Yeah, that thing talks way too much.” Ruby giggles, until suddenly there is a loud crash from behind them. Oscar gets up and his eyes widen as the collapsed roof begins to vibrate as Dark Energy starts to break it all apart.

“You didn’t think it would be that easy did you?” The Onyx Phantom asks them, as it suddenly blasts the rubble from the building towards all of them. Oscar protects them all with a time bubble, but he could not do the same to protect himself. He takes the impact and staggers back, his aura
drastically damaged from all the rubble that just collided into his body. As he staggers, the Onyx Phantom suddenly erupts through the rubble and swings its fist towards his face. But the white energy surrounds Oscar and he catches both of the fists of the Phantom, holding it back as they stand there.

“Why…won’t…you give…up?” Oscar strains as he holds the Higher Demon back with all his might, but he does not realise how much strength this energy is giving him until he feels – and sees – the roads begin to tear themselves apart. Huge fissures break open beneath him and the Phantom, causing the rubble to fall into the holds as they practically rip the roads and the ground apart from the force of them pushing into each other.

“You…you are the one that interests me the most.” The Onyx Phantom tells him as he pushes him back. “Because you truly have no idea of what you are.”

“None of us do!” Oscar strains, assuming he is talking about the markings.

“Oh no…dear Oscar Pine…that name, that surname? That is merely a fiction, one cast upon you from your…false birth.” The Onyx Phantom hints further, and Oscar stares at it with confusion, or worry.

“What’re you talking about?” Oscar groans, which makes the Onyx Phantom laugh sinisterly as it stares right into his Hazel Eyes.

“Must I say it plain?” The Onyx Phantom questions with a scoff. He speaks slowly, and the words burn right into Oscar. “You were not born…you were built.” He reveals, and his eyes widen. “Your parents…were a lie…you aunt…is a lie. Ozpin…lied to you.” The Onyx Phantom reveals before upper cutting Oscar so hard that it sends him flying up in the air. Oscar groans as he soars through the sky, and then the Phantom suddenly blasts up and punches him in the face, before kicking down into his chest, sending him plummeting down towards the edge of the cliff face that falls into the sea.

As Oscar falls he draws his sword and slams it straight into the face of the cliff, scraping down the side of it, hanging on for dear life as the time bubble around Ruby, Jaune and Pyrrha finally bursts, resuming their moment of time.

And he hangs there…

…thoughts eating away at him.

“What…is he talking about?” He stammers with disbelief. “My parents…my aunt? What am I?”

Mazen

In the distance, the sounds of the battle between the Four and the Onyx Phantom can be heard, all the way at the Atlesian Facility.

The High Leader of the White Fang stands amidst the battlefield on the Atlesian Island Facility, his Chainsword in his hand and breathing through his high tech combat mask he designed. He turns just in time as an Acolyte of Lien with a red sword swings it straight at his head. He dodges the strike and grinds the Chainsword against the red blade, sparks that glow bright orange dance off the two blades as they collide. He pushes the sword against the Acolyte with great ease, as he cuts it straight through his shoulder and the sternum, spraying blood everywhere. He kicks the corpse of the
Mercenary from his sword and he looks around. He watches as Arkaas glides overhead, drawing his bow and firing it down at the soldiers who fire up at him, explosive tipped arrowheads erupt and detonate the fuel supplies that were behind them. The fiery explosion sets the soldiers alight and they wail in agony, plummeting off the edge and into the salty seawater beneath them.

Acolytes of Lien and White Fang airships battle in the sky, fighter jets soar across the oceans, far away from the city itself now, as they battle in dogfights. Firing missiles and machine guns at one another, disturbing the once peaceful ocean into a torrent of chaos and war. One of the jets gets knocked out of the sky by a missile that blows the wing apart. The wing ignites into fire, causing the plane to spin out of control as it descends with great speed, crashing into the surface of the deep blue. Water sprays up into the air, smoke from where the fire burned carries in the wind.

All this chaos, and that is why he has some concern for the chaos he can see in the distance. Most of their forces have pulled out of the city, since they were not meant to cause an all out war in the middle of civilian populated zones. They were spotted early, and it all kicked off, but clearly not every soldier has made their way to the Atlesian Facility, because there are still some others terrorising the human populous. Or in Blake’s case, trying to avenge Sienna Khan, by killing Blake. For a crime she truly did not commit.

Mazen stares at the smoke from the burning flames in the Sleeping Angel of Remnant, and he clenches his hand into a fist. Every day that passes by, and he keeps thinking about everything that has happened. Adam was driven with certainty before he helped infect his mind with the belief that Blake betrayed them, and he played a part in his death in the end. He may have acted like he killed himself and he was not worthy – but Adam faced his demons and wanted to make things right. At the time he thought he was right to judge Adam…but now…he is not so sure.

Mazen hardens himself once more, turning back to the mission at hand. He activates his Chainsword and walks towards the battle of which they have started, seeing his men already getting their hands on the supplies from all the crates that have been shipped here from Atlas and Mantle. Then he hears her voice yelling through the powerful speakers. “Damn Faunus Scum! We should have exterminated you when we had the chance! Stand down, or I will make sure I finish the job!” The voice of Caroline Cordovin bellows from inside of her base, Mazen stares at one of the cameras and he scoffs.

“You people tormented mine, your people killed my family. I do not want Mankind gone, only those commanded the deaths of so many innocent Faunus.” Mazen growls as he points his Chainsword at the camera, and it is clear that Cordovin can hear him from this camera he speaks to.

“We are Atlas! We are better than that! Whoever it was that murdered your family was not under my command! What do you stand to gain from taking so many lives?” Cordovin questions, and Mazen growls behind that mask as he draws his sword, spinning it round so then the shotgun end is aiming up at the camera.

“Justice.” He answers, pulling the trigger. The shrapnel blows the camera apart, shards of metal and electricity sparks everywhere, cutting her feed of the High Leader. He walks towards the facility but then he stops when he hears some people approach him from behind.

“Mazen.” Ozpin speaks, and he stops, chuckling, turning to stare at the Professor of Beacon Academy.

“So the stories are true. You finally woke up from your slumber.” Mazen states with a scoff in his voice.
“Mazen, Blake told me about what happened at Menagerie. She told us all, and I know that you were there. You saw what our enemy is capable of, stop fighting us when we all have the same enemy.” Ozpin asks of him, and he looks at the three who stand before him. Professor Ozpin, Specialist Winter Schnee and the Architect. The large mechanical man aims his rifle filled with blue electrical dust at the High Leader, ready to fire if he needs to.

“Not from where I’m standing.” He growls, staring at Winter.

“I did not hurt your family or any Faunus.” Winter reminds.

“Maybe not, but your family has laid my people to waste for years.” He growls.

“I am not my father, and neither is my sister.” Winter reminds as she keeps her sword trained on the large Bear Faunus.

“Stop this. There does not need to be any more bloodshed. If Vir Nominis Umbra gets the Relics… he will shed more blood than any of us can even comprehend.” Ozpin states, and Mazen stares at them through that intimidating mask of his. But then the chained barbed teeth of his Chainsword begin to spin round.

“Until Jacques Schnee and the Schnee Dust Company are nothing more than ashes in the wind, I will never find peace. None of us will. No more Faunus will suffer in those Dust Mines…not… one…more.” Mazen growls, and then his aura hardens with a crackle of reddish orange. Winter turns when she sees Arkaas landing beside him, with his bow aimed at them, and a pair of daggers sheathed on his legs as well. His metallic talons built into his cybernetic legs create heavy metallic thuds with every moment made, claws scraping across the ground.

“Mazen…if the Acolytes of Lien manage to get through that Tunnel and get to Arkhonex, we are finished. We need to find that cure, otherwise what happened and Menagerie will happen again, but worse. If we don’t cure it, Umbra won’t even need to use the Relics on us. If we don’t cure it – you will never get your justice.” Ozpin states, and he can see Mazen actually start pondering on that as he keeps his sword pointed at him. Arkaas glances at him, and then whispers into his ear.

“What’re you waiting for, Mazen? They’re lying, we can take them.” Arkaas states, and Mazen keeps pondering on Ozpin’s words. He stammers, but then suddenly swings straight at the Huntsman with a powerful roar. Ozpin blocks the impact as his cane extends into his Sceptre, and the teeth dig into the powerful metal. He spins the weapon through his fingers and kicks Mazen back.

“Damn it Mazen! You’re gonna get your people killed!” Ozpin yells, but Mazen is so focused on stopping Jacques still that he cannot think of anything else. He has never been able to, so he keeps fighting, the only thing he has left. He swings the Chainsword with fury, the roar of the dust charged engine bellows with every movement made by him. As he swings, Winter cartwheels aside and she swings her sword with great skill across his arm. His powerful aura protects him, and then the Architect fires his rifle, only for the Eagle Faunus to fly straight at him, slamming both his talons into the metal man’s chest.

He falls back and crashes down onto the great with a heavy thud. He looks up to see the Eagle Faunus drawing his bow once more and firing an arrow directly at him. One of the explosive ones too, but the Architect rolls out of the way and he fires his rifle right back at him. Arkaas jumps and flips through the air, landing on his feet as he nocks and draws three arrows at once and fires them directly at him. One them punctures through a plate of armour, causing him to recoil back. Arkaas grins and unsheathes a pair of his blades and he sprints towards the machine to try and cut his head off and kill him.
He leaps towards him, but the Architect rises up and catches him by the throat, lifting him high up as he strains, and power bombs him down into the ground with great force. He grunts in pain, then the Architect goes to stop down onto his head, transforming his rifle into Sword form. The electricity courses through the blade and he spins it through his fingers, pointing the blade right at the Elite Faunus. The Eagle flies straight at him, kicking his sharp feet, slashing the talons with speed at him. The Architect backs up, using the blade of the sword to block and parry each strike, before thrusting it forward and blasting a powerful electrical shock into Arkaas that throws him back, crashing into the ground ahead of him.

Ozpin batters Mazen through slowed time with his cane, shifted back down into that form, hitting him multiple times before going for another strike. But as he goes to make that strike, he catches the cane, and he kicks Ozpin in the centre of his chest. The Old Vanguard gets thrown back from the impact, tumbling across the ground, which is when Winter makes her move. She glides across her Glyphs and she slashes both her sword at the High Leader. She spins and twirls just like a ballerina, slashing against his aura. She bounces up and down off her glyphs, shooting down like a shooting star as she cuts the sword across his powerful aura. Mazen staggers from the impact as she slides past him and then thrusts forward to grab him, but Mazen instead grabs her.

Holding Winter by the neck he slams her down to the ground, and with his Chainsword he slams it down towards her throat. Winter gasps as she holds her blade up, stopping it from cutting her throat open and spilling her blood everywhere. The sparks fall onto her skin as she holds him back, yelling with fear as the blade gets closer and closer to her neck. “I do not want this! But your Kingdom! Your Kingdom pushed me to do this!” Mazen yells with anger, until there is a flash of green behind him.

He turns and his eyes widen, as Ozpin suddenly blasts a powerful beam of green magical energy from his sceptre. Mazen pulls his sword away from Winter and engages his semblance which crystallises his aura to the point where it is invulnerable, but only for a shot time and he cannot move. The energy pushes his statue across the ground as he stands there, and Ozpin ceases the power, spinning his Sceptre through his fingers before shrinking it back down to the size of a Cane.

Ozpin charges towards the High Leader, and he smashes through the crystallised aura towards Ozpin, and they both slam their powerful weapons together with an almighty boom. The chained teeth of the sword grind against the cane as he holds him there, roaring as he pushes it towards Ozpin, but the Knight of Vengeance blasts a powerful pulse of magic into him which knocks him back. Mazen staggers back and spins his newly modified Chainsword round to fire the shotgun rounds at the Professor, but he deflects them with the speed of his defensive swings of the cane. He jumps forward and spins through the air, striking downwards with the cane atop his head to make him stagger back with a grunt.

But Mazen swings round with the Chainsword at Ozpin, but Winter suddenly stops the blade with one of her glyphs, which blasts him back once again. He tumbles away from them and drags his fingers through the dirt, charging forward once more.

The Architect fires his rifle up at Arkaas as he flies above him, firing Arrows down at him over and over again. The arrowheads stab down into the ground with great force, snapping upon contact with the heavier plates of metal around his body. He charges up a round and manages to hit the Eagle Faunus out of the air with the precision of a marksman. The shot courses the electricity across his body and he yells with anger and pain, crashing down to the ground with a heavy thud. Feathers burst from his wings as he hits the floor, but he rolls aside from the Architect as he punches his massive fist down into where he was.

Arkaas kicks him in the face with his clawed foot, and the Architect staggers from the impact with
ground, touching the scrapes in the metal on his head. “You son of a bitch…I just repaired that!” He yells, catches his leg as he goes for another slash, and he throws him straight into the wall of a building so hard that his yellow aura shatters like glass. The Eagle Faunus groans as he tries to get back up, and the Architect aims his rifle and fires it straight at him.

But luckily for Arkaas, he manages to roll out of the way just in time, giving him the chance to retreat. Mazen turns to see him fleeing from the battle, and Mazen backs up, seeing he is now drastically outnumbered. He keeps his eyes on the powerful Warriors who stand before him, as Winter keeps her sword pointed at him. “Enough, Mazen. Stop fighting against us, and help us. You know that if he wins we all lose.” Ozpin states, and Mazen turns his eyes when he hears the sound in his radio of his forces getting the supplies they needed.

“Then we’ll need to stop Jacques from helping him first.” He states.

“Jacques has men searching for Merlot…you know as well as I do what he is sending them for. If they find that garden before we do, they will burn it to ash. Our last chance to cure Horridus Morbus will be gone for good.” Ozpin tells him, and Mazen turns his eyes when he hears the sound in his radio of his forces getting the supplies they needed.

“I…I can’t abandon my brothers and sisters.” Mazen states.

“The White Fang is over already, Mazen. Can’t you see that those who follow you only do it because they want to kill humans? Look at the people under your command. Most of them are prison inmates.” The Architect reminds, and he knows that all too well. He backs up from them and stares at them.

“I owe it to my family to find justice.” He states.

“Then help us. We want to stop Jacques as much as you do.” Winter asks him, and he looks at the three of them. In comparison to most of his allies they are all far more trustworthy and honourable then any of them.

But he has a duty – and that has always come first for him – but he also not stupid to ignore the facts.

“I will think about it.” He assures, backing up from them, so they lower they weapons as he retreats back to one of the landed White Fang Airships. “All forces, retreat.” Mazen orders.

“What? We barely started the assault!” One of the White Fang argues.

“We did not come to slaughter, we needed they technology and weapons for our cause.” Mazen reminds.

“They would slaughter our children!” The Soldier argues.

“The only slaughterers I have seen today are my own men.” He growls, entering the ship and looking back at Ozpin and the others. The biggest flaw with the Anti-Air Cannons is that they can only face one way, meaning that if they destroy ones in a certain direction they can enter and leave. The only problem with that for the heroes though is simple.

The ones they destroyed will not help them get to the Tunnels – they need to shut down the turrets facing them, not the south east cannons.

Ozpin sighs with relief, looking at Winter and the Architect.

“Let’s go talk with Cordovin.” Ozpin states.
Oscar

He holds on still, and then he begins to reach up and splits his sword into the two daggers, stabbing them into the softest portions of rock on the cliff face, climbing back up to the top of the cliff as fast as he can. Then he can hear the mimicked version of his own voice calling down to him from above by the Onyx Phantom. “Do you really think you can go back to trusting him after this? Did you ever even think to ask your dear Auntie about what happened to your parents? Did her story ever make sense?” The Onyx Phantom speaks as he stands at the top of the cliff, Oscar climbs as fast as he can, pulling his body up every single shingle and piece of stone he can, using the protruding roots to his advantage. “Why do you continue to fight us, children? You’ve seen it with your own eyes, you can’t defeat us! Nothing can! Your efforts and struggles are pointless!” The Onyx Phantom continues, as Oscar gets closer and closer to the top.

“It didn’t have to be this way…you could have just accepted your future in a better world.” The Onyx Phantom tells him, he finally gets to the top but the Phantom kicks him in the mouth. The impact sends him shooting back and crashing against a dumpster on the other side of the road. He groans, pulling his body out of the dumpster. “You can’t win! I feel nothing! But you? You feel everything, yet you keep trying to fight! Trying to die?” The Onyx Phantom questions as it paces back and forth. Oscar looks around and he can’t see where the others have gone.

It is just him.

Just Oscar versus the Onyx Phantom.

It makes sense, when the Phantom threw him up in the air like that, they were still frozen in a protected bubble of time and they both ended up on the other side of the city. “I’m not like the Whisperer or The Ebony Berserker, I do not care for the futures of your kind. All I care for is the enjoyment of sending you there.” The Onyx Phantom tells him, as it suddenly blasts towards him, stopping right in front of him with his daggers copied into his hands.

“Come on then, Oscar Pine, let’s finish this.” He says, and at the end of the day both sides have been excessively weakened from this whole ordeal. Oscar swings his sword with great speed and he ignites the blade, a feature he has rarely used since he has rarely needed to do so. The dust cartridge of fire dust ignites, and he swings the fire blade with speed and agility at the Onyx Phantom. His dodges are fast and unnatural, slashing him with his own designed blades, cutting his skin and spilling his blood. Oscar yells in pain as the hot pain erupts from his arms as they get slashed by the Higher Demon.

Oscar thrusts forward and the Phantom goes to stab him, but then that white energy causes Oscar to turn ethereal just like Pyrrha did beforehand. This gift that protects them, it has saved them from being killed by the Onyx Phantom today multiple times. The Phantom’s anger to it is becoming clearer and clearer as well. “Why? Why won’t you just die?” The Onyx Phantom yells with anger as it swings the sword across Oscar’s stomach. He yells in pain and the Phantom kicks him in the face.

Oscar rolls across the ground before he grits his teeth in anger, pushing his body back up despite his wounds. He swings his two daggers hard and fast, slashing away the flesh and adding it to the breaking apart body of the Onyx Phantom. One of the whole arms is practically floating dust in the shape of an arm now, half of his body is in complete. The Phantom takes Traveller’s Atrocity in its hands and fires the two revolvers at him, but Oscar begins to use time to his advantage once again. He dashes aside from the rounds, before charging through time itself. Everything slows down, and
the Phantom staggers back as Oscar jumps and bounces off one of the cars, spinning through the air as he slashes his sword down through the body of the Phantom. He staggers and growls from his attack, spinning around and taking both fists, slamming them into the ground.

Black and red demonic energy blasts through the roads and explodes towards Oscar. The rubble cuts against his skin, throwing him back and crashing into the car he just used to his advantage. He stares at it and notices that the wheels recently were spinning, meaning he can reverse it with time. He holds his hand out to the car as the Onyx Phantom charges at him, then the car suddenly reverses back in its timeline, knocking the Phantom onto the ground. Oscar blasts at him and he stabs it straight in the chest, but the Phantom is still fighting, but it’s voice is starting to sound more and more crackled and deformed.

The Phantom smacks its head into Oscar’s to get him off, then it grabs him by the neck and punches him in the face, over and over again. His aura breaks from the first punch, and after every strike his skin breaks, and blood leaks from the heavy bruising on his face. He grunts and groans in pain as the Phantom keeps beating him down like that. He then takes his sword and runs it straight through the Phantom again, and he ignites the sword inside of its chest. He does not even react, apart from the fact it has damaged his form once again. “You can’t beat us! We will burn your universe to nothing!” The Onyx Phantom roars, and Oscar strains as he pulls the sword up through the other shoulder, dealing massive damage to its body.

“Not if we have anything to say about it!” He yells back, rushing the Phantom again, but it slashes his body further, leaving more and more deep gashes in his body and he yells in pain, bleeding heavily from every single one made. But Oscar keeps battling, launching time bubbles into the Phantom in different areas of its body to restrain it. It roars with rage as Oscar slows time and he takes his daggers and stabs it repeatedly, over and over again, dealing massive damage into the breaking body. The Phantom suddenly erupts from the bubbles of frozen time and it punches him in the side of the head with force, sending him crashing down to the ground.

The Onyx Phantom rushes him again, but Oscar gets up and he throws his sword straight into his chest, so hard it knocks him down to the ground. The Phantom’s body is now inches from being destroyed and getting sent back to the Charred Forest like before. As it tries to get back up, Oscar grabs onto it and he holds it on his bleeding chest, grabbing its head and holding it there as it strains, laughing maniacally. “If you think…that destroying my form…will change anything…you’re wrong!” The Onyx Phantom laughs. “You think you are better, but we’re the same! We are nothing more than weapons, constructed by a man who never cared for us! I at least can admit it! But you? You are just a weapon! Nothing more!” The Onyx Phantom yells, as Oscar holds his head and neck.

Oscar lets out a defiant cry of rage, as he twists the neck with all his might, and with an almighty bang – the Onyx Phantom’s body explodes into cinders. The glowing embers float away from his body as he lays there, panting with blood staining his clothes and leaking onto the ground. He wheezes in pain, rolling onto his chest and spitting blood out from his mouth, getting up slowly.

“What…was it talking about? What am I? A weapon? What else is Ozpin hiding from me?” Oscar weakly groans as he pushes his body back up, limping and holding the worst of his wounds. The one that is leaking blood down his leg from a deep knife wound. He staggers and leans against the wall of a building. “Ruby?” He calls out with a broken voice.

“Oscar?” Her distant voice calls out in the distance as she searches for him.

But he can’t stop thinking about what the Onyx Phantom just said. “It said I wasn’t born…I was made…did Ozpin…no…I have an Aunt…I know I do…” He weakly wheezes and coughs in pain, before he collapses down onto the path. He reaches his hand out, as he sees Ruby running to his aid.
“Oscar!” She cries out, holding him in her arms. “Hold on…you’ll be okay…”

Oscar grabs her hand and looks into her silver eye, just holding onto his consciousness. “Don’t…trust…Ozpin…”

Oscar groans and he passes out from his injuries, he has not died from them but due to the blood loss and mere exhaustion his body cannot take anymore.

Ruby looks at her unconscious boyfriend before turning her gaze to the others with worry in her eyes.

“What has he done?” Jaune questions.
Like a Monster

Author Note: Just so then everyone knows, I have decided to change the format of my writing from Present Tense to Past Tense. This is because my brother and I are now working on our original series which is being written that way. So this will help me get used to writing this way. If I do have slip-ups and accidentally do go to present tense and don’t realise then don’t be afraid to let me know. I want to make sure this becomes muscle memory for me.

At least this way it will help me improve upon my writing.

I hope you understand – Matt

Oscar

Everything felt so wrong now…

He thought he knew what he was doing, where he belonged in the world, but now it was not so easy to tell. Everything he remembered felt like it was a lie, a part in someone else’s game, like he was a pawn or just a chapter in another power’s story. He shook as he laid there, he could feel the skin peck with gooseflesh, an unnatural chill came over him as he laid there in this pool of darkness. Memories seemed to become so distant to him, like everything was fading away. With a groan he rolled onto his chest, he pushed his palms against the ground as he tried to get back up, but instead he stared into his own reflection in the dark water.

It was like he was staring into the eyes of a stranger, someone completely unfamiliar to him, he felt like he did not belong in his own skin.

Who am I?

Everything is wrong…I thought this was right, I thought I was doing the right thing…

…but what if the Onyx Phantom is lying? No! He works for Vir Nominis Umbra, surely he would never tolerate having something so powerful under him lying to his face.

Demons never lie…they use the truth, the cold hard truth to break us.

He wasn’t wrong either, the Demons have learned to use the coldest of truths to break people down. The Phantom used the cold truth on Pyrrha to control her, telling her she had no destiny, and it worked for a time. For quite a while, until it could not fight whatever is shining within her, alongside Oscar, Jaune and Ruby. Oscar stared at the reflection of his face, touching his skin and blinking those hazel coloured eyes of his. He got up and looked around with fear, he saw the darkness that surrounded him begin to change. A light formed, and colour drained into this light, forming the pictures of memories…memories that could all be a fabrication now.

His only memory he ever had of his mother and father, was the two of them walking away from him. Their smiles could have been seen if it were not for his realisation of this cold truth. Like his own, their faces became unfamiliar to him in an instant, he could not see their eyes, he could not hear their voices, only distorted sounds and voices as they looked back at him. Never before has Oscar ever felt
so alone, so vulnerable – even when he was Salem’s Prisoner he still had faith, because he knew he was real. He knew he had a future, he knew he had a beginning and that was not gonna be his end.

He had Ruby.

But now?

Now he faced the fact that he may not have been born at all, had no real family, had no childhood. He just existed one day, he was just…found. But he did not want to believe it, he gripped his dark hair and gritted his teeth down, grating them as he started to strain. “No…NO! I am real! I have a mother! I have a father! I know I do! You’re lying! It’s all lies!” Oscar cried out in desperation.

“We’re the same…you and I.” The voice of the Onyx Phantom echoed in the back of his mind, and that terrifying laugh, that laugh that echoed his own but merely in a chillingly more sinister way.

“No…we’re not! We’re NOT!” Oscar yelled with anger, he looked around desperately to find the Higher Demon but he could not find him inside of this dark landscape. But as he stood there, the darkness began to change, started to glow a dark red as the ashes settled. The flames could be felt, their heat against his skin and the windless air that carried the ashes. It all fell from the sky, ashes from countless extinguished universes. The endless howls of tortured souls echoed across the entire universe of death and suffering. Charred Trees surrounded where he stood, and he could hear the growls, he could hear the howls.

He turned and he gasped when he saw them, a mountain of Grimm it seemed to be. All of them charged towards him with a roar, clambering over one another so then they could dig their claws into his flesh. Tear the meat from his bones, eat him while he was still alive. But as soon as they approached, time froze before him, as he saw the arrow shot right past his head, and towards Ruby behind him. It was inches away from plunging straight through her skull, where it could kill her instantly. Oscar’s eyes were wide, he stared at the girl he loved.

“We are nothing more than weapons, constructed by a man who never cared for us! I at least can admit it! But you? You are just a weapon! Nothing more!” The voice of the Onyx Phantom yelled once more, and Oscar closed his large hazel eyes, he shook his head as if to disturb a layer of flies in his hair, but the voice would not leave him alone.

“Get out of my head!” Oscar yelled, he pushed his hands against his temples as the voices funnelled their way in. And then, a second voice appeared, one that he had never heard before. It’s voice was soft and whispery, yet it scared him to his bones. He turned slowly when he heard it speak.

“We all have learned the truth of our nature…nothing more than lost broken and incomplete souls…forced to fight in a weaker man’s war.” The voice of the Whisperer told him, and Oscar slowly turned and his eyes widened as he saw them.

Saw them in their true forms.

He saw the Onyx Phantom, and it was not mimicking him this time. No, in fact it was much, much more sinister. It had no features whatsoever, no face or skin pigment, no hair…nothing…just glowing orange eyes and a crumbling body of golden ash that constantly blows away but is infinitely replaced by more. It stood before him, and by its side was the Lord of the Wood. It was tall, and has bent back Corvid legs, glowing red burning coals for eyes and a long diamond beak, but its body was also humanoid. Large black feathers covered its body and it had long claw like hands, in comparison to the other Higher Demons, its body was the most complete.

And then…
…he saw the Whisperer.

It was not what he was expecting, for it was like the Onyx Phantom but instead of ashes being the product that created the featureless form – it looked like it was broken mirrors. Shards of glass floated atop a black smog within with glowing red eyes in the skull, and inside of the shards of glass, their reflections showed different fears and bad memories. He saw old enemies, like Tyrian, Watts, and Adam, alongside enemies that still live, like Salem, Vir Nominis Umbra, the Knights and the Spectre. But alongside these faces were dark reflections of himself from different potential paths his life could have taken.

A Bandit Highwayman, a corpse, a Mercenary, a criminal, a Thrall, and many heartbroken looks… but all of them seemed to float around the monster that stood before him.

The Higher Demons all looked upon him – and he never expected to see their true forms in their rivalry. But here they are, all staring at him, the Lord of the Wood still did not say a word, it just stared straight into his eyes, awaiting a command constantly. The Whisperer also remained still, whereas the Onyx Phantom was pacing back and forth. The whispers seemed to dig into the back of Oscar’s mind as he stood there. “W-Why are you…here?” Oscar groaned in pain, he reached for his weapon but it was not there.

“You know…you know what Ozpin truly is. He may wish to hide it, but he tries to play at being the god of your Universe. He is too dangerous to remain, and you know it.” The Whisperer told him, but Oscar shook his head.

“Whatever his reasons…I-I’m sure he…he knew it was necessary…”

“Necessary…” The Onyx Phantom scoffed, their voices were dark and seemed to match their personalities and what they represented. The Phantom’s was violent and aggressive, matching the insanity and the innate lust for destruction and death the entity has, whilst the Whisperer had the calm and soft spoking voice of a true manipulator, and not only was it soft, but extremely well spoken as well. “A fire is necessary to maintain the populous of a forest, so then the ashes could breathe life into a new habitat. A predator must kill its prey so then it can survive out of necessity. But a man that tries to play the role of a monstrous race? A man who created a child for the mere purpose of fighting an enemy that will kill him in the end? Where is the necessity in that?”

Oscar was left shaken, because the Onyx Phantom now has just said it plain – Ozpin created Oscar. He created him, he was not his father, he did not take him from any loving parents…he created him.

Oscar stared at the three Higher Demons. “B-But…I have these memories…I know…I know I’m like the others!”

The Whisperer walked around him, the shards of the mirror and its pane clink against one another as it approached him, it walked slowly and looked upon Ruby, it reached its hand out to her cheek and gently touched her, and then it stared directly at Oscar. “You fought so hard for someone you loved…and yet it did not matter? How would she react to learn you are nothing more than a tool?”

“Shut up! You don’t know her!” Oscar yelled.

“Actually, dear boy – we know you better than you know yourself. So who’s to say we do not know your little lover?” The Onyx Phantom asked as it slide its unnatural hands across his back, and it gave him a chill. He could not tell if they were male of female, but it was always easy to forget that something as trivial as a gender meant nothing to these Higher Demons, because they are beyond the biological laws of nature.
They can control and manipulate it.

As the Onyx Phantom moved around Oscar, it emerged as a Dark Reflection of Ruby, and it ran its fingers across his face, he could now feel it – and it almost felt like the woman he loved. It had the very same complexions but it was ice cold, despite the crumbling and burning hot embers. The Demonic Entity smirked as it stepped back, flicking its hair over its shoulder as it stepped back. “Or maybe she will love you more…you know how much she loves weapons.” The Onyx Phantom suggested, and Oscar clenched his hand into a fist.

“I am not a weapon…whether or not what you say is the truth…I am not a weapon.” Oscar snarled.

“You can believe Ozpin’s lies, son. We shall not force you…but when we meet again…when the life blood of a needless death has been shed…you will know then, that you truly cannot defeat us.” The Whisperer told him, and Oscar glared at the Higher Demon.

“We may surprise you.” Oscar scoffed.

“You have a choice before you, Oscar Pine. You can continue to live this dream of yours, of being like them – or you can see the world the way we do. They will never beat us, you cannot beat us – but we can help you ascend into something more. The choice is yours.” The Whisperer told him, but before he could answer.

The third voice suddenly appeared behind him.

“There comes a time in all our lives, Oscar Pine – when we all have to WAKE UP!” Vir Nominis Umbra yelled, and he gasped, turning and suddenly the hand of their ultimate foe slammed straight into his face.

It was like he was thrown from the Charred Forest and sent through the realms themselves, he woke up and gasped, he looked around and found himself.

He came to, he felt the pain of his wounds whilst Ruby was patching up the slash wounds he suffered from his bout with the Onyx Phantom. A battle that decimated an entire district of Argus. She held some bandages and wrapped them over the newly stitched up wounds, tightening them with Jaune’s help. Pyrrha on the other hand had Milo in its Rifle Form and was keeping an eye out for any Acolytes or White Fang nearby. She aimed down the iron sights of her rifle, and glanced back after hearing the sound of Ruby gasp to seeing her boyfriend finally wake up.

“Oscar! Are you okay?” She whimpered fearfully, her hands were pressed against his worst wound, a stab wound he never even realised he suffered from the Onyx Phantom. Oscar groaned in pain, tensed up from the pain that coursed through his body, he sat up slowly whilst Ruby helped him. They took off his shirt to use the bandages they found in a nearby doctor’s surgery that was abandoned after the staff and patients evacuated. Luckily there was enough inside to save him. And it had instructions, which was even better for them.

“Where is he?” Oscar groaned.

“Who?” Ruby asked him, too worried to remember what he said about Ozpin.

“Whaddya mean who? Ozpin!” Oscar shouted, he pressed his hand to his aching forehead to nurse the slight concussion he suffered from his fight against the Onyx Phantom.

“I…I dunno, we haven’t seen him. But the Tunnel is open, we need to find the Prowler and get to it. I called Qrow he should be on his way.” She said to him, and he looked around with a groan, the
gunfire has ceased.

“What happened? Where are the White Fang and the Acolytes?” Oscar inquired nervously.

“The White Fang fell back and the Acolytes of Lien are searching for any stragglers. Hopefully they took their attention off us thanks to their assault.” Jaune explained as he finished up on some of the slashes across his back. That Higher Demon did some pretty effective damage to his body with the copies of his own blades.

“I…I need to find Ozpin…I need to hear the truth from him, not from the mouths of Demons.” Oscar groaned as he tried to get up on his own, but he yelled in pain as his leg gave in. He stared at his wounded leg, for he took a hit there as well, the Phantom slashed the back of his leg, meaning walking is going to be very difficult for him until it heals up.

“Demons? They spoke to you when you were out?” Pyrrha asked him, and he pressed the back of his head against the wall.

“Yeah…I saw them…all of them.”

“The Whisperer was there?” Ruby asked him with worry.

“Yeah, I saw it. I still don’t know what they want…but they kept saying that I was like them…a weapon…” He groaned as he pressed his hand to his bandage around his deepest wound. Whilst this one was not deep, he now has a slash right across his torso from when it swung the copy of his sword across his body. Most of these wounds, he never even realised the Phantom dealt to him. It all happened so fast, he was so focused on stopping the Higher Demon before it could kill any innocents of Argus that he did not realise how many bleeding wounds he suffered. He tried to get back up but he staggered and fell to the ground, groaning in pain.

“Ssh…what’re you saying? You’re not a weapon – you’re my boyfriend.” She reminded, and Oscar coughed in pain, he grabbed his side hard.

“They told me…they told me that Ozpin…created me – that my mom and dad never existed – that my Aunt – isn’t really my Aunt.” Oscar groaned in pain as he leant back against the wall, he looked up at Ruby’s beautiful face and he sighed. “I…I think they may be telling the truth…Umbra has never lied so far…so why would his Demons?” Oscar asked him, and Ruby could not find an answer. Tears began to well up in his eyes, and Ruby had very rarely ever seen him cry, he was always the one to put on a straight face, a brave face, so then she could have a shoulder to cry on during her darkest days.

But now…

…now he needs her shoulder. “Ruby…what am I?” He whimpered, but then Ruby held him gently, and gazed lovingly into his eyes.

“Your name – is Oscar Pine. You are the man I fell in love with when I was in my darkest moment, you kept me going, you always have been by my side. You have always been there to catch me when I fell. You have listened to everything I have ever said…and never asked anything in return. You – are my boyfriend, and I love you so much.” Her voice began to break. “And nothing will change that…nothing. I don’t care if you were born like me or if you were built like those monsters say you were. Because you – are my light…the light I will always crawl to. And I will always love you.” She promised, before she leant forwards and kissed him devotedly, her hands gently caressed the hardened scabby blood on his cheeks and they gently pressed their foreheads together.
“I love you to…” He told her.

“Guys…” Jaune said, and they both looked up at him as he drew Crocea Mors, he saw the glow and he had not forgotten how it sent the Onyx Phantom flying back with one hit. But he knew that they were running out of time. “We need to go, I can hear the Prowler nearby.”

Penny

Before Mazen fell back with the White Fang…

Anto leapt forward with a powerful swing towards Penny, in which he took his duel maces and he pulled a trigger inside of the handles. The barbed metal around the head ignited with electrical and fire dust, forming fire lightning around the blades. He slammed them both down into the ground after Penny dodged his lethal move, which blasted flames and electricity through the ground. Penny jumped back and she bounced off the wall, she blasted down towards the Warthog Faunus and they both crashed down into the ground with a heavy thud. They both smashed straight through some of the wooden tables, which caused them to splinter and shatter like glass. Anto grabbed onto one of the table legs after accidentally losing track of one of his maces and he threw it up in the air, and he swung his mace into it.

The impact shot the spike of wood towards Penny and she gasped as it hit her face, it caused her to recoil back from the hard impact. But as she spun round she launched her swords towards the Faunus. They all spun and slashed across his aura. He grunted as the metallic bang of the impact sent him crashing through the decorative glass in one of the walls. The shards fall from his armour and Penny shot across the floor to face him and she crossed her blades over to stop his mace as he brought it down. She lifted him up and stared right at him. “Enough of this! We have a common enemy, just help us!” Penny begged, but the Warthog Faunus would rather listen to the voices in his head rather than the voice of a Human-Like Machine.

“We have no common enemy, I care not for the ideals that Mazen Ursus strives for. I merely help him for the pleasure of watching humans die. Nothing could please me more, a perfect punishment for the sickness they put into my mind!” Anto yelled with anger, he headbutted Penny in the face and the tusks that protruded from his jaw scraped across her face, and she staggered back. Her swords dropped and he spun round on the spot, smashing his mace into the centre of her bosom so hard that she was sent flying straight through the thin plastered wall. As she exploded out the other side, she tumbled across the deep fat fryers and landed down on the tiled floor.

She groaned, thistle dust covered her face and her hair, but as she looked around she gasped as she saw a pair of young Humans here. One of them was older than the other but they looked like brothers, who took shelter in here when the chaos started. Penny glanced round the dishwasher and saw Anto jumping in with a maniacal smirk, now with both of his maces in his grasp once more. He spun them through his fingers and he started smashing the plates with them, one at a time as he yelled. “Come on out, little human! I promise I will make your death quick, but I cannot promise your body will stay as pretty as it is now. I promise you I will leave little behind for your friends to remember you by.” Anto snarled as he looked around, he swung round and crushed the plates beneath his mace, sending the shards of porcelain everywhere.

Penny looked to the children that were hiding in the kitchen of this restaurant, so she gently took her finger and moved it to her lips to hush them. She then glanced at one of the cupboards, luckily it was large enough to fit them in. “Hide in there, I’ll handle the bad man.” She whispered with a smile, and
they did so, they got up and they opened it up, stuffing their little bodies inside and they hid. Penny
spun one of her swords through her fingers as she listened to the sound of him walking towards
where she hid. She used her clever mind as she looked around and she saw some pots and pans that
hung from above him.

She leapt from behind the dishwasher and she launched it, and it spun over his head, he ducked
down but it did its job, cutting straight through the attachments, causing the apparatus to plummet
down and clatter the Faunus in the head. He grunted in anger and pain, he got up and he swung his
mace towards her as she slid underneath his swing on her knees. As she moved past him she swiped
her arm across his legs to knock him over and he crushed down to the ground with a heavy grunt.
Anto barked in anger as he landed, and Penny jumped up in the air. The green energy of her
Android Body glowed bright as she channelled it into her hands, and she blasted a powerful beam of
energy down towards him. Anto rolled aside as she burnt the ground with her laser, but he leapt up at
her and he grabbed her by the throat. He smashed her against the wall and he grinned maniacally as
he stared at her.

But as he held her, he felt her hands grab his wrist and easily move him back, then her back opened
and more blades folded out with the strings that held them, aimed in his direction. “What…are you?”
Anto gasped in disbelief, and she gritted her teeth in anger.

“I’m not a real girl.” He told him, as she wrapped the cables around his arms and she swung round,
throwing him across the kitchen so hard he went straight through the vats of boiling fat. It hissed as it
burned on his arm and he growled, turning and he grabbed one of them, throwing it straight at her
face. The boiling fat burned into her eyes and she screamed in pain, she may be a machine but she
could still feel pain. She staggered back and Anto tackled her down to the ground, and he held his
mace over his head to bring it down onto her head. But the cables of her swords wrapped around his
arms and the others spun around before his chest.

“You…should not exist!” Anto yelled with anger.

“But maybe…but I’m gonna make sure I help those who deserve to!” Penny yelled right back, blasting a
beam of green energy into his chest. He was sent flying up in the air, crashing through the ceiling
and he caused the tiles to break and fall with him as he crashed back down on the ground. He stared
at her as she got ready, her blades spun behind her as she stood ready to fight him once more.

But he never knew to back down, as he picked up his maces and channelled the fire and electrical
dust into them, smirking maniacally. But as she watched him channel that fire dust into the electrical
dust inside of the mace – she realised, that the dust was coming from the inside. She could see his
bones glowing on the inside, and in his bare arms she could see scars.

Anto must have been some kind of experiment from the Atliesans, a slave from the S.D.C turned into
a monster – something else she just noticed on the back of his arm was their symbol. He must have
metal bones that also have fire dust loaded inside, and his tusks began to glow as well.

They were both broken and forged.

Blake on the other hand was desperately holding on behind the bar, feeling Ren as he carefully
mended her wounds, he pulled out the pieces of rubble in her body and patched up the open wounds
as fast as he could. She tried not to cry out from the pain but it was getting harder and harder. Ren
flinched as he just missed Nora’s hammer as it crashed straight through the bar over his head. He
gasped as he saw Kaa battling against his Girlfriend, and that was when they saw how deadly this
Faunus truly was. She may had been smaller, she was not wielding massive weapons – but she had
something else.
Speed and strength.

She pinned Nora against the table and her fangs unfolded from her mouth as she went for her throat so then she could inject her venom into her nervous system. “Nora!” Ren screamed, and Nora sparked back into action, as she slammed her Hammer into the side of Kaa’s head with great force. Kaa grunted as she tumbled across the ground, she slid back onto her feet and she held her knives in her hands. She then threw one of them towards her, but the blade extending from the hilt with a long chain attached that wrapped around Nora’s throat. Nora strained, and Kaa pulled her forward and went to stab her in the eye with her other knife, but Nora caught her arm with her hand. Kaa hissed at her as she stared with her almost fiery orange eyes, straight pupils burning right into her eyes.

“You humans…have taken everything from us!” Kaa yelled with rage as she stared straight into Nora’s cyan eyes.

“We…did nothing to you! You gotta grudge? Take it up with Jacques Schnee!” Nora yelled right back, she then twisted the arm that held the knife down and she kicked Kaa in the knee to bring her down. But with that cable still wrapped around her throat she could not break free from the Snake Faunus. Kaa leapt up in the air and she kicked Nora across the face with her heel, cutting her cheek momentarily before her aura repaired the damage.

As Nora fell, she found Magnhild on the ground and she grabbed hold of it and she swung round, slamming it into Kaa with all her might. The impact sent her flying out the window and into the street. But Kaa was smart and she threw her chained dagger and wrapped it around the base of a lamppost to swing right round and launch herself right back into Nora. She slammed into Nora’s chest and they both crashed down into the floor and Nora flipped over her and punched down at her head. Kaa rolled aside quickly, just as Nora’s fist buried itself into the floor, and she ripped it out, pulling out the shards of splintered wood with her.

Kaa could not even hear her radio amidst the chaos. “All White Fang forces! Our mission has been accomplished, all units fall back from Argus. We’re done here.” Mazen ordered, but Kaa was too busy fighting against the Valkyrie from Beacon to even think about following that command. The short and slender Faunus swung herself round and she seemed to slither around the floor before she thrust up and sent both boots right into Nora’s jaw.

She staggered back and reached out for Magnhild but Kaa wrapped her chain around it and threw it aside, sending it crashing into a car outside. Nora strained as the Snake Faunus held her up against the wall, she wrapped her chained daggers around her throat and arms, restraining. “Well, well… here we are. If I were on a bed with a sexy partner this would go very differently – but for you – it’s gonna hurt.” Kaa sighed, as she suddenly activated the secondary function of the weapons she wielded, which sent electrical dust through the chains and into Nora’s system. The electricity burned through her skin and aura and into her bones, but Kaa was not expecting what came next.

Nora’s growl of pain changed into a slow building laugh of terrifying proportions as her aura began to glow almost as bright as her eyes. “CRAZY THURSDAY, DUMBASS!” Nora cheered, she suddenly ripped herself free from her enemy’s hold and slammed her fist into Kaa’s chest so hard that it sent her crashing straight through the bar. Ren got thrown back and he groaned in pain, and Nora gasped as Kaa took her dagger and put it to the injured Blake’s throat, holding her there.

“Back off! Or I’ll carve this pretty traitor’s throat wide open.” Kaa snarled as she held Blake there, and she winced at her still bleeding wounds.

Nora glanced at Magnhild outside in the street but it was too far away, but then Ren slid his father’s Knife to her, so she kicked it up into her hand and she held it tight, glaring right back at the Faunus.
Back in the kitchens though, Anto started to go berserk, roaring with every swing he made with those maces, smashing through the walls as he channelled fire dust through his bones into the maces that crackled hot. Penny ducked under every swing and she caught his mace with her swords, holding him back and then her eyes moved to a device inside of the Kitchen that had been used by many others. As she could see many tools stuck to the wall, on both sides there were some rather powerful magnets, ones that she could use to restrain him.

But if they go to far, they could rip him apart, and from what she has seen about his fire dust augmentations, as soon as they touch the maces and leave his body the dust ignites. If the magnets restrain him without breaking and tearing his arms in the process, she could stop him without killing him. “I! I don’t want to hurt you!” Penny yelled as she went into a defensive fighting style against Anto, but he kept swinging his maces at her, slamming them down into the tables and the machines used to make and clean dishes for people who would come here every day.

“Good! Makes it easier for me to kill you!” Anto roared, as he jumped at Penny and he slammed both his maces down at her, but she blocked them with her swords, but even that was not enough to hold him back from her. The flaming crackling forks of lighting kept burning closer and closer to her cheek as she tried to hold him back for as long as she could. Penny yelled with anger, something she rarely showed, and she took her blades and she pushed them with her cables with all her might, an attack that pushed Anto back. He growled and he threw one of his maces right at her and it collided into her chest.

The explosive impact threw her back and she slammed into the controls of the magnets behind her. It pushed their power all the way to the max and she gasped, she stabbed one of her swords into the ground and she stared at the Warthog Faunus. His arms got pulled out whilst everything metal in the room got pulled straight into the magnets. The poor safety design of this device was clearly never thought through as knives got sent flying across the room into the magnets. Anto roared in agony as he felt the bones in his body start to get pulled apart, yanked in the direction of the magnets. “No!” Penny screamed in desperation as she reached up to the controls and she tried to turn the switch the other way to save him from his coming fate.

But he could never be saved from himself – as he let out a powerful howl and the sound of steel bending and breaking within him could be heard. And then his skin tore, and the flash of orange within was also seen. Penny looked away as the flashes of light inside of him grew and grew, his arms detonated into balls of fire, blowing him apart one by one before his whole skeleton erupted into flames. The fire and smoke passed by her and the mace he held bounced towards her, and it smashed straight into the magnet controls, shattering them, and all the metal tools fell from the device.

Penny stared at where he foe was…and how quickly it all happened…it hurt. She never wanted to kill him, she just wanted to stop him.

She just wanted him to stop. She looked across the room to see those kids stare at her like she was some kind of monster. They turned and screamed as they ran away from her, leaving her sat there alone, she lowered her head and she shed tears.

Tears…

…something she never knew her body could even do.

But she snapped out of it, she turned to the sound of her friends in trouble. She got up and stared at where Anto was, destroyed his own recklessness and his inability to let go of what he was.

Inability to let go of the violence.
Of the rage.

Penny walked out and she stared at what was going on in the other room, seeing Kaa with her knife still to Blake’s throat, ready to cut her open if need be. “Put the knife down.” Ren demanded as he aimed Stormflower.

“Where’s Anto?” Kaa hissed, she looked around and only saw Penny’s heartbroken look in her eyes. Everyone looked at her, and all but Kaa just wanted to hug her. But Kaa did not seem to care about his death, if anything she seemed relieved – in comparison to most of the Faunus that Mazen freed from that Asylum she was the one that was all there in the head.

“He didn’t make it?” Nora asked Penny, and she just shook her head.

“Well that’s a relief actually, the bastard was gonna get someone killed. At least it was just himself.” Kaa said.

“Put the damn knife down.” Nora ordered, Ren’s Knife in her hand, ready to use it if need be.

“Give me a good reason not to hand this pretty one in to Mazen? I can’t wait to imagine what kind of atrocities he could do to her for what she did to Sienna.” Kaa stated, still convinced by the footage.

“It…wasn’t me…” Blake winced, her hand still pressed to some of her bleeding wounds.

“Oh yeah? You mean that footage that was shown worldwide wasn’t you? Because it sure as shit looked like it, honey.” Kaa stated.

“It was Vir Nominis Umbra, he can change form. We’ve seen him do it right in front of us. He wanted the White Fang to fall apart again, so he could plunge the world into chaos.” Penny explained, she still could remember how horrifying it was to see Umbra do what he did that night at Beacon.

“Oh yeah…the old fairy tale character…please.” Kaa scoffed, mocking Umbra as just a fairy tale baddie.

“But you seriously think Blake would do what she did? After everything she did to help the White Fang get to where it was? To help people?” Nora questioned, and that question truly did stump Kaa. She was not stupid, she managed to make it this far, and she still had not cut open her throat, and she started wonder.

“S-She…wanted power.” Kaa assumed, and Nora scoffed.

“Wow…look at her. Look at her face, does that look like the kind of person who would want bloodshed? Who would want power?” Nora questioned as she pointed at Blake, and Kaa glanced down at her. Blake looked scared but not for her own life, it was for Sun – terrified of the thought of him having to lose yet another person he cared about. She never worried for her own safety, she just wanted to keep her promise to the man that she loved. She knew that face…because she saw it in herself.

“Blake Belladonna is one of the kindest people I have ever known, she and Ruby were some of the first people to accept me.” Penny stated, mustering her bravery to help Blake. And Ren stood up, Blake looked at them all – and it still touched her to see how much these people love her.

“She stood up when nobody else would, even when she knew very few would be by her side. She turned against the cause when it headed down a violent path, and she chose to help the very people she once branded as the enemy.” Ren stated, and Blake began to tear up at these words, and Kaa’s
pressure on Blake’s throat began to loosen.

“We don’t know each other well, I don’t even know your name. But I know you’re not like that guy in there. You’re not like the Albain Brothers, or Mazen or Adam.” Nora stated, and Kaa stammered a breath.

“I’m a survivor.” She told them.

“Then tell Mazen that he can’t keep fighting this war, not because he won’t win – but because it won’t matter who wins it at the end, if Vir Nominis Umbra gets all the Relics. Because none of us will be remembered if he does…we will all be forgotten.” Ren begged her, and Kaa glanced at them with shaky breath.

Kaa blew out a breath and she took her knife away from Blake’s throat and she stepped back from her, letting her return back to her friends. “I don’t know if you’re all crazy…but…you know how to persuade someone. I admire that.” Kaa admitted, and she sheathed her blades. She then glanced at them and she sighed.

“You know we’re right.” Ren said to her, and Kaa sighed.

“I don’t know what to believe anymore…but if you really think you can stop this thing…then who am I to stop you?” She asked them, so she turned and walked away from them. Part of Nora just wanted to stop her there and then, but that would be dishonourable, and they were better than that. As Kaa left, they all looked back to Blake as Ren helped her back up.

“Come on…we need to find the others.” Ren said, and Penny stood by the door, she looked back and closed her eyes.

The way those kids looked at her…

…like a monster.
Ozpin

The Acolytes of Lien aimed their rifles down the hallway as they heard the muffled grunts and impacting blunt strikes from beyond the doorway. The slashes of a sword could be heard alongside the gunfire of a powerful rifle. Suddenly one of their men got thrown straight through the locked double doors and towards the Mercenaries that were stood guard. One of them screamed as the screaming soldier crashed straight into him. Cordovin stared across the hallway at the three attacking Warriors, her eyes met Ozpin’s ones as they shimmered green with magical light. She turned to flee, slamming the door behind her. “Don’t let them get through!” She yelled back at the Mercenaries, and the three of them were truly impressed by the fact that the Mercenaries did not throw down their weapons out of fear. They stood their ground, and Ozpin had felt some genuine respect for that.

If there is one thing about the Acolytes of Lien that the heroes can respect, it was their discipline.

The Architect thrusted his armoured shoulder forward to block the bullets that came his way from hitting any important pieces. Whereas Ozpin slowed time and he smashed the bullets out of the air one at a time with his cane, before blasting forward. He grabbed one of the soldiers by his helmeted head and slammed him down into the ground with immense force, enough to knock him out immediately. He rolled aside when a Juggernaut punched at him, but it was not enough, as a Seeker dashed through the slowed time and he tackled Ozpin through the wall, and they both rolled into the Hanger deck. Ozpin grumbled, as he slid across the ground, and looked forward to see the Juggernaut jump in as well, all its weapons locked and loaded.

Ozpin stood back up and cracked his neck with a huff. “Come on then.” He challenged, he spun his cane through his fingers as he finally formed his Cog Armour that he used as both a disguise and also against Vir Nominis Umbra. The Juggernaut’s shoulder plates opened up and the loaded Swarmer Missile Silos emerged, blasting the small missiles in great quantities towards him. They spun through the air with a deafening shriek – nicknamed Shrieker Missiles – they all descended down towards him, and they exploded. Ozpin rolled aside and he spun his cane through his fingers and stabbed it downwards with great force, it formed a bubble of green energy that blocked the rest of them as they converged upon him.

Ozpin may be strong, but he could only withstand so much punishment when using that bubble just like back with Cinder in Beacon. The explosions caused the bubble to burst but luckily did not harm his aura, until the Juggernaut blasted forward with an upgraded booster in its back, and punched Ozpin in the side of his head. The impact was loud and metallic, which threw him back and he smashed the wing of one of the Atlesian Gunships clean off and he slammed down against the ground. Ozpin chuckled, and he opened his cane to reveal the Relic, and he held it above his head. It may grant knowledge but that stone and its raw magical power have other uses, as he used once before, he lifted the wing with telekinetic powers above his head. He then launched it straight back at the Juggernaut.

But the huge Mechanised Suit Piloted by a skilled Mercenary extended the log fire dust coated blade from its forearm and swung it downwards with great force. The wing was severed clean in half from the single swing, and the halves of the wing crashed down behind the Juggernaut as it stood tall, ready to fight Ozpin some more. Ozpin grit his teeth, and he blasted towards the Juggernaut once again, and he slid underneath the swinging blade that it attacked with. He could feel the heat from the...
blade as he ducked underneath it, and he turned to see the weakness – its back. He jumped up and he went to stab the Cane which formed into his Sceptre into the spine, but the Seeker stopped him just in time. He leapt up at the Professor with great speed and orange electrical energy seemed to propel the soldier to move even faster. They both fell to the ground and the Seeker darted around the room with great speed, before zooming straight at Ozpin once again with his sword at the ready. He slammed it against his neck and pushed him across the floor, and he attempted to cut open the Professor’s throat.

To no avail.

Ozpin took his fist armoured with cogs and punched the Seeker in the face so hard that his glowing red visor shattered instantly from the impact. He was thrown back merely from the punch, and he tumbled across the ground, Ozpin turned and he picked up a piece of rebar that was carried with the rubble after the Juggernaut and the Seeker tackled Ozpin through the wall. “Catch!” Ozpin yelled, as he spun round and threw the long piece of rebar and it punctured clean through the armour like a blade, lifted him off the ground and pinned him against the wall like a hanging photograph. Blood leaked from his corpse and his mouth, and Ozpin looked away from him, and he turned to see the cloud of fire that was blasted toward him. Ozpin slowed time and now that there was no Seeker that could challenge him in using this hidden power of his, he rolled underneath the frozen flames. And as he came back up he delivered a powerful uppercut to the Juggernaut’s jaw, and he staggered back when time resumed once more.

Only for it to pause once again for Ozpin, as the Professor jumped up and he spun through the air and slammed his boot down into the back of the Juggernaut’s head, bringing him down to one knee. The Juggernaut groaned in pain as he fell to both knees, only for time to pause one final time. Ozpin jumped up in the air with his Sceptre held above his head and the blade pointed downwards, as he descended and stabbed it straight through the chink in the Juggernaut’s Armour. He screamed in agony as he felt the blade ram straight through his ribs and his blood pour from the open wound. Ozpin left time completely untouched, as he stepped off the knelt over Juggernaut's hulking body, and he swung round and slammed the blunt end of his Sceptre into the side of the Juggernaut’s helmeted head, which caused his body to slump down to the ground with a heavy thud.

Ozpin spun his Sceptre through his fingers as he looked around, only to hear something powering up behind him. He turned and his eyes widened when he saw the massive Hellfire Tank standing up with huge folded out treaded legs causing the tank tower above the others. The Cannon aimed directly at him, as it fired and sent him crashing straight through the wall behind him, and out into the landing pad once more. The massive Tank followed him through the collapsing building unfazed.

“This…should be stimulating.” Ozpin finally admitted as the tank challenged him, charging up more powerful dust into the cannon.

Before the tank emerged – Inside of the base – however, Winter and the Architect were still battling against the soldiers inside of the facility. The Architect grunted as a Tremor Trooper took his piston powered gauntlet and slammed it directly into his chest, and the piston carried the force and pummelled him so hard that the metallic boom sent him flying back. He crashed straight through the many tables inside of the Operations Centre, sparks flew and he grabbed onto the ground, his metal fingers dug into the floor to slow himself. He stared at the Tremor Trooper as he pulled a Light Machine Gun from his back and fired it at him, and the Architect pushed his shoulder forward and he blocked the bullets, he held up his open palm to stop any more that came his way, and the bullets broke against his heavy armour, golden sparks flew from every impact made. He then finally heard the gun stop firing and he stared at the soldier, and he saw him fumbling to get the long belt of bullets fed back into the gun to reload it.
The Architect chuckled, as he cracked the non-existent bone in his neck. “That’s why I never like L.M.Gs.” The Architect told him as he transforms his rifle into the sword form, the barrel opened and the long blade extended from within, the conductive metal allowed the spiked forks of blue light course across its sharped shape. “Always take too long to load!” He yelled, as he blasted forward and he stabbed straight at the soldier, and he just missed as the Tremor Trooper moved aside, and as he went to aim the barrel at the Architect’s head, the Mechanical Warrior slammed his metal forearm downwards with great strength, so hard that the titanium exploded like glass. Shards of steel went flying into the soldier, puncturing the armour plating and caused the life blood to leave his body as he gasped for air, choking on his claret. He staggered back and the Architect swung round and cut the soldier’s head from his shoulders with honour so then he did not have to suffer any longer.

The soldier fell to his knees before his head rolled from his severed neck, and the corpse fell with a wet thud. The Architect flicked his blade to get the blood off like a Samurai, but as he stood there, he heard the whooshing. It was like that of the wind, but it was alive, and as he turned he saw the shadow. A Glider Jockey suddenly fired missiles through the window and the explosion blew the entire side of the building apart. The fiery boom caused the Architect to stagger back, as some Acolytes of Lien rappelled into the room, firing their rifles at him. The Architect retreated, he may be a machine but that did not mean that he was impervious to gunfire, so he leapt and took cover behind one of the pillars. He checked his rifle and he shifted it back down into Rifle Form, and he looked around the room.

The soldiers entered whilst the Glider hovered across the room ever so slowly, blowing the papers and the dust from crushed tables everywhere. The soldier aimed his machine gun around the room, a long beam of red light trailed from the side of the rifle as he searched for their foe. The squad of Acolytes advanced forward with their weapons armed and at the ready to shoot at the slightest movement. Then one of them pulled a grenade from his belt, one that had a blue glow to it – an E.M.P Grenade.

The Architect’s optics widened when he saw the glow of electrical energy inside of the device, using his scanner to detect what weaponry that they had. The soldier threw the grenade in the direction they saw the Architect flee, which when he took his chance and he caught the Grenade, launching it straight back at them. The Glider fled before the grenade detonated, and just escaped the range of the pulse, whereas the electronics that belonged to the Acolytes instantly short circuited. They all grunted from the small shock, but luckily for them their armour did not have the same level of tech as the Juggernauts or the Tremor Troopers. They merely removed their helmets and threw them on the ground, however the lack of vision was clear. They could not examine the area as effectively as they once could, meaning that now they just threw the advantage into the Architect’s favour.

*When someone has been so used to fancy tech helping them…they become blind without it.*

He took the opportunity, and he used the shadows to his advantage, sneaking around them whilst the Glider started to enter once more. The Architect snuck up behind one of the Soldiers, and he thrust the sword straight through the spine of the soldier, so hard that it erupted out his heart. He gasped in pain, and fell to his knees, and he ripped the sword out with great force, then he changed into Rifle form. He swiftly fired on them, nailing the last four soldiers in the head one at a time, killing them quickly. Then the Glider suddenly swerved around and the Jockey blasted towards him, firing the machine guns on the glider constantly. The Architect jumped up and he pushed his body off one of the pillars inside the building, and he took his rifle in one hand and fired it. The powerful blue bullet of energy burned through the right thruster, which caused the wing to rupture into the flames, the fire melted and crumbled the steel into smoke. The Glider crashed down into the ground but did not explode, just crushed every single table in the room.

The Glider Jockey rolled across the ground and he aimed his machine gun straight at the Architect
who sprinted towards him, and he fired it with a deafening scream. The Architect jumped across the 
last remaining tables as his rile changed back into sword form, and he jumped high up in the air. He 
spun through the air and he stabbed down into the Jockey’s chest, so hard he pinned him to the floor 
until he pulled it from his ribs. He wiped the blood off with the soldier’s sleeve and he turned to walk 
away.

Winter on the other hand had the last of the soldiers inside of the building to handle, as she took on 
the Captain and his remaining men with all their weapons. One of them was a Stalker with two long 
birds attached to his arms as he charged across the battlefield. He turned invisible and he leapt 
straight for Winter, but she slid aside with the aid of her Glyph. She bounced off it and landed on 
the wall Glyph she had just cast. The glyph set off a pulse that threw her like a catapult towards the 
Stalker. With her sword she stabbed it straight into the chest of the Stalker, and it killed him instantly, 
his blood covered her sword. She pulled it out fast and blocked the incoming strike from one of the 
other Acolytes, the red blade clashed hard with sparks that fell from the grinding erosion. Winter 
formed a black Glyph underneath him, which bound him to her will, so she sent him back, sliding 
him towards the wall in which crashed him to the ground.

Winter jumped in the air and she detached her second interior sword and she threw it right into the 
eye of another soldier, which swiftly ended his existence. He staggered back and fell to the ground 
with a heavy thud, and she landed on top of one of the tables. She ran across them towards the last 
two soldiers and the Captain who drew a pair of Axes as he ran towards her. Winter passed the 
corpse with her sword lodged in his skull so she pulled it out, and managed to block both swords that 
were swung in her direction. With them both locked, she kicked the attacking Captain in the chest, 
and she slid back on her Glyphs. They both staggered forward, so she formed two more with her 
fingers held up after sheathing her secondary sword back into her main one. The Glyphs suddenly 
fired icicles directly into the last two minions which killed them instantly, and caused them to 
collapse with ice punctured into their bodies.

The final soldier – the Captain – threw one of his Axes at her and she formed another Glyph that 
formed a slingshot and she fired it right back. It stabbed straight into his chest and sent him crashing 
down to the ground. Winter exhaled with relief, and she flicker her hair back round her shoulder, she 
turned to see the Architect exit the room he fought his share of the Acolytes inside of. “That was 
fun.” The Architect said to her, and she shook her head.

“When will they learn? They are helping a monster cause the end of everything. Why don’t they 
decide to fight for a noble cause?” Winter questioned with annoyance.

“Why? I can tell you why – Mercenaries will always listen to the highest bidder, and very few bid 
higher than Jacques Schnee. Although I don’t remember the Acolytes being so…rash. They’ve 
always been brutal and some of them have been almost savage with what they did to some people, 
but they would never have done something like what happened today.” The Architect explained, and 
he was right. They may not know about Ortega and his betrayal against Jacques Schnee and Vir 
Nominis Umbra, like Merlot, but even then they can tell things were better before Kelham. Kelham 
has turned the Acolytes of Lien into monsters, he has allowed them to live out their deepest and 
darkest desires.

Ortega was military, and he commanded respect. Kelham on the other hand is a soldier who grew to 
enjoy the killing, and now that is all he knows.

That is clear as day when looking at what the Mercenary Company has become.

As the two of them stood there, the boom of chaos outside swiftly caught their attention. They 
looked outside the window to see what was happening, as the massive Hellfire Tank emerged with
the chunks of concrete that fell from its thick armour plating. It was not possible for the Architect’s
eyes to widen since he did not have eyes, but just from the metal plated brow above his arrowhead
shaped blue optic rises – which was close enough to fit. “You have gotta be kidding me…”

“At least Cordovin hasn’t decided to unleash the Colossus. That would be a huge waste of resources
for three warriors.” Winter scoffed, since it would be a stupid idea.

Ozpin on the other hand was not in a joking mood, as he took yet another shell and was thrown
back. He has been able to face some of the scariest Grimm and the most powerful Entity to ever exist
– and yet this Tank is more annoying than any of them. He spun his cane through his fingers and he
turned just a Glyph shielded him from incoming fire. The shell exploded against the Glyph and blue
rounds practically bounced off the armour plating that surrounded the beast of a Tank that towered
above them. They both jumped out from the building as its cannon turned and fired straight into the
building, the explosion blew the whole wall apart and even caused part of the building to come
topping down.

“Ozpin! Enough of this madness!” Cordovin yelled from the safety of her office inside of the
mountain.

“We don’t want to fight you! We need to speak with you!” Ozpin shouted back, and she scoffed.

“Oh really? So cutting down my men in droves the way you have is all for the reward of my
company? Forgive my disbelief Ozpin! Stand down and surrender yourself into my custody!”
Cordovin yelled from her tower.

“Yeah…that’s not gonna happen!” The Architect called back, and Winter scoffed.

“Why the hell did Ironwood let her stay in command?” Winter muttered to herself as the huge Tank
walked across the open battlefield, and it charged up its railgun cannon that aimed in her direction.
The coils channelled powerful kinetic energy into a shell and fired straight at them, so Ozpin slowed
down time and he pushed them out of the way so then they survive it. The shell detonated and Ozpin
rolled across the ground, and he spun his Sceptre through his fingers. “Go for the legs first! If we get
it to stop moving, we can go for the turret!” Winter called out.

“Then what? How do we destroy it? My scan can’t find any weak spot to hit the engine.” The
Architect explained, he even sounded impressed by the design of this Tank.

“You go for the driver, and we destroy it from the inside. Hellfire Tanks are some of Atlas’ best
weapons for that purpose. It takes a damn large amount of Grimm, even big ones, to take Hellfire
Tanks down.” Winter explained as the titanic Military Vehicle walked across the area slowly, and its
machine guns built into the armoured spider legs began to fire, flames ruptured from the barrels that
burned so hot the steel began to glow orange. The bullets shredded the ground where they were
stood as they kept running as fast as they could. Winter blasted across the ground with the help of her
Glyph and she managed to get behind one of the legs and she formed a Glyph behind her shoulder,
she aimed her sword at the back of the leg.

She drew some fire dust and ran it down her blade, so then the Glyphs turned orange with fire and
she blasted small fireballs into the back of the leg. The treads began to snap and rupture from the
heat, some of them even managed to jam and create a chugging groan. The Hellfire Tank staggered,
smoke belched from its leg as it struggled, but then the turrets built into the legs rotated round on the
rails that were built into it. The barrels aimed down at the Schnee Specialist and she gasped, getting
hit by the bullets, which forced her to retreat so long as she had Aura.

The Architect had a different plan, where he was charging the Hellfire Tank head on, dodging the
shells that came flying his way, and he ripped the car door from one of the parked trucks in the car park. He used the door like a riot shield, and charged toward the bullets, and he slid underneath the stamping leg of the titanic weapon of Atlesian Technology. The dirt exploded around him and the tank’s leg, and as he got underneath it, he threw the door into the treads. The treads got jammed, and they began to buckle, which gave him some time to fire his Rifle repeatedly into the back of the knee, burning and damaging the pieces of metal repeatedly, melting steel and shattering pistons like glass.

He kept firing when finally the knee of the leg exploded, the huge armoured plates snapped in two and the leg broke off, causing the tank to fall to one knee, and it groaned like a wounded animal. But the other legs pushed against the ground with great force, which meant that it could still stand, but if they take out one more, they can knock it over, and it would not be able to move. The Architect fled just before he could accidentally be crushed by one of the legs, which gave Ozpin time to take one of the legs down.

He blasted like a bullet across the terrain with his Sceptre in his grasp, and he slowed time around him as he soared towards the vehicle. He stopped behind the back of one the legs. He channelled the raw power of the Relic of Knowledge into the tip of his Sceptre, which gave him the chance to blast a powerful beam of green energy into leg of the titan. The beam carved straight through steel like a knife through butter. The leg broke off instantly, and the Hellfire Tank collapsed with an Earthquake Level crash. The Tank attempted to get back up, and the Architect kept firing his rifle at the Cannon but it turned and fired straight at him once again. It may be immobilised but it can still fire its weapons at them, so the Architect had to roll aside. Ozpin dashed across the ground and he turned to Winter. “Miss Schnee, do you think you can get the Architect to dive down with one of your Glyphs? So he can get inside of the tank as fast as possible?” Ozpin asked her, and she nodded her head.

“Architect! I’m gonna send you above the Tank!” She yelled, already forming a Glyph underneath his feet before he could even argue.

“Wait…WhaAAAAA—”

She sent him up in the air, and she chuckled, and looked at Ozpin whilst the Cannon was following the mechanical man that was sailing up above it. “I never thought I would hear a robot scream like a little girl before.” Winter commented.

“Oh that was him?” Ozpin asked sarcastically which made her laugh.

“AAAAAAAAAAHHHH! I NEVER AGREED TO THIS!” The Architect squealed as the Glyph released him, and then he crashed straight through the turret, so hard that the metal bent. He laid inside of the smoke and he groaned with a heavy sigh inside of his mechanical body. “Ow…” The Architect groaned. “Good thing I’m not a squishy human…otherwise…” He turned to see the remains of the driver underneath him, completely burst like a balloon and blood absolutely everywhere. “I don’t know if I can gag…but that’s pretty close.” The Architect admitted, as he got up and wiped the blood from his mechanical arse, and he turned to see the engine and he just picked up the grenade and pulled the pin, dropping it inside before he jumped and climbed out.

“Did it work?” Winter asked.

BOOM!

The top of the Tank erupted into flames, massive chunks of metal bent and snapped from the heat and power of an explosion fell from the sky where it was thrown. The Architect fell and rolled across the ground, still with a lot of blood on his body. “I’ll take that as a yes.”
“NEVER! Do that again…look at the state of me…I’m ruined…” He groaned, and as he turned Ozpin approached the water’s edge and he used his telekinetic powers of the Relic to lift water, and he launched a wave straight at the Architect, so hard it knocked him over. He yelped and all the blood and mess was completely wiped off, which only left the scuffs and dents behind.

“Better?” Ozpin asked him.

He sighed. “Better.” He admitted, despite still being a bit upset over the whole ordeal. Ozpin offered his hand to the Mechanical Man and he pulled him up to his feet. The three of them looked up at the tower that Cordovin was hiding in.

“Think she’ll talk?” Winter asked.

As they got to the tower, the doors opened and she aimed her pistol at their heads. “GET BACK I’M NOT SAYING A THING!” Cordovin yelled, and Winter sighed, giving Ozpin a lien for losing the bet as they walked towards her. She fired at the Architect and it bounced off his armoured body, he looked at the shell bounce off and fall to the floor. Winter swiftly disarmed her and kicked her in the chest, and knocked her back into her chair. Winter also completely took the gun apart, and she dropped the remnants of the gun on the floor.

“Listen to what we have to say, we didn’t want to kill all those men.” Winter told her, and she scoffed.

“You betrayed Atlas, you betrayed everything you stood for!” Cordovin yelled with anger at her.

“I did? You gave up and let a bunch of cutthroats tell you what to do.” Winter snarled right back.

“You weren’t there! You didn’t see what odds were faced against. My duty is to protect this city, is to protect Atlas! And with Ironwood dead I will do whatever I must! If siding with the Devil is necessary to do that then I will.” Cordovin explained to them all, and the Architect scoffed with his arms crossed.

“Yeah…it’s always a great idea for the ice cube to share intimate relations with an open flame.” The Architect scoffed as he stared at the leader of Argus’ Defence.

“Oh go on! Mock me! The Valerians mocked me. The Mistralians mocked me. Hell even the Atlesians mocked me. But I stay true to my post, I always have and I always will. Don’t you dare judge me for what I have done to keep this city safe. I have worked with dangerous people countless times so then the world these people live in can be safe. So do I feel like I have betrayed my post for allying myself with the Acolytes of Lien?” Cordovin asked them, and she stood up from her seat, staring Winter right in the eyes. “Not. One. Bit.” She snarled.

“We did not wish to speak with you about the state of your position, it is about our mission. We did not want to fight the soldiers who defended you, and I know you will have reinforcements returning here from the city very soon, along with Atlas. So I need you to listen to me.” Ozpin stated, and his voice turned quite cold and terrifying as he stepped forward with his hands pressed to the table, glared right into her eyes, and she sat down with intimidation. “We need to get past your cannons, we could have destroyed them but I know how important those things are to the city. That tunnel we opened leads into a place that could cure the Horridus Morbus Plague that wiped out Menagerie and Vacuo.”

“If you ask me, Menagerie had it coming.” Cordovin scoffed, and Winter glared at her with a clenched fist.
“Are you joking right now?” Winter snarled.

“No. If you ask me it was fate for them, everything they have brought upon us.” She scoffed, which lead to Winter swinging her fist round and punching her in the side of the head, which knocked her down to the ground with a heavy thud.

“We were the ones that caused them to rise up, you dumb bitch! Humanity had been slaughtering them in droves for years! And you blame them? You try to tell me that they deserve what happened? I might not have been at Atlas when they took over, but you were not at Menagerie…you didn’t see what Horridus Morbus did to people there. Men, Women…and children. All of them were turned into monsters!” Winter let loose on her, showed a side to herself that very few had ever seen before, a side that actually scared Cordovin. The Specialist stared at her with fear, and she rubbed her bruised face where she took her fist.

The Architect gently pulled her back, and Cordovin looked at them. “Seems like time away from Atlas has changed you view on what matters, Schnee.”

“What matters is we cure Horridus Morbus. And trust me, there is a threat out there that will make the whole idea of Kingdoms completely pointless. Vir Nominis Umbra is coming and when that Moon is completely broken apart – he will lead an Army of Darkness so vast and endless that nothing will survive. And if he gets the Relics…everything we know…will end. We need Horridus Morbus cured, otherwise we won’t be able to stop him, because it will spread to the point where he won’t need an army of Grimm.” Ozpin explained to her, and the sheer scale of the threat they face was enough to send fear down her.

Cordovin was many things…but a fool was not one of them, and she knew when someone was lying…and Ozpin was not lying.

“I know that all that matters to you is keeping Argus safe, but I promise you – if you let us past the cannons and into that tunnel – you will be saving Argus.” Winter told her, and Cordovin was sat there, thinking on everything they just told her. She looked at Ozpin and Winter’s faces, and she could see their fear of failing – it was not a fear of losing a war with the Acolytes or the White Fang.

It was a fear of failing the world itself.

She lowered her head and she got up with a sigh, and she approached the controls, and she looked back at them. “I better not regret this. Make the lives you took to talk to me mean something.” She ordered, as she pressed the button, and deactivated the towers now that the White Fang have pulled out of Argus. Ozpin felt such relief as he saw the turrets lower their barrels.

“You won’t.” He promised.

Qrow

Qrow stood in the road as the Police Force began to secure the area, before the Acolytes of Lien could find them, the Prowler approached their location. Everyone managed to get back together, and he turned to see Jaune and Pyrrha with Oscar’s arms on their shoulders, and they carried him to the landing zone. His eyes widened when he saw Ruby’s boyfriend in such pain, bandages wrapped around his wounds he suffered from their battle against the Onyx Phantom. Nora gasped when she saw him, with Blake leant against one of the damaged cars left behind in the street, her wounds were
still healing but she looked better now that her wounds got stitched and bandaged up.

“What happened?” Nora asked with worry.

“Yeah, we could hear it across the city, like bombs were being dropped.” Qrow commented and Oscar sat down on the bonnet of one of the cars, and he coughed softly. His fists were tightly clenched as he sat there, and the Prowler landed down on the ground, they turned to see it open up and Cinder emerged from it with Kragen and Yenna.

“We all good to go?” Yenna asked them. Penny smiled and she nodded her head in agreement.

“Yes.” She said, but Qrow looked at his daughter and he gently caressed her shoulder, and he crouched down as she sat beside her boyfriend.

“Ruby? What happened?” He asked her with worry.

Ruby blew out a breath and told him about what happened. “The Onyx Phantom attacked us, out of nowhere. It nearly killed us… but something kept us alive. There was this… marking…” She said, she looked at her hand and she could still picture that mysterious glowing white marking that formed out of thin air on the pack of her hand. There were no scars or marks or even bruises whatsoever where the marking appeared, it was completely gone.

“Marking?” Qrow asked, as they got up and helped the healing Oscar Pine into the Prowler that waited for them to get inside and they all sat down, whilst Qrow listened to what they were saying.

“Yeah…we all heard a voice too. It kept us alive… I don’t know what it was, none of us do. But – it also said something to Oscar. Something about his parents, and that Ozpin is hiding something from us.” Ruby explained to Qrow, and Jaune looked pissed as he stood beside them, and he turned to see Ozpin walking towards the ship with Winter, and the Architect – the last of the large team to come back. As Ozpin entered, Jaune walked toward him with his fist clenched tight.

“Jaune…” Pyrrha tried to stop him, but he was determined to show him what he thought of the Professor.

“Are we ready to move out? We only have a small window before –” Ozpin grunted as Jaune punched Ozpin in the side of the face, and then with his sword he drew it and pinned him up against the wall of the ship. Ozpin stared right back into Jaune’s blue eyes, who glared viciously at him with gritted teeth.

“I knew we couldn’t trust you. What else are you holding back, you son of a bitch?” Jaune growled in anger, and Ozpin just stared right back.

“Jaune! Stop!” Ruby yelled.

“Why should we trust him? Higher Demons never lie! Tell him the truth! What is Oscar’s heritage?” Jaune questioned sternfully at Ozpin, who stared right back. The Professor glanced at the scared face on Oscar’s face, there was a desperation there. One that was filled with the hope of learning what his past really entailed. “You knew we had to come here, we found that Visionary Book with the Knights of Grimm and how they turned. Why are you still lying to us?”

Ozpin stared at him and he suddenly pushed Jaune back extremely hard, that caused him to slam into the other wall, and they all drew their weapons on the Professor. He stared at them and he sighed. “I understand why you do not trust me, but you have to understand I have reasons for what I do. For the secrets I keep.”
“Oh bullshit!” Cinder snarled as she got up. “You of all people should know what happens when you keep secrets from people.”

“Sometimes you do not want to know the information I have learned over the years.” Ozpin stated, and Winter scoffed.

“Y’know, I’m getting real tired of people telling me what’s best for me.” Winter stated, something Weiss would agree with tenfold.

“Is that why you lied about being a Knight of Grimm too?” Jaune questioned as he stepped forward.

“Yes, as a matter of fact.” Ozpin answered, and he pointed his cane at him with anger. “Sometimes the truth can be too much for certain people to bare. Ever heard the tale of the boy who told nothing but the truth? Where he kept getting people into trouble, truths that gave his family nightmares? Truths that killed people? Sometimes there are secrets that must be kept to protect the greater good.”

“And who decides what truth is for the greater good?” Raven questioned with a snarl.

“Me. Because I have watched both Humanity and the Faunus evolve in civilisation to where it stands now, after the chaos that allowed you all to evolve from the ashes of those that came before.” Ozpin explained as he stood before them all, and as they all stared at him they had a stern look in their eyes.

“Said every tyrant ever.” The Architect scoffed, and Ruby stood up. Ozpin turned away from them and he stared out at the city of Argus, that was built atop the skeleton of a city from his native time.

“Why are you so afraid to tell us these hard truths? We know where you stand and we know what is at stake, we’re not gonna turn your backs on you.” Ruby told him, and then he snapped.

“Do you seriously believe you were all the first to say those words!? That Leonardo Lionheart did not say those exact same words to me? You may be on my side but I have lived a long painful life and I have been betrayed more times than I can count by people who claimed they knew what the stakes were.” Ozpin explained as he walked towards them, and Oscar lowered his head with pain.

They all fell silent as he said that, and they all stood down, but they all felt hurt. “So when you said all those years back…that you have faith in Humanity and the Faunus…was that also a lie?” She asked and Ozpin sighed.

“No…I just have learned that for every good soul that aids me…there are those who betray my trust.” Ozpin explained and he sighed, and he pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Professor…” Oscar softly spoke and he turned to him. “Please…I need to know. What am I?” He asked with fear in his voice.

“I will tell you another time…” Ozpin attempted to escape it but Cinder and Yenna both suddenly ignited the fire in their eyes.

“You’ll tell him now.” Cinder growled, and Raven glanced at them for a second.

Ozpin sighed and looked at them all. “The Onyx Phantom was telling the truth.” He revealed, and Oscar’s eyes widened. “When Kragen and the Architect managed to break my curse, and freed me from Vir Nominis Umbra’s control, I saw everything that came now…I was thrown into broken time itself. It took me a long time to return to the present, and over time I learned how to use magic and many other abilities. And I used the Relic of Creation to grant me the power, thanks to the information I gathered from the Relic of Knowledge. I needed to become powerful, powerful enough
to challenge our enemy. I travelled throughout time after I saw the future events up to the Ice that smothered Beacon.” He explained.

Oscar’s eyes widened, for he could still remember the image that Ozpin showed him when Oscar first ever travelled through time five years ago. “When you said you were born at the end of time…and saw your family frozen in time…you weren’t completely lying then?” He asked.

“No…Wymerus Ozymandias died a very long time ago, and when I was freed from the name of Vengeance, I became the man you know now. Ozpin. I saw you there, and I went through the future timelines past the point of which I was freed, and I never found your birth parents. I only found you are a baby taken in by your Aunt. It was then I realised that you were created…by me.” He explained and Oscar’s eyes widened.


“I used the Relic of Creation, I knew we needed more than just my own power to win this thing…or at least to get to the point I saw. I designed you to have the same power as I, the semblance to use time to your benefit…and from your future I saw that you would fall for Ruby Rose, and she would fall for you. It seemed to be extremely important, so I knew I needed make sure you were born around the same time as she was. So then you would find each other at Beacon, thanks to when Cinder forced me into exile and stasis for my body to repair itself.” Ozpin explained to them all, and Oscar looked absolutely shocked from all of this.

“My…Aunt…she’s not really…”

“No…but she never lied, not knowingly. Because I put the idea into her mind that her long dead sister had a son. And that she made it her duty to look after you in her name, but never to speak of her.” Ozpin explained, and Ruby stared at Ozpin like he was a stranger. “You deserved to believe you were like the others, and I wish you still could. I had hoped the Onyx Phantom would not be able to tell that you were not naturally born, and were created instead. Clearly I underestimated the Higher Demon once again.” Ozpin explained.

“You never would have told me the truth?” Oscar whimpered.

“You were happier that way, and I hoped it could stay that way.” Ozpin stated. “Because whether or not you are born or built, you are still a person. You fell in love, can have children, and feel everything. You grow old the same and you can die the same. Your creation does not change that fact.” He explained and Ruby looked at her boyfriend, this information clearly has been a lot for poor Oscar to take in.

Now it was Ruby’s turn to look after him.

“That is the full truth Oscar, of what you are. I am sorry I kept that from you, but I felt it would be for the best, for your mental state.” Ozpin explained, and Oscar could not even find words. But Ruby held his hand and she gently kissed him, and Ozpin sighed, and turned when they heard the distant sound of Acolytes of Lien reinforcements. “We need to leave.”

“Yeah, he’s right.” Blake agreed and she winced, and sat down.

The Prowler began to take off, but Jaune took the chance while he still could, and he called Saphron. “Saph? Are you okay?” He asked her, and luckily she responded.

“Yeah…we were safe from the chaos but we saw it from here. Are you okay?” She asked with fear.

“Yeah, a little banged up, but we’re good. We’re leaving Argus…and you need to do the same.” He
said to her.

“Why?” She asked.

“The city isn’t safe, I don’t where is safe anymore. But I know that Beacon and Vale may be the
safest places left that aren’t under Mercenary Occupation. Glynda will help you, and I know you can
use your skills as a Nurse to good use there. That disease is spreading but from what we have seen,
normal disease prevention methods still work against it.” Jaune explained to her, and she shuddered.

“Are…things really this bad?” She asked with fear.

“It’s gonna get worse…a lot worse. I can’t lose another member of my family.” He said to her, and
Saphron sighed. She had always trusted Jaune and that was not about to change now, and the
Prowler started to rise up above the ground.

“Okay…please…stay safe baby brother.” She begged.

“I’ll try.” He promised. “I love you sis.” He said to her.

“I love you too bro.” She replied, and he ended the call, hopeful that they may survive the coming
calamities. They all looked out across the city as the Prowler turned towards the massive Tunnel
entrance, when suddenly the afterburners roared, and it soared right past the shutdown towers.

And finally.

Into the tunnels.
The Shade

Kassius

The Peregrine soared through the darkness of the tunnels, the lack of light was so thick it felt like you could actually touch it.

Kassius stood at the rear of the aircraft, the rear door was open and he held onto the ceiling handle with Vulcan Nox loaded in the other hand. He had been stood there for about half an hour now, long enough for the glow of the distant sun to fade away. Now there were in complete subterranean darkness, underneath the ocean. He still could remember how terrifying the aquatic Grimm were, the things that lurked down here would give them nightmares, and made the whole joke of Neptune being terrified of the ocean far more understandable. The Kraken, the Syrens and the Krastax. Merely stories, at first that was what they thought they were, until they saw the titans.

He never thought he would welcome these huge thick concrete walls that curved around them in thus gigantic tunnel network. He had been stood there, watching to see if the Acolytes of Lien were coming after them. But he never saw them, he never saw a single light from one of their aircrafts pursuing, they never came after them. But even still, he wanted to be sure, but after thirty minutes of nothing – he felt like they were safe from the Mercenaries at long last. “Alright…I think we’re in the clear.” Kassius said to them as he walked away from the open door. The ramp shaped door closed behind him as he returned to his team, Emerald was piloting the aircraft through the tunnel, Cardin was sat with his mace upon his legs, Coco was cleaning her Chaingun’s Barrels and Velvet was sat fiddling with her hair.

Kassius sat down beside Velvet and he rolled his shoulder with a groan, his shoulder popped softly as he did so. Velvet glanced at him but the tension was very clear, just not the kind she had hoped for. She now could not bare to look at Kassius because of her confession, and Kassius knew it. But at the same time he did not want to say a word in case she would get more embarrassed than she already has been. So he looked down at his boots and he kicked some of the dirt from it after he and Emerald made their epic escape from the Acolytes prior.

He looked at them – his team – it was not what he wanted but he never realised how much he missed being in command until he had all of them here. Two of his teammates were once leaders as well, Coco merely wants her teammates back…but Cardin will never get his back. He blew out a breath as he looked at them all. “Everyone alright?” He asked them, since it was a hard fight in Queen’s Cove. Velvet silently nodded her head and Coco groaned.

“Yep…hell of a fight though.” Coco stated and Cardin nodded his head.

“To put it mildly.” Cardin chuckled in agreement, his body was still aching from the battle that he and Emerald endured against Kelham. Something Kassius still does not even know about. But as Emerald continued to take them through the ancient Tunnel system, her red eyes widened and she gasped.

“By the gods…” She said as she slowed the ship down, so Kassius got back up and he walked over to where she was sat and he held the back of her chair, and he saw what she saw. The others saw it too.

“What the hell happened here?” Kassius wondered, they saw a massive barricade formed in front of
the road. Luckily they could still pass over it with great ease, but the amount of shattered bones left behind. The weapons that have nearly rusted away as time took them. Huge spike barriers were put up and they were standing their ground…with statues of Grimm left behind. They had all seen what the power of the Silver Eyes could do to Creatures of Grimm. None of them forgot what happened at Beacon and Kassius had seen the power first hand when fighting alongside Ruby.

“Silver Eyed warriors…looks like they were holding the Grimm back when they attacked the city. They must have used these tunnels to evacuate the civilians.” Emerald assumed as she slowly took them over the skeletons and the statues. There were hundreds of frozen Grimm, but unlike the Grimm Dragon these ones have been long dead. The Silver Eyed Warriors even managed to fortify their barricade of cars with the statues of Grimm by the looks of it, waited until they were close and unleashed the power of the light in their eyes.

There were so many destroyed cars left behind, with people dragged out or simply ripped apart in the claustrophobic space of their seats. The blood had dried over time but it was still visible thousands of years later. As they slowly passed across this mass grave, they all swore that they saw flashes of the past. Images almost of what it was like, what it must have felt like. The terror of the poor civilians who were desperately trying to get to the other side of this huge tunnel. The Grimm were coming, that much was certain, but so many of them did not even realise if there was another city on the other side. They had no idea if the world had ended, and that they would have to live out the rest of their days in total darkness.

“They never ran…they stood their ground to protect people they never even knew.” Cardin realised, since as they passed over that huge barricade, there were no other bones before that point. And they saw the twenty skeletons left behind with weapons at their side.

“Twenty…twenty Silver Eyed Warriors managed to hold back the horde.” Coco said with shock and awe, but also with great respect.

“And they did it…maybe not everyone made it, but there were no bones past the Barricade. They held them back, used their eyes to fortify the barricade so the Grimm could not pass through.” Velvet said with disbelief and Kassius chuckled.

“That’s why the Colonists managed to build up Queen’s Cove the way they did. The Grimm from Arkhonex couldn’t flood through into the city. Thanks to the Silver Eyed Warriors.” Kassius said and he chuckled and he closed his eyes and they all fell silent to pay their respects to these warriors. Warriors who fought, not for fame or money, they knew they would be forgotten, but at the very least, they could save these people. People who could tell the tales of legendary warriors whose eyes shone like mirrors.

For they will never see their like again.

Emerald kept moving the Peregrine over the sea of bones, she stared at the darkness, and the only thing that stretched out now was death and destruction. Burned out and shattered cars, skeletons torn to shreds and old stained blood everywhere. It must have been horrifying for them, a mass of darkness so thick that it killed anything that it passed over.

The Oncoming Shadow.

That was what the Army of Grimm was called, the army that never seemed to end, an army so rich of darkness that it would darken the sky itself, even on a Summer’s Day. They would never be stopped, just prevented. It was theorised that when the Moon Shattered and the Shivering Dominion began, the Oncoming Shadow would arrive as well. An army so powerful that it could wipe out Remnant in under a week.
Kassius and the others walked away from the view of destruction, everything they had seen was nothing in comparison to the attack that Arkhonex suffered. An attack that started on the inside and left an Empire to join the dust. Normally one would feel excited to see what an ancient undiscovered City would look like – but in truth? They were terrified, to see what the Grimm are capable of when commanded with strategy. And not as wild animals that were predictable.

Kassius sat down next to where Velvet sat again and he blew out another breath and he sighed, the fear they all felt was as thick as soup. They could taste it, like blood it was metallic.

“Those poor people…men, women and children…” Velvet softly whispered to herself and Kassius looked at her and he went to touch her shoulder but he lowered his hand with a sigh. He felt like he could not even speak to her anymore, he never wanted her to feel that way for him, he never felt that way for her in return. But…at the same time he did not want this little revelation to ruin their friendship.

“The Acolytes of Lien would never do what those Silver Eyed Warriors did for them…not the way they are now.” Coco stated and Cardin nodded his head.

“Yeah…I’ve fought them in the past, back with my team in Vacuo. They were deadly back then just like now, but…nothing like what we saw back at the Cove. There was little to no discipline in their troops.” Cardin explained, and that luckily seemed to break the awkward silence between Kassius and Velvet, which helped them talk about it again.

“I know, did you see the same, Kassius?” She asked him and he nodded his head.

“Yeah, the soldiers with Kannix were harassing innocents. I know some of Ortega’s men in the past have been harassing civilians for money for years, but never as many as we saw today. Normally few would do it, because they knew that Ortega would punish their asses.” Kassius explained, Cardin sat there and he looked at Emerald who looked back at him.

“Cardin and I know why.” Emerald revealed, and Kassius raised an eyebrow.

“We met their new commander.” Cardin revealed and Kassius stared at him.

“New? What the hell happened to Ortega?” Kassius asked with concern, since at least when the Acolytes were being lead by Ortega they followed strict military discipline and strategy.

“The new Admiral of the Drift of Wandering Star…is our old friend Kelham.” Cardin revealed, and Kassius froze in place. He would always remember that bastard, the way he treated his slaves was beyond cruel. He clenched his cybernetic hand into a fist as he sat there and gritted his teeth.

“The same one?” Kassius asked.

“Yeah. Somehow he went from pillaging villages and stealing people into Slavery – to becoming the leader of the world’s largest Mercenary Organisation.” Cardin explained to Kassius and he was sat there with utter hate and confusion of the whole situation, for all his flaws they all at the very least respected Ortega. He had code and honour and he only did what he did for the chance to see his daughter again.

“Why? How?”

“Jacques Schnee betrayed Ortega.” Emerald told him, and Coco raised a brow.

“How do you know that?” Coco inquired.
“Kelham told us himself. Said that Ortega was no longer of use and his constant failures made him a waste of their time, so they wanted someone who wasn’t afraid to get the dirty jobs done.” Emerald explained to Kassius and he scoffed.

“So you remove the guy with military experience with a madman…” Kassius scoffed.

“They took his soldiers from him and they also told him that Merlot’s Project…y’know the one with Penny? The one you told us about on the flight over to Queen’s Cove?” Cardin asked him and Kassius nodded his head. “Well, they told him he will get no more support and they will destroy all of his work when they find him. Ortega was left with nothing.”

“Poor guy…what happened to him? Did he tell you?” Kassius asked him with worry.

“Dunno. Last he saw of him was after he shot Whitley in the face and fled, with half of his military still loyal to him escaping Atlas in the process.” Emerald shrugged her shoulders and Kassius chuckled, since that was the first of him hearing that Whitley got shot in the head.

“I like his style…with Whitley dead that cuts one of the heads off.” Kassius stated, but Emerald shook her head.

“Before we were attacked, Kassius – when we were gonna call you? Whitley intercepted us, the bastard is alive…but I don’t know what he looks like now. He sounds like he is some kind of a…machine.” Emerald told him and Kassius sat there and he exhaled with shock at all this information.

“Well…at least it sounds like things are going bad for the bad guys for once.” Kassius chuckled.

“Ortega could prove to be one hell of an ally if he is still alive.” Coco pointed out.

“He could be anywhere. Dude was in the military for a long time, I bet he knows how to disappear.” Kassius explained.

“Or, he could be heading the same direction as we are. If Merlot is in Arkhonex, he’ll be heading straight there, won’t he? For his little girl.” Velvet added and Kassius sat there and realised that she was completely right.

“Well…if we bump into him along the way, let’s reason with him. Maybe he’ll be willing to talk now that we’re on the same page.” Kassius said, and the Peregrine Crew continued their path down the huge tunnel of death and destruction.

As they went further into the gloom though, something moved in the destruction. The stone statues crumbled as the huge creature slithered through the rubble, and flames trailed from its growling jaws, and massive wings opened up from its back as it growled.

More of them emerged as well.

Something was waiting for them.

Ruby

On the other side of the planet…
…Ruby’s team inside of the Prowler were funnily enough in the exact same position as Kassius. It was actually quite funny how both sides were experiencing highly similar events at the exact same time. Just like Kassius’ end of the spectrum, the Acolytes of Lien were not chasing after them either, and they were alone in the darkness. And thanks to how quickly they managed to get into the tunnel, there is no way that they could get ahead of them and set up defences to take them down as soon as they emerge. It was all going very similarly…but not everything was.

But the History of this Tunnel clearly was nowhere near as heroic as it was in the Valerian Tunnel Network. As their Prowler soared across the ocean of shadows, Ozpin stood with his hand held onto the side of the hull, he looked out the ship, at the light that surrounded them and he saw what just expanded out around them for miles and miles.

Ruby walked over to him and her silver eye widened with shock, as she saw bones absolutely everywhere. She could even hear the distant screams in time of the civilians who were trapped in here, who suffered agonising deaths at the claws and teeth of the Grimm that claimed them all by the thousands. Cars rusted away and nearly fossilised from time itself, Ruby stared at Ozpin and she saw the guilt ever present in his eyes. She could tell he had so many regrets in his life, but in her kind heart she knew that deep down all of this was not really him. It was the curse that bound him, just as the curse that currently bound the rest of the Knights of Grimm.

So she asked him what it was she was staring at. “Professor? What happened here?” She asked with fear, and her eye glanced to the walls of the tunnel, cracked and old, where she saw shadows of people stood by their corpses. They stood motionlessly, just shadows left behind after the Oncoming Shadow wiped them out.

“Betrayal…through cowardice.” Ozpin growled, and he clenched his hand into a fist as he stared at all the needless death. Ozpin turned and he walked away from the terrifying view of destruction and they passed Raven who closed the ramp behind them. Unaware of what was coming for them.

“Betrayal? Whaddya mean?” Ruby asked with curiosity and Ozpin sat down and he sighed, and wringed his hands. Everyone was looking to him, everyone was listening. There was no heroic story to tell about this Tunnel – the Mistraalian Secret.

This was a Horror Story.

“Not everyone was wiped out when the Oncoming Shadow attacked.” Ozpin revealed, and everyone looked at him with fear. That was the first they have ever heard anyone refer to the Grimm as that. “That was what the force that Vir Nominis Umbra unleashed on us was called. Yes the Grimm within the walls killed many, but it was the Oncoming Shadow that finished us off. A horde of Grimm so vast that they covered and crossed the walls in seconds.” Ozpin explained and Kragen nodded his head.

“I was not at Arkhonex when it happened, but I saw the aftermath. We never stood a chance. The Shadow hit the other cities soon after, a force so large and unstoppable it was like a flood. The Witches’ Omens told of them coming when the Moon was destroyed, but we never expected the Oncoming Shadow to hit us when it did.” Kragen explained, and it gave them chills, an army so large that it has its own name and Omens was always something to fear.

“Why?” Winter asked with fear.

“We found something we shouldn’t, so Umbra nearly extinguished the entire Human and Faunus race in one fell swoop. So then whatever it was that we uncovered would never see the light of day.” The Architect told them as he cleaned his rifle. That too gave them chills but also hope, something that managed to force Umbra to unleash an attack force like that was always bound to be important.
Was it his weakness they found?

If so…where? And what is it?

Ozpin continued to tell them all about what happened here, to all these people. “The Council lead by the Houses ordered that all the surviving civilians be evacuated through the tunnels. There were too many Grimm to even use aircraft or vehicles on land, or on sea. So we had to go underground.” Ozpin explained, but then he corrected himself. “They…”

“Huh?” Blake asked as she recovered beside Oscar.

“They had to go underground…I was involved in the attack with the other Knights of Grimm. Before Salem.” Ozpin stated.

“I thought Salem’s creation was what caused the change?” Oscar asked, and they all started to notice holes in the old story. The story in which told that they controlled the Grimm, and when Salem was born, she used the Grimm to wipe them out. The Oncoming Shadow were never mentioned before. And neither was the fact that Salem did not exist. Winter looked at Yenna, and she started to remember her story about Cynthia going after Salem…

…how long after the Fall of Arkhonex did Salem first appear?

“No. Salem was created a few years afterwards, at the time you did not know of Vir Nominis Umbra. Until we did, we needed to protect you by creating lies. Trust me when I say that Umbra would have known, and if we told you everything as soon as we met you…you wouldn’t have lasted long.” Kragen promised and that made them all understand. They did not like it, or even understand it. The past of Arkhonex was simple yet they were making it so complicated with their lies.

But lies they could understand – it was the same reason why Ozpin hid Umbra from the people of Beacon. If Umbra figured out who Ozpin really was and he was training children to fight him, he would have burned the Academy to the ground long, long ago.

“So if Umbra was the one who unleashed the army of Grimm, did he know about these tunnels?” Jaune asked.

“He did, he walked among us and we never knew. He probably worked on these tunnels, and sadly these poor men women and children paid the price for this mistake.” Ozpin explained to them all. “When the soldiers were bringing people there, the lights and power suddenly went out, and people were stuck in a massive traffic jam. The Oncoming Shadow flooded the tunnel from behind, and killed everything that they came across.” Ozpin explained to them all, and Pyrrha covered her mouth with horror of this dark truth.

“That’s…horrible…”

“It was…but it was worse. Because amongst the thousands of surviving innocents, was one cowardly criminal. He managed to get out to the city that we now know as Argus. He was afraid, and he wanted to survive…so he closed the tunnel behind him and left them behind.” Ozpin revealed. “It could only be opened from the outside, not from within.”

Their eyes were wide and Ruby looked out the window again, as she could see the flashes of people being dragged from their cars and eaten alive. Children ripped from their mother’s arms. Families torn apart.

All in total darkness.
“The…cowardly bastard.” Cinder snarled as she clenched her hand into a fist. She stared at the death that surrounded them. So many people died in pain, alone and in the darkness with no hope at all. “He let them all die so he could live?” She growled.

“I hope he died painfully.” Nora growled.

“We don’t know what happened to him.” Yenna revealed and they all stare at her.

“Who was he?” Jaune asked and she stared straight at him and she exhaled softly.

“Ezekiel Arc.” She revealed and their eyes widened with disbelief, and they all looked at Jaune, and he looked betrayed…betrayed to be named after such a coward. An Arc did this…his ancestor did this.

“The last we ever saw of Ezekiel Arc was that he was returning back to Arkhonex, to face Vyrryk. So then he could kill him.” Ozpin told him and Jaune stared at Ozpin with disbelief.

“Why?” He asked.

“Because Ezekiel wanted power above all else. He wanted to be remembered…to not be forgotten. Vyrryk cared not for that kind of legacy, the only thing he ever wanted was to keep the people he loved alive. To provide a future after the Apocalypse of Arkhonex.” Ozpin revealed to Jaune, how ironic that the person that Ezekiel described as a blight on the family name for what he assumed was weakness, was actually his honour.

“At least…one Arc in Arkhonex deserved the name.” Jaune said, since Ezekiel was a monstrous coward, and Constantine was a rapist.

“Not the only one.” Ozpin hinted and Jaune raised a brow.

“What do you mean?” He asked.

“I believe you will have to wait and see…Vyrryk will show you the rest. I know his books are out there, and I know where they all are. I will make sure that you find them all.” Ozpin promised, and Jaune raised a brow.

“How do you know?” He asked.

“Because when I was freed and I learned how to use Time as a Semblance thanks to the Relic of Creation, I went back and spoke with Vyrryk. I promised to archive his memories, so then you could find them. So I followed his past, and I placed Visionary Books in certain areas, for you to find them.” Ozpin finally revealed and Jaune’s eyes nearly popped from their sockets.

“Why?” He asked with shortened breath.

“Because he was once my closest friend…he deserved better than to be forgotten. And I know that there were others in the family name…who deserved to be remembered as well.” Ozpin stated, and he stood up, and placed his hand on Jaune’s shoulder and he walked past him. Jaune looked back at Ozpin, and it all started to make sense now…Ozpin does not simply want Jaune to learn of his family’s history – but because he made a promise.

Ozpin keeps his promises.

Ozpin approached Qrow and he picked up the flask of alcohol and he drank some of it, it did not belong to Qrow, it was already in the cupboard but he saw him sat close to it. He drank it and he
approached the door and opened it, and threw it out into the darkness behind them. He stared out into
the darkness and narrowed his eyes as they all stared at him. Ruby looked at Kragen, since as Ozpin
mentioned how he was broken free from the curse, there was something she wanted to know.

“Kragen?” She asked.

“Yes, child?” He replied.

“How did…you and the Architect…break the curse which bound Ozpin to Vir Nominis Umbra?”
She asked him, since at the end of the day they need to see if there was some kind of correlation
between the curses for each Knight so then they can defeat them for good. Kragen looked at her and
his silver eyes glanced over to Ozpin who turned to him and closed the ramp behind them, none of
them have even noticed what was following them.

Raven glanced back, she felt like something was watching them from the darkness. “They have a
right to know, end of the day it could prove useful to hear what they think.” Ozpin admitted, and he
sat down with them. Most of them were sat on the cold floor whilst Ren was in the pilot’s seat.

“Okay…well…” Kragen began and he rolled his neck with a pop. “It’s a bloody long tale.”

“Long ride ahead of us, might as well pass the time with a cool story.” Nora squeaked, and Kragen
chuckled.

“Fair enough.” Kragen admitted. “Well then, it all started back when we first saw him. You know
what he was – the Knight of Vengeance. So the crux of the curse was extremely clear, he was
determined to find his revenge. Can you guess what for?” Kragen asked them all, and the sharp
minded Pyrrha Nikos caught it first, just before the eager Blake Belladonna did.

“The loss of his family? Back when Axzura Vex attacked the city?” She asked, and Yenna revealed
a rubber bottle of alcohol, still fresh too. So she handed it over to Kragen after taking as swig. He did
the same, and he flinched from how strong it was.

“Wow…quick minds aren’t you?” He asked them, and he threw the bottle to Ozpin’s extended hand.

“I taught them well, told you they were great students.” Ozpin chuckled, even now he still sung their
praises. Ozpin drank some of it but he hardly even reacted to it.

“I’m, really sorry, Professor.” Pyrrha sweetly said to Ozpin and he shook his head.

“Long time ago, Miss Nikos. I may miss them, but at the end of the day it was a fixed point. What
happened…happened. We can’t change it, we must merely accept it.” Ozpin said, and he offered it
out to someone else, and Raven accepted it and took a sip, and passed it on. Impressively, Qrow
managed to actually deny the alcohol, despite the demon in his head whispering to have him do it.

“So how did you figure it out?” Ruby asked.

“Well, Curses are fickle things to figure out, just like Demons and their weaknesses. They play on
two things: Irony and Closure. These curses seem to bind the two things together, which made it all
the harder to figure it out. Another issue with curses and Demons, is that their weaknesses are
sometimes so obvious, you miss it. Complex Simplicity.” Kragen explained to them and they listen
and heed his words. End of the day, to beat a curse of a Demon, it is never about how strong you
are, or how fast – but merely how clever you are.

“How long did it take you?” Penny curiously inquired, and that made both the Architect and Kragen
chuckle.
“About a decade.” Kragen admitted with a laugh. “However that was mostly through trying to figure out what makes any curse or Demonic Entity tick. Sadly most of the old books of our people were lost in Arkhonex. Not sure if the old Library still exists.” Kragen explained to them all. “But we both had a theory, and we realised that the curse linked both closure and irony together. He wanted revenge but could never get it, because the people who killed his family were already long dead. And the thing that angered him, was that he never got to say goodbye. His family…there was nothing left.” Kragen explained and he looked at Ozpin, and saw the sadness in his old eyes.

Ruby looked at him and then at Oscar, he was still struggling to comprehend his own heritage, that much was clear, but his mind was still focused on the bigger goal at hand. “What did you do?” Jaune asked.

“We pretty much embarked on a suicide mission. We went back to Arkhonex a few centuries ago, one of the hardest missions we have ever gone on. Just the two of us – and we navigated our way back to Ozpin’s home location. Still destroyed, we dug through…and we found their bones. We gathered them, and took them to an honourable burial site.” Kragen explained, and Ruby saw how grateful Ozpin looked for this.

“We lured Oz to our location, to where we buried him, and we managed to get him to stare at the graves that we made for him.” The Architect told them all.

“Ozpin’s curse waned as he saw their names, and he crouched to them and he finally got to apologise. We gave him the opportunity to truly say goodbye to them, and when that was done, we saw a dark cloud trail away from his body. It was the curse leaving him – and after that he faded away. We thought he was gone, but when I saw you again…clearly I was wrong.” Kragen chuckled and Ozpin nodded his head.

“I would have been, but I could not leave, there was something else that bound me there. The fact Umbra was still alive, and I made it my mission to return. To create a new body, a new identity, to stop him once and for all. The Relic gave me that chance and Knowledge helped me learn. I needed to see him die – only then may I rest.” Ozpin explained and they all nodded their heads in agreement.

“As can we all.” Qrow agreed with the nod of his head.

“So…do you guys have any theories on the other Knights of Grimm? How they can be freed?” Ruby asked curiously and Ozpin nodded his head.

“Theories…but nothing clear yet. Only the Visionary Books can help us. I did not create those ones, only the ones for Vyrryk and the one you found.” Ozpin explained, and Ruby raised a brow.

“Then…who did?” Ruby inquired.

“No idea. Yang Xiao Long heard the voice of the individual, an old man named the Speaker.” He explained.

“Speaker?” Blake asked.

“His voice has only appeared in a single one but his name has been inside of every single Visionary Book. His identity to this day, is still unknown.” Kragen agreed, with the simple nod of his head.

“So what do you think? How do you think we can break their curses?” Ruby asked him again.

“Well, for Death…Krekras’ whole philosophy surrounded his honour, and he broke his when he was unfaithful to his wife, just as Starla was to her husband. I believe we need to appeal to his sense of honour, so then he can remember the importance of life.” Ozpin explained. “With Starla, I think it
will be more on her part. She had always believed life was precious, and I think soon…after too much death by her hand…she may break. We can only hope to wait for that to happen sooner rather than later.”

“Which means more people dying…” Yenna sighed.

“Fear is a harder egg to crack. I believe his curse is bound to the very emotion he is, fear. I think we must learn what his fear is, help him face it and that might break it. He is still baffling me, honestly.” Ozpin admitted.

“And Fury?” Cinder asked.

“I think it is linked to his Treasure Trove.” Ozpin revealed and Jaune raised an eyebrow. “Axzura Vex was a pirate, yes, but a pirate with a mission. His honour was based upon protecting the innocent, he pillaged those who served the Congregation of Dawn and none others, he took their riches. But the Arkhoni still executed him despite his deeds. I think that if we can help him find his trove…he can finally find peace, in whatever way he wants.” Ozpin explained, he may know the Knights of Grimm well but he did not know what it was they wanted.

But there was a hole in this theory. “Wait…that can’t be right, Fury’s Trove was at the Volcanic Chain Isles. When he touched it the coins and jewels all turned to ash. And the islands exploded.” Jaune reminded, Ozpin caught the rum and he shook it slightly, he could hear it slosh around inside.

“Interesting…but did you see the gold yourself?” He asked him.

“What do you mean?” Jaune asked.

“Vir Nominis Umbra enjoys torturing his subjects, whether they are with or against him. It could have been a projection that only he saw.” Ozpin asked them.

“He came out berserk though.” Ren reminded, since he was there and fought him with Kassius, Sun and Neptune.

“Axzura is not stupid, he would have known if it was truly his trove.” Ozpin stated, and they were all left stumped.

If it wasn’t his Trove…then where did it go?

The Prowler continued on its journey through the tunnels, unaware of the creatures that have just been woken up by the sound of their afterburners as they shot through their tunnels.

A distant howl like wind…

…a howl of screams.

Kassius

They continued to shoot through the tunnels, unaware of the creatures that have just been woken up by the sound of their afterburners as they shot through their tunnels.

“Ugh…this is taking For-EVER!” Coco whinged loudly as she laid there on the floor, kicking and
flailing her arms around the room and Velvet rolled her eyes with a smile.

“We’re travelling across two seas, it’s gonna take a while.” Emerald told her and she sighed as she laid there. But as she defended the time it was taking to travel to Arkhonex, her eyes widened and she stared at the radar when the alarms started to blare and the lights flashed red thanks to the onboard Virtual Intelligence that Solomon Karadin had installed.

WARNING: MULTIPLE GRIMM SIGNATURES DETECTED

THREAT LEVEL: SIX

CLASSIFICATION: LESSER WYVERNS

They all turned and Kassius picked up his weapons and his hat as he got to the rear door and he opened it up. Coco took her Chaingun and followed whilst Cardin and Velvet entered the dual cannons that detach from the wings, luckily they managed to get them repaired when they also got it refuelled upon arrival at Queen’s Cove. “Think they followed us?” Kassius asked them all.

“From Queen’s Cove? Unlikely, they must have been dormant this whole time!” Coco had to shout over the roaring thrusters whilst Emerald kept them moving.

“There’re some harnesses! Clip yourself to them! It’s gonna be a bumpy ride!” Emerald called out, so the two huntresses reached up and grabbed the harness clips and snapped them onto their belts, and it did secure them inside of the ship better. End of the day, if they got lost on foot in this tunnel, they will die. Gods know how many Grimm could still be lurking inside of these tunnels.

The four combatants stared back in the direction of which the Wyverns were coming from. They could not even see them yet, but they could hear their nearby roars. Terrifying in the darkness, and the flapping of their wings could also be heard. “Be ready! They’re closing in on us!” Emerald called, so Coco started spinning her Chaingun’s multiple barrels with her finger on the trigger, and Kassius aimed both his Vulcan Nox Gauntlets, loaded with explosive rounds – courtesy to Yang.

The darkness was still as thick as ever, until suddenly fire erupted from the darkness and almost claimed them. The Wyvern roared with horrifying viciousness behind it, and Kassius and Coco staggered back as Emerald suddenly lifted the left side of the Peregrine up to dodge the incoming pillar of fire. Velvet screamed with shock as the fire nearly killed her as well, whereas Cardin had a full view of the Lesser Wyvern. This one was definitely one of the bigger ones, huge ice white armour plating surrounded its head with scuffs here and there across the scales. It kept getting closer with many other Wyverns behind it, which also start to breathe fire at them.

“Shoot at them!” Emerald yelled, she did not have the room to start performing evasive manoeuvres in here. Coco unleashed her hellfire upon the first Wyvern that made its attack, her bullets started to cut into the flesh of the massive airborne reptile and it roared with agony and anger. It flinched as the black, softer, scales got shredded across its neck, and suddenly it dived down, and smashed through the cars and bones. It stayed low to avoid her shots, and suddenly shot upwards, and slammed into the Peregrine. Kassius got thrown up in the air, but luckily his harness kept him from being thrown into the jaws of one of the Dragons.

Another was getting close but Velvet aimed her cannon she was sat inside of and fired it, the explosive shell went flying straight into the side of the Wyvern’s jaw. It roared in agony as the explosive round snapped and shattered the jawbone of the creature, which caused it to shake its head around in pain, flames bled from its wound as it started to drop in altitude. Cardin assisted, and he fired another round which nailed the Wyvern square in the heart, and caused it to crash down into the field of broken cars and skeletons. It crashed hard, tumbled and scraped across the ground. The
scales cut into the concrete, and water started rising from the road.

The tunnels no longer were connected to the seabed any longer, they were in Open Ocean, which meant that even the ground was vulnerable. It was not enough to cause a breach that could destroy the entire tunnel and cause the ocean to swallow it with seawater, but enough to raise alarm.

The first Wyvern suddenly rose up once more and clamped its jaws down onto one of the Peregrine’s wings, ripping into the steel. Emerald stared at the Wyvern and her eyes widened as she saw it try to rip the wing from the body of the ship. “Shit! It’s going for the wings! Take it out!” Emerald yelled, so Kassius had an idea – a crazy one.

Kassius drew Lash Equinox, and he checked the distance of the Harness and how close the Wyvern was, and luckily he was in distance. He backed up and he charged out, and leapt out from the Peregrine. “Kassius!” Coco screamed, and he road the cable out like a Monkey, and he stabbed his sword into the wing of the Creature of Grimm. It bellowed in agony and stared down at him, and he swung out of the way just as it tried to get him with its fire. He got reeled back in thanks to the mechanism, but as the Wyvern went to devour him, Coco started firing and nailed the creature in the eye.

The sudden impact of so many bullets caused the white armour plating around the eye to suddenly explode and it roared in agony. Black smoke trailed from where the glowing red eye once was. It flapped its wings as it tried to retreat, and luckily for the beast it managed to, and it disappeared into the darkness for a while. Which gave the other Wyverns the chance to make their attack. Two of them unleashed their fire immediately, and the two Hunters closed their eyes as the fire got closer and closer.

“Hold on!” Emerald yelled, as she suddenly brought the Peregrine upwards, and just caused that cloud of fire to miss them. She spun the ship round and the two Hunters got thrown into the ceiling, but thanks to the cable it kept them inside. The Wyverns pursued them constantly as Emerald road the walls to avoid the fire as best she could, but the act was extremely dangerous. If that fire blows a hole in the walls, the whole tunnel ceiling will collapse and suddenly they will be trying to escape the ocean flooding into the entire tunnel.

Emerald spun the Peregrine upright once more, and the two of them landed back inside, until suddenly Coco’s cable loosened and caused her to suddenly get pulled out from the ship. She screamed, with actual horror as she held on for dear life. Right in front of her was one of the Wyverns, which was aggressively snapping its jaws at her. “I got you, Coco!” Kassius yelled, he reached out with his metal hand after sheathing Lash Equinox and caught the metal cable, and he started to reel her in. Coco grit her teeth together and she aimed her Chaingun as best she could, and started firing it at the Wyvern as soon as it opened its armoured jaws. But the inside of its mouth had no armour, so she unloaded into it with a bellow. The bullets shredded the internal muscle of its black mouth.

The Wyvern cried out in immense agony as the bullets cut deep, it shook its head and Velvet aimed her cannon at the neck of the Wyvern. She fired and the fire dust formed a shell like always, and sent the shell exploding into the throat of the monster. The shell exploded and caused the throat to be eviscerated, the head hung from loose sinew and it gargled as it crashed down towards the ground with a loud bang. More cracks started to spread through the underwater tunnel, making their perilous situation that much worse.

Kassius kept reeling Coco back into Peregrine whilst she kept firing back at the Grimm with fury in her yells. The Wyverns kept taking the hits, but since her rounds were mainly hitting the armour plating, she was merely keeping them at bay. Finally Kassius got her back into the ship and she
hugged him with relief, since she was so close to dying right there. “Thank the gods for you!” She cried out with relief.

“Let’s celebrate after we’re out of this damned tunnel! Got more coming!” He called out as the final Four started to get closer and closer. Cardin aimed his cannon and he fired a well placed shot towards the creature, which exploded into the side of the armoured spine of the creature. Huge white plates of armour broke off, black smoke bled from its open wound as it cried out, started to lose altitude due to the sudden impact of a fire dust shell. It snarled and let out a deafening roar, as it suddenly picked up on speed and went straight for him.

“Guys! This things gonna eat me!” He screamed as it went straight for him, but Velvet fired and hit it in the wing. The explosive shell caused the shoulder to shatter and the flesh to tear, and the beast roared in agony as the wing peeled clean off the body of the muscular beast. It plummeted down and went straight through one of the abandoned security checkpoints left behind. The old building exploded into rubble as it crashed through the bones that scattered the road.

Three more remained and they were not about to retreat. But deep down they knew that there was still the biggest of the six Wyverns that have attacked them to contend with, since it was still in the darkness, waiting for the right moment to make it’s next attack. Another one of the three Wyverns breathed fire from its open jaws at them, the flames burned across the wing that Velvet was attached to and she saw some of the pieces of metal start to melt and peel off. She fired and the round exploded into the leg of the creature. The leg came apart with ease, burned away but it kept coming, but luckily the shock of losing a limb caused the Wyvern to roar in anger and pain at the loss of a limb.

The Wyvern dove down slightly and suddenly ascended towards Velvet with open jaws to crush the pod and cannon she was in. She gasped and aimed the barrel down into the jaws of the creature as they opened up. She fired and the shell erupted inside of its jaws, which caused the cells of fire inside of the creature’s glands to explode in a fiery boom. The skull of the creature burst like a balloon, flames and black Grimm Smoke erupted from where its head once was. The long serpentine head drooped down and the beast plummeted down and crashed into the ground.

Two more Wyverns excluding the first which still had not been seen.

Kassius took Vulcan Nox and he fired two explosive rounds towards one of the advancing Grimm Wyverns as it let out a deafening roar, the rounds exploded against the side of its head. The fiery clash caused the flames to burn across its armoured jaw, it scorched the white bone and it snarled with anger, and blasted flames straight into one of the rear afterburners. The fire caused significant damage as the plates of metal burned and cracked from the extreme heat. Emerald grunted as she felt the shockwave, as one of the other Wyverns suddenly dug its clawed feet down into the roof of the ship. “The hell was that?” Kassius called out.

“Wyvern’s on us!” She yelled, and looked up with widened eyes as the Wyvern stared down into the cockpit at her, flames started to built up the throat of the creature as it stared at her viciously. Kassius narrowed his amber eyes, and then they burned hot as the cracks burned into his skin. Suddenly Hyde erupted from Kassius’ body and leapt off the Peregrine, and he landed onto the head of the Wyvern. He took his fist and pummelled the beast straight in the side of its head. He then grabbed it by the horns as it went to blast flames straight into the centre of the ship’s interior. He pulled the giant upwards, and suddenly leapt off it, and landed onto the back of the creature riding their ship. He grabbed onto the horns and pulled its head back so then it did not kill Emerald.

Instead…it blasted fire up into the ceiling of the tunnel. Hyde’s eyes widened from what he realised he just had to do, as the fire blew the concrete and stone apart. The water suddenly came pouring
down, crashed straight into the centre of the tunnel behind them, and started to flood the tunnel in
seconds. Emerald kept the Peregrine moving as fast as she possibly could, and her eyes widened
when she saw the light at the end of the tunnel.

After hours of travel, they finally saw light.

The Valerian Tunnel was simply shorter in length than the Mistralian one, but they now were
running out time with the whole tunnel about to be submerged. Hyde took his fist and he punched
straight into the open eye of the beast, so hard that he managed to puncture the skull matter and crush
the brain inside. The Wyvern’s roar faded away and Hyde leapt off, and faded back into Kassius’
body for safety. The Wyvern slumped and fell as it crumbled away into ashes and black smoke. The
last of the Wyvern reinforcements continued to get closer and closer, when Kassius fired both of his
Vulcan Nox bracers at the creature again, and this time it managed to blow the armour plating clean
off. Which gave Coco the chance she needed to let loose the barrels of her Chaingun, shredding the
skull down until it was dead. The beast fell silently into the ground, swiftly consumed by the wall of
water behind them.

The Last Wyvern was right behind them now, it roared furiously as it blasted more fire at them, and
Velvet looked at Cardin. “This thing isn’t giving up!” She yelled.

“I know! What’d we do to piss it off?” He laughed.

The Wyvern bellowed as it drew closer and closer, so they both aimed at its chest as it started to
build the flames within its chest. The red veins glowed brighter and brighter, and then they fired.
Two shells of condensed fire exploded into its chest and the impact launched the Wyvern back. It
roared with rage as it was swallowed by the raging wall of seawater behind them. “Yes! Great shot,
Velv!” Cardin cheered and she cheered too.

Kassius turned and he ran to the cockpit whilst Cardin and Velvet’s Pods were pulled back into the
Peregrine. The rear door closed as Emerald was pushing the ship to its limits to outrun the water at
this rate. They could move extremely fast but the speed of the water was astonishing. That was
because the whole cave was collapsing behind them after Hyde was forced to lift the Wyvern’s head
to save Emerald’s life. “We’ll be cutting it close.” Kassius said, and Emerald nodded her head.

“I’ve got a plan, but we won’t have enough fuel for the trip back if I do.” Emerald told them.

“We knew this could be a one way trip. Do it.” Kassius said to her, and everyone was in agreement.
They all sat down and strapped in, whilst Emerald started to charge up the afterburners so then they
could go supersonic levels of speed. The water was getting closer and closer. The thrusters now enter
the green and she pushed the throttle forward with all her might, and the afterburners blasted with
great force, and it sent them forward with such speed that the sound barrier breaks around them. The
sonic boom shattered the walls around them, but they kept ahead of the water.

Finally, they escaped, and shot out the other side, the water sprayed out the other side and they
finally arrived.

Ruby

Not far behind in terms of distance from Arkhonex…
Kassius’ end of the adventure was not the only one with such excitement, for on their journey through the silent and haunting Mistralian Tunnel, they all had been acting strange. Some of them would end up looking over their shoulder at times, or their hairs would stand on end. Raven felt spooked too, and she looked at all of them. “Guys…do you feel like something’s…”

“…watching us? Yeah I do.” Jaune agreed, as he rubbed his goose skin. Raven looked at the rear of their ship, the door has been completely shut as they felt this weird feeling. Raven hit the rear door’s button to open the ramp and she stared out, and her eyes widened with horror from what she saw. It made her heart skip a beat, and they all saw it this time as well.

There were shadows…

Hundreds of them.

Shadow People would be the best way to describe it, like the one Ruby saw. All were featureless and could be seen on the walls, shadows on the ground and walls and ceiling of the tunnel. Every single one of them, sprinting at full speed after them, able to keep up. “What the fuck?” Raven softly stammered, she had never seen anything like it before.

“AAH!” Penny screamed with shock and they all turned, to see one of these mysterious Shadows stood within the Prowler now. It stood completely motionless in the wall, and then it began to move. It shuffled unnaturally, almost vibrating. It approached the light switch, and the hand slowly rose towards it. As soon as the shadow passed over the button – it clicked.

Total darkness.

And they heard them now.

A bone chilling howl of screaming monsters could be heard now, the light had somehow drowned it out, and they could hear the droning rumble of hundreds of feet sprinting through the bones. Penny began to scream in terror as the entity attacked her, it bit and slash at her and she was terrified, and Ruby slammed her hand against the lights. “PENNY!” Ruby screamed with terror as soon as it happened.

Silence once again.

And the Shadow was still in there. Penny was still screaming in terror, covered it slashes and bites on her body, and she was in tears. “HELP ME! AH! PLEASE!” Penny thought it was still attacking her, but Ruby knelt down and held her hands.

“It’s okay!” Ruby assured.

“What the fuck are these things?” Qrow yelled and Ozpin’s eyes widened.

“The Shade…” He gasped, with disbelief.

The Shadow Person remained on the wall, and Jaune stabbed at it, but nothing happened. You cannot kill a shadow, and then it moved its hand towards the light again. “The light! Stay near the switch!” Jaune yelled, then darkness hit again, and that sickening constant roar returned. Jaune felt the cold hands dig into his wrist and the teeth bite down onto his shoulder as it jumped onto him with a horrifying roar. His aura was keeping it from ripping out his jugular, but his aura could only last so long. Suddenly he saw Milo emerge right in front of his face, just missed him and the teeth faded away, then the lights returned thanks to Kragen for hitting it in time.

Jaune grabbed his neck and he panted with relief, and Pyrrha hugged him. “Are you okay?” She
whimpered, and they all stood back to back whilst the pilots kept flying as best they could. They could not even see what it was that got aboard, and in truth – neither could they.

The Shade could not lay a finger on them or even show their true form when in the presence of any form of light. Which also meant they can only be killed in total darkness.

“What the hell are these things, guys? The Shade? Never heard of it!” Nora asked with worry, she held her trusty Magnhild tight as she backed up.

“Stay in the light, they cannot touch you.” Ozpin assured, for now they were surrounded by nothing but light and silence. But if another one of those things got aboard, they would be in real trouble. They all started to stare at their own shadows in fear.

“How far are we from the tunnel’s exit?” Ruby asked as she held Crescent Rose in her hands.

“Still can’t see light, but we’re close!” Ren called out to them.

“If they keep hitting the lights then we will never make it.” Kragen told them, and he held his staff tight with the Maidens shoulder to shoulder with him. Their eyes ignited but even all their power was nothing against this monstrosity. They kept coming, their shadows just kept sprinting across the walls, and then one of them jumped.

Suddenly the shadow person appeared within the Prowler and stared at them. It ran towards the light and they all got ready. “The light! Quick!” Pyrrha yelled, as the creature suddenly tackled her to the ground and started biting and slashing at her repeatedly. Kragen swung his cane and it struck both the Creature and poor Pyrrha by accident. Nora hit the lights, and silence once more. Pyrrha rubbed her cheek in pain, but her aura repaired her injury fast, and she returned back into the ring of family in arms. Ozpin even looked quite scared, and he had seen every monster in the book.

Even he had never seen them in person before.

They kept drawing nearer and nearer and started jumping again, and more than one started to appear within the confines of their ship. Another jumped aboard with a second behind it and Cinder formed an Obsidian Sword and she readied herself, then the lights went out again. She felt it rush into her and start biting viciously against the blade. She strained as she held it back, she could not even see what it looked like, all she saw were jet black jagged teeth. She held it back for as long as she could, when she forced herself forward and slashed her sword’s blade right through the face of the creature, so hard she managed to kill it instantly. The second attacked Penny again and she screamed with horror.

The poor girl’s main fear had always been one thing – the dark.

And now it was attacking her.

The Architect protected her though, as he grabbed it by the back of its head and threw it with all his might. He heard it shriek as it fell from the Prowler, so he engaged his night vision, but even with this on, all he saw where the shadows on the wall. Even that did not help him see the Shade.

They hit the lights and they could see once more, until more of them started appearing inside once more. These ones were inside the cockpit now, and when the lights went out, they went for Ren, and it clawed at his neck, his aura kept him safe but the constant strikes caused him to jolt, and every jolt made the Prowler start to shake. Nora growled and she reached out for the creature after hearing Ren’s grunts of pain, and she felt the shoulder of the creature. She pulled it towards her, but it turned and grabbed her, and it snapped at her face. She strained as she held it there, when Cinder punched
straight through the creature and pulled Nora back up to her feet.

Lights came back on.

It was a repetitive cycle, one that soon they would lose if they did not find a way to stop the onslaught of shadows.

Ruby looked at Kragen and he nodded as his silver eyes began to shine.

One Shadow Person, two, three, five, ten…

They started appearing in greater numbers every single second that passed them by. Ruby grabbed her eyepatch and she stared at the shadows sternly, her silver eye shimmered and the eye socket began to glow as well. The Shade went for the lights, and they all suddenly leapt towards them in the darkness. When suddenly both Kragen and Ruby unleashed the raw power of the Silver Eyes, they lit up the darkness of the tunnel. The howls of the Shade could be heard around them, so loud it burned into their minds.

But as their light dimmed...

…there was silence again.

Ozpin hit the lights and they looked around, and Raven stared back outside of the Prowler.

The Shade were gone, the Silver Eyes managed to destroy all of them, or at least most and the others fled. They all sighed with relief and Raven closed the ramp, end of the day the door would not have stopped them from getting inside. “Guys…the end of the tunnel…I can see it.” Ren sighed with relief as he stared ahead and saw the faint light. Everyone sat down, to catch their breath which they had so desperately deserved.

“I’ve…never seen any Grimm like that before.” Blake stammered, she luckily did not get grabbed by them during the attack, and Oscar was panting as he held his dagger in his hand.

“The Shade…” Ozpin told them. “I have never encountered them myself, very few have. I guess it’s because none ever return to tell the tale, I always thought they were just a myth. Grimm that hid as Shadows.” Ozpin explained as he sat there and they all chuckled.

“Man…Ozpin thinking something was a myth? That’s a first.” Jaune scoffed.

“I know…and I agree.” Ozpin chuckled in agreement.

“The reason why we have never seen them, is because they have to live in total darkness, even the faintest light would turn them into shadows. Night Vision and Thermal too. They cannot be seen to our eyes, they just watch us.” Kragen explained, due to the stories he heard of them as well. “In other words, they are a subterranean species of Grimm by the looks of things.”

“Not strong, but extremely ferocious. I’m guessing, that when Ezekiel Arc locked this tunnel, the Shade Must have found a way in, and massacred the people alongside the Oncoming Shadow.” Ozpin states as he leant against the wall and he sighed.

Ruby and Kragen both were recovering from using their Silver Eyes, the white energy trailed from her eye as she sat beside her boyfriend who helped put her eyepatch back on her, and he kissed her cheek. “Good thinking you two.” Ozpin congratulated.

“Yeah, thanks guys.” Jaune agrees and Ruby nodded her head.
The Light at the End

Both teams made their approach, and Ruby got up as they approached the light.

They all stared at the surrounding landscape, thick with forests and vegetation. Kassius’ team saw the same thing, trees swallowed almost everything around them. Ruby looked around and she smiled when she saw a tiny and adorable bunny sat in the field, and it looked up at their Prowler as it soared across the sky.

Ozpin, Yenna, Kragen and the Architect approached and they stared ahead, with anticipation. “You're not gonna wanna miss this.” The Architect said to them, with both excitement and fear.

They followed the hill of trees, and Kassius’ team followed the river that headed into what remained.

The clouds parted...

…and finally…they saw it.

The Long Lost City – of Arkhonex.

It expanded for miles, massive destroyed towers in the centre and thousands of buildings, buried by green and colourful plants. Nature completely reclaimed it all, the clouds soared above them, except for the tallest of them. The Spire, a massive needle shaped tower blown apart from time, ribs of rusted rebar hung out from within. It seemed to be endless, with massive destroyed walls that surrounded every single inch of it. And a dark shadowy landscape to the north, where dark clouds and dark purple energy surrounded it. Ruby, Cinder and Oscar saw it and it sent chills down their spine.

They know what that place is...

…it is Salem’s Sanctum.

But they were all caught and struck with awe, as they saw the Grid Like Districts that were left completely destroyed, cities built into the huge spikey mountains. Such an alien landscape with architecture totally different to anything they had ever seen before. They all stared at it with awe.

Ruby looked back at the four Arkhoni and saw their faces.

There was nothing but cold stern looks, or maybe even heartbreak. It would be easy to forget that this place was once their home.

Kassius’ team on the other hand soared across the Western Side of the city, across the River District where countless fished and the river connected to the ocean for so many people to head out, and connected to the Cove. They could see this destruction claimed by nature for miles.

They have finally made it to their destination.

Unaware, that they were expected.

Ruby’s Team suddenly saw a flash of light from within the city, and there was a thunderous bang, and a shell suddenly blew right past their Prowler. They all staggered from how close it was, and
their eyes widened as they saw Acolytes of Lien emerge from the streets, and a huge Anti-Air cannon built into one of the destroyed buildings. A weapon that would have taken at least two days to build.

There was no way they prepared that today.

They knew they were coming.

*Someone* told them, from their end.

The Cannon kept firing, and one of the shells exploded against the right wing, the wing shattered like glass and the fire engulfed the wing. The metal plated shattered and peeled off, causing it to drop in altitude. “Shit! We’re going down!” Ren yelled as he tried to pull it back up, and the Architect pushed past to help him. But as the Prowler started to come apart, the hull tore clean off and Penny gasped.

Everything became weightless for her and Ruby screamed as she reached out for her. “PENNY!” She screamed as Penny got sucked out from the Prowler and fell into the woods somewhere. The Prowler span out of control.

“Gonna be a hard landing!” The Architect yelled, and they fell towards the district, and crashed straight into the roads, and into the buildings. The wings broke off and shattered thousands of year old buildings in the crash.

Kassius’ team were just as unlucky, as watching them from nearby, was Salem. She stood atop her Wyvern that was hiding nearby the exit of the Tunnel. She smirked, for it was her that sent those Wyverns in with her King Wyvern so then they would bring them down. She smirked as she stared at their Peregrine.

“Foolish boy.” She said, her red eyes glowed and her Wyvern suddenly took off towards the Peregrine and Emerald’s eyes widen.

“Oh come on, what now?” Emerald asked, and she looked back.

“FUCK! It’s Salem!” Cardin roared when he saw her face atop that massive Wyvern that could be recognised anywhere after it’s attack on Beacon years ago. It suddenly blasted fire with crackling electricity within it into their Peregrine. It burned into the hull and started to melt the metal with ease.

“Oh, great! That’s REALLY ruined my day!” Kassius yelled in anger, but Salem kept blasting at them, even firing dark magic down into them as well. She blasted bolts of black and red lightning down into their aircraft as well.

“You think she’s just dicking with us?” Coco asked as she staggered around and Kassius double took at her when the fire started burning through the Peregrine’s whole body.

“NO COCO! THIS FEELS LIKE A PRETTY SINCERE ATTEMPT ON MY LIFE!” Kassius yelled back through the roaring Dragon’s flames. The lights began to flash red and Emerald’s eyes widen.

**EJECT**.

**EJECT**

**EJECT**.
“Peregrine’s dead! We need to get out of here now!” But before they could even make a break for
the exit, Salem’s King Wyvern suddenly ploughed right through the Peregrine, so hard it caused it to
explode like a grenade. The five of them got split up in the blast. Kassius was on his own again with
just Hyde, Coco fell with Emerald and Cardin with Velvet. They all fell in different directions and
plummeted into the woods.

Salem’s Wyvern soared across the sky and roared terrifyingly.

Someone was feeding the enemy information.

That much was certain now.

The question – was who?
The smell of burning fuel filled her senses where she laid, and she groaned, her side was in great pain. Some large black and blue bruises were imprinted upon her body as she sat upright. She winced, and grabbed her side, before her head started to throb. Most likely a minor concussion, but in the grand scheme of things she was likely that a headache was all she suffered from. Her head was pounding heavily and as she looked around, she saw the destroyed remnants of their Prowler imbedded into one of the ancient Arkhoni Towers. She desperately looked around, and she wanted to call their names.

Oscar! Penny! Blake! Jaune! Qrow!

So many names, but she caught her words before she could even say them, when she heard alien voices. More Mercenaries, they were waiting for them and had sent in a retrieval force. She heard the heavy footfalls of a mechanical suit of armour, and it made the ground shake. She crawled behind the rubble as she felt her aura still broken around her body. She touched the open wound on her forehead where the hot sticky blood was leaking from. “Find them, they definitely survived that crash. And look for the MK V, we spotted her fall from the ship as it broke apart.” One of the Mercenaries ordered as he walked around the area, and they all kept their eyes peeled.

Ruby was completely defenceless, she could not find Crescent Rose anywhere, and she was split up from the others in the crash. As soon as they collided into one of the ancient towers the Prowler tore itself apart, the fire melted the steel and the engine exploded. They all survived, but she was too far away to help them. So Ruby narrowed her Silver Eye and she pulled her red hood over her head and she stayed low, and drew the only weapon she had on her. Her trusty knife sheathed onto the sheath that was clipped to her boot. She held the blade tight, the glow from the fire gleamed off the steel as she slowly leaned round the remnants of the wing.

It hurt to see the Prowler in this condition, she was actually starting to like the huge aircraft, she wanted to hold onto it for longer. But it was a matter of time before the Acolytes of Lien upgraded their scanners to detect their signature, so then they could shoot them down. If that was what happened after all, she was out of the loop just like the rest of them. The sky was dark from a thick layer of grey clouds and she could hear the thunder that clapped after the lightning that crackled across the sky. The rain fell suddenly and all around them, the soldiers were searching every nook and cranny.

Ruby looked at the mud she was treading in, and she had an idea, the mud could be her best ally. So she set her knife down and she rolled around in the mud, despite how disgusting it was, it would prove to be her best ally in this situation. It stuck to her fast, it made her feel so heavy as well as she rolled across the floor. It got stuck in her hair, but she tied it back into a ponytail after she pulled her hood over her head again to keep her face and mud hidden. Her hood was darkened thanks to the mud too.

She picked up the knife and she held it in her hands, as she snuck round and hid amongst the muddy bushes. She waited as one of the soldiers walked towards her position, a heavily armed assault rifle in his hands. “Clear.” The soldier said.

Think again.
Ruby suddenly emerged behind him and she dug her blade into the soldier’s throat, right where the armour plating was open. She sawed away into his throat, his red claret sprayed out and he choked in agony, as she pulled him back into the shadows. She ripped the blade from his throat and she set him down onto the mud, and she looked round the corner. The armoured suit was not a Juggernaut like she expected – it was an Acolyte of Lien Paladin. It walked slowly around the area, massive guns loaded as it stomped across the remnants of this ancient Civilisation. Ruby did not even have the time to admire the city, the Acolytes were crawling every inch of the street that she crashed into.

But luckily Ruby was never afraid to use Guerrilla Tactics against her enemies, so she kept moving around the area, she refused to stay in one place. The huge Paladin was not all they had, they clearly had a lot more handy tech given to them after they took over Atlas. They now had Drones and more Atlesian Knights, all of which had been modified from their original white and black colour scheme to Black, Red and Gold. They marched around the area to search for any survivors. “If we find them…can I have the girl? Y’know, the Silver Eyed Girl?”

“Huh?” One of the soldiers asked the creep, Ruby stared at the soldiers and she narrowed her muddy eyes, and she gasped. Some of them had prison tattoos on them, she knew this from the one they visited, Tyrian’s old home. They all had the same tattoos, five dots – four of them make a square and the dot in the middle. The square represented the prison walls, and the dot in the middle was the individual who bore the mark. Only those who were in maximum security prisons would have these tattoos.

She did not know Ortega very well, but she knew he would never enlist people like that. Mazen might have done but it was becoming clearer and clearer ever day that passed them by that the White Fang was getting closer and closer towards a major collapse.

Ruby looked ahead and they were not looking at her, so she moved up, and she took cover underneath some pieces of metal. She snuck under and she hid in the mud and shattered plants underneath. She held her knife tight as she waited, she felt her bruises throb every now and then, but she had to wait. The soldiers were pacing back and forth, then she heard the rest of their conversation. “I like ‘em young…I wanna have a taste.” The soldier stated, until one of the others suddenly punched that soldier in the face so hard that he fell onto the ground with a heavy thud.

“Ortega may not be in charge anymore, but if you dare rape her…I’ll kill ya.” The soldier snarled at him, and the rapist scoffed, he got up and spat at his feet, before he stormed off, he picked up his helmet as well. Ruby remained there and the soldier who defended Ruby walked in her direction. For his honour, Ruby decided to spare him, but swiping him off his feet so he would crash into the mud. She punched him in the face hard, so hard it sent him to sleep. She slid out from the mud, and she got up quick and rushed past the other soldiers that were in the area. She jumped up and slid down the broken wing, which was embedded into one of the buildings.

As she slid down, she jumped off and crashed down into the mud beneath her with a wet splash. She was fast to get out of the light when the soldiers turned and they aimed in that direction. All they saw were some petals on the ground and they slowly advanced. “Rose Petals…think it’s her?” One of the Mercenaries asked as he walked towards the wall of muddy vines. Ruby stared at the soldiers, and she emerged suddenly behind one of them. She lodged the knife into his throat, and spun him round, with ripped the knife straight through his throat and caused the blood to come hissing out with great force. The other soldier span round with a gasp, but Ruby was already leaping at him.

She tackled him into the mud and she drove the knife right up his jaw and twisted it, silenced the soldier before he could have alarmed the third soldier who was walking around the point of which Ruby was hiding. Ruby pulled the knife out and the blood sprayed from his open neck, and onto her cheek. She slid across the mud, she was getting absolutely covered as the ran and thunder obscured
her. The soldier could not even hear the commotion of his allies being butchered the way they were. Ruby stayed low, and she picked up the soldier’s sub machine gun, with one hand holding a knife and the other a S.M.G, she waited for the soldier to pass round. He had his rifle raised and she snuck up towards him.

He was not like the others, he did not have any armour on whatsoever, for he was just a thug. He wore the black, red and gold suit and hat with red glasses that Junior’s Men had. Sadly Junior lost quite a lot of his men after he joined Ortega when the Acolytes split apart, since they never had much respect for him in the first place due to how he got his arse handed to him by Yang Xiao Long.

Ruby threw the gun when he saw her, and it clattered right into his chest, so she sprinted towards him and jumped at him with a screech. She slammed her knees down onto his chest and she stabbed him in the ribs over and over again until he died. But even after he was dead, she just kept stabbing, so much blood was covering her face and her hands. She could not even catch onto the fact that Roman was over her shoulder right now with a smirk on his face. “Yes…that’s right. Let it out…make them suffer.” Roman whispered into her ear, and she flinched, and slashed across Roman’s chest to make him die. But the apparition merely staggered back.

“Get out of my head! GO AWAY!” She screamed with anguish, the lightning flashed and thunder cracked above her as she stood in the icy cold rain that fell around them in the flames and the smoke.

“C’mon, red…let’s see what you got.” Roman chuckled sinisterly as he suddenly sprinted towards her. She felt his hands grab onto her, but she was not staring at the puddle, to see that it was another Acolyte of Lien Mercenary in reality. But she never saw him, she only saw her enemy, the monster that was haunting her. Roman took his fist and punched her in the cheek, hard, that it made her head fuzzy as she staggered back. The man rugby tackled her into the mud and started pounding his fist into her face over and over again, since her knife was thrown from her hand. He broke her nose with the first punch, blood splattered across her face and into her mouth. She grunted as he punched and kicked her. “I expected more from you!” Roman laughed, he crouched down and grabbed Ruby by the throat and swung her round, slammed her against the wall of broken metal. She grunted as he slammed her head up against it, he pushed her face hard towards the jagged molten metal where the fire was still burning hot.

“No…” She strained as she pushed her hands against Roman’s face.

“This…might hurt a little.” Roman strained as he pushed her towards the flames, and she grit her teeth and she swung her leg upwards and between the legs of the man who was attempting to kill her. He staggered back and Ruby swung round, and collided her whole forearm into the soldier’s face. For a split second she saw the Acolyte of Lien, but he grabbed her once again by her core and he lifted her off the floor and slammed her down into the mud. She could see Roman again now, and the man grabbed her cheek and he pushed her face into the mud, in order to suffocate her. She kicked and tried to scream, but all she could taste was the mud her face was being forced into.

Don’t let him hurt you!

You cannot die, don’t let this be the end!

Kill him Ruby!

Kill him Ruby!

“Kill him Ruby!” Roman yelled at her, and she yelled right back, and she wrapped her legs around the soldier’s arm, and twisted. The loud crunch of bone in his elbow was sickening, she twisted the arm and forced the soldier into the dirt as well. But as she went for the knife, he grabbed her boot
and pulled her back. She got up and kicked him in the face, but he got up anyway, and instead he sent his boot right up in between her legs. The shock of pain was absolutely agonizing, so bad it nearly made her throw up. The soldier punched her in the stomach once more, and he swung his fist into her face as well. The man was much larger than her, and she could see him now, instead of her hallucinations.

He was definitely three times larger than her with a shaved head, bruised and cut up from already fighting her. Ruby spat out blood from her mouth, since her nose was still bleeding. Ruby staggered and the huge man relocated his arm, and he went to attack her again, but she ducked down and sent her fist up his jaw again, which caused him to stagger. He growled as he bit his tongue, his blood started to pour from the wound but he picked up a piece of metal and swing it right across Ruby’s face, so hard that it threw her onto the ground with great force. She yelped in pain, and the blood trickled out from her open wound.

She stared across the muddy terrain as the man walked towards her, and she heard Roman Torchwick once more. “You can’t fight against it, little red. You know you can’t, you never can… you will fail. It is all you will ever be remembered for.” Roman stated as Ruby saw her knife in the mud ahead of her, so she crawled towards it.

Until the man kicked it away and he yanked her up by her hair and he punched her three times in the face. She cried out in pain as he kept hitting her, over and over again. She reached out, and found a rock.

She took said rock, and slammed it right into the side of the soldier’s head so hard that it broke the skin. He toppled off her with a grunt and she got on top of his body. He screamed, but as she brought the rock down, she kept seeing his face. Roman was laughing, and with every strike she saw different faces the more crushed and collapsed the skull became. The blood started to cover her hands as she pounded his head into oblivion.

Roman.

Tyrian.

Fennec.

Dew.

All their faces kept flashing before her eyes, and she slammed the rock one last time, until a pair of hands wrapped around her and pulled her away from the corpse. “Ruby!” Qrow called to her as he pulled her back.

“GET OFF ME!” She shrieked, as she went to punch him in the face, but he held her arms and he looked right into her silver eye, her eyepatch was hanging off after the clip got detached from how hard she was beaten by the soldier. Covered in bruises and bleeding, he looked right into her.

“Hey…hey…it’s me…it’s Qrow…” He whispered to her and caressed her cheek with a smile.

“He tried to…” He sniffled, and finally her rage turned to tears as she buried her head into her biological father’s chest. He held her close and kissed the top of her head as he whispered.

“Oh baby…” He softly say.

And then…the words just slipped from her mouth…but she really meant it.

“Dad…” She cried, and Qrow’s eyes widened when he heard her say that. He looked at her again,
and he saw her pain, both physical and mental. So many hallucinations had been eating away at her for so long. He saw so much of her mother in her beautiful face, and all he ever wanted was for her to be happy. He never wanted Ruby to follow in his footsteps, neither did Tai…

But she’s alive…which meant he did not fail her.

He had not failed Taiyang.

He did not fail – Summer.

“We gotta go now… I found the others, come on…” He said to her and Ruby nodded her head as Qrow helped her up, and they left the soldier’s caved in skull behind. Ruby picked her knife back up and eventually they found Crescent Rose scattered from the crash.

They left together – and for the first time – they both truly felt like father and daughter.

Coco

Where Ruby was forced to kill her own kind, Coco had a far less troubling threat – but that did not make it any less dangerous. She was taking cover behind the trees that grew into the city, the rain still fell hard around her as her hair blew in the wind. The storm was loud and violent around her, lightning sparked and crackled, and thunder boomed monstrously. The sky was alive, especially when she peered round the tree and saw her.

Salem.

She was still riding the massive King Wyvern, it roared terrifyingly as it descended through the storm, rain fell from its tough black scales and wings. The flames trailed from its parted jaws, and Salem stood atop the Wyvern’s massive saddle and spines. She held onto one of the spines as she looked around the remnants of Arkhonex for their targets. The Knights Bannermen were everywhere with some Grimm as well, they had weapons in their grasp from different times, snarling in broken languages. The Grimm were patrolling, they were tearing up the area to find any signs of life.

Then finally Salem spoke. “They are alive! Find them and kill them, my children!” Salem demanded, and then the Wyvern roared so loud that Coco had to cover her ears it was so loud. It nearly deafened her, and she ducked down as the huge Wyvern took off, it glided over the buildings and toppled over one of the towers in the process. Completely unaware of the building it had just slammed into, the Dragon left the district of which Coco was hiding inside of.

And now…she was alone with the Grimm.

She looked around and she could not stop hearing that recurring thought in the back of her mind.

Velvet…where’s Velvet…I didn’t see where she landed…oh gods…if she has been hurt…

Then she heard the yelling Knights Bannerman Battle-Wagon as it marched with its men, it held a huge double ended scythe in its hands as it stood tall. Sharp jagged molten steel metal covered its body with bones inside, burning red eyes and a thick black smoke surrounded its cursed body. “Et omnes qui reliqui fuerint inuestigandum! Venabuntur eos nullus relinquat vivit!” It was a tongue she could not even begin to translate, and without the Bracelet of which Kassius was given by the Architect, she would have no clue of what that Knights Bannerman just ordered to the Grimm.
She pushed her sunglasses up and flicked the long strand of caramel coloured hair from her eyes that was dripping wet. End of the day…she did not care.

She turned and a smirk grew on her face as the Knights Bannermen stared directly at her. “ARE YOU READY FOR A PAR-TAY?” She called out, as the handbag transformed in her hands and formed into the huge Bronze and Gold Chaingun, the many barrels spun round and the bullets loaded into the chamber. The Knights Bannerman Battle-Wagon pointed at her and yelled through the bony jaws,

“Abscinde illam seorsum!” The Knights Bannerman bellowed, once a Congregation of Dawn Follower, now nothing more than a corrupted shadow of such a thing.

Coco held the trigger down, and the Chaingun blasted a storm of bullets towards her enemies as they charged towards her. The two Beowulves that ran right at her, were shredded instantly from the sheer amount of bullets that came their way. Limbs came flying off and their skulls became utterly obliterated. Whereas the Knights Bannermen were smarter than the Beasts, and one of them had a shield. It pushed the shield forwards and blocked her incoming firepower, and Coco narrowed her eyes behind her sunglasses. “Oh yeah? So that’s how it’s gonna be, huh?” She asked as one of the Knights’ Bannermen vaulted over the other and kicked her in the face. The impact sent her tumbling back, but she managed to land on her feet eventually.

The Fashionista pushed her sunglasses back over her nose and she closed the Chaingun back down into its Handbag form as the Bannerman charged towards her with an axe. She ducked down and dodged the incoming attack, which gave her the great opportunity to swipe the entity off its feet with one swing, and knocked it down to the ground. She jumped and pushed herself off the wall behind her and she slammed the bag downwards and into the helmet of the Spectre of Grimm. The impact broke it apart and it roared in agony as it collapsed into itself, sent back to the Charred Forest.

The beings of pure darkness kept coming after her, so she stepped back to dodge the hard and fast swings from the Knights’ Bannermen as they came towards her. She ducked and veered aside from each attack, before she shoulder charged the Bannerman and swung her bag over her head and into the side of one’s helmet. It cracked the steel and caused it to stagger from the sudden attack. It roared in anger, a metallic and demonic scream all the way through as it grabbed her by the throat. She strained as it did so and it took its sword and stabbed down at where her stomach was.

She rolled aside and jumped towards one of the pieces of wreckage around her and she leapt forward, and slammed into its chest. The two of them crashed down into the mud and she crushed the helmet into the ground with one stomp. The Knights’ Bannerman collapsed, but instead of watching the spectacle of a Corrupted Spirit being sent back to the Hellish Realm of which it came from, she took her handbag and threw it with great force, so hard it bounced off the helmet of the Bannerman and it returned back into her hand. She kicked the Bannerman’s knee so hard it brought it down to one knee, all so then she could swing the bag upwards and knock it up into the air. As it fell back down, she jumped and she twirled through the air, and swung her boot downwards with great force, so hard that it crashed down into the ground with a loud thud.

Suddenly the Bannerman Battle-Wagon leapt towards her and spun its double-ended scythe through its fingers, which slashed across her aura and knocked her down into the dirt. Coco looked up, her eyes impaired with mud – or her sunglasses were at least – and she closed them and put them into her breast pocket. The Bannerman paced back and forth, dragging its long scythe through the mud as it glared at her with those burning red eyes.

“Reliqua autem comburet igni?” The Bannerman snarled as it paced back and forth in front of her, and she scoffed at it.
“Buddy, I don’t have a fucking clue of what you just said.” Coco scoffed and the Bannerman growled at her, and it spun the scythe once more, before it leapt forward and slashed at her repeatedly. Every time it brought the blade down, it brought the other down as well. Coco rolled back and she blocked the incoming blows as quickly and as well as she could. Until it spun round and slammed it straight into her chest. The attack sent her flying back into the mud, which ruined her clothing and winded her. Luckily for her aura, that was all that happened, otherwise that blade would have punctured straight through her and killed her instantly.

She got up and she scoffed. “Alright…so that’s how it’s gonna be.”

“Silentium!” The Bannerman yelled as it charged towards her, but then she suddenly formed her Chaingun and unleashed all the barrels onto the Bannerman, and it started to spin its long double ended scythe through its fingers, deflecting every single incoming bullet that was headed its way. Some of them went ricocheting off into the distance. But as she kept firing, suddenly something wrapped around the scythe of the Bannerman. It flinched when it saw the green sickle hook onto it, when suddenly it got yanked from its hands and swung all the way round the area and slammed straight into its chest.

The Bannerman grunted as it fell back, and ripped the weapon from its own chest. It yelled to the skies. “Auxilia! Perdere omnes!” The Bannerman yelled, and Coco turned and her eyes widened as she saw Silent Judgement swing back into Emerald’s hands. Coco never thought she would be relieved to see the thief, and they both went charging towards the Bannerman, until suddenly a huge black Nevermore descended from the sky with a roar. It launched feathers down toward them, but luckily it was not Death and a normal one. The white bones and markings made that very clear. Emerald slashed her long chained sickles towards the feathers and cut them down before they could even reach her, whilst Coco shot them out of the sky.

The massive Crow banked around one of the ancient towards and its shadow loomed through the lightning and the clouds. It suddenly came diving towards them once more, and Emerald threw both of her sickles and she launched herself towards the nevermore like a Ballista would fire a bolt. She twisted through the air and she dug her curved blades into the wing of the beast, and the Nevermore released a chilling shriek of pain as she cut through the muscle and the thick layer of feathers which covered its body. It cried out as it began to descend, slamming the same wing that broke off from the collision, and crashed into the ground with great force. The soil became upturned and it slowly came to a stop with a deep groan. But it was not dead yet, it still had some fight in it, and it snapped its black beak at Emerald on its torn shoulder.

But as soon as it goes to attack Emerald, Coco unleashes hellfire onto the beast, the thousands of bullets shred through the beak and its skull with ease, blowing off portions of its cavity in seconds. It groaned in pain as it collapsed to the ground, and crumbled away into dust. Emerald stood beside Coco as the Bannerman got back up and spun the Scythe through its fingers. “Good to see you in one piece.” Emerald said to her, and Coco nodded to her.

“Right back at ya.” Coco replied.

The Bannerman snarled and it lunged towards them once more, and it slashed the double ended scythe with great speed. Emerald blocked and parried the incoming strikes whilst Coco started firing onto the entity. It roared in pain as she blows it apart, and the singularity collapses inside of its body, devouring the armour, smoke and bone into oblivion. The two of them were finally in the clear as they looked around, and there were no more Grimm of any form skulking around the area.

Coco and Emerald both sheathed their weapons and turned to one another. “Have you seen anyone else? Velvet, Kassius, Cardin?” She asked with worry in her voice.
“Nothing, Salem did a number on us. Split us up, I saw them all get scattered.” Emerald said to her.

“Do you have a rough idea of where they could be?” Coco inquired.

“Kinda…it’ll take a while to find them though.” Emerald stated, and they both pondered.

“Well, Ozpin and the Headmasters always had the same lesson in scenarios like this. Find a recognisable landmark, everyone should find each other there.” Coco muttered as she looked around and Emerald wondered.

“Well…I did see this old Fortress nearby. Must have been the Fort for this section of the city, considering how big it is.” Emerald assumed, since she knew the structure of cities and locales of military like the back of her hand after how many cities she had robbed people in.

“Well…let’s hope that if they’re still alive, they’ll head there.” Coco agreed and the two of them set off.

But these two have some shaky background…especially since it was Emerald who messed with Coco’s head.

Ruby

They both walked through the street of the ancient city. The storm was beginning to subside around them, but the cloud layer was still rather thick. Ruby and Qrow both sat down on some old overgrown rubble and Qrow pulled out a cloth from his pocket and he started wiping the mud off her face and off her clothes. He saw the cuts and bruises she got from her brutal fight, her nose had already been reset thanks to her aura recovering pretty quickly outside of combat.

“Look at the state of you…got mud everywhere.” He chuckled as he cleaned her up, he never did get the chance to be a real father for her – his semblance was always too much of a danger for her safety. No matter how much he wished he could have raised her with Summer…things could have been different. Maybe Taiyang wouldn’t have hated him as much as he did back when he had to live with Summer, even though she never loved him…not like how she loved Qrow Branwen.

Ruby looked at her knees whilst he cleaned her up and she sniffled, she was used to pain and things being ugly…what upset her was how she killed him. She once shied away from killing people, or at least she tried to, but she still killed lots of people back in the earlier days. It scared her, it scared her so bad since she really started to believe that maybe she had more in common with her enemies than she wanted to accept.

Qrow looked at Ruby and he gently lifted her gaze with his thumb under her chin, and she looked at him with her only eye. Every time he saw the eyepatch it saddened him, he promised he would keep her safe. And look at her now, covered with scars in different areas of her body, and her mind scarred worst of all. He gently kissed her forehead and he got her back up. “C’mon, kiddo.” He said to her, and they both walked across the torn apart streets.

Ruby finally started to look around at the place, she saw some of amazing architecture designed by none other than the Architect himself. The buildings were much larger than they were back at their home and other cities. They were not skyscraper sized, those buildings were in the centre of the city, but these seemed more like houses for people. Every single one of them were quite large, and
considering the fact that the city fell two thousand years ago, it was quite impressive to see these buildings were still standing today. Even though there was a massive attack, the skeletons of this ancient civilisation still stood strong.

Ruby and Qrow did not really know how to interact outside of a Uncle Niece scenario, and it was not merely down to the fact that Ruby saw Taiyang as her father, but also because neither ever experienced one another’s company in such a way before. It seemed quite awkward, and Ruby did not even think of calling him “Dad” the way she did… but… it was the way he found her, the way he calmed her down, and the way he held her close, gave her a shoulder to cry on. It was the same thing that Taiyang would do for her, back when she had her hallucinations and episodes, if Oscar was not there, or if Yang was not there – Taiyang would have been.

He always knew how to calm her, and it seemed the same went for Qrow. All it would take to calm Ruby down from her psychotic episodes would be to hold her close, and promise her that it would all be okay. Finally Ruby spoke as she passed some of the pieces of rubble left behind from the Fall of Arkhonex. “The others…where are they?” She asked him with worry in her voice, since she wanted to see her boyfriend.

“They’re fine, we were all still inside the ship when you got pulled out.” Qrow said to her and Ruby looked at him with a worried eye.

“Penny?” She asked, and Qrow shook his head.

“We haven’t seen her, she may have found them when I went out looking for you.” Qrow said to her, and Ruby wrung her small delicate hands with worry for her friend’s safety. She got pulled out from the Prowler as it came apart on their… landing. She could have landed anywhere… she could be hurt.

“How did you find me?” She asked him, and he chuckled.

“Well, followed your example. Look for rose petals and sooner or later I’d find you.” Qrow chuckled as he looked at her, and he held one of her petals in his fingers. Ruby chuckled as well, since that meant he must have been close by when she woke up. She was lucky she did not get captured when she was unconscious. Would have made things very easy for Vir Nominis Umbra.

“Thank you…” She softly said, and Qrow chuckled.

“I think you had it pretty well handled, taught you well.” Qrow said, he simply wanted her to feel better with his jokes, but he knew that the way she killed that soldier…it was not like her. She had been getting worse every single day that passed them by.

It scared them… scared them to see where her violent inner demons would lead her.

“I…If it weren’t for you, I don’t think I would have stopped…” She said as she stared at the blood on her hands. Qrow stopped and he looked back at her and she sighed. “I’m messed up.”

“No. You’re not, Ruby. Everyone lets loose every now and then, we have to take out our anger.” Qrow explained.

“I crushed his skull with a rock.” Ruby reminded, then Qrow nodded his head.

“Your mother had a rage in her too, y’know.” He revealed and Ruby looked at him with confusion. “Summer was very calm most of the time, but if you got on her bad side, then my the Gods have mercy on you. One time I found her in a position like yourself, we were tracking a Serial Killer… he enjoyed murdering children and used their bodies to create these messed up… I don’t even know
what to call them…I guess messages to their parents.” Qrow revealed and Ruby even got angry at just hearing that. “You mother could never bare seeing a child cry, so seeing one murdered in such a horrible way…well she snapped. When we found him, she let out all her anger on him. She beat him to death and left him a bloody mess…forensics nearly could not identify him.” Qrow explained to her.

Ruby stared at Qrow and he gently wiped a bit of mud he missed from under her eye, off her skin. “You’re not messed up, taking out pent up anger is not messed up. Everyone does it.” He told her, and she looked past him to see Roman smirking at her with his arms crossed.

“My mom didn’t see my past enemies though.” Ruby said and she walked ahead of Qrow and he stood there and sighed. He reached out for her but she just kept walking, so he followed her. He wanted to have a proper fatherly relationship with his Daughter, but she was sadly broken inside.

But just because something is broken – it does not mean it cannot be repaired.

Ruby kept moving forward, it was all she knew how to do, to keep moving ahead of the darkness. But sometimes it was difficult, sometimes she would trip and some of that darkness would fall over her. She knew what would trigger these episodes of hers, the immense violence and rage, it was all linked to her inner emotions. Anger, Sadness, Fear – all of which tend to have some kind of effect. In different ways though, her rage would make her become violent, her depression could make her see the people she loved who are dead now. And her fear would give her terrifying hallucinations, nightmares and memories of her painful past.

It all depended on the situation.

As Ruby walked, the hallucination of Roman Torchwick walked alongside her and he chuckled sinisterly. Qrow walked behind her, even though she knew Roman was not real, he seemed so real that she expected Qrow to attack him. “So you finally let loose again…ooh the taste of that desire for killing is oh-so sweet isn’t it? You should really let me have a crack at it some time, it was entertaining watching you do it…but you could have done some more.” Roman chuckled, but Ruby did not even give Roman a look, she just pushed through the bushes.

He disappeared from her side and appeared sat atop the remnants of a house, sat on the collapsed rubble. “Do you see what I mean now? You and I? We’re not so different.” Roman chuckled.

“You are just like me.” Tyrian’s voice also spoke and he was stood round the corner, and she jolted from the fear of it. She staggered slightly, something that Qrow noticed. He could not see any of the dead foes stood around the little one he loved, and all he wanted to do was hold her and keep her safe. But when it came to hallucinations, you could never hide them from her.

“I’m not…”

“Ruby?” He asked her.

“Look at your hands – see that dry blood that stains them?” Roman asked her as he pointed to her small hands, and she saw it all. The dry blood that was under her fingernails, that stuck into her fingerprints like dirt. It was everywhere and she started to rub her hands, and it would never come off.

“You’ll never get it off.” Dew also said, and she turned with a gasp to see the Huntress she butchered back at Vacuo. “You killed me in cold blood…”

“I didn’t want to!” She cried out, and Qrow reached out to her, but when Ruby stared at him she saw
someone else, she saw Fennec, and he was stabbing at her with his Spiralled Dagger. “GET AWAY!” She yelled as she aimed her rifle at Qrow, completely unaware that it was him. It shocked Qrow to see how suddenly these episodes can happen, she was fine earlier, and as soon as she walked ahead, they all started appearing once more. Her emotions may cause them to appear, but sometimes they could appear completely out of the blue.

It was why she was having to take her medication for her hallucinations and Psychosis, because she and Oscar could be having Dinner, and suddenly she would be sat at the table with Roman. Or Tyrian.

“You think yourself so much better than us, but you’re no better. Your worse, at least we accepted what we were.” Roman said as he approached her with a grin on his face.

“You’re a murderer.” Dew snarled.

“A liar.” Fennec hissed as Ruby dropped Crescent Rose in panic as she pressed her hands to her temple, she dug her nails into her hair and cried out.

“A monster.” Tyrian snarled, suddenly her eyes ignites and she blasted a pillar of silver light into the sky as she screamed with anguish and terror. The silver light parted the clouds and she collapsed, right into Qrow’s arms. He held her and he shook her, but she fell unconscious.

“Ruby!” He called out to her, she was out of it, the sudden burst of silver light drained her completely. Qrow was scared, and he looked around, until he stared ahead, and saw the source of this fear.

Of her hallucinations.

The Knight of Fear was stood down the street from them, his eyes glowed bright gold as he glared at them. He did not say a word, he just smirked and he walked away from them. His mere presence instilled another fear in Ruby’s mind to give her another psychotic episode. It was easy to forget that the Knights of Grimm’s curses all gave out the aura of negative emotion to those around them.

Ruby was still unconscious in Qrow’s arm, when he turned after hearing the sound of a twig snap. He spun round with Ruby in his arms, and he saw them. More Acolytes of Lien, Stalkers that emerges from their invisibility enhancements in their armour, and rifles all trained on them both. He could not beat them all, and one slammed the stock of his rifle into Qrow’s head. He collapsed to the ground and it all went dark.

A few moments later…

He came to, and he was on his knees with everyone else. Ruby was awake again, she looked drowsy, she must have just come to as well. Around them, were the others. Blake, Jaune, Pyrrha, Oscar – everyone else was here. Even the two Maidens and Ozpin were here, which meant that if they managed to get captured, that meant that they must have that Shadow Dust in their guns which could kill them instantly, even with their auras up.

They were evenly matched by the soldiers in terms of numbers, but they could not risk trying to free themselves with this guns to their heads. The Captain paced back and forth with his finger to the comm-piece in his ear. “We got them sir, all of them. Silver Eyed Girl, Ozpin – all of them.” The Captain said, and they faintly heard the voice on the other side.

“Good, keep them in custody. If some of them try and escape, kill one of them that we don’t need. The MK V for instance.” Kelham ordered, then the Captain stammered.
“Uh…well we couldn’t find that one, sir. She got thrown from the ship as it crashed.” The Captain told him and Kelham sighed.

“It’s unlikely she would have survived the landing. Keep them alive.” Kelham ordered.

“Yes sir.” The Captain replied and the soldier walked around, so Nora glowered at him.

“Hey!” She yelled, when suddenly she got punched in the back by one of the soldiers behind her, and Ren turned suddenly and yelled.

“Watch it!” Ren yelled, when the gun suddenly got aimed directly at his face, the soldier looked like he really wanted to escape.

“I wanna talk to you!” Nora strained as she got back up and the Captain sighed.

“What?” The Captain groaned.

“How come you got a bunch of Convicts in your military? I get why the White Fang did it, they needed the numbers. But you boys don’t…” She chuckled and the Captain scoffed.

“Well we wouldn’t if it weren’t for that traitorous bastard taking half our forces.” The Captain foolishly told her, and Blake smiled softly, since she knew exactly what Nora was doing. Even Ozpin softly chuckled, proud of how clever his students are.

“What do you mean? Who betrayed you?” Blake asked, and as they hoped – these Mercenaries were not exactly great and staying tight lipped about things.

“Ortega, piece of shit shot Whitley in the face and ran. All because he wants his dead baby back.” The Captain fake winged and laughed, Winter stared at the soldier with horror in her eyes. She may not have liked Whitley much, but she still knew him when he was just a baby.

“My brother’s dead?” She asked with worry.

“No, your Uncle brought him back, he’s a robot now.” One of the Mercenaries told her, and Winter now knew that Donovan was also out of prison as well. It made her shudder to imagine the madman being free.

“We’ll kill ‘em though. Kelham’s paying us handsomely for it.” One of the soldiers agreed, unaware of the beam of red light that suddenly appeared on his head.

Suddenly there was a loud crack, and a bullet came zooming across the overgrown wilderness and punctured straight through the soldier’s skull. They all panicked with fear and their prisoners ducked down, when another shot came in and just missed Pyrrha’s head, but clearly was aimed at the soldier in front of her. The impact blew the top half of his skull apart and he crumpled to the floor. “Where’s it coming from?” The Captain screamed, when suddenly Ren got up and plunged his father’s dagger into the throat of the soldier. One soldier turned to shoot Ren, when the mysterious Sniper saved him and nailed the Mercenary in the head as well.

Finally Ren spun round and threw his knife into the head of the last soldier and the Mercenary stumbled backwards, before he slammed down to the ground. They all got up and they looked around, their weapons were piled up in a corner luckily so they could pick them up. Oscar and Raven looked around and they could not see where the shot came from. Until the red dot appeared on Pyrrha’s sternum. She froze and stared at it, and glared into the bush. Jaune stood beside her and he held his shield at the ready…
...but before he even got in front of her, the dot vanished.

Whoever aimed that at her, the shooter decided against firing on her.

Cinder and Yenna looked at each other with confusion. “Who the hell was that?” Cinder wondered.

“Dunno...maybe we have a friend already here for us.” Yenna said.

“He had his sights on Pyrrha – dunno if I’d call them a friend.” Jaune scoffed as he sheathed his shield and sword together and they looked around.

“He didn’t take the shot though.” Pyrrha pointed out.

“Oh that makes it alright?” Jaune scoffed.

“No, trust me I know what it’s like to be shot in the chest like that – it’s not fun. But whoever it was...they still saved us.” Pyrrha said and Jaune nodded his head with a sigh.

“Yeah...I guess.” Jaune agreed.

“Well if the shooter ever introduces themselves, I guess we should hear them out.” Cinder shrugged.

“Did you hear what that soldier said? About Ortega?” Winter asked them with disbelief.

“I know...you alright?” Blake asked her with worry in her voice.

“Yeah...I guess maybe he’s on our side now?” She wondered.

“I dunno about that...the guy still has a lot to answer for.” Ren pointed out.

“I guess we’ll have to see...it explains how the Acolytes acted back at Argus though. He would have never sanctioned something like that.” Cinder pointed out.

“Yeah...you’d know all about that wouldn’t you?” Raven suddenly asked her.

Cinder stared at her with confusion. “Huh?” She asked.

Raven suddenly grabbed Cinder by the throat and pinned her against the wall, her sword pointed directly at her eye. Cinder looked truly scared now, and they all stared at Raven and Qrow grabbed her shoulder.

“Whoa! Stop!” Qrow yelled.

“You said it yourself. Someone’s spying on us, there’s no way in hell that Anti-Air tower was set up in the perfect spot in waiting for us like that. That would have taken days...who else would possibly have contacts with the enemy, than her?” Raven snarled as she pointed the sword at her face.

Suddenly someone punched Raven in the side of the face and she staggered back, and stared at who hit her. It was Pyrrha and she stood between Cinder and Raven. Qrow too was a bit suspicious of Cinder, but after the Architect put him in his place, he started to accept it. Raven glared at Pyrrha, the one who was previously killed by Cinder, defending her. “She did not betray us.” Pyrrha snarled.

“How the hell do you know? She destroyed your school! She killed you!” Raven reminded and it hurt Cinder, it hurt that some of them still do not trust her. Even after everything she had done to earn her trust.
“Look at her face.” Pyrrha stated and she stepped aside, and Raven looked at her. There was no plotting whatsoever, she just looked afraid…and saddened. “Does she look like she has a plan? She’s scared just like the rest of us.” Pyrrha snarled as she stood there.

“I told you, nobody is betraying us. You do remember who we’re up against, right?” The Architect questioned and Raven stared at everyone who looked like they were ready to fight her if it meant protecting Cinder.

“Yeah, and it totally fits in the bastard’s book! We can’t beat him, but he can definitely beat us.” Raven stated, and Ruby walked over to her.

“We can beat him. I know we can.” Ruby said, and Raven scoffed.

“Don’t you remember what happened at Beacon? All we did was hurt him, and he killed for of our own in the process. We can’t beat him.” Raven scoffed, and she sheathed her Odachi as she walked away from them.

“Raven!” Oscar called out but Qrow touched Oscar’s shoulder to stop him.

“Let her go. She’s been pretty defeatist lately…I know my sister. Give her some time, she’ll figure it out. And don’t take it personally, Cinder – Raven and I grew up in a Bandit Tribe. Our first instinct is to expect the worst.” Qrow told her and Cinder nodded her head, before she looked at Pyrrha.

“Why’d you defend me?” She asked and Pyrrha smiled.

“You’re trying. I don’t know if I can ever forgive…but I want to try.” Pyrrha told her, and Cinder nodded her head and she touched her neck softly with a strain. Raven was sat on a rock as she wanted to be alone with her thoughts for a while.

“PENNY! PENNY!” Ruby cried out, she hoped she would emerge but alas she never did. She must have landed father away from them. “We need to find her.”

“No, we can’t risk getting lost in Arkhonex.” Ozpin stated.

“Uh…we are lost.” Jaune pointed out as he held his arms out to the alien city.

“Okay fine, yes we are. But if we start running in circles we could be attacked again.” Ozpin stated.

“We can’t just leave her!” Ruby argued.

“We’re not.” Kragen said, since he knew exactly what Ozpin was about to say. He pointed with his Staff towards the huge damaged Tower in the centre of the city, a few miles away from their current position. “The Spire is the tallest landmark in the whole city. Penny knows what to do if she got stranded, and it would be to get to the most recognisable landmark. That is our best bet to reunite with her. And we need to keep moving. Without the Prowler we will have to find the Embered Grove on foot. Which means heading through the different Districts.” Kragen explained.

“And deeper into the Grimm infested locales.” Yenna sighed.


“Well…where are we right now?” Winter asked them and the Arkhonii looked around the street that they were in. But it was Pyrrha who recognised the symbol on one of the signs, and she touched it.

“Nikos…” She softly said and they all turned, and to their left should be the Nikos Estate, where
Ares Nikos lived…and Cynthia Nikos was born.

“Is that a good Landmark?” Ruby asked.

“Could be, it depends on how far Penny is.” Ozpin shrugged.

“We could find something else there too.” Ren agreed and they all nodded. Since the city is so damaged, they needed to go through it carefully, since Grimm were practically everywhere.

“Welcome to Arkhonex, I guess.” Ruby sighed.

Penny

SYSTEMS DAMAGED

BEGINNING REBOOT PROGRAMME

VOCAL SYSTEMS RESTORED

VISUAL SYSTEMS REPAIRED

MEMORY CORE STABLE

POWER CELL AT 57%, RECOMMEND SOLAR CHARGING AT 20%

REBOOT COMPLETE

Penny gasped as her eyes opened and her green optics flickered back to life, she sat up and she gasped in pain. Her shoulder was hit bad after she crashed through the trees and landed in the middle of nowhere. She pushed her hands against the floor, and saw her face in the reflection of the water. She was a bit damaged from the impact but nothing too serious, can be easily repaired.

She got up and looked around. “Ruby?” She softly said as she only heard the various sounds of wildlife around her in this dense jungle that formed around the lost city. “RUBY?” She called out louder, but she could not hear her.

Until she heard the sniper shots earlier, she turned and gasped, and she headed in the direction of which she heard them. She pushed her way through the thick vegetation, the sound of distant howling Grimm was almost constant. The concentration of Grimm numbers around here must be absolutely insane.

Penny approached what looked like an old abandoned house, it was definitely Arkhoni in design. One would not have even realised that what she was walking through used to be a town of houses, now there were very few houses left, that she could see. Nature had reclaimed the land. Penny approached the house and she drew one of her swords as her back opened. She looked around the house carefully, the plants and roots had practically devoured the entire house.

She stepped in further, when she felt the cold steel barrel of a Revolver push against the back of her head.

“Well, well…isn’t this a surprise? The long lost Mark Five.” Ortega said, as he held his sniper rifle in his other hand, he stared at her with a stern expression. His finger quivered on the trigger, despite the
fact that he did not believe this was even his daughter, she still looked so much like her.

“Ortega…” Penny greeted.

“Polendina…” He paused as he said her last name. “Any last words?”

“Wait.” She demanded.

“Poor choice.” Ortega sighed, but even if he wanted to, he could not pull the trigger. He just could not bring himself to do it, so that gave Penny the chance and she spun round and punched the gun from his hand and she slid back. Ortega walked around the room as they circled one another, they stared right at each other.

This was the first time they had ever met.

Could have gone better.

“Here to hunt us down? For Jacques Schnee and your traitorous brothers?” Penny questioned as she circled him.

“Jacques Schnee is no brother of mine. Neither is his lunatic brother of his idiot son.” Ortega scoffed as he walked around and then he caught on and he slung his rifle back over his shoulder and as he picked up his revolver, only to holster it. “Gods…I expected naivete but this?”

He turned to face her. “The Acolytes of Lien do not fight for him. I only agreed to fight for him out of a sense of gratitude since he saved my company. My stupid mistake obviously, I didn’t realise he was working for a monster.” Ortega explained and Penny narrowed her eyes, since she did not know about what happened.

“But…the Acolytes at Argus. They were getting innocents killed when they were coming after us.” Penny pointed out and he stared at her.

“Did they? Kelham…that damned bastard…there was a reason why I ex-communicated him. Should’ve killed him.” Ortega growled as he clenched his hand into a fist.

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying?” She asked.

“I turned on them, yeah. Half of my forces are on my side now, but I had to get them to scatter. They’ll attack on my command.” Ortega explained to her and Penny’s eyes widened and she lowered her sword, since he clearly was no longer a threat to her. “Look…as much as I would love to tell you stories…I have a job to do.” Ortega said, as he turned to the doorway.

“What job?” She asked him and he stopped.

“One of my men – Hei Xiong and his two little mercenaries he kept by his side – they got grabbed by some Acolytes nearby. I was tracking them when I came across your team captured.” Ortega told her and Penny’s eyes lit up.

“They’re alive?” She asked.

“Yeah, saved their asses.” Ortega told her as he gestured to the Sniper Rifle slung over his shoulder.

“Where?” She asked him.

“A few clicks that way. Unless you wanna kill me here and now, I’m gonna go.” Ortega said to her as he went to walk away from her, and even though she knew where Ruby and the others were.
There was a curiosity and kindness in her heart she could not shake away.

“I’ll help you.” She said, and he stopped and raised a brow.

“Why? Your friends are that way. I’m heading the other way.” He pointed out, and she sighed.

“Pyrrha told me who you are…and…what I am to you. What I am in general.” She explained and he stared right back and he sighed.

“You don’t know. Not really.” He said.

“Then help me understand. I have never truly known who I was…I know I am not your daughter…not really. But I want to know.” Penny begged him and Ortega sighed through his nose at her.

“No.” He told her as he went to walk away.

“I’ll cry.” Penny told him and he scoffed.

“What? Why would I –” He turned and saw her pouting at him like a child, and he chuckled – he did not want to admit it, but that was something his Penny would do all the time to persuade him to do something for her. It actually hurt, because in that moment he really thought it was her. As he thought about taking her with him, he then realised…she had some immense firepower.

He could use the help. “I guess I could use the help.”

“If I help you get your friends back, will you help take me to the big tower thingy?” She asked him curiously and he raised a brow.

“You mean the spire?” He asked her.

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“Because I know that’s where they’ll be heading, most recognisable landmark.” Penny proved them all right, she did indeed listen to those lessons on what to do when stranded.

“Perhaps…I guess our interests are indeed aligned. I know your friends are headed to the Embered Grove for the Aphax Violet, I’m searching for Merlot. My best bet for Merlot’s location is the Grove, rumour has it Creatures of Darkness cannot enter the Grove. Maybe even Umbra can’t.” Ortega said to her.

“So…do you accept?” She asked him.

“Okay then…a truce.” He said as he held his hand out to her. “You help me find Junior, I help you reunite with your team. After that – we will see.” Ortega said to her and Penny nodded her head with a smile.

And she shook his hand.

“Excellent. Shall we be off?” Ortega asked her as he walked out of the building.

“Do you even know where your friends were taken?” She asked him.

“Well…no…not really. I know they’re around here somewhere, but their tracks had gone cold. Merely because my tracking skills are…dusty at best.” Ortega admitted as Penny walked out with
him.

Penny stared out and her internal systems started to cycle through.

TRACKING SYSTEMS ENGAGED

“I can track them down.” Penny promised.
Corsac

He stood there, his back leant against the cracked grey cement of the old destroyed building, the Bullhead landed nearby. Vegetation had started to claim the old Valerian Expansion City, and he kept spinning that Spiralled Dagger through his fingers. His long fluffy Fox Tail flicked as Kardas dropped down from the rooftop where some of their sharpshooters where nestled. Every now and then a shot cracked off as Grimm started running their way, only to get picked off one at a time by the skilled White Fang Militants.

The huge Hyena Faunus approached him with his duel knives being shoved back into their scabbards on his belt. It seemed like he changed his weapons all the time, to whatever it was he found at the time. Unlike most, who had a certain weapon to be used, he did not. Corsac glanced at the maniac who approached him and he exhaled through his nose as he looked around. “This is a good location, good idea picking it out.” Corsac said to Kardas.

“I was once part of the White Fang, a long time ago. I fought alongside that man…Roman Torchwick…he wanted to use the trains like bombs, or torpedoes in a way. Until those damn brats showed up and ruined the fun.” Kardas scoffed, they all looked up at the still completely desolate and decimated peak of Mountain Glenn. The scars from the Grimm King Wyvern were still ever present in the mountain, and it was as if they could still hear the howling roars even then. Corsac stopped spinning his dagger through his fingers.

“You were part of this operation?” Corsac inquired, he remembered those old days but he was never present at the operation itself.

“As I said, days long past. Roman Torchwick is dead, Adam Taurus is dead, your brother is dead.” Kardas listed as he walked around the area whilst the other Faunus kept the area secure from investigating Creatures of Grimm. The moment he mentioned the death of his brother, Corsac froze and shot a stern glare at Kardas. But he was not fooling him, he was not intimidating him, and that was what scared Corsac about Kardas. The Hyena would just laugh, it was all he did…he was truly a madman.

He did not follow Corsac here for revenge, no he came here for blood.

Nothing more, and nothing less.

“I was down in the caverns, now completely caved in, got knocked out by the Blonde one.” Kardas explained, and Corsac sheathed his Spiralled Dagger into the sheath on his belt.

“That’s the one I’m after. Stay out of my way.” Corsac demanded and the Hyena laughed maniacally.

“Worry not, Fox…I don’t care for revenge. Faunus or Human it doesn’t really matter to me anymore, I just wanna hear them scream. Scream the way I screamed…” Kardas snarled as he scratched his arms, and he looked at them. Corsac started to piece it all together and he pulled his sleeve back to reveal the scarring underneath it. Kardas suddenly glared at him, his golden eyes glowed bright in the night, and he snarled viciously before be swung his head straight into Corsac’s. “Back off!” He yelled, but Corsac saw it…the sewing…the burns.
“You…you were a test subject like Anto was? Weren’t you?” Corsac asked him and he nodded his head with a growl.

“Once I was…we were taken from our cells by a Human Scientist.” Kardas explained as he walked past the knocked over Albain Brother who wiped the grime from his face. He got up as the Hyena approached one of the crates and he sat down with a sigh. “His name was Merlot, a professor who never showed his face to us in person, only ever saw a hologram of him. He had his machines do terrible tests on us…he was trying to create soldiers that had dust infused into their bones. To make them stronger…” Kardas explained as he rolled up his sleeve to show the deep scars that were covering his forearm. Corsac stared at them with widened eyes.

“I saw some of Anto’s…he is the same?” He asked Kardas, both of which had no idea that Penny killed him at Argus.

“Anto was better…his Warthog Genes made him so much stronger than me…I’m a Hyena, so I am strong on my own, but my body could not handle the procedure. So instead of killing me, he stopped, left the scars, and sent us both back to the prison. It worked for him…but then his facility was destroyed.” Kardas explained, and Corsac scoffed. Yet another time of which that Team R.W.B.Y caused this man so much pain, they put him in the prison that caused him to be tormented, and left him scarred after they destroyed Merlot’s Base on the island.

Corsac nodded his head, it was all starting to make sense now. He went insane through his suffering, the torment and agony of being ripped apart by machines for a test that was in the end completely worthless…that would be bound to create some mental problems for the patient. “So there you go…there’s something I envy you for. At least you aren’t a failure.” Kardas stated as he stared at Corsac who looked down at the floor. “I didn’t see you here, on our operation.”

“No, Adam had us stationed at Menagerie alongside Yuma and his team of Elite Faunus. We were tasked with spreading our word throughout the civilians there to gain more numbers, and assassinate the Belladonna Parents when the time was right. The Knight of Fury punched a hole in our plan, we nearly didn’t make it out alive.” Corsac explained, he looked at his arm that was covered with some old faded burn scars that he suffered from Fury’s attack.

“Then I guess that’s one thing we have in common.” Kardas said to him as he leant back.

“From one failure to another.” Corsac agreed, then they turned to see a Faunus staring at them. She was a Crocodile Faunus with a shaved head, a dark-green mohawk and yellow eyes. She wore a dark green collared shirt with a dark brown corset, black and grey striped trousers and black shoes. In addition, she wore dark brown fingerless gloves and carried a large stopwatch with her. Her Faunus trait was patchy green scales all over her body and face. She had an x-shaped scar on the left side of her head, black polish on her nails, and sharp metal teeth with two screws in them.

She tapped the golden stopwatch on her hip as she stared at them, and Kardas stared right back.

“Then I guess that’s one thing we have in common.” Kardas said to him as he leant back.

“You two know each other? She joined us, but she never said much.” Corsac asked him.

“Yeah I know her…mass murderer. Isn’t that right, Tock?” He asked her with a grin as he leant back, he did not seem to hate her one bit. If anything, Kardas seemed to like her. She grinned back with her screwed in metal jagged triangular teeth. It made Corsac shudder when he stared at how unnatural it looked. She walked over to them and spoke with a harsh cockney accent as she pushed her scaly fingers through her mohawked hair.

“Right it is, luv. And who might you be?” Tock inquired as she approached the Hyena Faunus, who smirked right back at her.
“Kardas.” He answered.

“Kardas…what a brilliant little name right there. You a killer too, or some petty thief?” She wondered, since she could see the tattoo of the prison dots on his neck, the same that she had.

“Killer, just like yourself.” He replied.

“There’s a certain art in death, wouldn’t you agree, Corsac?” Tock asked, she showed her inner insanity to him. It truly showed how weak the White Fang had fallen, when once they fought for something great, and now most of the honourable are either dead or changed sides. The only ones left were either too far gone or prisoners released for this very purpose.

“I guess.” Corsac replied.

“Ah, you not one for killing?” She asked as she bent down to look him in the eyes.

“I’ve killed my fair share, I can promise you that.” Corsac stated as she stared right back, and she giggled softly. Somehow that cute sounding giggle was actually quite frightening to hear, from someone as unnerving as her.

“Well that’s just dandy, darling. But…you don’t find the art in it, do you? The many expressions you can find, when their souls leave their bodies…the things they say when you gut them with a sword. The sound they make when you bite out their throat.” Tock snarled viciously as she bit her metal teeth together, hard, so hard that it sent off sparks onto the floor.

They were all sinful.

Adam was corrupted by his pride, Mazen was corrupted by wrath, Kaa by Lust, Arkaas by Sloth – since he did not want to follow Mazen – Kardas by greed – he could never get enough death – Anto was driven by Gluttony, a hunger for killing Humans. And Corsac was Envy, jealous of Ruby for still having a sibling.

They were all the seven deadly sins.

Two of them had already fallen their sins, Adam died because his pride of being a Faunus turned to rage, and Anto’s hunger lead to him being killed in a kitchen of all places.

The question what how the others would fall…if they do not redeem themselves for their sins first.

Tock smiled at the two men as she walked past them and she approached a charging Beowulf that roared through the broken glass. But she swung her sword fast and hard, and beheaded the creature before it could even get close. It’s corpse slid across the ground and stopped beside them, and it turned to dust before her very eyes. She smiled as she felt the black smoke caress around her, and she sheathed her sword onto her belt after one of the soldiers called out. “Alright, we’re clear!” He called, and Corsac got up as he approached the edge of the city, and he could see Vale from all the way over here. The Cross Continental Transmit Tower stood tall and Beacon was at the very edge.

Yang Xiao Long was down there, they were all down there, he narrowed his eyes as he glared.

“There a reason why we need to hide up here?” Tock asked as she crossed her arms.

“We all have very recognisable faces, most of you are all escaped Inmates, you’d be recognised in seconds. We can’t risk that happening, can we?” Corsac explained to them and the soldiers all nodded to one another.

“It’s the safest location.” Kardas stated.
“Safe is a word.” One of the soldiers scoffed as he fiddled with his magazine.

“How much Shadow Dust do we have?” Corsac inquired as he looked back at them, and the Purple Dust that they managed to acquire from previous raids on Acolytes of Lien Bases glowed across the corkscrew like dagger of his. There was a crate with some Dust Vials stored inside. One of the men pulled a vial out and he showed it to him, it glowed an ominous purple as he looked at them.

“Enough to kill our targets, not for a full on assault.” The Soldier stated after he checked the whole crate.

“Most of them are infected, wouldn’t be much of a fight.” Kardas stated.

“The Afflicted are not the ones that worry me. Hazel Rainart, Glynda Goodwitch and some Branwen Tribesmen are still guarding the Academy. Not only that but I heard a few stories that they have some powerful Witches on their side down there trying to cure this thing.” Corsac explained as he toyed with his dagger in his hands.

“Witches don’t exist.” One of the soldiers scoffed, Corsac turned and stared at him with a raised brow.

“Everything that has happened in recent years…and that is what you claim is ridiculous?” Corsac scoffed as he stared right at the soldier. The White Fang Militant piped down after that and Corsac glared at the Academy once more.

“We need to be careful, and we must wait for the perfect moment…for when they least expect it.” Corsac stated with a smirk on his face.

His hunger for revenge…his envy… …it will either be his undoing.

Or his triumph.

Kassius

The cold droplets of rainwater continuously fell upon the scarring on the side of his face, he groaned as he began to wake. He fell from the Peregrine when it broke apart, and he crashed through the city. If it were not for his aura protecting his body he would have been killed by all the branches. From the building that he was sent straight through. He rolled onto his chest and he coughed up the water that he had swallowed from the fall. It felt like his lungs had collapsed, but his aura was working hard to fix the damage done to his body, so he started to get back up.

His bleary eyed vision faded and sharpened back to normally relatively slowly, or at least as best it could, the storm that hit upon their arrival was still chucking rain down in gallons. The muddy water was all around him and had ruined his trusty clothing. He reached out and grabbed onto the hilt of Lash Equinox, and pulled the swords over to him. He flicked them downwards with the sharp movement of his wrists so then they folded back down. He clipped them back to his belt and he tapped the side of Vulcan Nox. The poor weapons had been drowned from the muddy water, but he could clean it…as long as this weather lets up eventually.

Kassius reached up with his metal arm and he grabbed onto the branch that was above his head to
pull his body up. That’s when suddenly there was a sharp jolt of pain that shot through his leg muscles, he grunted and snarled in anger from the feeling. He fell back against the branch… and then he realised that his leg had been impaled by a chunk of metal. It was not serious enough to the point where he could not walk or lose the leg, but it was still painful and would at the very least make him limp. He felt other pains too, a few cuts and grazes in different areas of his body. He stared at the metal and he grabbed onto it, he slowly pulled it from his leg and he yelled in pain. The lightning flashed as soon as he did, the thunder drowned out his scream as he threw the shrapnel aside.

Thick blood trickled from his open wound, so he got up after using the branch of the tree like a support. He got up and pressed his hand to the wound as he stumbled. He staggered and he crashed back down into the mud. He yelled in anger at how weak he felt, the mud splattered across his face as he laid there. “C’mon, Kassius…get your ass moving.” He strained as he punched the ground, and he got back up.

He limped onward, and he moved through what appeared to be some kind of old Dock. He was lucky, if it where not for some of the vines that slowed his descent, he probably would have fell into the water and drowned. He was exceedingly close to that edge too, so with his infinite way of looking at the brighter side — he decided this was the best possible scenario.

Apart from the obvious one — not being attacked by Salem in the first place.

He had been in locations that felt alien to him before, but the mere layout of the city felt wrong. The roads had no markings on them, the signs were merely markings, hieroglyphics. He stared at one of them and he held up his bracelet that was still on his wrist, and he scanned the High Arkhoni Markings on the sign.

**WESTERN DOCKS**

**COX FERTILITY CENTRE**

**CITY CENTRE**

The Cox Fertility Centre was the closest, so he kept moving as fast as he could, and he looked around the area as he heard things moving. He ducked down and he gasped, for he saw them. He hid behind one of the ancient burned out vehicles left behind, they all wandered together. They shuffled slowly and snarled, almost whispered to one another. They hummed softly in a lullaby form, and they just moved down the roads together. They looked almost human, but there were so many.

They were Horridus Morbus Thralls…and there were hundreds of them.

They all lingered and wandered through the Arkhoni Streets, and they bumped against one another as they moved. Their hums could give Kassius nightmares as he watched them. The Grimm were also with them, like a military force they were lead by the Knights Bannermen. The Beowulves growled as they looked around, and they started to head in Kassius’ direction. Kassius ducked down and he started to cover his body in the mud, and he kept his hand firmly over the wound. He held Lash Equinox tight, but he would never stand a chance against that many Grimm. He slid underneath the car as they approached with groaning snarls.

They all bumped against it as he laid there, and all Kassius could think as he laid underneath the car, was the same thing.

*Don’t alert them…just get to the Cox Fertility Centre…find something to bandage this fucking wound…find the others…cure Yang…*
Cure Yang…

That’s all that matters…

The old car bounced from side to side as the Grimm bumped into it, they moved like a river round a rock. Some of them even crawled over it, and every now and then he could see the armoured boot of a Knights’ Bannerman as well. They walked and they looked around with their complex weapons in their grasp. Some of them even had rifles, which must have meant they were corrupted recently. Especially since these firearms were clearly made by Atlas. They had the same style to them, except they were not using dust anymore, these weapons channelled dark energy. And they were completely black too.

The Beowulves howled to one another, they communicated constantly as they kept moving. One of them charged ahead and Kassius saw the beast tackle a poor deer to the ground. The beast bit down into its neck so hard, the blood essentially spewed from the jugular. The monster shook the animal around as it tore into it. And then suddenly, the Horde of Horridus Morbus saw something, more Deer that were running away from the Beowulf. They all started to shriek and they charged away from the Knights Bannermen. They yelled in their broken language in an effort to keep them in check, which failed.

The sound of hundreds of corrupted Humans and Faunus running off at once, it was absolutely nightmarish. Their screams sounded so real, as they tackled the Deer down and swarmed over the body like ants. The amount of blood…the Deer must have been killed by the mere impact alone, since it did not even scream as they tore it to shreds. Kassius dragged his body out from under the car and he moved quickly to take cover behind the building. The muddy road was completely ruined by the horde, and Kassius breathed a sigh of relief.

Until he heard a Knights Bannerman approach the car of which he slid out from, and it stared in his direction. It aimed its sword in his direction as if it was about to investigate, until the other Bannermen called it back to keep moving in its tongue. He was very lucky, if even one of the Bannermen spotted him, that horde would have been on him…and he’d have never escaped it.

Once he knew he was clear of being tracked by the Grimm, he kept moving in the direction that the now toppled over sign showed. He kept his hand on his leg as he moved, but the sight of Grimm killing the average wildlife…that was nothing he had ever seen before. He heard the others mention the Grimm had started killing and eating other animals now…but to really see it…

Things were getting worse day-by-day.

And they were seriously running out of time.

Kassius wanted to call out their names so desperately, but with the Grimm being so hyper-populous in this region…he could not risk it. He was lucky that the Horde did not locate him mere moments ago, so he kept moving. Luckily he found what appeared to be the location he was searching for, a large building that had the symbol for Male and Female upon it. He stumbled and caught himself from falling by pressing his metal hand against the side of the wall.

He opened up Vulcan Nox, and saw the internals were still not working, so to get out of the rain, he drew one of the swords and he walked inside. He pushed the old doors open and he looked around. It gave him chills, it looked like they all just packed up and left, obviously though some people were still in here. There was a fight here, slashed across the wall, old stained blood…he could even hear it.

Echoes…whispers…
Their screams, he heard it for a split second as he stood inside of this building. “Hello?” He whispered, he really thought that someone was in here. But Kragen was not lying when he told them all about the nature of Arkhonex.

There were a lot of secrets here.

He walked inside with his leg still bleeding, and he limped further and further inside. He staggered and he fell when he tripped on an old toy train. He slid across the ground and he sighed. Mildew and rot had claimed this place, and most likely most of the buildings in the city were in this condition. And considering that it had been over two thousand years since the city fell, it was impressive that there were still any buildings left standing at all. Kassius got back up and he wiped the rainwater from his face as he looked around, he used the wall to support his body, since his leg was not helping.

“Hyde? You still with me?” Kassius asked the Higher Demon in his head.

“Yeah…sorry…still taking it all in.” Hyde admitted as he also was amazed by the city. Kassius entered the building properly, since now he had moved past the damn reception. Then he saw what kind of place this was.

The Fertility Centre…it was beautiful.

A place that was built for those who could not have children, designed to help repair their organs, and test if their drugs and machines had done the job. There were many beds…and he knew what these were for. He could even hear the distant moans of ecstasy that must have echoed constantly from these rooms. Blacked out doors and windows, couples must have come here all the time to see if the drugs worked.

Kassius pushed one of the doors open, and he froze from what he saw in there…

There was the skeleton…of a Knight. He was leant against the wall, and Kassius only just noticed the doors he opened were smashed to pieces. There were chairs and tables broken apart on the ground, he must have set up a barricade in here when the Grimm attacked. And in the room were cots, where babies were kept. Kassius almost did not want to look into them…but he did.

They were empty.

Every single one, then Kassius looked at the Family Insignia that was on the Knight’s Armour.

Arc.

He was a Knight of Arc, he must have fought for Vyrryk Arc, and there must have been more who got the babies out of there so then they could have a chance. He truly was a great man, but as Kassius approached the Knight’s bones, he saw a little pad. “What’s this?” He wondered as he crouched down, and suddenly he saw a Hologram of an order.

It wasn’t Vyrryk.

It was Constantine Arc.

The Brother who was accused of raping a girl and had lost all his honour in the process for his sins. He was stood there, clad in heavy armour and held a large mace in his huge hand. “Brother Linus!” It surprised Kassius to hear that the message was in his tongue, but then he also touched the pad…it must have instantly translated the message for him. Like a Visionary Book…the Arkhoni thought of everything. Kassius looked back at the bones of Brother Linus Arc, and he continued to listen to
Constantine’s Message.

“Lord Constantine Arc.” Linus responded, he sounded composed and honourable.

“I have a task for you…one…one that is extremely dangerous, but necessary.” Constantine told him.

“I am a Knight, my Lord. Your command is my honour.” He said to the older Arc Brother, the respect that was given to Constantine was indeed surprising, considering his reputation. But it was his personality, it was that…that was what surprised Kassius. If he was a Rapist, then why would he be so honourable?

Or was there no truth behind that claim?

So many questions…so little answers.

“Isabel Cox has abandoned the Fertility Centres, there are only a few employees left there, the Grimm will get in soon. There are babies in there, innocent babies…I want you to go back into the city, and get them out. No matter the cost.” Constantine gave his order, and it shocked Kassius to hear these words coming from this man’s mouth. Cinder told him about what they learned about Jaune’s family a few days prior, and she included Constantine Arc. It was very shocking to hear that such an evil man…would give such a noble order. “I would go with you, but my brother needs me.”

“I understand, my lord. It will be done…my men will give our lives for those children if we must.” Linus stated and Constantine bowed his head to him.

“May Honour Guide Your Way.” Constantine said as he held his mace to the ground.

“May Honour Guide Our Way.” Linus responded, and then the feed ended, only to return with the last message that came to his pad.

Constantine was back, and he looked older. He had a thick bristly beard, new scars and he looked exhausted. Black Grimm Blood smothered his armour, and yet he still had time to send this message to a man he knew was dead. “Linus…two men who went with your fifteen man Platoon have returned. All the babies were with them, Claudia is bringing them with her…to the Beacon.” Constantine sounded so tired as he spoke. “You did it…I merely hope you can find peace in the embrace of the Gods.”

The message ended there, and Kassius stood before the old skeleton of Linus Arc. He must have been a Cousin or something like that, Kassius crouched down before him and he smiled. “You didn’t die in vain, Linus…when I get back to Beacon…I’ll be sure to tell Yang about you.” Kassius said as he patted his shoulder gently. He got up and he held his sword to the ground as Constantine did, to give him the proper honour that a Knight deserved. Kassius turned and he walked away from Linus’ body.

At least someone knew what he sacrificed, for children who never knew his name.

Kassius kept walking, in the hope that he would find something to patch his leg up with. He wandered through the halls, when eventually after passing but multiple ripped apart skeletons…he found the double doors to another room. He pushed them open and his eyes widened with relief from what he saw – it was a small medical centre. There was not much left but luckily his wound did not need much to fix it. All he needed, was heat, and a bandage.

“Alright…I need to cauterize the wound…then wrap it up…how to make a flame though? Everything in here is all damp and ruined…” Kassius sighed as he looked around. “Hyde…are you able to help?”
“Sorry, I was wondering if I could, but it’s not as easy as it seems to jump out of your body like that, y’know? I need to save it for when we need me.” Hyde explained and Kassius sighed, and nodded his head. He understood Hyde’s reasons. End of the day, leaving your host’s body on command must be extremely taxing on one’s soul. It would be wise to save his strength for when it would be absolutely necessary.

Kassius pondered and pondered on an idea as he sat down, he stared at the wound and then at Vulcan Nox. “Gotta cauterize the wound…” He kept mumbling to himself, when he saw Hyde in his head sat against the wall across the room from him.

“What about one of your Fire Dust Bullets? The ones that Weiss showed you how to make?” Hyde asked him and Kassius’ eyes widened with realisation. He was right, Weiss did indeed show him how to infuse dust into his bullets to have different kinds. He reached into his pouch and he pulled some of them out. They had red tips to them and he was about to unscrew it…but then he paused.

“Wait…” He looked around the room, there were some old tarps around the area, so she grabbed one and yanked it from the crate that was holding it. As he pulled it off, his eyes widened from the symbol. It was the same symbol on the side of the building, but the markings spelt out these words…

**INFANT NUTRIENTS**

“What’s wrong?” Hyde asked him and Kassius sighed, he lowered the tarp and he set the bullet down by his leg. He took his sword and he started to cut away some of the fabric.

“Yang and I…we’ve been talking about having kids for a while now…I heard what she said to me that one time.” Kassius still remembered how heartbroken she looked when she found out she only had a fifty-fifty shot of being fertile for the rest of her life. “Yang has always wanted to be a mom… she’s always been one at heart.”

“It’s a fifty-fifty shot, Kassius. There’s worse odds.” Hyde stated as he sat there.

“I know…it’s just, I don’t want her to be afraid.” Kassius said.

“Yang? Afraid? Please…it would have hit her hard, but if I know her, she is probably already getting ready to fight right now.” Hyde pointed out. “Remember how you and her would always end up sparring together before bed?”

“Yeah…she’d always kick my ass too.” Kassius chuckled.

“That’s because she fights for what’s hers, she always will. I know the two of you will have a baby some day…and if you do…”

“No, I’m not calling it Hyde if it is a boy.” Kassius stopped him right there, which just made Hyde guffaw with laughter.

“What? How about Hydette if it’s a girl?” Hyde asked and leant forward with a smile on his face as he looked at his brother by choice.

“We’ll talk about it.” Kassius said as he shook his head with a smile. He tested the fabric and he wrapped it around his bleeding leg. He sighed, since now he knew what he must do. “Alright…no more tiptoeing around it…c’mon…C’MON!” He unscrewed the tip of the bullet and he pointed the fire dust at the wound. As soon as the dust fell from the capsule and made contact with the oxygen in the air, the dust ignited. This dust was always extremely tender, so the slightest amount of oxygen would be enough to ignite it. The dust burned into the wound and Kassius slammed his fist against the ground as he took the pain. It was nothing in comparison to worse injuries, like his facial scar.
thanks to Cinder.

Didn’t mean that it did not hurt though.

The pain subsided as the wound closed up due to cauterization and he sighed with relief, and began to wrap up the injury with his makeshift bandage. He tightened it up, and jolted upon hearing the sudden clap of thunder from outside. “It’s still raining out there…you should get some rest. Heal up. Don’t worry, I’ll wake you when it clears…or if there’s trouble.” Hyde assured and Kassius smiled as he looked at Hyde.

“Thanks…brother.” Kassius said to him.

Ruby

After the storm had passed…

Walking through the streets of a long extinct people…it was a feeling that Ruby could not describe.

The water from the storm was still everywhere, puddles splattered across the old terrain that they walked across. The clouds started to part, and rays of sunlight beamed down from the heavens like the Gods were gazing down upon them all. Ruby walked beside Blake as they looked around, her Faunus Friend looked better now that her wounds had healed up. She was constantly looking around the city, she could see the stunning way in which Nature had reclaimed the land of which mankind had taken from them. Vines that dug through the concrete and birds made their nests inside of the same homes that had trees growing through them.

Ruby looked with her, and they saw so many different yet impressive things. Statues that were built from steel, forged with incredible markings. They could not help but explore, and the survivors of Arkhonex decided to let them. They were still young and they had the right to learn more about their past. Ruby and Blake both walked over towards this building and they looked around. It looked like some kind of Library, the books had all faded over time. Weathering, sunlight and mildew had claimed their secrets long ago, but they could not help but be amazed. “Wow…they had so many books…” Blake gasped as she picked one of them up, she opened it and some insects crawled out from the pages, so she dropped it as a response.

“Looks like they haven’t been touched for years.” Ruby replied, and Blake walked around, and she approached a mantlepiece with a statue. It was Jinn…the Goddess of Knowledge that Kassius and his team spoke with back at the incomplete Colony on Vytal.

Blake lifted her wrist and scanned the ancient Hieroglyphics to translate what they said. “It is through knowledge, that we grow stronger…and if we forget knowledge…we wither away, like trees of Autumn.” Blake read as it appeared before her large amber feline eyes. She looked at Ruby who stood there and she looked at some of the books. None of them were readable anymore, but she was still interested.

“What do you think they read about?” Ruby inquired curiously as Blake approached.

“All manner of things.” Yenna said as she entered the library with them, she looked around with her and she picked out one of the books. She sighed, since all the ink had either faded or had been smudged into obscurity.
“Did you have fiction then?” Blake curiously asked and she chuckled.

“Oh of course, I used to enjoy the romantic novels.” Yenna said with a wink, she slid the book back into where she found it, Blake blushed since she did too enjoy those books. “But no…fiction was not the best seller for us. It was tales…true stories.”

“Why’s that?” Ruby asked curiously, for she always found the fictions more interesting than reality.

“Well, because people love to know why certain things happened. How they happened, under what circumstances. Our Historians were some of the greatest in the world, they followed Jinn’s way…and they searched for Knowledge every chance they could.” Yenna explained, she sounded like she was in awe of them. But they were merely Historians, but as she explained, she sighed and she just stared at the forgotten books…information long erased by time. “Not that it saved us in the end.”

“It did…you’re here. Ozpin, Kragen, the Architect.” Blake stated, and Yenna smiled.

“Yes…I guess there is that.” Yenna agreed, they followed her out and they walked back into the street. As soon as they came out, they all jolted when they saw the flashing image of people walking through the street. All manner of folk, innocents who simply were out shopping, going about their business. The ghosts of the Arkhonis walked past them now, that image simply because the echoes of souls who once lived in this time. Ruby stepped aside as a Ghostly Horse and Rider walked towards her, only to vanish into thin air a few steps later.

“What was that?” Jaune asked as he watched the ghosts walk around, a woman approached her house and entered. But the house now, was completely burned and destroyed from time itself. Ozpin held his hands atop his cane as he watched them all walk around.

“The Whispers of Arkhonex…it’s what we call them. Whispers…Ghosts…Echoes…everyone who ever goes into Arkhonex would see them. They are literally echoes of time itself, memories of our long forgotten empire.” Ozpin explained as he watched them all move around them. They all just went about their business, none of them even looked at them, they did not even know they were there. Ruby looked at a man who was stood by one of the houses with his arms crossed, he looked so real…yet he was translucent. As if he was not even there at all.

They could even hear their softly spoken voices, gentle whispers around them, as they spoke with one another. It was creepy…but not in a sinister way…it was…sad…

All these people were long gone now, and yet here they were, as clear as if the city had not fallen at all.

“Come on, we’re not far from the Nikos Hold.” Ozpin stated as he walked ahead of them, Raven and Qrow looked around as they saw the Whispers of Arkhonex walk around the area. Horses and Carriages march on past, Nobles rode them with the Nikos Insignia sewn onto their clothing.

“My family…we were the Military Power here, weren’t we?” Pyrrha inquired.

“Yes. There were eight major families in Arkhonis Culture that had pull in certain areas. Seven of which became the Lords that lead Arkhonex after the deaths of the old Councillors.” Ozpin explained, and the Architect listed them.

to the poor people that were left to die painful deaths inside of that tunnel.

“That explains the soldiers around here.” Winter said as she looked at the armoured soldiers that marched past. They wielded shields and spears that also had Xiphos Swords sheathed on their backs. They wore golden armour with red feathers built into it in places, like the helmet.

“They were called Spartans. Ares trained them all from birth, they were some of the world’s greatest fighters in the world, and some of them had Silver Eyes, like he did.” Kragen said as he walked with them, he used his Isomacium Staff like a cane, even though he could walk perfectly fine now.

“Why…did the Varr Skaal not have a place? They were the Faunus, weren’t they?” Blake inquired with curiosity.

“They did – they were the ones who were in control of Colonisation. They were the first ones to actually colonise Menagerie, since it was always so dangerous due to both wildlife and the Grimm there. But eventually they did…” The Arkhoni Survivors seemed to pause upon mentioning Menagerie and the Nikos family, something that both Pyrrha and Blake caught onto.

“What is it?” She asked and Yenna sighed.

“The Nikos Family were tasked to use their Spartans to…cull many settlements, due to the Horridus Morbus Plague that hit. Thanks to the Congregation of Dawn.” Yenna explained to them, their eyes widened with disbelief.

“They unleashed it the first time?” Ruby asked.

“Yes, but as we said before – it was nowhere near as advanced as it is now. The Witches managed to cure it eventually, but only because House Nikos had the unfortunate job of killing and burning all infected victims. They could not risk the disease spreading any further than it already had.” Kragen explained as he walked with them, it was the oldest strategy in the book when it came to containing any outbreak – to cut off the infected hosts before it could spread any further. A terrible thing to do…but it would have to be done.

“Ares Nikos did what he had to do…no matter the consequences he faced afterwards.” Ozpin told them as they all kept walking down the streets.

Ren walked with Nora and Cinder, they both slowed down when they walked past a small playground. The Whispers of Arkhonex could always be heard around them, but then they changed into something more unnerving. They could hear the distant giggles and laughs of children playing at the playground. The swings were rusted and abandoned, and yet they had a slight swing to them. They could not see the ghosts of these children…but they could still hear them.

“People always said that locations hold the memories of those that lived and died there…I never believed it until now.” Cinder said as she stared at the rusted playground. Nora and Ren looked at her and back at the playground.

“I know what you mean…I felt this when I went back to Kuroyuri.” Ren said to her, she looked at him and back at the swings and they all sighed.

“Nothing really surprises us anymore, does it?” Cinder said.

“Nope.” Nora agreed, then they continued to walk through the street.

Every now and then they could hear the distant roars and howls of terrifying Grimm, but they kept moving. “We should be careful, the Grimm that live here and unfamiliar…and terrifying. There’s a
reason why very few ever return from Arkhonex. The Hauntings and Monsters here…do not take
them lightly.” Ozpin warned.

“If you told me that a few years ago I wouldn’t have believed you.” Qrow chuckled, which made
Ozpin chuckle as well.

“Neither would I…but here we are.” Ozpin said.

The large group turned round the next road and they saw it before their eyes. Pyrrha’s eyes widened
as she gasped and saw the massive Citadel like structure. It had huge walls and defences that were
left behind, and a tall tower in the centre. And the old tattered and faded flags that held their
recognisable symbol gently blew in the breeze.

“Welcome to the Nikos Hold.” Ozpin said to her and Pyrrha stared at it…

…this was where her lineage began.

It was time she learned about who her family truly were.

Penny

They were not the only ones to hear the Whispers of Arkhonex.

Penny cut through the vegetation with her swords as she followed the tracks that Ortega brought her
to look at. They were clear as day, Acolytes of Lien without a doubt when it came to those marks.
Ortega never really was one for conversation, but the Whispers of Arkhonex were undoubtedly
getting to him. “Gods…do they ever stop?” Ortega wondered as he walked further and further into
the vegetation, but then Penny slowed down with surprise in her green eyes. He looked at her with
confusion as he furrowed his brow. “What?” He asked her.

“I don’t think these are Acolytes…” Penny revealed and he raised a brow.

“What? No I know they are, I had been tracking them before you showed up, Penny.” Ortega said to
her. It was surprising to Penny to hear Ortega actually refer to her by her real name. Normally he
would just not even refer to her at all, he would just call her the Mark Five. But clearly he just
wanted to get to his missing allies as fast as he could. “And besides, how can you tell by tracks?”

“Because Acolytes of Lien have a patrol pattern about them.” Penny said.

“Yes, I know that. I made sure they were disciplined like soldiers should be.” Ortega said to her.

“These tracks aren’t…they’re informal. All over the place.” Penny said as she crouched down to
investigate them. Ortega looked at them and he suddenly reached to his revolver after he heard
something nearby. The Whispers of Arkhonex where almost constant at this point, right in their ears,
and it was starting to get into Ortega’s head.

Penny looked at him as he looked around. “What is it?” She asked him.

“Something…I thought I saw something run through the bushes. It was fast.” He said as he looked
around. He heard a horrific breath, it was dark and raspy, like it was right in his ear. But then it was
gone again, he looked over his shoulder and nothing was there either.
“Come on…the tracks go this way.” Penny calmly said as she walked ahead, and cut down more branches that were in her path. She moved ahead, and she shuddered as she approached this old Arkhoni home. It was abandoned…or at least that was how it seemed to be…they entered and they looked around. Ortega walked in first, like a military man he entered gun first and checked his corners. Penny on the other hand looked around and she narrowed her eyes. She started to touch the old desks, and she found…not a spec of dust.

It was odd.

How can a place that’s been abandoned for over two thousand years not have dust anywhere?

She was never gonna find an answer just by wondered, so she kept walking around whilst Ortega searched the house. “Hei! Militia! Melanie! You in here?” He called out as he searched the building for them. Penny walked through the kitchen, that was about to collapse by the looks of things. But there was something else that was strange about this place.

She could smell…coffee.

Someone had been there recently, and they must have been brewing something to drink in here. She crouched down and she reached underneath one of the old cookers and pulled out a spoon that must have been used to make the drink. She scanned it, and it was definitely the culprit – it was used merely ten minutes ago. Whoever was in this house, got out of here very recently.

“We’re clear.” Ortega told her as he came down the stares and he holstered his pistol.

“Run away…” A whispery voice said in their ears, which made him suddenly draw his pistol again and he looked around.

“Who said that?” He called out.

“Skin…Skin…Skin…Skin…” The voice repeated the word over and over again, until it faded away. The incoherent whispering remained but that word lingered in their minds. The word Skin…Ortega kept his senses sharp as he listened. Something was stalking them, the question was…what?

“Someone has been here recently.” Penny told him, and she handed him the spoon. He touched it, and it was still warm.

“Shit. Wouldn’t have been Acolytes, they’d still have some stuff left here. Whoever this was…it’s a survivor of some kind.” Ortega said, so they kept searching for clues on who this mystery person was. Penny checked the living room for anything, letters, notes, anything she could find. Whereas Ortega had a different plan, he started to search through the bedrooms, he used his knife and he cut open the beds. People that are smart would hide things inside of old mattresses. And yet even this…it was clean.

Someone…

…or something…

…was looking after this place.

Ortega searched each cupboard, checked every single table for anything. He stopped when he saw an ancient photograph – and just like everything else in this supposed abandoned home – it was spotless. He looked at the picture of the woman, she was young with short brown hair, quite pretty too. He set it down and he looked around.
“Help me!” A voice cried out from outside, female too. Ortega drew his revolver and he aimed it out the window, and there was nobody outside.

“Did you hear that?” Penny asked.

“I did…” He agreed.

“Please! Help me!” The voice repeated once more.

It came from downstairs this time, it sounded like it was in the room with them. Penny looked around with total confusion. They had been following this trail for ages now, and there was nothing out of the ordinary…until they found this place. “What the hell is going on here?” Ortega softly said with disbelief as he looked out all the windows. There was absolutely nobody there.

Ortega kept checking the room, when his boot hit something underneath the bed. He crouched down and found it, it was a book, clean and freshly written in. He opened it up and found writing…writing that was unnervingly familiar.

**Day 68**

I’ve been here for…I think it’s been a month…I’ve been hunting for food but the whispering here. I keep thinking there’s something outside, it keeps calling for help, but every time I check it’s never there. I think I’m going crazy, I’m going so fucking crazy…

This is all Barnes’ fault. I never should have followed him on this stupid adventure, trying to fulfill a dead woman’s dream. When will he just fucking accept that Robin Polendina is dead? The Fountain of Creation is a lie, he can’t ever find it. We’ve been here in this destroyed city for months now, trying to find an answer, and now I have lost them. Something attacked us…I don’t know what it was, a Creature of Grimm. That’s all I know about it, but it was fast…faster than any Grimm I’ve ever seen.

It was unnatural, it was almost human in the way it walked and acted. I actually thought it was once of us at first, it was right behind me, and I felt its breath over my shoulder. But it didn’t attack me, it scared me shitless. Then it attacked all of us, it dragged one of our members into the night…I hid in this house…I heard him screaming in agony as it ripped him apart. It ate him alive, slowly…I just wanted it to kill him after a while.

This house…there’s something wrong here.

Why is it so clean? It’s been abandoned for thousands of years.

This is all your fault, Barnes.


YOUR

FUCKING

FAULT!

It ended there, and it made Ortega’s eyes widen. His wife’s name was in there, Robin…Barnes…he was an old friend of hers. A very good friend. “Barnes? The hell are you doing out here in Archonex? Robin told me the expedition lead to nothing but loose ends.” He said as he caressed the
necklace that has that triangular jewel inside of it.

“AHH!” Penny screamed with terror, her scream was so real that it seemed to trigger something in Ortega. He got up and charged down the stairs, to find Penny shaking on the floor. The door was open, and it was under the stairs, what Penny found was understandably terrifying.

There was old stained blood everywhere, and the door was locked, which meant that whatever did this…locked it when it was inside with the body…in the dark. There was a ripped apart skeleton on the ground, and scratches on the painted wall.

**HELP ME!**

**HELP ME!**

**HELP ME!**

She had short brown hair, just like the woman in the picture that Ortega found, it was her…the same woman. “What the hell? How did she get in here? What did that to her?” He questioned, he turned to look at Penny, she was still shaking with horror from what she found.

Then…

…unexpectedly.

The Whispers silenced completely.

They both looked around, when suddenly a bat swung straight into Ortega’s face so hard it knocked him unconscious and onto the ground. Penny gasped and she reached for her blade, but the woman stepped on it. She had long uncared for hair and she pointed Ortega’s gun at her face.

“Trail ends here.” The woman said with a maniacal grin on her face.

And scratched onto her arms were the words…

…*Your Fault.*
Ortega

His head felt like it was beating, a pulsating pain on the side of his head where the baseball bat had struck him. It was dark now, and he could barely see through his stunned blurred vision. He could not tell how much time had passed, but the sun was indeed beginning to set by this point as well.

They were all running out of time.

The sixth day just ended, they were now going to be at the end of the first week. They now only had a week left to cure Horridus Morbus before the Moon shatters and the Shivering Dominion begins. But that was not what was on Ortega’s mind right now, no…it was more the fact he was bound to a chair with some wire. He strained and slowly tried to break free but he couldn’t. He shook his pained head as he tried to recover from the pain, and he started to look around, and he realised where he was.

They were still inside of the Creepy Abandoned House that they were attacked inside of in the first place. And he was between the very people he was looking for – Junior and the Malachite Twins. And two his left was Penny, she was awake unlike him, she could not really get knocked out like he could be by a baseball bat. She was staring at him with a gag over her mouth, shaking and trying to break free. There was a magnet placed on her spine, and it kept the panels that held the swords in place closed, which meant she could not break out. She was just as helpless as the rest of them were, and Junior looked badly hurt, judging by the blood that was trickling down the side of his head.

“Junior? Malachites? C’mon…” He groaned, then he heard the voice of his kidnapper tut at him.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk…not even saying hello to an old friend, Darren?” She asked, and Ortega paused. He recognised her voice, it was with a slight Latina Accent and he turned to see her sat on a backwards facing chair with a large steel knife in her hand. She ran her finger across the serrated edge as she stared at him, and he stared back. He leant back against the spine of his chair and he exhaled through his nose as he looked at her.

“Hello Alvarez…been a long time.” He said to her as the clouds above them slightly parted, and the glow from the Fractured Moon shone upon them. They could hear the hooting of owls in the forest outside and the crickets that chirped. Life flourished here, and yet the monsters were still everywhere. They expected the city to be Barren and Lifeless, not a bumbling habitat for all forms of existence. Natural or not.

Alvarez stared at him and she smiled, she was a pretty woman, around the same age as him, yet her sanity was clearly non-existent at this point. She was rugged, had not had a bath in months by the looks of it, dirt stuck to her skin and her hair with some fresh cuts and bruises. Her clothing was torn and moth eaten, and she was skinny too. She could hardly even stand, and looked quite pale too, even through her bronze skin. Her hair was extremely long now, with braids and old broken jewels woven inside of them. She giggled softly as she tapped the blade of her knife against the chair, and she stared at him. “How long has it been now? Ten years?” She asked her, and Ortega pondered on that one.

“Something like that, yeah.” He said, and she chuckled again.

“You and I…we used to date, remember? Back in High School, before you met Robin Polendina…
“That was a very long time ago…is that why you captured me? Gotta admit…I didn’t think you were into this kind of thing.” Ortega said as he glanced at the wires that held him on the chair. He looked at her and she laughed at him, not loudly though. Her voice was very soft, both because she was hiding from something and because of her poor health.

“You’d be surprised…” She said to him, and he stared at her rather menacingly now, he may have betrayed Jacques Schnee but that did not suddenly make him a saint.

“The hell is this, Alvarez? What are you doing all the way out here?” Ortega questioned, he may have read that note but it did not mean that he knew the whole story.

But clearly, she already knew he read that letter.

“You tell me, you were the one rummaging around this house and looking at my things.” Alvarez said to him, she pointed her knife at them and at Penny, Ortega glanced at her and then back at Alvarez. She narrowed her eyes and glared back at her very old flame she had once, someone who clearly never felt the same way for her. But things had changed, and she clearly had suffered something extreme out here.

“Yeah, I read that note…saw another one on the way here. Not an easy road I’d like to add, our airship got shot down by that Anti-Air tower, after we got ravaged by those Griffins in the Skyscrapers.” Ortega explained, which also revealed how he and his little trio of friends managed to get inside of Arkhonex before Ruby’s team did. “The hell is Barnes doing? I thought he gave up the search for the Fountain of Creation…after…” Ortega couldn’t even bring himself to say it, but Alvarez did instead.

“Before your pretty old perfect Faunus Bitch died, huh?” She scoffed and laughed, but Ortega suddenly slammed his boot down onto the ground and he glared right into her soul. She stared right back and it all went silent, all they could hear was the distant rustling of life in the bushes outside. The blow of wind through the trees and the destroyed buildings.

“Watch it, Alvarez.” He snarled.

“Oh, what? Surprised I remembered? Surprised that I remember how you dumped me for her? A Faunus?” She scoffed and he shook his head. “You were at war with them, and you fell in love with one, over me! I mean…where’s the logic in that?” She scoffed, and Ortega stared at her hard. He looked like he was about to erupt from those wires.

It was over thirty years ago now, and she still held that grudge like it happened yesterday. It was bizarre to all of them but Ortega. He knew her, he did once like her but he never loved her, not like how he loved Robin. “That was different…neither of us wanted to be in that damn war.” Ortega reminded with a stern voice. It still irked him that he could never find Demetrius Albain, and he never will, unless he finds his grave.

“And…bam…you both fell in love? Ha! You told me you would come back to me!” She argued, and he stared at her and his onyx eyes met hers.

“You still obsess over that?” Ortega scoffed, and she narrowed her eyes. “We were at war, and we helped each other survive for months. When I got back to you…I realised I could never love you. Because I fell for someone who was there with me. Sorry, things just pan out that way.” Ortega said to her and she shook her head, and she leant forward.
She was a Faunus. The enemy.” She reminded and Ortega scoffed.

“Are you really that dense? You think she wanted to be there? She got dragged in there out of school to fight just like me.” Ortega reminded, and she shook her head. She could not handle the fact he was making sense, and her hatred for the Faunus all due to being unable to move on…from anything it seemed.

“Chose a Faunus…over me. Unfaithful bastard, that’s what you are.” She snarled viciously, and Ortega shrugged.

“Well…technically…I wasn’t unfaithful. I was honest, and I broke up with you. Then I asked her out for a date. I was actually quite good about it.” He said with a slight pinch of sarcasm, which made Penny slightly chuckle. She never imagined the words Humour and Ortega to go together…yet when they did…it was a brilliant chemical reaction.

“Screw you.” She snarled at him though, still not accepting the kind and loving soul that she really was. The four of them captured with Ortega all thought the same thing.

Gods…you really dodged a bullet with her, Ortega.

Ortega shook his head as he stared at her, and a curious question entered his mind. “If you hated her so much, then why the hell did you let her lead the expedition? Better question – why’d you even join her in the first place?” Ortega grilled as he glared at her, her eye twitched as she sat there, and she forcefully got up and stormed around the chair towards him. She grabbed him by his hair and pressed the cold blade against his throat. He stared at her and she stared right back with gritted teeth.

“She paid well…I needed to pay off my college bill at the time…needed to pay off my loans and mortgage…I thought finding the Fountain of Creation would make us famous and rich. Not nameless gravestones.” Alvarez whispered, but Junior, Penny and the Malachites started yelling at her through their gags to get her to let go of Ortega. She spun round and she slashed her blade across Militia’s cheek and she muffled a cry of pain as the blood leaked from the open cut. “Make another sound when I’m talking, and I’ll open your throat.” She whispered as she pressed the tip of the knife against her jugular. She fell silent after that threat, and even though she was just a Thug, not even a proper soldier – he spoke up.

“Get your hands off her, Alvarez. Your quarrel is with me. I’m sorry things didn’t work out between us, and I guess I’m sorry I managed to move on without you.” Ortega said to her, Alvarez stared at him and then at Penny and the Malachites started yelling at her through their gags to get her to let go of Ortega. She spun round and she slashed her blade across Militia’s cheek and she muffled a cry of pain as the blood leaked from the open cut. “Make another sound when I’m talking, and I’ll open your throat.” She whispered as she pressed the tip of the knife against her jugular. She fell silent after that threat, and even though she was just a Thug, not even a proper soldier – he spoke up.

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“Yeah…you really have, haven’t you?” She scoffed as she stared at Penny. Ortega looked at her and then at Alvarez. “I heard about your little bun in the oven…what happened to her. And how you have been spending every lien you have left trying to bring her back. And all you have to offer is…that.” She scoffed and poked Penny with her knife. Penny jolted but she did not yelp, she just stared down Alvarez. She learned a thing or two when it came down to staring into the souls of her enemies from people like Kassius who were basically pros at it.

“Leave her alone.” Ortega demanded. “My problems have nothing to do with you, Alvarez. They never did…things just didn’t…pan out.” He said to her, as honestly as he could. Alvarez stared at Penny and she wanted to cut her face off, since despite the fact she was a machine…she was identical in body and face to his daughter, if only a bit older. And thus, that meant she hated that, since she only saw the prettier and better Robin. The woman was ten times the person she was, and Alvarez was still here…it was a cruel thing.

“Besides…you still haven’t answered my question.” Ortega pointed out, since Alvarez completely
changed the subject to focus solely her envy of Robin Polendina. Alvarez stopped and she stared at him. “Your letter said your looking for the Fountain of Creation. Robin told me it was a dead end, and it was too dangerous to go in there.”

“It was. But when she died, we stopped listening to her rules and decided to go into Arkhonex anyway. Despite her warnings, not sure how she knew the concentration of Grimm was so high. She was with the White Fang though…guess that’s enough reason to explain it. Untrustworthy…”

“Oh shut up!” Penny suddenly yelled after she managed to push her gag off her mouth with her tongue, and Alvarez stared at her angrily, but then she laughed. She walked towards Penny and grabbed her orange hair and yanked her head downwards with force. She cried out in pain as she felt it, but she did not regret saying that. One way or another, Robin was her mother and she was not about to let this uppity bitch trash talk her like that.

“You even sound like her…with that annoying voice.” She chuckled, and Ortega wanted to punch her. Alvarez was not always a nasty piece of work like she was here, she was once a lot kinder…clearly the world had not been as kind in return.

“For the love of the gods, get off her!” Ortega bellowed, his voice suddenly reached a level none of them heard. His anger normally was reserved and whenever he did get angry, he was normally quite quiet. Very rarely would he explode on someone like that, and even he seemed surprised by that.

Alvarez released her head, and she walked back to the chair and she sat down and crossed one leg over the other as she stared at Ortega. “Enough with the trash talk. Why the hell is Barnes so obsessed with finding the damn thing? No reward is worth it, look at this place.” Ortega stated with a scoff.

“Then why’re you here?” She questioned.

“Not for the same reason as you if that was what you’re expecting. I’m looking for a friend of mine, he’s in trouble.” Ortega told her, he did not divulge the details of course, since that would take all night. And with…whatever that thing is…prowling outside, they would never stand a chance.

“How noble of you. Hate to say it though, he’s probably dead. Trust me…nobody gets out of this hellhole alive. Barnes wanted to come here, because he wants his dead wife back. She died a couple years back and he wants to save her from death itself. So we followed the clues again, through Vale, to Mistral and to Argus finally. We took passage with a Smuggler and he got us there, took all our lien to convince him to go there.” Alvarez explained as she sat down…and she sighed.

“Our Airship we hired crashed from a Grimm Attack. There were sixty of us,. But this big horde ran in and swarmed fifty of us…then there were ten…now the last I knew…there were six. Barnes was already starting to go crazy, if he is still alive…I bet he’s gone absolutely insane by this point. We kept moving through, and that was when this thing attacked us. Two of us got picked off, and I ran with my friend. It tackled him…and I hid in here. It kept him alive, and slowly ate him, made him suffer, made him scream…for two days straight.” Alvarez described to them, and it sent chills down their spine.

Penny sat there and she kept wondering, she had taken plenty of classes with Professors Oobleck and Port in the past, and they always said the Grimm desired death. Why would a Grimm make someone suffer? Was it feeding of their fear? Did it enjoy hearing him scream? What kind of monster is this?

It was an anomaly.
“It must’ve gotten bored of his screaming eventually though, because then I heard it finish him off. His screams…they got higher in pitch…and then…BANG!” She slammed her hands against the spine of her chair, and all of them bar Ortega flinched, since he had heard much louder and scarier sounds than that in his long career in the military. “It was like a wet squelch, like when it splat an egg. It crushed his head in its jaws…and threw his corpse through the window…I’ve been here for a month since.” She described with horror. They stared at the shattered window and the blood stains on the wall, stains they somehow missed.

“It was hard eating all my rations…but…human meat…that was something else entirely…” She whimpered, their eyes widened with horror. She could not leave the house, the Creature of Grimm was prowling around constantly, withering her sanity down with every second that passed by. They could still hear the disturbing whispers and voices from outside and even in their ears.

“Skin…Skin…Skin…Skin…Skin…” That whispery voice continued and she pressed her hands against her head and started to hit herself repeatedly.

“Shut up…Shut up…SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP!” She shrieked at the top of her lungs, and then their was silence. Until the disturbingly horrible demonic giggle came from outside as the bushes rustled. The Grimm was toying with them all, it was getting in their heads, making them want to run, scaring them. Feeding off the negative emotion alone, like nectar. She started to punch the walls and screamed incoherently at it, before she ran up the stairs and they could hear her rocking back and forth, crying hysterically.

She was trapped here, by a monster, after witnessing fifty friends and acquaintances die horrible fates, two more were killed and she heard her other die an agonizing and unseen death over the course of two days. Which eventually lead to her resorting to cannibalism to simply stay alive.

All with the Whispers of Arkhonex in her head…

…it’s not surprise that she went a bit mad.

Junior, Militia and Melanie finally managed to push the gags from their mouths with their tongues and they coughed, finally able to breathe again. Junior looked at Ortega through the blood which partially blinded him. “Hey boss…long time…no see..” He groaned, the wound on his head was bad. He took a bad hit when their Airship crashed into Arkhonex, and clearly his aura was struggling to repair it all the way.

“Yeah…couldn’t help but get captured again, could you?” Ortega asked him with a scoff.

“Alright…good to see you too.” He said with a sigh, before he looked at Penny and saw her staring at them. “Uh…why’s the robot kid with you?”

“She volunteered.” He said with a sigh.

The two Twins were not saying anything. They both seemed a little shaken up still from what they just been through. “So she’s an ex?”

“Yeah…a damn crazy one too. Seriously didn’t think she was still obsessed over that.” Ortega sighed, which also meant she was probably not gonna let them leave alive.

Of course even then…whatever the hell was watching them out there…was still there.

They could hear it.

And it was getting closer.
Velvet

She gasped and opened her eyes as she came back into consciousness.

She had been out the entire time since she landed, for a full six hours, and now she was lost and alone in the darkness of Arkhonex. She coughed as she slowly came to, and looked around, her vision was blurry and eventually she found her camera. Named Anesidora, she picked it up slowly as she sat upright. Her body was soaking wet, and she felt the old rotten wood beneath her light body. Her ears flicked as she paid attention to the falling droplets of rainwater that fell from the ceiling. She stared up at it with widened eyes after remembering how she got here...

_The crash…did I…I fell through the ceiling…what’s that sound?_

She soon figured out, as the floor suddenly shattered like glass from her weight after sitting upright. The no longer spaced out weight caused the ground to collapse, and she plummeted down the ancient and destroyed building she fell into. If it weren’t for her aura she would have died instantly from the impact. She fell and she held her breath, for there was a rushing rapid waterway right beneath her, and it pulled her in. She tumbled through the raging waters and she swam up the surface and gasped, her brown hair drenched and ears completely soaked through.

Panic was starting to set in as she struggled to get free from the rushing waters of Arkhonex, being taken away from any kinds of supplies. Finally though, she was washed hard into the shore. And by shore, it was the side of the riverbed, she cried out from the pain, but grabbed onto the roots inside of the soil. She hung on, and started to climb her way up the side of the riverbed walls, and she grabbed onto the soaked soil, and hauled her body out of the river. She landed on her back and she coughed up the water that clogged her lungs, splattered out from her lips and onto the soil. Her lungs felt like they were on fire as she pushed her hands against the ground, and looked around.

“Coco?” She wheezed, she could not see them anywhere. “Kassius?” She also called out, but she was in the middle of nowhere. Just destruction surrounded her, if anything this was the worst looking area so far. Not one building was in one piece, and they were all black. Charred from fire, and completely annihilated. The rains had stopped falling, so she picked up her camera and she kept moving carefully, she coughed every now and then but that did not stop her from moving forward.

She turned round one of the collapsed and charred buildings and she gasped from what she saw on the other side. There were Ash Men and Women…even children…all of them reduced to statues of ash, left behind from the Fall of Arkhonex. They were all featureless, but she could see their terror from their statures. She carefully walked past them, and saw a family with a little kid behind them, holding what she assumed to be the mother’s hand. She could not really tell which were male or female…

It did not matter anymore, they were all ash, and forgotten.

“I’m…I’m so sorry.” She softly said with heartbreak as she stared at what they had become. They had definitely found the District that was hit the hardest, it was possible that this was due to the Knight of Fury’s attack. So she kept on moving, that was all that was on her mind at the time as she walked.

_Just…keep going Velvet…just keep going._
She used her camera’s night vision to help detect any Grimm, since their eyes were easier to spot that way sometimes. But the water had messed up the electricals inside of her camera, she needed to do some repairs on it but not here. It needed to be dry in order for her to make any real repairs. She lit up though, for she found in the ground was their supply box that was inside of the Peregrine. “There…the Supply Box…gotta be something…some warm clothes…” She shuddered from how cold it was, it felt like the cold air was biting her firm skin every step she took.

The mud was so slippery from the storm that she kept almost falling over as she traversed further into the bog. She approached the box and she slid down to her knees as she opened it, hopeful to find something in fine. She gasped with defeat, for it was already empty. “Empty…just my luck…” But before she could give into defeat, she realised there was a good side to her misfortune. “Wait…maybe that’s good, one of the others might have taken it.” She assumed with hope in her voice.

She pushed herself back up to her feet, and she kept walking, slipping on the mud every now and then. The rain was still falling in this region of Arkhonex, but it was starting to die down. Most of the storm had already passed and had headed north. But as Velvet approached more of the buildings, she did not notice that something was wrong here. She approached the main street, and saw an ashy mass surrounding one of the buildings. She froze and her eyes widened when she saw the titan move. She ran and slid behind one of the buildings, her ears drooped down beside her long brown hair as she peered over to see what was there.

A Royal Manticore…

Her large brown eyes grew bigger with disbelief. *A Royal Manticore? Why is there one of those things over here? I thought they only lived in the Mistralian Mountains? Oh gods…please help me…*

Her luck was not improving, because she heard the sound of time and space being ripped open, and Knights Bannermen appeared in the destroyed region. The Royal Manticore was massive, it dwarfed the common variants by a mile, it was nearly the same size as a King Wyvern, and it looked like it was just at home on land as it would be in the sky. It was gigantic with huge muscular legs that walked across the terrain, smashing straight through the Ash People left behind from the Fall. It cared not for respecting the honour of the dead, as crackling flames trailed from its jaws.

Royal Manticores, unlike the Common Manticores, could breath electrical fire, a lethal combination that could also eliminate the power of digital weaponry. Which meant her weapons would be useless against a beast like that. Its massive Scorpion tail dragged through the muck behind it, and it turned and smashed through one of the ancient buildings, toppling it over like it was made of dust. It crumbled away so easily, it was actually frightening. It had heavy armour too, especially around the head and its back, with long spines protruding from the black fur.

It also had a pair of huge white fangs that protruded from its jaws and massive claws. It was a force to be reckoned with, even for a team of Hunters it would be a difficult titan to bring down. It walked around the terrain after being alerted by Velvet’s presence. She stayed low and peered round the rocks. The Knights’ Bannermen were here too, with their broken voices and languages they spoke to each other as they searched for her. They had their weapons at the ready, and they could take her down pretty easily due to her condition right now. She was not lucky with the landing like Coco and Emerald were, she was knocked out like Kassius.

And nobody knew where Cardin landed, it was looking rather bleak honestly. Velvet pushed her back against the wall and she closed her eyes and tensed, bit her lip and she looked round the corner to find a way out of here.

There was.
One of the buildings was high enough for her to reach the ridge behind it, one she could take cover and hide from the Grimm in. The only problem with that...was that it was on the other side of the town. Meaning she would have to navigate through the whole area of Knights’ Bannermen, and a Royal Manticore, all of which were hunting her aggressively. The Manticore growled as it sniffed the air to find her.

They were gonna find her sooner of later...

That much was certain.

She blew out a breath and calmed her nerves, before she cracked her neck and holstered Anesidora, and she advanced. She stuck low to the ground, and used the walls and the darkness to her advantage. She could hear their dark demonic voices but could not even figure out what they were saying, it was broken language. Speaking in tongues completely foreign to her, so she kept moving and ignored what they were saying.

*Just keep going...don’t think too much...just don’t let them see you...*

She nearly got spotted as she thought that, as the massive scorpion tail of the Royal Manticore came slamming through one of the buildings over her head. She ducked and she rushed forward before the Manticore could spot her. The rubble crashed into the ground and it snarled as it looked for her, the growl was deep and guttural as it walked around. The smell of the beast was horrible, like a cat that had not been washed for years, but multiplied by a hundred.

She gasped as she saw a Knights’ Bannerman walking right past the wall she was behind, so she kept her head down and she hugged the wall. She moved quickly and slid inside of the room. The Bannerman stopped, and turned after hearing the sound of something moving behind it. The Knight turned and approached where it heard the sound, where Velvet was hiding. She slowly formed a dagger thanks to Anesidora’s library, and she waited for the Bannerman to get closer. She suddenly swung round and stabbed the Bannerman straight through the eye socket of its skull.

It was surprising, because whenever in combat the Bannermen roar and they collapse into themselves. But this one? It just crumbled and collapsed into a hundred pieces in front of her. *Perhaps they only collapse into themselves when they are engaged in combat? Good to know...*

Velvet slid down a small slope behind one of the buildings and she rolled behind one of the tables that she quickly overturned, just before a Bannerman entered. It luckily did not even notice the sound or even the change in the room. It walked slowly into the room, Velvet held her Hardlight Dagger in her hand, ready to drive it straight into the skull of the Bannerman if need be. The Bannerman looked around as it held the axe in its hand, dragging it across the floor as it walked through the room. Their silence was something that really made Velvet feel quite unnerved.

She got up and she exited the building towards the main one at the very end, and she sprinted towards it, since the area was clear. She jumped up and grabbed onto the wall and started to pull herself up. She gasped, for as soon as she grabbed one of the tiles, it slid off...and fell onto the ground with a bang. Her eyes widened and she turned, as the Royal Manticore suddenly spun around and roared at her. “Crap!” She screamed, and she swiftly started climbing up the tower. She jumped and pulled her little body up as fast as she could, when the Manticore started to charge up the Electrical Fire inside of its jaws.

She jumped up just in time, for the crackling fireball erupted from the roaring jaws of the Manticore, and it exploded beneath her. The violent shockwave rippled the collapsing tower, so she started to move faster and faster. “Gotta get up! Gotta get up!” She yelled at herself, and she climbed up onto the tower, then it started to tip over towards the face of the cliff. “No!” She screamed, for now she...
was sprinting across the tumbling towards. She jumped and slammed into the cliff, but managed to dig her Hardlight Dagger into the stone. She grabbed onto whatever handles she could find in the rock, and she kept climbing. The building collapsed and crumbled into ash beneath her with a deafening crash.

But that was the least of her worries, for she turned and saw the massive wings of the Manticore suddenly extend outwards and it roared at her, as it started to charge at her. She jumped up and she rolled across the floor, and she stayed laid down. She covered her body up with dead leaves and sticks, and closed her eyes as she waited to see if this strategy was the right move. She heard and felt the wings as the Manticore searched for her, the deep growl and the hot breath. It looked and growled as it searched for her, but it could not see her, or even sense her.

The Manticore roared with rage and it took off, and started to search the area for her. She took that opportunity as it left, and she fled. She ran towards the trees, and she kept running as fast as she could. When suddenly a mace came swinging towards her face round one of the trees. She screamed and she ducked under the attack and she formed Fox’s Tonfas – named Sharp Retribution. She spun round and she swung towards the attacker, only to stop and sigh with relief.

Cardin lowered his mace, after realising she was not a Bannerman. “Gods…I nearly took your head off.” He sighed as he leant against the tree, and Velvet never in all her life thought she would be relieved to see him.

“Cardin…you’re okay.” She said, and he chuckled.

“Yeah…nothing I can’t walk away from.” Cardin shrugged as he connected his mace to the magnetic strips down the spine of his armour. “Good to see you’re alive, Scarlatina.” She said to her, he wanted to hug her but he also remembered the tension between them for his past mistakes. So he decided against doing that.

“Did ya see what I just had to run from?” Velvet asked with a chuckle of nervousness and disbelief.

“Oh yeah, Big Lion Scorpio bastard. Grimm really are everywhere here…they weren’t kidding.” Cardin said with a shocked chuckle.

“Yeah…no surprise nobody comes back from Arkhonex alive.” Velvet pointed out.

“Well, let’s be the first, huh?” Cardin asked her as he patted her shoulder. Velvet scoffed. “C’mon, we got a crazy Scientist to find.” He reminded, since that was the whole reason they agreed to follow Kassius to Arkhonex.

Look how that panned out…

Velvet, the voice of realistic views and sensibility, could not stop herself from expressing her feelings about the situation. “Hold on, man…I mean…what’re we doing?” She questioned, Cardin looked at her and furrowed his brow in confusion.

“Whaddy mean?” He asked her.

“I mean – our Airship is destroyed and we’re all stranded in a cursed abandoned city.” Velvet described, which perfectly summed up how bad their situation really was.

“Yeah, so? Then we can go and steal something from the Acolytes…they’ll probably be nearby.” Cardin stated, since they all knew that they were in league with Vir Nominis Umbra.

“Yeah, and there’s that. We’re going up against an army.” She reminded.
“We’ve been holding our own against them so far.” Cardin also added.

“Yeah, on turf we could use to our advantage. We’re marooned on the worst place on Remnant.” She stated, and Cardin kept trying to find the good side, but Velvet was running low on motivation right now.

“We were trying to get here, remember?” He said as he held out his arms.

“When we still had an escape plan.” She added, and Cardin sighed with a frustrated look facing her. She lowered her head and she sighed. “Look…just hear me out, crazy suggestion? Why don’t we just track down some Acolytes and at least secure one of their airships?” She asked him, but Cardin shook his head.

“We can’t, we need to find the others. We need to find Merlot, we owe Kassius that.” He reminded her, and she scoffed.

“I care about Kassius too, Cardin. You don’t think I don’t know that? The guy has never asked anything of anyone, and this is the one thing he has ever asked for. I will help him find his dad so he can get his answers, but we can’t risk dying in the process. My team is out there, and I need to find them too.” She reminded, since they had heard absolutely nothing on Fox and Yatsuhashi’s current status.

“I get that, I really do. Trust me, if I was in your shoes, I’d do the same thing.”

Then Velvet went cold…and quite disrespectful.

“Would you?” She questioned, and those two words were enough to anger Cardin. But he managed to swallow that anger, and he just stared her down.

“Don’t…Velvet. I’m trying right now, I really am. I wanna make things right between us, and I don’t expect you to forgive me. But we have more important things than to just sit here and argue like idiots.” Cardin reminded as he pointed at her, but she smacked his hand out of her face.

“Don’t point at me. And tell me, Cardin, have you even seen any signs of Merlot and his scientists being out here? Because I sure as hell haven’t.” Velvet stated and he scoffed as he paced back and forth.

“Man…now you decide to doubt yourself? We’re here! We’re in Arkhonex!” He argued.

“And we’re probably never coming back! The stories never lie, Cardin!” Velvet yelled back, and Cardin grit his teeth as he stared down at her.

Suddenly, they both ducked down as something went roaring overhead, so as they ducked and took cover, they moved through the bushes. The growling of a convoy could be heard nearby, and they peered through the bushes. They saw what flew over their heads…and their sudden outbursts of anger made a lot of sense now. Fury landed on top of a rock with Death, Fear and Loss nearby as they watched over the Convoy of Acolytes of Lien that were moving through the city. Fury was in his Burning Wyvern form and he roared to the sky.

“Alright…that a good sign for you?” Cardin asked her, and Velvet gave him a glare, but then he grabbed her face and turned it towards something he caught. She saw it and she gasped harder than she had ever gasped before.

There were two cages…and inside…were…
“Fox…Yatsu!” She went to free them, but Cardin rightfully grabbed her and held her back and covered her mouth. In one of the trucks by the main lorry was Donovan Gele, he stared into the bushes were he caught a glance of them. “Get…off me…” She strained, but he whispered into her ear.

“Don’t be an idiot, we can’t take on a Convoy like that. And the Knights of Grimm are there too. We’ll get slaughtered and what do you think will happen to them?” Cardin asked her, and the image gave her chills…she calmed her rage and he pushed herself away from Cardin. The proximity to Fury was setting off her disgust for the man and what he did to her in the past, despite all the bonding they were doing beforehand, there was still that internal anger.

Velvet stared at the convoy intently through the bushes, she stared at Fox and Yatsuhashi, and from what she could see, Fox was yelling obscenities at Donovan and the other Mercenaries. Seemed like despite everything that they had been through and all the torture…Fox was still Fox.

Cardin approached her and he pointed something out. “At least you know they’re alive…” He said to her, and she nodded her head.

“Yeah…they’re alive.” She agreed, Fury took off with a roar and he continued to patrol the skies. The further away he got the less that anger became and she looked at Cardin. She felt guilt now for the things she said.

“I’m…sorry. For what I said.” She apologised. “I don’t know what got into me.”

Cardin looked at her and where Fury was. “Yeah you do.” He said, and he got up and walked away. “C’mon, let’s go. I spotted this old Fortress nearby. If the others are headed anywhere, that would be the best bet.” Cardin said. She followed him and despite her wishes, left Fox and Yatsuhashi to be taken to whatever facility Donovan had set up.

They could only pray for them now…

…pray they wouldn’t be too late to save them.

**Penny**

They were all still restrained, and now they were trying to get free from Alvarez’s restraints that she put them in. Penny pulled hard but she felt her pain receptors go off when the wires started to cut into her skin. She stopped and Ortega started to yank his arms back and forth to try and pull one of his hands out. “We’ve gotta get the hell out of here…before she snaps out of it…” Ortega said as he pulled his hands. The Malachite Twins strained as they pulled their wrists as hard as they could against the wires that restrained their thin bodies, and even Junior was struggling.

The wire was quite strong, she must have gotten a hold of it from the basement of the house. “How…the hell could this house be as clean as it has been? Couldn’t have been just Alvarez…” Junior strained, he was simply trying to take their minds off the pain of pulling hands from wiring restraints.

“If…it’s what…I think it is…it’s the creature, not her.” Ortega told him, and Militia stared at him with fear.

“What?” She whimpered.
“I’ve heard stories, of rare Mythical Grimm. One of them, was called the Skinwalker.” He began to explain as he kept fiddling with the wires, trying to bend the easily malleable metal so then he could pull his arms free. “It was said it could mimic people, and when it killed and devoured people, it took part of their souls. Their mannerisms, actions, even memories. The woman who owned this place, we found what was left of her under the stairs. We think she hid from it, but it attacked her and slowly killed her. Skinwalkers apparently prefer the taste of fear from their victims…so they kill them slowly.” Ortega explained to them, he never really have a filter, since telling a terrifying story about a monster that could be outside the house was probably not a good idea to begin with.

“You mean…this is its house?” Melanie fearfully asked.

“Most…likely!” Ortega finally freed his hand and he started to fiddle with the other to get his other hand free. Until suddenly they heard the heavy steps of Alvarez storming back down the stares, and suddenly she had a rifle in her hands and she pointed it straight at Ortega’s face.

“This is your fault! YOUR FAULT!” She screamed with anger at him as she held the gun to his face.

“Whoa! Calm down, Alvarez!” Ortega begged her.

“NO! If it weren’t for Robin and her stupid quest, I wouldn’t be here right now! If it weren’t for you and your brat robot daughter, I could have escaped! But that damn thing is still out there, and it’s waiting!” She screamed with anger. Then she stared out the window and she narrowed her eyes and a mad smile grew across her face. “Unless…I give you to it. As a sacrifice…when its eating you…I can make a run for it.” She said with hope and they shook their heads.

“Al…listen to me…that won’t work.” Ortega begged her.

“It will…I’m going home. I’M GOING HOME!” She screamed.

“Alvarez! Alvarez where are you!” A voice called from outside, it sounded like one of her friends and she gasped with hope for the first time. She looked out the window and saw a light that shined upon the house.

“Oh by the gods…they found me…” She sighed with relief and she smiled. “They must have killed it…” She said, and she suddenly ran past them and she cried with happiness as she ran out of the house. “Guys! Guys I…AAAAARGH!” Suddenly she shrieked an agonizing howl as there was a loud crunch and bang as she got thrown hard against the building. Blood splattered up the window…and it all fell silent.

Then they saw the shadow…at first they thought it was her…and then they saw it.

It stood tall, upright like a human, and the long curved black nails dug into the paintwork of the walls. It peered in slowly, curiously almost as it stared at them. Its body was covered in mangy black hair that hung low from its body, and it walked in, so humanly. The skull however, was the most terrifying inhumane face they could imagine. It was like some kind of demonic Goat Skull, with burning red eyes staring straight at them with a wild hunger. It had blood smothered in its teeth, and it slowly walked in, holding the flashlight in its hand, before it dropped it on the floor.

It tricked her…

…and now they were trapped and restrained in a house…with a Skinwalker.

The Skinwalker ran its hand across the dusty surface of the table and it softly grumbled as it identified the mess and approached them. It hummed softly, like it was singing as it approached, yet
the voice was so horrible. “H-Hello? How are you?” The voice did not even make any sense, it just mimicked what the woman who owned this place said, growling and in pain almost. It stood behind Melanie and she whimpered, they all tried to hide their fear but it was hard. Ortega was the only one who wasn’t…but even then…he was on the edge of breaking. He shook and he just glanced at the others.

“Don’t…look at it…don’t be afraid.” He whispered to them. It’s long black tongue licked Militia’s neck and she shuddered, it felt like sandpaper, and it she was shaking like a shake weight now. Very little set these two off like that. The Skinwalker moved around them and it looked at them and snarled softly, and said more words that made no sense to the time.

“Nice day?” The voice the creature mimicked said, as it walked in front of them. It stood in front of them and it wiped the dust from the shelves as it stood there, then suddenly turned at the speed of a bullet to stare right into Penny’s eyes. She jolted, understandably, because it turned so fast that the shoulder broke and dislocated. The Skinwalker pushed its bony humanoid hand against the shoulder and reset it back into position with a terrible squelch. It stared into her green eyes and she looked away, and closed her eyes. Then she felt the cold black hands press her temples, and it turned her head to face it, and it snarled horrifyingly. She opened them, and it’s burning coals were all she saw. She wanted to scream, she began to cry with terror. She could hear the crying pain of the woman’s soul that was trapped inside of this horror, and it was enjoying her pain and fear a great deal.

Ortega could not even bring himself to calm her down…because he was scared too.

But suddenly, Alvarez staggered back in, and the Skinwalker let out a horrifying bellow that deafened them and caused their ears to ring. Alvarez’s shoulder was completely ripped open, and her arm was hanging by sinew, blood poured from her wound and she aimed the rifle with one hand and started firing desperately at it. Ortega stared at his Revolver on the ground and he reached out, but the Skinwalker suddenly started to violently vibrate, and shot through them, knocked all five chairs onto the ground and it tackled Alvarez against the wall.

She shrieked in terror and agony as it dugs its claws into her stomach and started to squeeze her insides, blood poured from her mouth as she wailed. Then it slammed her down on the ground and began to disembowel her as she screamed. “NO! PLEASE AAH!” She shrieked desperately, punching and clawing at the black fur, but it just kept pulling her apart, and it bit back into her chest, into her breast and ripped her open more. She gasped and was merely running on adrenaline, now…which was the last thing she wanted. It took its massive bony jaws and slammed them down onto her screaming head, and crushed her head like an egg…blood splattered everywhere and covered the black fur.

Penny stared with disgusted horror as the Skinwalker rose up, hot thick gooey blood trickled from the sharp teeth over the mangled corpse of Alvarez. It stared straight at her and it created a terrifying baby’s giggle, before it shot towards her as well. It bit and slash at her as she screamed.

Until Ortega stood back up, after the chair he was in broke from the charge of the Skinwalker, and he picked up his Revolver. He hip fired the Revolver into the side of the Skinwalker’s head relentlessly until the eight shooter was out of ammo. The skull armour blew apart and black smoke spewed from the side of its head, and the Skinwalker staggered aside from Penny. It laughed, it choked and it had one last thing to say.

“What…is…your…name?” The Skinwalker collapsed and crashed to the ground with a heavy thud…and finally…the beast crumbled and dissolved away into smoke.

And left them all…
…in fear.
The birds tweeted joyously in the trees that surrounded them, the bright sun shone down upon the Group as they approached the Nikos Hold. The name of this great Fortress was simply known as Olympus, it stood tall even now. The massive walls that were damaged from Grimm bombardment still stood alongside the watch towers. The Gates were broken open, yet the rust still did not rot them to the point of collapse.

Pyrrha stepped forward, her bronze plated boot pressed into the soil and crushed the grass beneath her, the wind blew against her cheek and her long tail of red hair danced with it. Her eyes were wide and bright, as she stared at the home of her Ancestors…the place her bloodline began. It gave her chills, and despite how much life had grown over it all, she could still see the scars of war. There were old spears that stuck up from the ground like bones from a great beast, and the wind whistled through the cracks and crevices in the fortress ahead of them. None of them could find words, Jaune approached Pyrrha and his hand found hers. She felt his warmth grasp her and she held him tight as she stared at the ancient ruins.

Ozpin walked forward with his cane at his side, and he exhaled through his nose, and finally spoke when he looked at Pyrrha. “Are you okay, Pyrrha Nikos?” He asked her, and she looked at him. How could she answer this question?

She was staring at the birthplace of her bloodline and where it was almost wiped out, every body that was left behind…she could have been related to any one of them. And she never knew their names, nobody knew their names. She walked forward and she crouched down with Jaune next to her, she pressed her hand against the soil and she just took it all in. She could feel it, feel the energy that came off this place, in the ground itself. She blew out a breath and lifted her head up. She looked at the Professor who stood behind her. “Yes…Professor. I’m just, taking all of this in. This was where my family began…and I never even knew they were here.” She said to him.

Ozpin nodded his head, and he chuckled. “Well I know it may not look like it, but this was not where Ares Nikos and his House actually fell.” He revealed, they all looked at him with disbelief.

“Seriously? I mean…just look at the place. Looks like it was a massacre to me.” Cinder said as she held out her hand with confusion. Ruby felt the same way, none of this place looked like there was a resounding victory.

“When I and the rest of the Knights of Grimm were corrupted, and we lead the first attack against Arkhonex, the Spartans of Nikos held the Fortress against them. With their Phalanx Strategy, the Grimm could not break through. Their Ballistas managed to take down airborne Grimm before they could even get close. They held the entire Fortress for three weeks, constantly. Most of them passed away afterwards…merely from malnutrition.” Ozpin explained as he walked with Pyrrha across the field of dead.

They passed by some bodies that were left behind, and indeed…not one of them were Spartans. They all had different symbols, some of which they did not even recognise. “Then, who were these soldiers?” Nora asked as she walked past one of the skeletons clad in old armour.
"Wraiths, that possessed the bodies of those who were killed in the attack. Many of which were soldiers. But even they could not get through the Spartans’ Blockade." Ozpin said, he sounded truly impressed by the skill and determination of these Spartans. They all could see where Pyrrha’s skill came from, she would have fought just as hard as all of these men as well.

"Tough bastards." Qrow chuckled as he looked around at the location. It was incredible, and it would never stop amazing them, at how despite the terror and the destruction that happened here in Arkhonex…on the surface at least…life just goes on. The grass, the insects, the rabbits, the deer, just all forms of life surviving together in the bones of such an Advanced Civilisation. A civilisation now forgotten, and returned to the dirt of which it sprouted from, like the stem of a flower.

"Yes, they were." Ozpin agreed, Pyrrha knew though that the Nikos House did indeed fall, but not the whole house obviously…otherwise she would not be here.

"But they didn’t win in the end, did they?” She asked.

"No, they did not. They fought valiantly here in Arkhonex, and they refused to back down or run. They stood tall, and stared death in the eyes…as they all fell. But not all of them, Ares’ Daughter and Son survived, except for Cynthia Nikos of course. Her desire for revenge on those she lost, it brought her to Salem…and she never returned.” Ozpin explained, and Oscar lowered his head sadly. He never really knew Cynthia Nikos well but she struck him to be a kind hearted soul, and she died just like the rest of her family.

"You said that the Nikos Family once had Silver Eyes, right?” Ruby inquired.

"That is correct.” He answered.

"So…how? How did they consistently have them?” Ruby inquired curiously, and Ozpin chuckled.

"Well, the Silver Eyes is a Dominant Trait. The parent who had them would pass them on to their children, no matter the eyes of their partner. But…over time…with the knowledge of the power fading away and their children never learning to use their powers…out of fear…it lead to the Nikos Family losing the trait forever.” Ozpin explained as they walked towards the broken open gate. Something massive slammed through these, and from the scars that were across the walls, it looked like they were the tusks of a Goliath. It must have managed to twist the gates and its steel, and ripped it straight from the mechanism to allow the army of Grimm through.

But since there were no Spartans here…

They must have tricked them.

"Man, how did they win this battle if the Grimm broke through?” Jaune asked as he walked through the archway with Pyrrha next to him, she still held his hand tight and longingly. The walls were very Nikos Inspired, that much was clear, the stone had bronze accents of steel and gold across them in beautifully artistic fashion.

"The Spartans managed to retreat back, and they tricked the Grimm into storming inside, this strategy allowed them to escort the civilians they saved to safety, and out of the city walls. You see, Ares Nikos was a ruthless combatant…and just as ruthless at leading, but if he had the chance to save civilians instead of slaughter them to bide time for other plans, he would take it…only if it was for the survival of Remnant though.” He added, Pyrrha looked at Ozpin with worry.

"What do you mean?” She asked him, and he looked at her.

"Every Family has a dark secret, Miss Nikos. Yours was no exception, you see Ares Nikos became
infamous for how unstoppable he was on the battlefield. His strategic genius and skill made him something to fear. He was even nicknamed *The God of War* to some people in Arkhonex. Nobody could defeat him.” Ozpin explained, but as they entered the courtyard, they saw the destruction. And despite the fact there were no bodies, it was still abandoned, and Arkhonex was a massive Graveyard of souls.

“And yet…” Ren said sadly as he held out his hands to all of Arkhonex, as he heard the birds continue to chirp away, he listened to the wind, and the silence in the air. They all agreed with him on this, all of that sacrifice, all that skill…and Arkhonex was still lost and forgotten. All that knowledge, technology and resources…all lost.

“Yes…even the God of War could not stop Vir Nominis Umbra from destroying Arkhonex.” Ozpin stated, and Raven shook her head with a scoff.

“Then what hope do we have?” Raven questioned, Ruby glanced at her and she just sighed and walked around.

“Was this the Courtyard?” Pyrrha asked, and Kragen nodded his head before Ozpin could answer.

“Yes, I remember visiting this place with Cynthia once. Good old Ares always trained his men down here…when they were only eight years old, man or woman it did not matter. He believed that strength was not just found in your body, but also in your heart. He believed that you had to steel it, and fear nothing. The method of training Spartans…well…it was brutal, but as you can see, it made them some of the greatest warriors to ever walk Remnant.” Kragen explained, he walked over to one of the old weapons caches, that was overgrown and ruined, but even still, some of those weapons would be worth thousands.

Blake walked beside Ruby as they examined the walls of this small arena, or a large pit, that was built. Even now, after thousands of years, the stains of blood could be seen. The slash marks on the walls from where beasts would attack their enemies. Blake ran her finger down across the scars on the wall, and she looked back at Ozpin, Winter stepped aside so then he could see her. “Did they use Grimm against the kids?” Blake questioned, and Yenna nodded her head.

“You have to remember, the Arkhoni back then? We knew how to harness the power of the Grimm, we could tame them and turn them onto our side…at least we thought we could. Clearly Umbra let us get soft and feel all soft, then he flipped the script…then it was a damn massacre.” Yenna explained as she gestured to the destroyed surroundings of Olympus. Winter walked around as well, and she already could picture how they fought.

As she touched the ground, she gasped from what she saw, what they all saw. There was an Echo of Time, this was another one of those mysterious things that happened a lot here in Arkhonex. Echoes of Time, Oscar could see them anywhere in the world, but here everyone could see them. They all saw a young woman, she battled against someone that they could not see with a long staff, she blocked some of the strikes but got hit in the face, hard, so hard it broke her nose and knocked her on the ground.

“Iterum.” The voice demanded, it was Ares Nikos’ voice.

“Was that him?” Pyrrha asked Ozpin.

“That was indeed his voice…he would train every Spartan himself. He wanted them to be strong, and he fought them hard…but as you can see…” Ozpin said as he held up his hand to the crumbling echo of time before them. The shards of Chronon Particles showed their bodies in full detail as they stood there. They then saw Ares crouch down and he wiped the blood from her nose and he spoke to
her softly with his arm around her, she smiled and nodded her head with a smile. “He understood that they were still children, and they would fight for him if they respected him. So he cared for them, looked after them…and rewarded them every time they landed a hit on him. At first they were sweets, they tasted nice but were also made to strengthen their bodies and make them bigger and faster. Then it was new armour…finally it was their own personal weapons. At that point they were allowed to find a partner, and start a family. Then the cycle would continue.” Ozpin explained to them.

The Training Style…it made a lot of sense.

People who fight for someone that they cared for, would always fight harder than someone who did not. It also would keep inspiring the kids to fight harder and improve.

“Did every Nikos Spartan have Silver Eyes?” Ruby asked curiously.

“No, only those who followed Ares’ bloodline did. They were known as Spartan Polemarchs.” Ozpin told her. “Pyrrha, you are from his bloodline, but as I explained, your family forbid the use of the silver eyes after Arkhonex fell…out of fear. There were no more Nikos’ left after…and they did not want to lose everything. And eventually, your eyes became green instead of silver.” Ozpin explained to her, she looked at a puddle inside of the pit and she stared at her bright green eyes.

Ruby looked at her own reflection too, and they looked at each other and shared a smile. It was crazy to imagine if Pyrrha also had Silver Eyes…she would have been nearly unstoppable.

“Come, follow me.” Ozpin said to them as he pointed his cane down the path which entered the largest of the buildings, the main Building. He pushed the old doors open and the wind blew through. He held his hand up as the dust and old cobwebs blew right into him. He pulled them down and they walked in slowly and carefully. Jaune drew Crocea Mors as they walked in, and they turned to see the beautiful paintings.

Of Ares Nikos, and many other faces that they did not recognise…until they saw Cynthia. She was so young and beautiful, with her stunning bright silver eyes. “Professor Ozpin?” Oscar asked as he stared at the painting of her. Ozpin stopped and he looked back at him and then at the painting of Cynthia.

“Yes, Mr Pine?” He replied.

“About Cynthia…this painting of her looks almost royal, but when I found her she was barely getting by. Why was that?” He inquired, but to their surprise it was Pyrrha who knew.

“It was a test.” Pyrrha answered, he turned and he looked at her.

“You know this?” Oscar asked her.

“Yeah…” Jaune agreed with curiosity.

“I guess it was a tradition my family kept, we trained the same way, maybe not as brutally…but my Mother and my Father were quite rich when I was born. We had a fancy estate and everything we ever wanted. But they never wanted me to be spoiled by it…so they had me go out into Mistral for a whole week without their help, to get by. I understood what it meant to be poor, to be hungry. It is why care so much for those who were not as fortunate as I was.” Pyrrha explained, and it also explained her kindness and generosity even further.

“How did you do it?” Nora asked her.
“Well, I met this…” She paused and her eyes widened, and she clenched her fist.

“…this what?” Jaune asked her, and she sighed, because she never realised up until this moment.

“This Merchant.”

It was all she needed to say, and they knew exactly who she was referring to. Even then, Vir Nominis Umbra was watching her, plotting her future, and planning whatever atrocities he would put her through when Cinder would eventually kill her at Beacon. “Vir Nominis Umbra…” Winter said, they all knew but one of them had to say the name.

“Yes…I just realised now that I was retelling the story.” Pyrrha shuddered, and it made them all feel a bit anxious. Blake turned her head when she heard the caw of a Crow outside and she drew Gambol Shroud and aimed the pistol down the hallway. And there it was, a black crow with glowing red eyes and a crystal beak. It stared at her, but she shot it without hesitation, and it shattered into a burst of feathers, before fading away altogether.

“He really does like watching us…doesn’t he?” She asked, and Ozpin sighed.

“I really keep thinking I know where he is…but he always manages to sneak up.” Ozpin said with anger. It always frustrated him at how easily Umbra could spy on people and you would never even realise it.

Ozpin sighed, they did not have time to worry about Vir Nominis Umbra. He turned and he walked ahead of them, and Pyrrha followed him with a skip in her step. Jaune stayed close to her, whilst Ruby stared at the Crystal Beak that was left behind, which eventually crumbled away into nothing.

Ozpin approached the room that was before them, and it was a large and beautiful dining room. The dinner table was left there, completely clean. It had some cobwebs and dust, sure, but the silverware and the dishes were left where they were last placed. They all walked in and they looked around. The Architect stared at the fireplace before he lifted his head to stare at the painting of Ares with his wife and three children. He was so happy once, and now all of this was left behind…and forgotten.

But as they stood there, they saw Ozpin walk up the steps and he extended his cane into his Staff Form. He slammed it down and the cogs spun, and he manually formed an Echo of Time, one he needed them all to see. One that Pyrrha needed to see, the table showed the projections of multiple people. This was definitely set long after the events of the last Visionary Book they saw Vyrryk in. At this point, the Congregation of Dawn and Horridus Morbus was handled, and Arkhonex had already fallen, but the Nikos Generals and their soldiers still remained here at Olympus.

Ares was sat at the end of the table, they all watched as the Generals appeared…and then Jaune’s eyes widened with disbelief of whom he saw stood at the very end of the table. He was much older than when he last saw him, his hair and beard still had some blonde in them but it was mostly grey. He held his arms behind his back…and Jaune approached his Echo. It was Vyrryk Arc, he did indeed survive the War against the Congregation of Dawn.

But why was he here?

They were about to get the answer.

“The design is ready, Ares. The time has come.” Vyrryk told him, and Ares sighed with the nod of his head.

“Not many of us left, Gentlemen.” He spoke, his voice was deep and gravelly which matched his body and face. His hair was no longer red like it was in his younger days, his hair was completely
white and he must have been in his seventies at this point. Or the equivalent of that in terms of Arkhoni Years, due to the fact they lived double the lifespan of the Current Generation.

“What are you two talking about? We have not been informed on these plans.” One of the Generals said where he sat, one of them looked like he was a Schnee too.

“Yes, Lord Commander Nikos, what is going on?” Another inquired, Ares looked at Vyrryk and he just nodded his head.

Everyone watched the Echo of Arkhonex with widened eyes.

“My Militia and I, we have been working hard to fight against what my father has done. There was an old Sword he had the designs for, and I managed to sneak into our old home and steal them back. The sword was said to be able to harness incredible power, to channel the power and semblance of every Arc who wields it…The Speaker I mentioned in our last meeting? It told me that there is a future after this…but Arkhonex must fall in order for it to happen. It simply said that there will be Four…and one will be able to end this once and for all. We are all a part of this, and we must bide our time…and I must build this sword to make sure that my descendant carries it.” Vyrryk Arc explained.

And just then…Jaune just heard the truth about the very sword he was holding. He stared at it, and the Glyphs were shining bright. He stared at it and back at Vyrryk Arc with a gasp, he stepped back with disbelief. But the Generals did not seem as convinced as everyone else watching this memory. They all guffawed at Vyrryk at his explanation of his plan. “Are you serious, boy? Arkhonex is falling by the day! Every single settlement we ever built is being demolished, Queen’s Cove had just fallen!” One of the Generals yelled in anger.

“I understand your frustration, but this sword may be our best chance.” Vyrryk told them.

“What have you deigned to name it?” Ares asked him.

Vyrryk looked at him and he sighed.

“Crocea Mors – the Yellow Death.” He answered, and they all looked at him as he named the sword, and Jaune held the same sword up and he sighed. He held it close to his chest and he closed his eyes. He never realised how important this sword would be, not just in strength…but to him…and his entire bloodline.

Pyrrha looked at Jaune and she just held his hand lovingly. “What is it you want us to do, Mr Arc?” A General inquires and Vyrryk sighs.

“I need time…our base in Vale is not sufficient and does not have the Forge we need. But the Old Forge…in Old Town…that Forge will be the one we need to make the sword. I can bring the weapon to the Witches and they can help me by enchanting the blade…except…” Vyrryk said, but Ares already knew what the issue with this plan was.

“Old Town is completely infested with Grimm.” Ares stated, and all the Generals buried their heads in their hands.

“House Nikos…what I ask of you…it is a war crime…dishonourable…and I am sorry. But this sword, we need it. I know the word of an Oracle is not much, but after everything…we need every bit of help we can get.” Vyrryk explained as he held out his hands, and they all fell silent. They knew what he was asking.

Ozpin paused the moment as he stood there. “You see…House Nikos…they made it their mission to
save as many civilians as they could, they lost many Spartans along the way. And they knew of a Traitor among their ranks, one that was manipulating the Council, for what they believed was for Umbra’s end goal. Ares was the only one who trusted and believed in Vyrryk…and he had to make…a hard call. But it was not the first.” Ozpin explained to them all, then he tapped the staff against the ground once again. The memory repeated before their very eyes.

Ares stood up and he cleared his throat. “Thank you, Vyrryk. Please, you may take a seat.” He said to him, which Vyrryk respectfully did, but the Generals were still trying to comprehend everything that was just shared.

“What? You’re going to thank him? You do know what he is asking, don’t you?” The General questioned.

“I do…and it must be done. It’s not a nice decision, this I know. But Arkhonex and its future is soon going to be non-existent…Vyrryk will help us assure the possibility of there being life after this is over…a new civilisation, one that learns from our mistakes. Maybe…even a way to destroy Vir Nominis Umbra once and for all.” Ares spoke truthfully to them all, it was strange to hear someone else in such a high place of authority to speak of Vir Nominis Umbra with certainty…especially with what they experienced with President Thaddeus Brimstone and Atlas.

“M-Maybe we should talk about this! You’re talking about putting guns, swords and shields in civilians’ hands! Against the Oncoming Shadow! They won’t stand a chance.” One of the Generals argued.

“The Oncoming Shadow cannot be stopped, General. I’ve seen them, they are endless, they just keep coming out of the darkness, they’re like an ocean. He will not stop until our entire Empire is wiped off the face of the planet, all because of what those damned Scientists uncovered.” He stated, and they all sighed.

“Damn Eggheads, never should have poked around in things they didn’t understand.” Another General growled.

“We were all fools…to think the Grimm were under our control. We laid the bomb and set the timer, Vir Nominis Umbra simply hit the detonator.” Ares explained, and none of them argued with that description. “We will help Vyrryk accomplish his task no matter what, the Grimm cannot be anywhere near Old Town, Crocea Mors must be forged. If it is not, then there may not be a generation to protect.” He explained to them all as he pushed his hands against the table.

“But the Schnees have money, we could use that money…I dunno…use machines…something?” A General begged.

“NO! The Economy collapsed as soon as Arkhonex fell, and it only got worse when Ephai was destroyed at the same time. Money will not buy Vyrryk and Constantine the time that they need…that can only be paid for in blood. And I know exactly where to pay it.” He explained, and he opened his hand and formed the image of the Arc Fortress. Where Ezekiel Arc was hiding.

“My Father?” Vyrryk asked.

“He has been working against us, I have seen it, I know it in my bones. The bastard is a coward through and through, all he wants is a dynasty. We will send our forces there, every man and woman, and we will draw the Grimm in with us. Even if they wipe us out…the Grimm will destroy them too.” Ares explained, his mission was suicide, and one of the men could tell.

“Lord Commander…I know…the way you lost your wife, I am sorry…but we cannot lose you.” A
General begged.

“You do not understand my meaning – Arkhonex is over, Generals. I have already spilled more blood than any of you combined, my judgement has been waiting for me for a very long time. House Nikos will fall in this fight, that much is certain, but if we can kill Ezekiel in the process, then it will be a victory. And Vyrryk will have the time he needs to forge Crocea Mors…mind you…the Oncoming Shadow will swamp us fast. You might not have much time to do it.” Ares explained as he looked at Vyrryk, the Arc Knight stood tall.

“I will spend every second, as soon as the Grimm are gone I will light the forge, and get out of there…I just…I’m so sorry.” He apologised, and Ares smiled.

“Do not apologise, Vyrryk. I am a Lord Commander, I know when I am on the losing side. But I will not change allegiances like your father…I will not go gently into that good night. Generals…if any of you choose to leave…now is the time. I will not judge you for your decision…but know that if you follow me…there is no turning back. You will not return.” Ares explained, it gave them chills. They did not realise how dire the situation truly was, there were more Grimm signatures in Arkhonex than there were living things.

And yet…not one General stood up to leave.

They all remained there and nodded their heads. “We are Spartans, Lord Commander. And we shall fight by your side to the bitter end…even against odds…that will destroy us.” One of the Generals spoke up, and Lord Commander Ares bowed his head, it made Pyrrha tear up with heartbreak.

They were so brave…they knew they would all die…and yet they would do it…all so then a single sword would be forged. Jaune held it, and suddenly it felt like he was holding glass, he did not ever want to let go of it. The amount of poor souls who lost their lives, all so then Vyrryk and Constantine Arc could get into Old Town to build it at a single Forge that was still burning.

Ares looked at Vyrryk, who felt such guilt. “Good luck to you, Vyrryk Arc. Get that sword forged…we are counting on you…the future is counting on your success.” Ares said to him, and Vyrryk nodded his head.

“Good luck to you…Lord Commander.” He said his goodbyes, and he turned to walk away. Ozpin lifted his staff and it collapsed back down into his cane, and the echo of time faded away before their very eyes. They were silent, it felt like there were stood there for hours trying to contemplate everything they just witnessed from Ares and Vyrryk’s talk. All of that death, for a single sword.

A Sword…that could help destroy Vir Nominis Umbra.

And yet this Speaker said to Vyrryk that out of the four, only one will be the one to actually end this once and for all. If this Speaker was to be believed…

Whoever he was.

“By the gods…those brave soldiers…they went to face Ezekiel Arc, knowing that they would all be swarmed by the Oncoming Shadow?” Cinder asked with fear and Ozpin nodded his head sadly.

“Ezekiel…he betrayed Arkhonex?” Jaune asked.

“Ezekiel Arc is the most destructive traitor to ever walk the planet, Mr Arc. His children were not like him, and contrary to belief…both brothers had honour. An Honour that their father lacked.” Ozpin explained, but Jaune still remembered what he heard about Constantine Arc.
“But…he broke his vow…he dishonoured himself.” He said, and Ozpin stared at him.

“Did he? Did you see him commit the crime?” He asked curiously, and that simple question started to raise more in the back of his mind.

“Did…did they die with honour? My family?” Pyrrha tearfully asked Ozpin, and Kragen looked at her and then at Ozpin. They both nodded and he gave her the truth.

“They managed to hold the Oncoming Shadow…and Ezekiel’s Forces off…for two whole days, before they fell. Not one of them fled, not even the civilians. Ares had to make many tough calls as the Lord Commander, but everyone trusted him. And if he said that their sacrifices would save the world…then they would fight to the bitter end.” Kragen assured, and Pyrrha…well it still hurt. Ares sounded like he had honour, a fair amount of guilt very clearly had plagued his mind despite it all. But…they all died fighting…to the end.

There is no greater honour in the world, than that.

“Come with me, there is more you must see.” Ozpin said to them, Blake turned and watched as Ozpin walked down the steps, and the three other surviving Arkhoni followed. She walked next to Ruby and she looked at her with fear. They had heard stories about the Oncoming Shadow, the Army of Grimm so massive that they would bring about an artificial night and kill all life around them.

They followed Ozpin, and they found a large room nearby. It looked like some sort of large Lecture Amphitheatre, cobwebs hung everywhere in the building and dust was everywhere. Some light bled through the cracks and holes in the ceiling, but in the centre…it opened up before their very eyes.

Yet another message…but this was no Echo of Time.

This was a Holographic Message that opened up, and they all saw the Nikos Symbol, exactly the same as it was now. The spear…and then they saw his Hologram appear before them. This must have been recorded before he left the home of his family, to face Ezekiel…and die fighting valiantly.

Pyrrha walked forward and she stared at him, she felt small in comparison to him, yet she did not feel intimidated by him. “Hello…my name is Lord Commander Ares Nikos, I was once the leader of Arkhonex’s Military Force. I was in charge of maintaining order and destroying Grimm Threats…or other purposes.” Ares explained with his arms held behind his back. Video footage appeared before them and they walked forward to see the footage.

Spartans, all of them fighting hard against their enemies, stabbing them with their spears and holding the huge forces of Darkness back with shields alone. Not one Grimm, not one soldier, could get past them. And he always fought with them on the front lines, he never cowered behind walls, he faced the enemies head on.

“And this…is a confession of my crimes against Remnant, and her people.” He said to them all, and he bowed his head. “I have presided over the greatest loss of Human and Faunus life that has ever happened in History. No killers, no mass murderers, could ever match up to the things that I have done…to protect my Empire…to protect, my family.” He explained, and then the ground opened up in front of him, Pyrrha was so close she had to step back so then it could rise out.

“If you have found this message…and you are of my bloodline…then please, place your hand upon the open page of this Visionary Book. The truth will be made clear to you…for that is all that matters in this world of ours.” Ares explained to whomever was watching. Pyrrha stared at him and then at the Visionary Book that opened up before her, and there was the handprint. She gazed at it, before
she turned back to Jaune. He nodded to her, and she smiled…

She looked at Ozpin and he nodded. “Thank you…” She kindly thanked, since she wanted to know about her family’s history ever since she was a child.

“I owed you…for what I forced onto you…” Ozpin said, it still ate away at him, what he did to try and secure the very powers that Cinder had acquired.

Pyrrha looked back at the book, and she blew out a breath, as the whispering voices called out to her, to observe her family’s history. She held her hand above the mark…and pushed down.

**Ares**

She was seeing through his eyes…

…but he was a young man at this point, his hair was still red and his skin was fairer. He held his hands against the table as he stared down at the maps of which he managed to plan out the attack against the rebelling forces. This was during the Bloody Epoch, a War that surrounded the very idea of materialism, which sparked between two houses…both of which were now completely vanquished and forgotten, long before the events that brought Arkhonex down into the ashes.

He sighed as he pressed his hand to his head, when he turned to hear the voice of his wife behind him. “My love?” Aphrodite spoke, she walked up to him from behind. She had bronze skin and long locks of black hair and large brown eyes. She did not have the body of a warrior, unlike her husband, but she was very beautiful, and her skills were useful in other ways. Aphrodite Nikos worked at the Fertility Centre with Isabel Cox, she helped people have children there, or helped understand their afflictions.

“Aphrodite? I did not know you were awake…” He sighed, he wore his black gown, she still ached from his fierce love making earlier. This was the night of which that they first ever conceived a child, they were young and madly in love. The first of three children – their son. Cynthia Nikos was the youngest of the children.

“What are you doing, Ares? It’s dark…” She softly said as she wrapped her arms around his large muscular body, he held her hand and kissed the back of her palm. She giggled and she rested her head on his shoulder. She stared at the plans of the Siege against the Claviki – one of the Aggressor Houses that rose up due to the Bloody Epoch.

“Just…looking over our plans…” He said to her as he checked their siege locations, the last thing they could ever have happen would be a mistake. The Spartans had no room for error, they needed this to be a clean sacking of their house. They gave them plenty of chances in the past, but now they were out of chances, and out of luck.

“Is…is it really too late to sue for peace?” She asked with worry.

“We’ve tried everything with them…” He said to her.

“War is your realm, husband, not mine. But…you are marching into this war, and you never sleep. How can you fight a war if you can barely keep your eyes open?” She asked him, and he chuckled as he held her.
“Your fears are unfounded. The Claviki will fall, and the Bloody Epoch will soon come to a decisive end. Then I will be by your side once more.” He said as he turned to her, he held her round her back and she wrapped her arms around him, their lips were close together as she whispered.

“Promise me that.” She softly said, and he smiled.

“I promise you.” He said. “Nothing will stand between us.” He assured, as he kissed her suddenly and she moaned with ecstasy and held onto him tight as he lifted her off the floor and carried her back to the bedroom.

The memories shifted, and suddenly Ares was in the middle of the war. Screams were everywhere as the Spartans battled together, they held their shields and they moved forward in unison, grunting with every step, and they pushed their spears forward with every single attack. The Claviki were being absolutely decimated, every single soldier who tried to attack got rammed through the chest or the throat – or the head in some occasions – but massive spears.

Nothing could stop them…

…nothing at all.

They battered, they bashed, they stabbed and they cut through the soldiers one by one. They burned the homes down and left their home completely destroyed. As Ares walked through the meadows where the ashes of a destroyed House flowed past him…Pyrrha could hear his own narration of his sins.

“My sins…cardinal but true…I massacred more lives than I can count, all for an Empire that was more corrupt on the inside than those I fought against. I laid entire Houses to waste that stood against us…but that…that was not the massacre that haunts me…only one did.” Ares explained, and the memories shifted many years later, his hair had turned greyer in places and he had aged a bit. His three children were born at this point…and the Congregation of Dawn were on their knees.

Pyrrha stood there and she could see the ghostly apparition of Ares as he testified his sins. “The Congregation of Dawn were falling, we had withered them away to a mere few, burning everything they had made with nothing behind. But the Father had another trick up his sleeve…” He revealed, and he opened his hand. Pyrrha gasped when she saw the black smog blast out from his wrist and start infecting everything around Pyrrha. “Horridus Morbus, a disease that devoured Biomass, and converted it into dark matter. A pool of black sludge, after it had melted every inch of your body down…into nothing. This was his last resort, he wanted to wipe the Faunus off the face of the Earth and he first unleashed it upon Arkhonex. The Witches of the Restless Marshlands were working hard…”

“…but it was not enough. We tried to keep it contained…and then it advanced. It spread to Ephai but we managed to send cures there to stop people from being infected, but we never realised that someone also managed to sneak off…to hit Menagerie. The Varr Skaal Tribe were in charge there, a Bloodline long lost now…because of me.” He revealed and her eyes widened, the vision formed around her and she saw the Airships gliding towards the large island.

There was no Desert back then…no desert at all…it was a lush tropical island.

He stood at the bridge and Pyrrha stood beside him as he watched over, she looked at the old recording of her Ancestor as he spoke. “My Mission? To contain the spread of the disease, no matter the cost. And if things had gotten too serious there…I would be left no choice…but to use the Relic of Destruction.” He revealed, her eyes widened and she slowly turned to see the Relic contained inside of a cylinder behind him, floating thanks to a piece of Gravity Dust.
She turned back to the island and watched with fear. “Lord Commander.” One of the Generals spoke, Pyrrha turned to hear his voice, and he was one of the very same Generals at the table they saw earlier. “We are in position before Menagerie, and have begun scanning.”

“Show me.” Ares commanded, and a large holographic map of the Island formed before him and he stared at the scans as it passed across it, searching for detections of Horridus Morbus. Most of the island appeared clean for now, most of the Varr Skaal seemed completely unphased by it.

“Population counting to over twenty seven thousand Faunus, Lord Commander. No signs of Horridus Morbus so far.” He said to Ares, and Pyrrha felt hopeful as she watched the scan…it was nearly covering the entire island.

“Is it possible? Have we gotten ahead of it?” Ares pondered, then…suddenly…the eastern side of Menagerie suddenly shone bright red, a massive section…up to one thousand people had already been contracted with the disease and it was spreading fast.

“Horridus Morbus signature detected, Lord Commander!” The General called out with fear.

“NO!” Ares roared with anger and heartbreak, and he slammed his fist into his table so hard that the screen cracked.

“Lord Commander? The Plague has been detected in a locale that we could cleanse alone…perhaps if…we warn the Varr Skaal?” The General asked, but Ares had seen how fast that disease could spread.

It killed his wife.

Slowly and painfully.

“No…if we warn them, we give the disease time to spread.” He said, and his eyes started to well up with tears. He squeezed them shut and turned to the Relic of Destruction. It was the last thing he wanted to do…but… “You know we have no choice.” He said to them.

“Give me the Relic of Destruction…I will cleanse Menagerie.” He told them, and Pyrrha’s green eyes widened with horror.

“NO! Don’t! Please no!” She screamed with horror, but there was nothing she could do. The events were written, and now they were going to play out as they happened. Ares took the Relic of Destruction and his Silver Eyes shone bright as he held the powerful Relic in his hand. It then floated as he opened an extending bridge from the glass, it opened and he stood before them.

He opened his palm…and the flaming pebble floated before him…and suddenly a bright solar light suddenly blasted out from the small rock, and it burned the plants, the houses, and the people. It all burned and disintegrated before him, in mere moments an entire island of twenty thousand people was completely extinguished…

…and left nothing behind…

…but sand.

Pyrrha
The Visionary Book pulsated and threw her back and she screamed with horror, right into Jaune’s arms. She held onto him with heartbreak, and she turned to see Blake, who was on her knees with horror. She then saw that Ares was telling them all what he did as she was experiencing it for herself, she did not have to tell her about what he did to the Varr Skaal. And suddenly, the mystery of what happened to the Bloodline made a lot of sense. The Great Faunus Tribe that once ruled Menagerie… they were still there.

The Desert of Menagerie…is the Varr Skaal.

They were speechless to what they just heard Ares confess, but none of them hated him for it… because he had no choice. Didn’t he? They had no time to warn them, they had to stop it right then and there. “Vyrryk promised the Varr Skaal he would protect them from the Congregation of Dawn…and in the end…it was I…who killed them all.” He said and he looked down at his hands, it was like he only saw blood all over them.

He looked up at the screens changed from the footage of him destroying Menagerie to the annihilation of Arkhonex, flames that rose so high that they touched the clouds. “This is my sin…to be the man that would have to make the choice that nobody else would ever make…because it was cruel. But to face Vir Nominis Umbra you must play him against his own rules…and now I shall leave, to face my judgement once and for all.” He explained, but he was not done.

“To those watching…survivors of Arkhonex who followed Vyrryk Arc, or the People Who Came After…this is my confession. Of the deeds I committed to protect my Empire from the Oncoming Shadow. From the Shivering Dominion. The Shadow will never stop, it is an endless wave of Grimm that will consume anything and everything that stands in its path until its leader – Identified as Vir Nominis Umbra – retrieves the Relics. If he gets all four…it’s game over.” He said to them all, luckily they already knew this information.

“This was the story I told the thousands of innocents who followed me. That they would be fighting for a better future, for a better tomorrow to save the people that came after us. But truly…it was all a lie. Everything I did…Operation Yellow Death…was the idea to inspire thousands of innocent people to fight a losing battle against death itself. Why?” He asked them.

They all listened to every word he said, and they knew who he was speaking to now.

“To buy time for you. To build Crocea Mors, and pass it down the line of Arcs to the one that must wield it when the time comes.” Ares explained, Jaune and Pyrrha both stared at him, from different bloodlines…and yet their love bound them together.

Ares continued. “The Shivering Dominion – the final recorded day in Remnant’s history and future…is coming fast. It cannot be stopped. But…there might be a future after it, it all depends on what comes after us. I pray…for Remnant…and for our descendants…that you do not make the same mistakes as we did.” He said, and he held out his hand, it almost touched Pyrrha’s cheek and a tear trickled down her cheek. “And to…whoever the beauty is…that follows me…follows my children…please…do not be…like me.” Ares begged them, he began to cry in the end.

He stepped back and Pyrrha reached out for him as he stood there.

“Ares…signing off…one last time.” He said…and then he disappeared from them all, and the dark silence was all that surrounded them.
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