A Light in the Dark

by Lordxana0

Summary

Cinder Fall is a young huntress who has recently been accepted into the world famous Beacon Academy, a school that will train her to fight the evil forces of the Grimm. Standing against her is the murderous Ruby Rose and the mysterious creature known as Shade.

Will the girl and her new allies stand against the darkness? Or will the light the world clings so desperately too be snuffed out once and for all?
Cinder Fall sighed as she walked around Vale streets as the sun went down on the horizon, more content than she had been for as long as she could remember. In a few days she would be receiving her reply to the request letter send to Beacon, a school that would train her to be the best of the best, a Huntress who could defend humanity from the terrible force of the Grimm and finally begin to use her abilities for true good. But before that she would need to stop in and pick up some Dust for school supplies, after all even if she didn't make it in she could use the Dust for around the house purposes.. Her family wasn't quite poor enough for the academy to cover the costs of all the stuff she would need to attend, so that meant the Dust she got would have to be paid for out of pocket. Of course it was already rather late and there weren't too many places open at this time of night. She mentally cursed Emerald for making her sit through a second movie, though she would admit that the movie was one of the better ones she had seen in a while. Finally she came to a pause in front of a small store, which not only seemed to be open but actually had both powder and crystal Dust. Hm… From Dust Till Dawn? She would admit that the stores name was a bit hokey, but who was she to complain at the time? Cinder entered the store and was quickly greeted by the old man behind the counter.

"Can I help you today miss?" his voice was rather kind, albeit a bit worn with age.

Cinder nodded a bit, reaching into her purse and pulling out a few Lien to show him that she was a paying costumer. "Yeah, I was wondering if maybe I could get a few tubes of Burn and maybe a crystal, uncut if you have them." the young huntress to be was an adept Dust user, able to challenge it at an advanced stage and manipulate them into powerful attacks. Sometimes a bit too powerful, but the intricate seals weaved into her clothing and hidden along her arms provided a bit more control.

"We are having a sale on Burn actually, bit of a fire sale you might say." the old man laughed at his little joke before getting out some storage containers. "It will take me a bit too get your order together, why don't you check out our selection of magazines from the back?"

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The young woman gave the storekeeper a bow before moving past the shelves and too the magazines in the back. A few of them were just catalogues for different weapon mods or new Torchwick brand Dust mixes. Cinder picked up a new 'Strange Tales of Hunters' from the rack. The magazine had quite an old run, telling strange stories that Hunters and Huntresses saw in battle against the Grimm. Some of them had liberties taken to make the story flow better, but she still got a kick out of it. Before she got well and started reading through she brought her headphones up to her ears, deciding to listen to a song or two while she read.

While the young huntress listened to her music and read another figure entered the store, backed by four men in rather nice suits and wearing hats, an outfit commonly worn by those of the Three Bears gang. Three carried blades at their sides, and the fourth carried a small pistol. The fifth person to enter was a rather tall woman; she had long flowing blonde hair and two golden gauntlets that
covered both of her arms. The look in her eyes was filled with dark fire, a look that could burn a person's soul if they looked into it for too long. Too put it lightly, she had the eyes of a killer. "Hey there old guy" the woman waved toward the shopkeeper and one of the men put a gun to his head. "Any chance you are having a sale today?"

The man's hands quickly shot above his head, not wanting to die in defense of his modest shop. "Please don't kill me, just take the Lien and let me be," his words were desperate as he pleaded with the woman, who he recognized straight away. Yang Xiao Long of the Blood Rose gang, one of the most notorious and deadly people in the city. She was known for going on huge killing sprees with little to no reason, and it was said that the only thing that controlled her was her sister, the leader of her gang.

Yang went "Tsk-tsk" and wagged a finger at the old man. "Come on now, I am not gonna take your money," she turned her eyes toward the four men. "Grab the Dust and let's go." The four men nodded and grabbed their Dust containment jars, ready to drain the place as fast as possible. "Hey how about you give me some Freeze, one of my friends has been dying to get her hands on it." The man nodded and quickly handed it over. "Hm… craftsmanship is spotty at best, many if I wasn't stealing this I would be offended." Yang balanced it on one finger and smirked.

As one of the men was draining the Dust from its container he noticed a girl at the very back of the store, reading a magazine and listening to a pair of headphones. He sighed a bit, obviously not really wanting to scare some young girl but also having a job to do. He pulled out his blade and walked toward her. "Put your hands in the air, this is a robbery!" The girl didn't seem to hear him, focusing more on her music and reading than the world around her. The man took another step and put a hand on her shoulder, turning her around and pointing toward his ear.

Cinder blinked in surprise and embarrassment, expecting to see the shopkeeper having come to inform her that her stuff was ready and instead finding some man she had never seen before. She pulled down her headphones and the music she had been listening to bleed out into the world around her. "Yes?" she asked politely.

"Put your hands in the air." the man gave her a threatening look and raised his blade.

The young woman took a moment to process the situation, wondering just how exactly she had gotten into this situation. "Are you robbing me?"

The man let out a sigh and nodded. "Yes."

"Oh, well then." she put up her hand and let out a massive ball of fire directly into the man's stomach, sending him flying backward out the window of the business. He probably wasn't dead, but with burns like that and the broken bones that came from the impact he certainly wasn't going to be feeling good.

Yang raised an eyebrow as one of her men went flying out the window, landing quite unflatteringly on his back. "Huh?" she asked in confusion. She pointed toward the man with the gun to go see what was happening.

The man turned the corner and raised his weapon at Cinder. "Freeze!"

The huntress to be smirked and raised her finger. "No." she snapped and the gun melted in his hands, drawing a scream from him as the molten metal bit through his gloves and burned his skin. Before he could react to this through Cinder was moving forward, slamming a burning palm into his face and using the momentum to carry them through the shattered window and tossing him into a nearby building. Her music clicked off as she turned back to look at those who had been inside of the
building, deciding that she would probably have an easier time getting them to surrender if she could scare them. With a deep breath Cinder drew in her power, setting the runes along her dress on fire and cutting a terrifying figure against the mostly black night, like a pure fire in human form.

Yang crossed her arms and took a good look at the young girl, unable to believe that some brat had managed to take down two hardened criminals like they were nothing. "Huh?" she shook her head and pointed at her. "What are you idiots waiting for, get her!" the men nodded and ran outside to attack Cinder.

The girl let out a sigh and stepped back, drawing her power toward her hands and creating two new fireballs. These people weren't about to back off, and that meant that she couldn't either. She aimed her palms down and launched her flames at the ground, and when they hit a circular wall of flames surrounded her, forcing the two standing men too retreat from their heat. Before they could think of dodging two whips made of fire lashed out and grabbed their weapons, pulling them away from their grasps and tossing them aside. Before they could even process this through the ground under their feet suddenly rose to massive temperatures, melting their shoes and causing them to fall over. Cinder killed the flames and looked toward the leader of the group, who was giving her an odd stare from the window of the shop.

"Well crap, those guys weren't worth half of what my sister paid for." Yang shook her head and stepped out of the shop, craning her neck from one side to the other and drawing free some fresh pops from it. "Now normally I would kill you, but I would hate to be late so….." the woman lashed out and sent a bullet straight at Cinder, which exploded in a cloud of smoke in front of her face. "Later!" Yang rushed past the girl and toward a building in the distance.

The shopkeeper came out of the building, looking afraid but unharmed. Cinder turned toward him and smiled a bit. "I am going to go after her, do you mind?" the man shook his head and tossed her the Burn crystal she had asked for, showing support for her efforts, probably believing that she was an actual Huntress. Cinder quickly gave chase after Yang, seeing that despite the short amount of time the woman had managed to get rather far. Cinder drew energy from the crystal and began to run quickly, getting to the ladder that Yang had climbed up and using the force from her flames to rocket her to the roof of the building, looking at Yang.

"Man you kids just don't know when to stop do you?" she turned around and looked at Cinder as a light airship rose up behind her. "Sadly I don't have much time to waste on you… So…" Yang jumped up into the open door of the ship and tossed out the Freeze crystal, having it bounce right next to Cinder's feet. "Bye-bye" she launched a shot from her gauntlets, expecting the explosion of cold to freeze the young girl.

Before it could however a figure descended from the sky and formed a shield around the Cinder and itself. When the ice cleared the figure was revealed to be none other than Glynda Goodwitch, one of the bigger thorns in the Bloody Rose's plans. The woman gave a glance toward Cinder before refocusing on Yang.

"Oh come on, this was supposed to be a quick hit!" Yang discarded her current shells from the gauntlets that covered her arms and loaded in a number of bright yellow shells. She quickly launched it out, trying to hit the Beacon professor, only to have her dodge and have a massive explosion shake the rooftop. However Glynda didn't pause for a moment, creating a spiral of destruction form the broken bits of roof the blast had created. Yang fired down with her explosive bullets at the stream, but it didn't seem to make much of a difference as no matter what blew up it kept coming straight at them. The blow hit the ship hard, but thankfully the lackey behind the wheel was more competent than the four that had been with Yang on the ground, and most of the damage was to noncritical systems. Before the best blow could hit Yang gathered together all of her energy and forced it out,
creating a wave of pure fire that surrounded the ship and burning the debris.

Cinder looked at Glynda and up too Yang, launching out a few blasts of fire from her hard up at the criminal. However her attacks proved useless, and the response was a number of powerful and destructive shots from Yang's gauntlet, nine shots that would have destroyed the building they were standing on with ease. Before they could land Glynda focused all of her energy into a shield, causing them to detonate harmlessly in the air. This however gave the pilot enough time to carry them away into the air and out of her range.

Cinder let out a sigh and looked toward Glynda. "Are you… Are you a Huntress?" the woman turned toward Cinder with a look that was hard to read. "C-can I have your autograph?" she asked meekly with a bright and hopeful smile on her face.

The next hour or so was a blur for Cinder as the Huntress took her down to the police station to be questioned before sitting her in a small room with just Glynda and Cinder in it. "In all my years I have never seen anyone do something so very foolish… and also very brave." Glynda gave Cinder a look that showed that she disapproved but respected Cinder. "I am tempted to let you go home with a pat on the back…" she brought down her crop on the table near Cinder, causing her to jump. "And a slap on the wrist" the woman sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. "But that's not really up to me, there is…someone who would like to see you."

Almost as if on cue a white-haired man entered into the room carrying a plate of chocolate biscuits and a cup of tea. He got a bit close to her, examining her for a moment. "You have… golden eyes"

Cinder blinked for a moment and nodded a bit self-consciously. Her odd eye color had been the interest of a number of people, not all of them kind. "Excuse me?"

The man seemed to shake off the thought and put the biscuits and tea on the table, setting them down in front of Cinder and nodding at her to eat her fill. Cinder did so happily, being a huge fan of sweets and tea. "So then," the man lifted up a holoscroll that had a display of her fight on it. "Tell me what weapon you used in to do this." he pointed toward the screen to show where Cinder had created the massive fire barrier.

Cinder tried to speak but almost choked on one of the biscuits, causing a small blush to rise from her face before taking a sip of the tea in order to wash down the food. "I um… I didn't sir."

The man seemed surprised by this. "You mean you controlled this much power without using an apparatus to focus it in?"

She nodded a bit, playing with the hem of her skirt. "It's something I have always been able to do."

The man looked toward the woman and nodded his head toward her. "Have you thought about what you want to do with this power of yours young lady?"

Cinder smiled and looked up, confident in answering this question. "Yes, I want to be a Huntress."

"You want to fight monsters?" the man added.

"Yes, I feel like I was gifted with these powers for a reason, and while I understand that the police help people too I feel like I am better suited to help battle against the endless hoard, you know fighting to advance humanities standing and creating a better future for us all… It's something my mother used to always say, 'if we sit back and don't fight for tomorrow than who will', so yeah…"
Cinder clammed up again after realizing that she had been speaking rather rapidly.

This answer seemed to satisfy the man. "Tell me, do you know who I am?"

"You're Professor Ozpin, right?" Cinder looked up at the man, recognizing the headmaster of Beacon, the school she so desired to go to, from his global fame.

The man nodded and smiled. "Hello there."

"Hi." she gave an awkward wave.

"So you want to come to my school?" he asked, through it sounded like he already knew the answer to that question.

"More than anything." Cinder confirmed.

Ozpin reached into his coat, pulling out a letter and placing it on the table. Stamped over the front of it was the word 'accepted' in bright red letters. "Well, all right then."

In that moment it felt like Cinder could have died from happiness, the pure joy of knowing that her dreams were coming true just seemed unreal.

And now it just felt like she was actually going to die. "Oh man I can't believe we both got accepted oh man this is just way too awesome!" Cinder's best friend and current squeezing death trap went by the name Emerald. Her skin was tinted a light tan color, and her mint green hair ran down her back in two small strands. "And especially after last night, man people are going to think you are awesome." she finally let go of Cinder, allowing the air to flow back into her lungs.

"It's not all that great," Cinder rubbed her arm a bit, biting her lip and looking down. "I am just like anyone else."

Emerald punched Cinder in the arm gently. "Nope, none of that you were amazing and you just need to accept that for the plain fact that it is."

Cinder let out a chuckle at her friends antics and looked down at the city they were leaving. She had lived all her life in Vale, and watching it now it was amazing to see just how large it really was. "It's beautiful." she said mostly to herself.

"Yeah, it really is..." Emerald wasn't looking at the city, but rather at a boy among the crowds.

Cinder raised an eyebrow at her friend. "Careful who your eyes fall on, you will need to actually focus this time around in class."

Emerald huffed up and poked Cinder in the cheek. "You need to start getting interested in boys miss bookworm, like maybe..." she pointed into the crowd, her finger aiming at a blonde boy who appeared to be clutching his stomach and running toward a trash can. "Okay maybe not him..." she scratched the back of her head and chuckled.

Cinder rolled her eyes and turned toward the holoscreen on the TV. "If everything went your way then I would already have twenty boyfriends and two husbands." She raised a hand to pause Emeralds response as a news report began to play.

"Yesterday members of the once peaceful Faunus civil rights group the Black Fang committed
another act of corporate sabotage by blowing up a number of factories with unconfirmed cases of labor abuse. Seen on the sight of the bombings was notorious leader of the Black Fang, Blake Belladonna. Just as fast as they appeared they were gone again."

The news was handed over back to the main desk.

"In other news, infamous murderess Yang Xiao Long of the Bloody Rose crime family was seen robbing a Dust store last night, attempting to gather Dust but choosing to leave the Lien. More news on this story as it develops."

Cinder tightened her hand into a fist as she saw the face of the woman she had gone against the previous night and cursed inside of her head, wishing that there was some way to go back and stop her. Before the thought could develop through the holoscreen was replaced by the floating figure of Professor Goodwitch.

"Who's that?" Emerald asked as she nudged Cinder in the side.

"Hello students, my name is Glynda Goodwitch." the hologram started.

"Oh." Emerald quieted down to listen to the message.

"The world we live in is going through a wonderful time of peace at the moment, free from some of the dangers our ancestors faced. However in order to keep this peace people must be trained in order to defend it, those who have the will to protect this world. You have been chosen because of your skill, bravery, and power. We have been tasked with giving you the knowledge of the world in order to allow you to most effectively defend this world, may you prove yourselves to not only yourselves, but the entire world" the hologram faded and students began to gather at the windows, looking at the approaching school.

"Here we go." Cinder whispered under her breath, putting a hand on the glass.

"Uh Cinder, might want to move your foot." Emerald pointed down and Cinder jumped up.

"Gross, gross, gross, gross, gross, gross, gross!"

Well, not every story starts off as heroically as the legends would have you believe.
A New Flame

After a few more minutes the airships began their decent toward Beacon, landing on the waiting docks and opening their doors so the new students could get free of them. As soon as these doors opened the blonde boy from inside the airship Cinder was in ran out and found the nearest trashcan, letting loose into it and making noises that almost didn't sound human. Cinder and Emerald walked past the puking boy along with the rest of the crowds, letting out sounds of awe and wonder as they looked at the massive buildings that made up the academy for future Hunters.

"Man this place makes Signal look like crap" Emerald said in a rather blunt tone, grinning from ear to ear as she looked at the massive building that would be her new home. "Don't cha think so too Cinder?" she looked over to her friend expecting a response.

Instead of responding or looking at the massive building with her friend Cinder was doing something else. She was looking at each and every student, struck in awe and wonder as she did. "Beautiful…" she said in almost a whisper. For as long as she could remember Cinder had a special ability that let her see people's Aura's in a way that no one else could. The bright and vibrant colors of a person's soul which normally remained hidden could be viewed easily when she put a bit of power into it and looked closely. Each of the students that passed all had a unique Aura, like a thumbprint that could tell you what kind of person they were. And as she looked around she saw that unlike the muted Aura's of normal civilians or even those trained at Signal the Aura's around her were all bright, like a beautiful cloud of light surrounding each of the people. Some were even so developed that they has special features, like wings, or claws, and in one case even a detailed set of armor.

Emerald sighed and tapped her fist on top of Cinder's head to get her attention. "You know starring at people is rude." She gave a smirk to Cinder.

"Coming from you that is rich" Cinder rubbed the top of her head and fixed her friend with a glare. "Aren't you the one that is constantly staring at the boys?"

"That's not fair, I actually talk to them after getting a good look" Emerald played at annoyance, but her joking tone was easy to hear.

Cinder rolled her eyes at that. "I can learn a lot about someone just by seeing their Aura, it speaks volumes to who they are and what they think. Honestly what is even the point of getting to know people when you can just figure out everything you need too with a look?"

"What happens when you end up on a team and can't talk to anyone through?" Emerald pointed at in a kind tone, honestly worried about her friends isolationist tendencies.

Cinder shuffled uncomfortably at that, not really having an answer. "I…um… I will just be on your team right?"

Emerald bit her lip and looked away, not really wanting to tell Cinder the next bit. "You are my best friend Cinder, but you need to learn to work with more people. You have seen the old war films, and you won't always have a conductor who can compensate for a lack of communication"

Cinder sighed in defeat, knowing that her friend was right but not really wanting to accept it. If only she could conduct herself, but sadly her Aura wasn't suited for it. Those with the ability to 'conduct the battlefield' could link their Aura's to others, creating an instant chain of free flowing thoughts and ideas. Conductors would send the flow of thoughts through the head of the leader, to the rest of the group, feed input from the team to the leader, and then pull off the maneuver. This all happened
within seconds without a word needing to be spoken between people unless they wanted something to remain private. But people with that ability were rare enough as it was, and not all of them chose the Hunter life. "Well maybe we could still be partners and I can still try the whole branching out thing. Hey at least we get to hang out now right?" Cinder turned and noticed a curious lack of Emerald next to her. A quick scan revealed she was talking to a group of boys who already seemed to be slobbering all over her, something she would no doubt use to her advantage for a bit of fun.

Cinder pinched the bridge of her nose and walked forward, her mind filled with confusion and terror over the fact that for one of the first times in her life she would actually need to confront and try to connect with a human being that she hadn't known since the beginning of forever. She was awkward enough with just the one friend as it was, adding more was just asking for trouble and she knew it. She was so distracted by these thoughts that Cinder ran smack into a cart filled to the brim with box upon box of Dust, causing them to spill over and Cinder to fall among them.

"Are you an idiot!?" a rather pissed off sounding male voice asked her from above. "Do you have any idea what you are doing?"

Maybe if I just lay down he will think I am dead and I can sneak away. She thought to herself before cracking open one eye to look at the person who had called her an idiot.

The young man in question was a rather nicely dressed guy with orange hair covered by a bowler hat. He also walked with a cane in his right hand, although he didn't really seem to need it to assist him in walking. "Well are you going to sleep all day, or has Beacon lowered it standards and started to employ the mentally challenged into its number now? Seriously who walks into a cart full of Dust!?" the young man picked up one of the bottles, which was marked with a pair of eyes above a smiling face one might see carved into a pumpkin.

The insult stung Cinder and she pushed herself up, looking him straight in the eyes before taking a step back, not really sure what she was looking at in terms of the Aura that surrounded him. The color was the first thing that hit her, a dull grey surrounding a thin layer of white that covered his body. Normally with just a look she would be able to tell that the guy had problems, but that layer of white confused her to the point of not really being able to respond. "Sorry, what was that?" she asked, having realized that she had forgotten the situation she was in after seeing the man's strange Aura.

"Dust you idiot!" he began to wave around the bottle. "Fire, Ice, Electricity, the weapon that harms the Grimm?" as he waved the bottle around a thin layer of Dust began to form, which he must not have noticed in his ramblings.

Before Cinder could react however her body quickly absorbed the Dust in the air. "Oh no" she quickly pushed him back and tried to hold back what she knew was coming, but couldn't. Her energy exploded out and created a pillar of flames around herself, and kept burning until the Dust she had absorbed ran out and left her with just her natural energy.

"Are you a lunatic!?" Roman shouted as he pushed himself off the ground, dusting himself off and getting into her face. "You nearly blew a hole into the school"

"Sorry, it was an accident" Cinder wanted to lash out at the guy, but the fact she was in the wrong here was kind of plain to see.

"Sorry? I was mocking before but are you really mentally challenged?" Roman appeared to have let go of the mock and now spoke his words like potent venom.

"I said I was sorry," Cinder felt herself start to get angry at the man, not really wanting to be harassed

"Really!? I thought you were a lunatic!" he shouted at her and prepared to throw another bottle, not really believing that she was sorry.
at the moment for a mistake. "Who do you think you are to be talking to me like that, some kind of royal?" she spat the words at him, eyes running along the outfit he was wearing. It honestly looked more suited for a dinner party than a hunt.

"Heir, actually" a young man appeared from seemingly nowhere and handed Roman back the bottle of Burn Dust he had dropped when I pushed him over. The man was tall, standing at least a head taller than Roman or Cinder, and was built in a rather muscular way. His hair sat on his head and was silver, almost a bit grey. "Roman Torchwick, heir to the Torchwick Dust Corporation"

The recognition brought a smile to Roman's face. "Finally, someone among the ants who actually recognizes the face of greatness when they see it"

A smirk danced across the young man's face. "The same company that is being investigated for multiple counts of labor misconduct and paying bribes to anti-union groups to break up protests"

Cinder had to repress a laugh as Roman's face went a uniform color of red. "I…you…" his hands clenched into fists and for a moment it looked like he was going to strike, but he managed to hold himself back. "Whatever," he picked up his cane and walked away, leaving some hired help to pick up the burden for him.

"I really am sorry!" Cinder called after him. Sure he had been a jerk but she had also nearly turned him into ashes a few moments ago, so she could understand a bit of frustration. "So um… thanks for that…" she turned around to thank the person who had helped her but found that he was already walking away, seemingly not having heard her or just deciding that his time was better used elsewhere. "Damn it" she whispered under her breath, closing her eyes and forcing the tears building up in them to go back down. How could she ever expect to protect anyone when she couldn't even bring herself to just make one conversation work? Maybe she really was mentally challenged.

Before she could beat herself up anymore she felt a hand placed on her shoulder in a rather comforting fashion. It wasn't squeezing, or trying to move and invade her space, rather if just felt like someone reaching out to just be kind. "Hey are you okay?" the voice asked her, the tone matching the hand that had been placed on her shoulder, kind and without a hint of pity behind it.

Cinder opened her eyes and looked at the person who was offering this kindness to her and found herself both shocked and oddly amused that it was none other than the boy who had gotten sick on the airship before. She took a deep breath, trying to gather together words so maybe she could try and talk to someone and not mess it up. How hard could it be? "Aren't you the guy that was vomiting on the ship?" her entire brain froze as she realized what she had just said. She really was hopeless it seemed. No doubt the guy would just walk away or would get offended.

But despite her worst fears the young man actually laughed. "Yeah, and I am pretty sure you just exploded a few minutes ago, we all have problems" he turned around and waved his hand. "Come on, we should get moving before people start asking questions about the scorched ground"

The young huntress to be have a nod of her head and followed after him, utterly confused by the boy who had just shrugged off the rather insulting introduction. "I... Uh... Sorry about that" she said awkwardly, trying to keep conversation.

He waved his hand a bit at her apology. "Don't be, it may be a common problem but that doesn't mean it's not weird. Anyway the name is Jaune Arc, short, sweet, and the ladies love it" he gave her a playful wink, not the hitting on kind but the sharing a joke kind.

"Oh do they now?" Cinder crossed her arms and gave him a knowing look, deciding she could at least act normal for a bit. "By the way, my names Cinder"
Jaune scratched the back of his head and laughed. "Well uh… not yet, but they will. It's like my mom used to sa-" he blinked and quickly realized how nerdy that sounded. "Uh… Never mind"

Cinder gave a light chuckle which she quickly covered with her hand, not wanting to offend him but also not being able to hold it back. "Hm…" she moved in front of him, causing them both to stop. When they both were paused she opened up her Aura sight and looked at him. What she saw was strange to say the least. Unlike the other students around Beacon, Jaune's Aura was still locked behind the normal barriers, meaning that it had either been locked or never opened to begin with. But unlike a normal civilians soul there were actually cracks in the normal gray haze, showing pinpricks of white light breaking through. "Did you know your Aura is locked?"

He tilted his head to the side. "Aura?" the look on his face showed that he had no idea what she was talking about.

"The extension of your soul that allows us to effectively hunt down the monsters that plague our world" she couldn't believe the combat school he went too hadn't taught him about it. He must have been from some far and away country that didn't use it. "Here, I will unlock it for you" and with her decision she stepped forward and put a hand on his heart, and then the other on his cheek.

"Uh…" he blushed a bit, not really sure how to react to a girl he had just met getting this close to him.

Cinder closed her eyes and took a deep breath, speaking the words that came first to her mind. "From the ashes of this world rises a spark of life, and from that spark rages a fire that brings new life. Allow my soul to feed your flame, and allow that spark to grow." Her flame like Aura glowed around her, spreading over Jaune's body and feeding into his own. "And may your spark burn into an ever burning fire, fueling your strength to guide you down the path of transcendence" the energy that surrounded Jaune disappeared as his Aura exploded outward, forcing Cinder back a few steps.

When she looked at him again she was amazed at what she saw. The sheer amount of energy radiating off Jaune was amazing to behold. A pure white light glowed off his body, forming the shape of armor over his skin. He radiated hope, strength, and honesty. She quickly closed her Aura sight just to prevent herself from looking into it too long, it was just that blinding.

"What?" Jaune looked down at his arms and noticed a quick flash of light run along them, something that made him both nervous and excited.

"Aura is the extension of your soul; it protects you and guides you down your path. All living creatures have it… through I don't think I have seen someone our age with that much of it" Cinder smiled a bit. "Hm… that sounds a bit complicated, how Qrow would put it…" she snapped her fingers. "Imagine it like a force field and radar for danger"

He nodded and looked down at himself again, however the light that had danced across his was gone. "Wow… that was awesome!"

Cinder laughed at that, nodding her head. "Yes, awesome is one word for it" she blinked and looked around. "So…where are we supposed to be going?"

He looked at her and raised an eyebrow. "I don't know, I was following you."

"But…I was… Oh dear" she pinched the bridge of her nose. "Well great."

"Think there might be some landmarks around, maybe a cafeteria?" Jaune asked with humor in his voice, walking forward again.
Cinder chuckled and followed after Jaune, not really sure where she was going but not more than ready to get there. Maybe getting to know people wasn't as bad as she thought.
Cinder and Jaune finally managed to find their way past the large doors that lead into the main auditorium, having followed their wits, ingenuity, the stars, and of course the large group of other people that had been moving right toward it. Once inside, Cinder began to look around, trying to spot her wayward friend.

"Cinder!" Emerald waved to her from the crowd. "I saved a spot for you!"

She began to start forward before remembering that she had actually been walking with someone. "Do you have anyone to stand with?" Cinder asked in a kind voice. She didn't want him to feel that she was making assumptions.

The boy scratched the back of his head. "Nope, kind of new to the city."

Cinder nodded and waved for him to follow her, walking over toward Emerald. "Hey there, room for one more?" she asked with a smile on her face.

Emerald blinked and looked between them, seemingly confused for a few moments. The idea of Cinder having already made a friend that she wanted to invite over with them was beyond strange. Which wasn't to say that it didn't make her happy, it just made her wonder if Cinder had been replaced by a less socially awkward robot. "Totally fine…" she turned toward the person standing next to her, a large and muscular guy with burnt-orange hair. "Hey Cobo"

"It's Cardin," the boy replied, looking at Emerald. "What's up, babe?"

"Two quick things, first being that you need to go away so my friend and her friend can have spots next to me. Second, don't call me babe." She smiled darkly at Cardin. "Because yeah you have the whole dumb jock thing, but that kind of burns out quickly, and the only people allowed to call me babe are… well actually no one, no one is allowed to call me that."

"You b—" Cardin caught himself before he cursed at the girl in front of a room full of other women with weapons and guys who probably wouldn't be too keen on him doing it either. "Whatever," he walked past the ground, bumping into Jaune, who before this point had been laughing a bit at Emerald's speech. "What are you laughing about?" he said with a glare.

"Uh… funny joke, something about clowns," Jaune put on his best 'innocent' face, hoping to defuse a situation before it started up.

"Whatever," Cardin made a point of hitting Jaune with his body on the way out.

"Can't imagine that is going to end well," Jaune said under his breath, more than a bit annoyed at the fact that he had just been run into for something that wasn't really his fault. Before this annoyance could grow further though, he suddenly found himself face to face with a very attractive girl with one of the oddest colors of hair he had seen before.

"So… are you Cinder's boyfriend?" she asked with a playful smirk. Both Cinder and Jaune's faces lit up red. "Oh wait, no, I don't think you two have known each other that long…” Emerald snapped, as if she had just solved a great mystery. "You two are lovers, right?" If it were possible their faces fell into an even darker shade of crimson.

"Emerald, come on, that's not funny," Cinder crossed her arms and glared at her friend, thinking to herself how much easier it would be to deal with Emerald as a pile of ashes.
Emerald opened her mouth to speak again, but was cut off by a burst of static that instantly grabbed the attention of everyone inside of the room and drew their eyes up toward the stage in the front of the room.

Standing atop the stage were Headmaster Ozpin and Professor Goodwitch, looking out over the students with eyes that seemed to lock on to everyone in the crowd. After a few moments of the intense gazing, Ozpin stepped toward the mike and began to speak. "I will keep this brief," he began in a loud and commanding voice. "There are those among you here that most likely believe that by being accepted into this school your status and ability are on full display, and that this is the first step toward your future," he paused to let his words sink in. "To this I must inform you that you are wrong, this isn't the first step toward your future, for the second you entered these doors the you that exited on the airship died. The person you were, the beliefs you held, the things you found important are no longer of any importance. Your life is now in service to the people of the world, to the battle against the darkness. Beacon is not a school that teaches warriors, we make them from the ground up." His eyes scanned along the crowd, eventually locking with Cinder's for a moment, giving the Huntress in training a second longer of a gaze before moving on. "Today all I see before me is the potential that is locked within each of your current corpses, and I promise that by the time you leave this school you will either unlock it and become a new you," he turned around. "Or you will leave as you entered this room." He walked away and Goodwitch stepped forward.

"You will all rest in the ballroom tonight, in the morning you will be given breakfast and then face initiation," Goodwitch turned and followed after Ozpin, leaving the students talking amongst themselves.

"Well..." Jaune scratched the back of his head, not really sure what to say after that speech. When he turned to see how Cinder and her friend reacted to it, he found that both of them had disappeared. "Wha... oh, come on," he sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Where am I supposed to find another quirky girl to talk to?" he shook his head and walked forward, not really knowing where he was going. Before he got too far though, he ran into someone, falling back and groaning. "Sorry," he looked up at the person.

Said person was a rather tall young woman with long red hair, dressed in light armor and carrying a shield and spear on her back. "It's no problem, are you okay?" she offered her hand to Jaune and he took it, allowing himself to be pulled up.

"So uh... you from around here?" Jaune asked, a bit unsure what to do with himself. Despite his success at talking to Cinder he was still not the best when it came to just talking to people he had just met.

"No, but I have been to Vale a few times," the young woman gave him an odd look, almost as if she were expecting him to say or do something different. "Do you not know me?"

Jaune shook his head. "Nope, why? Did we meet before?" he shook his head and couldn't help but feel a spark of recognition, but as soon as it came it was gone again.

A smile crept onto her face. "No, the name is Pyrrha, Pyrrha Nikos," she offered a hand to him and Jaune shook it.

"Mine is Jaune Arc, short, sweet, and uh..." he stopped himself from repeating the last part. "...really excited to meet you."

Emerald stopped in front of the stone fountain and turned to look at Cinder, letting go of her arm. "We need to talk Cinder."
The golden eyed huntress rubbed her arm and glared at Emerald, more than a bit unhappy at being dragged away from her new friend and being pulled by her arm. "Talk about what Emerald? If this is about meeting people…"

The green haired girl put up her hand to stop Cinder from continuing. "Last night, what happened?" the usually light hearted girl had suddenly become serious, and the look she gave Cinder was one she had never seen before.

"I was at a Dust shop and it was going to be robbed by a few thugs and a woman with some custom gear," Cinder shrugged. "I did what anyone would do in order to make sure that people didn't get hurt."

Emerald nodded at that. "Okay, I believe you," she looked at the figures put upon the statue. A group of humans standing over the Grimm, the demons that had hunted and killed humans since the dawn of time. If only that were the only threat humanity had to face. "Do you know who the woman was?"

"News said her name was Yang, why is that important?" Cinder had to admit her confusion at the questions coming from her friend.

Emerald paused, biting her lip and trying to form the words in her head before she spoke again. "Yang Xiao Long, the rampaging dragon. Second in command in the Bloody Rose crime family… second in command to Ruby Rose."

Cinder felt her entire world freeze as the name that had haunted her life since she had first heard it passed through her friend's lips. When she had been younger she had lost her family to a cruel and vicious murderess, a woman who wielded a scythe who had brutally killed her parents. That day she had been with Emerald, staying the night at her house while her family was killed. Cinder felt her body began to heat up, the anger at the memory and the idea that she had been so close to someone who aided the person who had murdered her family and hadn't been able to actually hurt them. "You're sure?" she asked, her voice cold.

"Yes," Emerald put a hand on her friend's shoulder. "Listen, the fact you survived is amazing, that beast has been known to kill people for stepping in her way at the store. Vale's police force is working twice as hard to find them with them trying to knock over a Dust store, and Qrow…" she smiled a bit. "Well he is doing his thing."

Cinder felt herself calm down at the mention of Qrow. When her parents had died he had been there the second he had found out and had taken her in when she didn't have another person in the world. He had once been one of the top Hunters in the world, a triple S rank that went by the title The Grimm Reaper. He had thrown it away in a second in order to make sure that she wouldn't be alone. Her parents had been his best friends, in fact he was actually her Godfather, but insisted she call him Uncle. If he said he was on the case, then she would believe in him. "Let's go, I am starving," she began to walk forward but was stopped by Emerald, who wrapped her arms around Cinder from behind.

"You are still my best friend in the world Cinder," the words provided a comfort all their own.

"I know Emerald, thank you," Cinder let out a sigh and suddenly felt as if she were back in that horrible time, trapped in the memory of learning she would never see her parents again. "As soon as you enter the doors, your past self dies." Cinder looked up toward the sky, really wondering if she could leave that memory behind and move forward.
The rest of the night passed uneventfully for Cinder. She grabbed some dinner, moved into the ballroom and set up a sleeping bag she could use for the night. After a quick shower, she had changed into a loose shirt and long pajama pants. She laid down and pulled out a pad of paper and a pen.

"Making out a love note to that guy from earlier?" Emerald plopped down on the sleeping bag next to Cinder's with a playful smirk on her face. The sleepware Emerald wore wasn't quite as conservative as Cinder's. A pair of loose fitting shorts and a top that left a good bit of her midriff available for all to see, something that was just classic Emerald.

Cinder sighed and tossed a pillow at Emerald's face, hitting her directly. "No, it's a letter to Qrow, he said that he wanted me to write him when I could."

Emerald suppressed a giggle and looked around at the various people. "I probably shouldn't write mine, imagine my dad hearing that I was in a room full of guys in their pajamas," she pantomimed her head exploding and grinned. "Man I wouldn't want to be in the room when that information came into his mind."

The mere thought of it was enough to make Cinder smile. "Hey, I think I am going for a walk, want to join me?" she slowly stood up and brushed herself off.

"Naw, I think I will just enjoy the sights and try to get some shut eye," Emerald laid back and scanned around, clearly enjoying the view.

Cinder left her friend and grabbed a bottle of water from a table set up with a few night snacks and things for them to drink before heading out. The night sky was rather beautiful from this high up, and not a cloud in the sky obscuring the heavens and the full moon that seemed to stand in heavy contrast to the darkness of the sky. She began to walk around until a noise grabbed her attention, the sound of grunts of effort loud against the otherwise silent night. When she went to investigate she found the young man who had come to her rescue earlier today performing a series of kicks against an invisible enemy, practicing each move with such perfect flow that it could almost be described as dancing. When he finished Cinder gave a few claps. "That was very impressive."

The young man turned around and looked at her, a look of surprise playing across his face before vanishing and returning to a more neutral expression. "Thank you," he said, his words and tone measured and without inflection.

"Would you like some water?" Cinder offered the untouched plastic water bottle to him.

"Sure," he raised his hand and Cinder tossed it to him. He quickly tilted it back and drank every drop from it, lowering it only once every drop of liquid was gone.

"So, I wanted to thank you for earlier," Cinder crossed her arms over herself, only just realizing how cold it was outside.

A smirk came to the man's face. "It wasn't an issue." He looked up at the sky and seemed to fall into a relaxed state. "Tell me, have you ever heard about the legend of the moon?"

"Depends on which legend you are asking about." Cinder had often buried herself in books when she was younger, so she knew a great many of the old legends.

The young man looked up toward the sky at the full moon. "Where I come from, it is said that the moon was once a Huntress from long ago, back when there was only darkness once the sun set. The Huntress saw the people in pain and hunted in the dark, only protected by meager flames. So using
all of her power she charged the infinite darkness in the sky and went to war with it, offering her light down. Of course the darkness fights her as well, breaking her power to pieces and at some points devouring her altogether. But the Huntress always strikes back and glows brighter than ever." He pointed at the sky toward all the various stars, "It's said that the stars in the sky are the wounds she has dealt upon the darkness during their endless war."

A round of clapping came from the darkness, causing both of them to turn and look at whoever was coming toward them. "Beautiful story, real touching," Roman walked toward the two, dressed in a button up silk shirt and comfortable looking pants. "But honestly, aren't you two a bit old for bedtime stories?"

Cinder clenched her fists, wanting to reach out and set fire to Roman's hair. "What do you want… jerk?"

Roman put a hand over his heart. "Oh, I am wounded deeply," he rolled his eyes and pulled out a pamphlet from his pants and handed it to Cinder. "Anyway, I figured if we are going to be in the same combat school it would be an annoyance to have you die." The pamphlet had the title of 'Dust for Dummies', and its intent was obvious. "You are welcome," he turned and began to walk away.

Cinder smirked and snapped her fingers, setting the back of his pajama pants on fire. As soon as he felt the heat the heir gave out a loud yelp and ran toward the water in the fountain, jumping in. "You should probably get some sleep you know."

The young man raised an eyebrow and smiled. "You should do the same," the two of them moved toward the doors. "The name is Mercury, just so you know."

"Mine is Cinder, pleasure to meet you," Cinder covered up a yawn and finally felt the claws of sleep pressing into her. The next day would be the first step toward her new life.

What could possibly go wrong?

Yang sighed and lit a fresh cigarette as she leaned against the metal door of one of the various warehouses nestled close to the docks. Honestly she didn't understand why Ruby needed her around to pick up this special 'cargo' from the Black Fang. Wasn't like she would be able to do anything about it, and it wasn't like they had to scare their leader into working for them. The leader of the Black Fang worked with them only because their end game was the same as theirs; the removal of humans from the top of the food chain. Of course they probably wouldn't have guessed that Ruby was antilife and not just antihuman, but that was a fact best left for a later date.

She let out a sign and dropped the half burned cigarette to the ground, putting it out with the toe of her boot and looking up at the sky. Despite everything else, at least there was a beautiful full moon out. After a few more minutes passed by, a sound alerted Yang to another person being out in the darkness. "About time you slow pokes showed up, you know it says bad things about the Black Fang if they can't even make a meeting, Blake."

Three figures stepped into the limited light offered by the lamp hanging off of the warehouse. Two of them were dressed in the same, pure black outfits with hoods and white masks with red symbols meant to look like the eyes of a Grimm. Standing in front of those two was a woman whose every step bled power and authority. The woman wore a long trench coat with small flame designs running along it, on the back stood the current symbol of the Black Fang, a wolf's head with two blades and pure, red eyes. On her back sat the woman's weapon of choice, a Variant Ballistic Chain Scythe, one of the more dangerous weapons ever thought up. Covering the woman's face was a full mask that was white with multiple black marks that ran along its sides, along with two small slits that allowed
the woman to see. "We are right on time, you however are early," the woman stepped forward and Yang rolled her eyes, opening the door. "Will she be showing up tonight?"

Yang shrugged a bit. "The boss has a habit of coming out of nowhere, but I don't really know if she will be coming tonight." She followed them into the warehouse, closing the door behind them. Inside of the building were a number of mercenaries that wore the symbol of an ash colored snowflake, the mark that they worked for one of Ruby's more powerful friends. At the end of the room was a massive cage, easily reaching up toward the roof, and wide enough to show that the thing inside must have been massive. The warehouse itself was usually meant to stock large vehicles and boats, but now it was being used to carry much more dangerous cargo. "They say it took thirty people in order to capture this thing," her words where filled with admiration, not a hint of care that thirty people's lives had been ended by the creature inside of the cage.

"Pardon me if I don't pause to weep," she looked into the cage and crossed her arms. "So this is it?"

"Yep!" a voice from behind the four caused them to turn around, which was when the two others that had come in with the woman made a mistake. They pulled out their pistols and aimed them toward the noise that had surprised them. In a blur of movement one was quickly disarmed, his gun used to kill the other before having it turned on him and putting an end to his life. The person who performed the two kills was wearing a red and black dress, and carrying what appeared to be a large gun on her back. The smile on her face was in stiff contrast to the blood that had splashed on her from the shot. "Oh look at that," the woman tossed the gun on one of the corpses. "Casualties," the woman laughed a bit and adjusted a black crown with dark red jewels on it so that it was sitting correctly on her head.

Blake reached for her weapon but paused, knowing that she was at a disadvantage at the moment. "Ruby, here I thought you wouldn't be here," she looked down at the two corpses and sighed. "Sup sis?" Yang walked over and hugged Ruby, obviously happy that she was able to see her sister, not showing a moment of thought to the two corpses that were bleeding out onto the floor.

"Not much, just figured..." before Ruby could finish the thing inside of the cage let out a massive roar, a sound that was near deafening. "One sec," Ruby walked toward the cage and raised her right hand, which held a black iron ring with a round black orb on top of it. "Obey," the word she spoke carried a dark power to it, and the beast fell silent at the command. "So, are we still clear for the plan?" she asked.

Blake sighed and nodded. "Yes, you will release the S-class Grimm."

"Mega-Oozaru," Ruby said with a childlike smile.

"Yes that, once you release it the danger will draw out the teachers to stop the slaughter it will be performing on the new recruits. While they are distracted the Black Fang will enter the school and located the sword," under the mask a smile formed on Blake's face. "And then every human on this planet will die like dogs."


But Ruby wasn't listening; she was looking toward the cage that held the beast that would make all her dreams come true. "The Crown of Domination, the Ring of Chaos, and soon the Sword of Annihilation," the silver eyed woman laughed darkly. "Oh yeah, the end is coming, and when it does," she turned to look at her allies. "We will drown this world in darkness."
Into the Fire

The entire world was consumed in fire and darkness, or at least that's what Cinder thought as she looked down from her vantage point from a building standing high above the streets of Vale. The city appeared to be burning, and roaming the streets were armies of shadowy beings that killed whatever was unlucky enough to cross their paths. This scene should have been horrifying to her, but she couldn't help but feel the unnatural smile on her face as she viewed it. Destruction and death seemed to own the entire city, and there was nothing that could be done to stop it. Cinder stepped off the building and slowly fell down to the ground, landing softly among the chaos and watching as the monsters turned and paused as she walked passed them. They knew who she was, the power she held, and they were her weapons now. She passed by mounds of dead bodies which were set aflame by her very presence. Finally she found herself in front of a window, staring into the reflection and finding that she didn't look like herself, instead she looked like the woman who had killed both of her parents, Ruby Rose. A laugh escaped her mouth and a massive pair of red eyes filled her mind until she was shocked out of her sleep by a sudden push.

"Come on Cinder, wake up!" Emerald pushed her arm again, trying to wake her up. "We are going to be late!"

Cinder slowly got up and rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, trying to banish the nightmare from her mind. It must have been a holdover from the news Emerald dropped on her last night. Yeah, simple as that. At least she hoped it was as simple as that. Cinder yawned and grabbed the bottle of water she had put next to her and remembered the boy she had met last night. Two people in a single day that she had met and had gotten along with, the very idea of it was kind of exciting if she were being honest. She turned toward Emerald and noticed her eyes trailing a few of the guys as they woke up and decided to keep that little encounter to herself though. Emerald could be great, but also a massive pain in the butt.

The two of them got up and went toward the bathroom with their change of clothes in hand, taking quick but cold showers and changing into their battle gear. "So, I hear the teams are getting picked today," Emerald looked at Cinder as the two were walking out of the bathroom. "Nervous?"

Cinder shook her head. "No, I don't think so." If she had been asked yesterday, the answer would have been a loud yes, but after meeting people and talking to them, she felt like even if she didn't get teamed up with Emerald that she could survive.

A smile formed on Emerald's face and she gave her friend a hug. "Come on, let's go get some breakfast, apparently Beacon has some of the best food on the planet!"

Cinder nodded and walked with her friend toward the mess hall.

Ruby tapped her foot impatiently as she stood next to the airship they would be using to deliver the massive cage to the Emerald Forest. It was a special model that had been made for stealth, unable to be picked up on any form of radar and with the ability to cloak itself from things within a certain distance from itself. A true piece of art developed by the geniuses that used to work for the Schnee Corporation. Of course when the company had been acquired by a new CEO who didn't find much use in it -after all, it couldn't carry much in the way of weapons with the stealth system aboard- and since Grimm could detect a human's aura without needing to see the thing in front of them, the entire invention was rendered pointless in Torchwick Company's mind. No, instead they just continued to develop their battle drones and new forms of Dust. Seemed a shame to Ruby. Given a bit more time, you could at least load up the ship with explosives and invisibly ram it into an enemy flagship and
take it out in a second. But since there was only one of them, it was doubtful that Weiss would let her just use it in the fun ways that existed only in her mind.

"So I know Weiss is the person who supplies us with money and weapons and stuff, but does that really excuse her for being ten minutes late?" Yang complained as she ran a brush through her long mane of blonde hair. "I mean honestly, I am itching to watch some chaos but instead all I can do is..." she winced as the brush caught on a snag. "Son of a—"

"I hate to say I agree with Yang, but her timing is rather insulting," Blake said from the top of the airship. "It's especially surprising that you aren't angrier about this," she said, directing her words at Ruby.

Ruby raised an eyebrow at the leader of the Black Fang. "What's that supposed to mean?" she asked indignantly.

"You once caved in a man's skull with a tea kettle because you said he had let it go cold, and then you poured the steaming hot water on his face," Yang pointed out, enjoying getting off the occasional jab at her sister/leader.

The most feared killer in Vale crossed her arms and huffed. "The water had gotten a bit cold; it could have been way hotter in fact!" she threw up her arms. "Are you trying to say that I have a soft spot?"

"Maybe it's a twisted form of love," Blake joked dryly, not believing for a second that the monster who could somehow kill people without batting an eyelash could actually love anyone.

"I will love carving you up if you keep talking," Ruby said before pulling her hood over her head.

Before the conversation could continue, the door to their temporary base opened and two figures walked in before the door slowly closed behind them. On one side was a person who was dressed in full armor and seemed to stand at an intimidating 6'5". The armor was pitch black except for a white T that sat on the left shoulder blade. She also wore a helmet that covered her head and face, an orange visor blocking away anything from view. The other figure wore a pale blue bolero jacket over a similarly colored thigh-length dress with a piece of black lace making up the neckline of the dress. On the back of the bolero was an ash colored snowflake, the symbol of the once proud Schnee family. And the person wearing it was none other than Weiss Schnee herself, former heiress and current crime lord and ally to Ruby Rose in all she did. She stopped a few feet away from them and raised her left arm straight up, opened her hand and pointed each finger straight. "Weiss Schnee." On the back of her hand was the symbol of her family etched in pure black.

Yang made the same movement. "Yang Xiao Long." With her gauntlets in their bracelet forms, the symbol on the back of Yang's hand was clear to see, a black dragon that spun itself in a circle, moments away from biting its tail.

Blake sighed and followed suit. "Blake Belladonna." On the back of her hand sat the symbol of the Black Fang, a wolf's head with an X running through it, a bright red that matched perfectly with the pitch black of the wolf's head.

Finally Ruby ended the chain by raising her own arm. On the back of her hand sat a symbol made of a skull wearing a crown atop its head with a wide grin. Where the eyes would normally be were two points of the darkest red that could ever have existed. "Ruby Rose." A cold wind went through the room despite the room's perfect temperature control and vents.

The four slowly lowered their hands and Weiss spoke. "Now that that is out of the way, we get to business," she snapped and the various workers sprang to life, doing their final checks to make sure
all of the preparations were ready. "Run me through the plan one last time," Weiss demanded, looking toward Ruby.

The slightly younger woman rolled her eyes and gave a shake of her head. "I swear I have repeated this like a hundred times," she cleared her throat before speaking. "We release Mega Oozaru—"

"What?" Weiss asked, clearly confused.

"Her name for the Grimm," Yang and Blake said with an almost perfect harmony.

"You mean the Pitch Affe?" Weiss asked.

"Mega Oozaru," Ruby continued with a tone of annoyance coming to her voice. "To slaughter the new students, forcing the teachers to step in to fight the S-class Grimm in order to prevent it from murdering all of the precious little things," she giggled behind her hand before going back into her serious mode. "From there Blake takes over."

She nodded and stepped forward. "From there me and a small army of Black Fang members—"

"And me," Yang interrupted, pointing toward herself with a rather cocky grin.

"…and Yang will attack the school and acquire the sword and proceed to destroy as much property as we can before making an escape on the stealth ship, striking a blow against our enemies and bringing us one step closer toward our ultimate goal," she didn't feel the need to speak their goal, it was something they all desired.

"I still don't see why you don't just let my people take care of this," the person in the armor spoke finally, and with a feminine sounding voice. "No offense to your people Blake, but the Hunter Slayers are fully equipped to take down Hunters, even on their home territory."

Blake nodded to this. "Normally I would agree, after all sacrificing a few human lives doesn't bother me that much," no one in the room reacted to her words, it was something they had known already. "But your people… well…"

"Most of them are really dumb… like… really, really dumb," Yang said, not able to accurately describe how she thought of the group.

"You and yours are better suited for single target hunts or large battlefields where you can cause as much chaos as you want, we want a scalpel for this mission. You know what I mean Alli—" before Ruby could complete her words the person in the arm had leapt forward, placing a blade with a number of small saw-like blades around it against her neck.

"Don't. Call. Me. That." A number of clicks rang out from around the hideout as every person in the room aimed a weapon at the armored woman.

Ruby for her part didn't even seem mildly worried by the blade being pressed against her throat, or the threats being made against her life. She seemed more bored than anything else. "If I call you Tex will you let me keep talking?"

The armored woman held position for a few moments before stepping back and sheathing the blade back into a slot within her armored leg, making it look like it had vanished. Without a word, she stepped back to Weiss and resumed her silence.

"The plan seems fine," Weiss said finally, watching as everyone in the room went back about their business, putting their weapons back into their holsters.
"It should, it's the same exact one you approved back when I first pitched the idea," Ruby sighed a bit before beginning to cough violently into her hand for a few moments, causing Yang to flash over to her side and place a hand on her shoulder. "Sorry… bringing the S-class under my full control was straining."

Weiss nodded a bit at that, knowing that Ruby was already doing the impossible. One of the objects by itself was supposed to be strong enough to destroy a human's soul just by using it one time, yet Ruby was actively using two of them for long stretches of time and still engaging in dangerous activity. "What did the doctor say?"

Ruby laughed a bit and stood up straight once more. "Same thing as before, using the two artifacts will slowly eat away at me until there is nothing left, and that only all three together might have a chance to stabilize the power."

"Right, all factors approved then. I will see you three once it's completed and we have the keys to the kingdom in our hands," Weiss turned away and made her way toward the exit, the armored woman known only as Tex following closely behind.

Ruby walked into the stealth airship and took a seat, looking idly at the ring on her hand. The deeper she looked into the black jewel, the more she felt herself slip away into darkness, and the more the voice in her head rose in volume.

Soon.

Cinder put a hand on her stomach and pushed the food away from her with a content sigh. "I will admit that even Qrow's birthday breakfasts are a bit bland compared to what Beacon's staff can make," she quickly turned toward Emerald and raised a finger toward her. "And if you tell anyone I said that, I will tell your parents about the 'field trip' incident."

Emerald raised her hands in front of her. "Hey, hey, I am not going to tell anyone and you are going to just forget that," she tapped Cinder's forehead. "Forget touch!"

Cinder raised an eyebrow at her friend. "Really?"

She shrugged. "Worth a shot. Anyway, let's get our gear before we are late."

The two of them got up and moved toward the lockers where they had been asked to store their weapons and other equipment the previous night. Emerald reclaimed her guns and put them into the waiting holsters on her back. While she was doing that, Cinder pulled out a Burn crystal that the old man whose shop she had saved had given her for free after her fight. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, drawing the energy from the crystal into her Aura, summoning the two forces into one. Once it was done, the crystal was left grey and dead, and quickly dissolved into dust and blew away, fading from existence.

While the two of them got equipped, another pair were making their way down the hallways. Jaune and the girl he had met yesterday after Cinder and Emerald had ditched him, the girl named Pyrrha. The two of them had spent some time hanging out the previous day, discussing stuff and kind of just passing the time. Pyrrha had been surprised that there was a person at the school who knew nothing about her championship victories or minor fame outside of a cereal box, and Jaune was equally surprised that there was another person willing to listen to him being an awkward idiot and discussing his mostly boring life from back home.

"So, are you nervous?" Jaune asked as they made their way through the lockers, looking down at the
piece of paper he had written his locker number on. When he had lamented that he would probably forget it, Pyrrha had written it down for him on a spare piece of paper she had on her.

Pyrrha took a moment to think on that question. "Well I don't know if nervous is quite the right word, but it comes close enough I think."

Before Jaune could ask what that meant, the two were suddenly separated by another figure that made its way between them; Roman Torchwick in his white suit and hat atop his head. "Morning to you Pyrrha, how are you surviving the waves of inadequacy this place has to offer?"

"I am quite fine Roman, what about yourself?" Pyrrha spoke in the measured tone of someone who was used to dealing with someone she didn't really quite like.

Roman smiled and gave a nod. "Great to hear. So I was thinking that when it came time for team selection that you and I should make a great pair. After all, with my brains and your skill we would easily make the strongest team."

"Oh… uh…" the first word that came to Pyrrha's mind was no, but she didn't want to hurt the guys feelings. "I suppose we will have to see how the dice roll themselves."

"Hey," Jaune finally spoke as he got a good look at Roman. "Are you Roman Torchwick?"

The young man in the bowler hat finally turned to look at Jaune and gave a rather cocky grin. "It's amazing, even among the unwashed masses my name is legend."

Jaune blinked and looked at himself, thinking that he had done a perfectly fine job of washing himself off this morning. Sure he didn't have time to exactly soak under the water but a guy couldn't do everything in just a few minutes no matter how hard they tried. "Well uh… it's more that I heard you kind of took a swim in the fountain last night."

Roman's smile vanished and his eye twitched dangerous. "If you two will excuse me," he walked off mumbling something about annoying woman and burning something down.

"He seemed…" Jaune looked for a word. "Uh… I got nothing," he said, scratching the back of his head. He knew that his mom had always told him to not say anything if it wasn't something nice, so he was just going to stay silent on that one.

Pyrrha laughed and turned the corner. "My locker is this way, I will see you out in the field," she disappeared with a shake of her head, unable to believe that someone had actually managed to silence the ever infamous Roman Torchwick and his bragging ways.

Emerald turned and watched as the two separated and nudged Cinder. "Looks like someone has their eyes set on your boy toy, better make a move quick," her words were teasing and lighthearted, not really meaning anything by them.

Cinder shook her head but couldn't deny a pang of odd emotion in her chest at Emerald's words. Maybe it was her just feeling possessive over someone she considered a new friend, after all she could get rather annoyed when Emerald's special someone of the week starting eating up their time. Despite that though, she put on a smile and walked over. "Hey Jaune."

"Got ditched?" Emerald asked playfully. "Young love is so cruel," she gave a dramatic sigh and laughed afterward.

Jaune's face lit up and he quickly shook his head. "No, no, no, it's nothing like that."
Emerald laughed and nodded. "Sure it ain't lover boy. Anyway, grab your stuff and let's go!"

Cinder nudged Emerald in the ribs. "Ignore her, well other than the equipment thing; we really do need to get going if we don't want to be late."

Jaune nodded and grabbed his equipment, walking with the two young women out toward the field where they were told to meet.

After another few minutes, all of the new students had arrived at the base of a rather steep cliff, lined up shoulder to shoulder and looking down upon the forest that sat at the bottom of the cliff. Ozpin and Goodwitch slowly walked down the line of students before Ozpin finally spoke. "Today begins the first step in your journey toward being Hunters, the day when you either rise or fall," he turned to look out toward the forest, taking a drink from his mug. "The forest bellow is filled with the creatures of Grimm, and at its center lies a temple holding a number of treasures. You and your partner will collect a single artifact and bring it back here. Oh yes," he turned back toward the students. "As soon as your feet touch either ground or nature this rule comes into effect, the first person you make eye contact with will be your partner for the next four years of your training here at Beacon."

A number of gasps made their way through the line. Cinder wanted to gasp, but couldn't feel any part of herself as a cold sense of dread ran through her body. At first it just felt like the dread of being forced to partner with someone she didn't know, but it somehow felt deeper than that. Like there was a storm on the horizon that was just waiting to break.

"While you will be monitored throughout the exercise, no teacher will come to your aid unless your death is assured, but if a member of the school staff saves you, then you will be asked to leave Beacon and never return," his words were sharp but honest, telling the students the fact that he was sure none of them wanted to imagine. If one couldn't survive a simple exercise like this then they would never make it through anything. "You will have to work out your own landing strategy, by the way," he raised his mug. "The test begins now." The ground beneath the students shot forward all at once and launched each one of them into the sky. One loud scream seemed to break the air and despite his years of training and disciple Ozpin allowed himself a smile. He really did love this job.

Ruby looked down upon the ground of the forest through the monitors within the stealth ship and finally raised her hand. "Stop the ship." The airship paused its flight at her command and she drew in a deep breath. "Release the cage." The chains under the ship let go of the massive cage containing the S-class Grimm landing on the forest with a massive boom, like the sound of a bomb dropping. Within seconds, the cage was ripped apart and the massive shadowy figure was released into the forest.

"Today, chaos reigns," Ruby raised her hand and closed her eyes for a moment. When she opened them next they were bright red, the same as a Grimm's. "Let's get this party started!"
At the beginning of time there was darkness and light. From the light rose humanity; strong, resourceful, and full of life. From the darkness rose the Grimm; cold, destructive, and born only for bringing death. They lived in a divided world, when the sun rose humans would roam the planet, and when the darkness consumed the land, the Grimm would wander and destroy all things humanity had created. Eventually the Grimm decided that they wanted to erase light, and began to attack during the day.

This is the beginning of the story.

Cinder cursed as she felt herself launched suddenly from the ground and high into the air. Not a moment's warning, one minute she was on the ground and the next she was flying through the air on a collision course with the ground. It would waste a bit of her energy, but she did have a plan to prevent the impact that would most likely kill her. She focused a ball of energy into her left hand before aiming it at the ground and letting out a pillar of fire, pushing her up and slowing down the rate at which she fell to manageable levels until she could touch the ground without turning into a human pancake.

"Well that was exciting," Cinder quipped to herself, before realizing there wasn't anyone around and talking to yourself was a sign of insanity. Whatever the case was, she needed to find someone fast. The Grimm of the forest were dangerous to take on alone, and she really didn't want to end up with someone she didn't know.

Speaking of which, Cinder began to run through the options in her head. There was of course Emerald, her first and best choice; lifelong friend, stealthy to make up for her more blunt approach, and a blast to be around. There was Jaune of course, but his inexperience with Aura might mean Cinder would have to watch over him at every step. The counter point was that he seemed to have massive potential. The guy she had met last night who called himself Mercury seemed nice enough, and the blows he had been practicing showed that he obviously had quite a bit of skill.

Whoever she met, she would need to do it fast because this forest was filled with loads of dark energy radiating off the Grimm, and going it alone was about as bad of an idea as letting Emerald loose on a beach full of cute guys. It could only end badly.

With a sigh Cinder began forward, wishing that she had the ability to feel Aura's as well as she saw them. But that skill was mostly kept for conductors to help them build their strategies. A sudden rustle of foliage broke her free from her pondering and made her take a battle stance, already building up power to launch an attack. "Looks like finding another person will have to wait," she muttered to herself, getting ready to strike.

Emerald laughed out loud as she was suddenly launched into the air, taking the time to do a few spins while her body was light as air. How many times could a person say they were sent flying like this and actually got to do some tricks in the air? Probably not many, so she wasn't going to waste it.

Once a spin or two was done, she looked down at the various others who must have been launched at different angles. Most of them seemed to be landing rather well, using trees, their Aura, weapons, or anything else to help prevent a big splat when the ground came rushing to meet them.

Well, except for the blonde guy that Cinder and herself had been talking to earlier. He seemed to be
screaming his head off and trying his best to swim in the air. She considered helping him but found that someone else was already on it. Before he could hit the ground, a spear came flying out of the trees and hit a tree he was going by. By the looks of it, the spear was probably meant to go through his outfit to pin him to the tree, but at the last moment he adjusted himself to grab hold of it and hang on above the ground.

Good thing Cinder unlocked that guys Aura, might have looked pretty lame if he had actually gotten stuck to a tree. Emerald snickered at the idea and realized she should probably think of her own landing strategy, seeing as the ground was a lot closer than before.

She closed her eyes and focused for a moment, opening them again to get a full view of everything beneath her. Her Semblance was known as Super Awareness, the ability to process millions of variables in a matter of moments and plot out a simple route toward what she needed. Great for getting dates, and also useful for preventing painful meetings with the ground, which she was finding helpful. She pulled out one of her weapons in its pistol form and began to fire it, adjusting her position and making it so she would land on a number of sturdy branches. After enforcing her legs with hardened Aura the shock from a few snapping under the force didn't even register, and she finally landed on one branch that held firm for her.

"Woo, I totally made it!" she threw her fist into the air and looked around. "And now I don't know where I am."

She tilted her head to the side and thought about what she should do. Finding Cinder could be one thing, but then again she had her own grade to worry about, and Cinder would most likely be fine on her own.

A thud from a bit away drew her attention and she decided to follow it, turning off her Semblance to conserve power and not hear every movement in the forest. She peeked down from her hiding place in the trees and saw a young man walking along the ground. He must have just landed or something, at least, that's what she thought.

She ran her eyes along him and recognized the person as the guy Cinder had met last night on her walk. And he was cute. But was he strong? Emerald decided to follow after him, saying a silent apology to Cinder as she did.

She will be fine, whoever she gets partnered with won't be that bad.

Roman cursed as he was launched into the air and looked down toward the forest. If Ozpin had given a seconds worth of warning, he could have linked up with Pyrrha's Aura and would have been able to track her and ensure a good partner, but no, the old coot had instead decided to just suddenly launch them into the air.

The hunter to be reached under his coat and pulled out a sphere shaped object from it, pressing a button on the side and throwing it at the ground where he knew he would land. As soon as the object hit the ground, it exploded into a bed of soft goo that made it so he landed without a heavy impact.

It was something he had invented himself, a high impact foam that would distribute the force of any object impacting it along the surface, nullifying any damage from heights. It would, in theory, allow soldiers to drop from airships at any height without the need for parachutes, dropping landing times and allowing them to get straight to fighting the enemy when they touched ground.

Roman scowled and brushed some of the foam from his leg, wishing that he had included something that would make the foam not stain his expensive pants. But fashion sometimes had to come second
when it came to saving one's own life.

The young man looked around the location and realized that many of the others had probably landed in trees and were probably moving via the branches, meaning that he had a slight advantage in not running into others and making a weak partner. Speaking of partners, he had some searching to do.

Roman stabbed his cane into the ground and slowly sent tendrils of his own energy around the forest. Not enough to connect with anyone and form a full connection, but enough to feel out the power of those close to him. A strong Aura inevitably meant a strong fighter. There were a few good choices, but they were also either moving quickly or close enough to another person to make it seem like they already had a partner.

After about half a minute of searching, he finally locked on to someone with quite a bit of power and no one else around them. With that information in his mind, he drew back in his search threads and began to move toward the presence. He could deal with personality later; so long as the person was powerful, he could mold them into someone he could agree with at a later date.

What could possibly go wrong? he thought to himself.

Mercury closed his eyes and enjoyed the feel of the wind pushing against his skin as he was launched into the air, thinking about the words the Headmaster had said. The first person he made eye contact with would be his partner. It seemed like an odd way of making such an important decision, but maybe Ozpin was a fan of destiny, and believed that the pairings would work themselves out. Or maybe he had set the springs to launch them in certain ways so they would land near ideal partners.

The young hunter in training wouldn't put it past the Headmaster of one of the greatest Hunter Academy's in the world to rig to odds every now and again. Of course he didn't have much more time to muse on that line of thought as he looked down and noticed that the ground was starting to become a lot closer.

"Cannon Mode," he spoke loud enough to echo down to his boots. His personal weaponry was equipped with two different varieties of ammo, a high impact explosive "cannon" round and a faster but smaller and less deadly "missile" round.

In order to take away reload time, he had incorporated a voice module that could easily change what type of ammo he was using on the fly. He moved his foot and activated the round, which fired off and adjusted his course toward a tree that was filled with leaves. Once he got close enough, he flared up his Aura and lessened the impact, jumping off the tree and rolling on the ground in order to remove any remaining inertia from the fall.

With all that done he finally took a moment to observe his surroundings, trying to figure out where he should go next. "Hm… from the look of the landscape I got from the top of the cliff and taking in that this is a test… the place with the artifacts would be in the center of the forest, which would be…" he closed his eyes and summoned up the memory of the forest in his head. "This way," he started walking through the forest, all of his senses on high alert for any dangers.

One couldn't be too careful when the creatures of Grimm were around. And if his eyes hadn't deceived him, a few of his old classmates had also been in the line up, Lie Ren and Nora Valkyrie. Both knew about his past and if one ended up accidentally partnering with him it would be… messy.

Nora would have been a fine partner, but Ren most likely would kill him for getting close to her. Likewise, if he accidentally caught Ren's eyes, he probably would just kill him and call it an
accident. He couldn't really blame the guy, but it was still a fate he wanted to avoid.

*Other than that,* he thought to himself. *What could possibly go wrong?*

As soon as that thought entered his mind, he felt the need to hit his forehead with the flat of his palm. One was never supposed to think that, it invited bad tidings.

As if the universe was reacting to him, a number of red glowing eyes began to peak out from the foliage, followed by a number of low and dark growls.

"Fantastic," he muttered, taking a fighting stance and getting ready for whatever was about to come next.

Jaune dropped down from the tree, taking the spear that had come from out of nowhere with him as he landed. He expected the drop to be a lot more painful, seeing as he had been pretty high up. But instead it felt like he had just stepped down from a wall, still a bit bracing but nowhere near as bad as it could have been.

Maybe it was that "Aura" stuff Cinder had unlocked for him. He made a mental note to thank her for that when he had the chance. For now though, he was just going to wait, holding the spear that had prevented him from taking a face first dive into the ground. It felt rather odd in his hands, like it had been specifically designed for someone else's hand.

Not for the first time, Jaune began to wonder if he was really supposed to be here. After using the fake transcripts he had managed to forge, he had thought that this place could finally give him the thing he had always wanted, a destiny, a way to feel important. But now that he was here he felt completely out of his depth when surrounded by people who were already great warriors in their own right.

What could he do? All he had was a sword, a shield, and some extremely dumb luck to run into someone who had seen his lack of a basic tool in the Hunter's arsenal and unlocked it without a second thought.

Before he could continue to tear himself a new one, Pyrrha walked out of the forest and gave a wave to him, meeting his eyes without a moment's hesitation. "Sorry about that, it looked like you were a bit out of control with your landing."

Jaune laughed a bit and scratched the back of his head. "I uh… I thought my shoelace was untied and was looking at it. Didn't expect the launch," it was a lame excuse, but he was already a pretty huge dork in most people's eyes, so it was probably easy to buy.

"I see," she looked at her spear for a moment. "Would you mind if I had that back?"

Jaune nodded and tossed it over to her. "So uh… you know if you want to find a different partner there is a chance that we weren't caught on camera."

Pyrrha cocked her head to the side in confusion. "Why would I want to do that?"

"Well…" Jaune shrugged a bit. "I mean you are really good, especially if what that guy earlier was saying was true. I am okay but you would probably do better with a partner that was on your level, right?"

She shook her head and walked over to him, putting a hand over his heart. "Strength can only take you so far, a pure and honest heart is a much greater weapon than the force one can put behind their
"actions," she gave him a warm smile. "And I can tell that you have a great heart to you, Jaune."

Jaune blushed a bit but also felt her words dispelling the darkness that had earlier been eating away at his mind. She might have had a point, and he could also grow stronger as time went on anyway.

"Thanks..." he looked around and sighed. "You know, I just realized I have no idea where we are supposed to be going."

"Hm... well let's explore around a bit. Maybe we can find some other students and follow them," Pyrrha suggested, putting her spear on her back with her shield and starting to walk. "Try and stay alert though, I am getting a bad feeling."

Jaune nodded. "Well we are already in a forest full of Grimm, what else could possibly go wrong, right?"

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Ren sighed and walked with Nora at his side, moving through the forest carefully, and ready for another Grimm to strike. He had just battled against a King Taijitu, an enemy which was usually meant for at least two Hunters, so he was understandably a little tired and needing to build up his energy.

Unlike Nora, he was more built for scouting missions and finishing blows rather than prolonged one on one fights with enemies. It was something the combat school they had previously attended had drilled into them.

One stealth fighter with quick movement and speed and a strong fighter with powerful blows. These teams were put together in a way to trick students into thinking they were organic, but in reality they were anything but. Students would be paired with people who not only balanced them out on the battlefield, but also in their normal lives.

Nora and himself made a great example of their methods, as the two of them were opposite in almost every way but were still an efficient unit. Nora had probably never really thought that their friendship was anything but natural, and even though Ren knew the truth, it didn't change that he still considered the energetic hammer wielder his best friend.

"Whatcha thinking about?" Nora asked him in a sing-song type of voice. "Still worried over that Mercury guy?"

The name of Mercury caused a look of annoyance to flow over Ren's face. It was rare that anything could get on his nerves, but that man was one of the things that truly danced on his sanity and composer. "No, just about what other surprises might await us."

Nora blew a raspberry and struck a pose. "Well whatever it is, I will beat it down! Nothing can beat the Incredible Nora!"

Ren raised an eyebrow at that. "I thought your title was 'The Invincible Nora', or was it 'The Amazing Nora'," he was mostly just teasing her at this point, an act that calmed him down quite easily.

"I can change stuff if I want too," she huffed, crossing her arms.

"Of course you can," Ren assured her before continuing on their way. They probably had quite a bit of ground to cover, but that only meant he had more time to charge up. Survival was more important than a grade, and the bad feeling that he had running through him made him think it was much more intelligent to store as much energy as he could for the road ahead.
Cardin cursed as he pushed his way through another bunch of bushes, his newly minted 'team' following behind him. The three other guys had landed pretty close to him, and after a bit of talking they had decided who wanted to be whose partner.

They were all pretty similar when it came to strengths, and they meshed well in the personality department as well. With the four of them working together, finding their way to the center of the forest had been easy. The area was clear of any trees and had a small structure that held a number of objects in it.

"Told you we would find it," he said with a smirk. The others nodded their heads in agreement and started toward it.

Before they could get far though, a massive roar tore through the forest, giving them pause and causing a few to shake with real fear.

That wasn't the sound of some low class Grimm, or even an Alpha Grimm, which though rare around forests like these, were still known to show up from time to time. No, that was the roar of a real demon.

Suddenly, a feeling caused Cardin to turn around and lock eyes with a massive beast. Before any of the four could react, the beast leaped forward and struck, knocking them all back and into the dark realms of unconsciousness.

There was a loud scream or two from the others, but the last thing that Cardin could truly remember was the creature's eyes. They were like the red of a normal Grimm, except they were marked by a strange black symbol in the center. The symbol, from what Cardin could see before falling away into unconsciousness, was in the shape of a raven.

Ruby laughed as the four young hunters went down, moving her hands much like a puppet master would when standing above their toy to control its movements. With the crown and ring together, she was able to control the S-class Grimm even at this distance. With all three objects together, anything would be possible.

"Why not just kill them?" Blake asked from the other side of the stealth airship.

"Simple, if I kill them, they will just bomb the forest," Ruby moved the massive beast to stand by the structure housing the artifacts and had it go into resting mode to converse her energy. Controlling the creature drained her a bit, so it would have been stupid to just have it roam around. The students would come to it, and then she could strike. "Leaving them alive gives incentive for the teachers to come out and protect them."

Blake shrugged a bit. "I suppose there will be time for the death of humans later."

"Indeed," Ruby laughed a bit. With all this power in her hands, with the plan in place, what could possibly go wrong?
As the Grimm began their attack on the light humans were forced into the darkness of the caves at all times, living off of fungus and other oddities that grew deep in the holes they cowered in. That is until one day when they came across the embodiment of nature's wrath, Dust. Using the power of Dust and the strength of their soul's, humanity pushed itself from the brink and began a counter attack against the Grimm to claim the world for themselves. Standing against them was an infinite sea of darkness controlled by four beings that claimed to be gods. These four are the only documented SSS class Grimm, the most powerful creatures to ever walk the planet. Using their will alone, they could command the hordes of darkness against humanity. But even against these monsters, humanity fought.

And so the story continues.

Cinder looked at the moving brush and prepared herself to attack, forming a ball of flames into her hand and running attack strategies through her head. She wasn't used to fighting one on one, most of the time she would either be teamed with Emerald or fighting multiple opponents that would allow her to release wider attacks that she could catch groups of enemies in. But from the way the bushes moved, it seemed like there was only one creature on the other side.

"Son of a… thorns… crap," out of the bushes fell the figure of Roman Torchwick, whose entire body was covered with foliage from his trek. "Why would there even be…" he looked up and locked eyes with Cinder. "Oh no… not you," he fell backward as he realized just how very badly this was going to go.

With a partner that couldn't even control herself around Dust what was he going to do? He would get kicked out of Beacon, he would have to go back to his family and explain why he hadn't been good enough to get accepted.

While Roman was worrying about his own problems, Cinder felt her heart shatter into bits. She had always hoped Emerald would be her partner, but she wouldn't have minded it too much if someone else were to take her place so long as they were nice or at least bearable. But it seemed fate was destined to stick her with someone she couldn't stand. What was it Uncle Qrow would say? Making the best out of the worst is the best quality for a Hunter… or something like that at least. "So…"

"Yeah…" Roman stood up and looked at her, trying to form his thoughts into words. He decided to scrap that since his thoughts would probably land him with a sharp slap, and decided to go a different route. "Listen, I get that this isn't ideal for either of us."

"Agreed," Cinder said with a sigh.

"…But we both want the same thing in the end; to be Hunters and protect the world," he finished, annoyed at the interruption but not willing to start a fight over it. "So let's just try to get through this forest alive, and deal with the issues that will probably come up from it later."

Cinder thought about that for a moment. "You mean put aside any insults or annoyance for later and just act like adults?" she put on a show of considering it. "I suppose it's not the worst idea in the
Roman was obviously not amused, but put on a fake smile anyway. "I will take it," he put out his hand. "Let's start fresh for now. My name is Roman Torchwick, I work best with small to mid-size Grimm in up close combat and can act as a Conductor for up to ten people at the same time."

Cinder looked at his hand for a moment before reaching out and taking it. "Cinder Fall, I am a Dust Caster, I work best at a range and have limited up close fighting skills. However, my blows hit hard enough to count."

Under his guise of politeness, Roman winced at the pairing they had been given. A Dust Caster and a Conductor were two people you didn't want to have fighting by themselves. They were meant to stay back and attack at range while weapons specialists or Aura fighters held off the enemy. But this was the real world, so he knew that there wouldn't always be ideal team ups. "We should try to link up with another group of two then to bolster our numbers, I don't think either of us want to get caught in a fight with a bunch of Beowolves and no one to distract them."

"I suppose..." a sudden chill ran through the air as a dark energy ran through the forest. This wasn't like the normal chill one would get when faced with a group of Grimm, this was much more intense and much more powerful. A massive roar followed the chill, along with a number of screams of pain and terror.

"Someone's in trouble," Cinder ran toward the sound of the screams, knowing that whatever was causing them was a force to be feared. At the same time she couldn't just let someone be hurt. It was her duty to protect others, no matter the cost.

Roman hesitated for a moment, having felt the same thing as Cinder. He didn't like the idea of running toward whatever was causing it. But then a thought ran through his mind. This is probably part of the test, just a collared Grimm that seems powerful but can be destroyed at any time. With the rationalization in his mind, he ran after Cinder.

Mercury took a few steps away from the eyes and waited for the enemy to make the first move. His style was more about counterattacks than straightforward aggression, which worked well against many flavors of Grimm. Grimm tended to focus only on attacking and destroying their target with no mind for defending themselves or building a strategy for a long fight.

From the woods burst forth six Beowolves, five of which were normal versions of the creature, but the one at the very back of the pack was different. It was a bit larger than the others, and had a few more bone like blades coming forth from its skin. It was the pack's Alpha most likely, leading the group and allowing them to act in a more unified fashion.

This fight was going to be slightly difficult from the looks of it. A smile crossed Mercury's face, because to be honest, that was the way he wanted it.

"Missile," he struck his foot forward twice and launched two blasts directly into the armored heads of two of the Beowolves, knocking them away from the pack. "Now then," he turned toward the remaining three that were still moving. They ran in a V formation with the Alpha taking the back and the two Betas covering it.

Before Mercury could react though, another figure leapt out of a nearby tree directly onto the Alpha pack, forcing it to the ground and sliding on its body ahead of the two Beta's. The figure on its back was none other than Emerald, who after giving a small smirk aimed at Mercury, pulled forth her blades and slashed the back of the creature's neck, the lead armored portion of its entire body. After
the cut was made, she lifted and aimed her weapons at the two other Beowolves, firing two explosive rounds into their necks and grinning as they both slumped over. "Behind me please?"

Mercury nodded and leapt over her, slamming both feet into the two Beowolves that he had knocked down, both of whom were about to attack Emerald. "Cannon," he fired two powerful shots directly into the Grimm's faces, leaving two smoking holes where their heads had once been. "Thanks," Mercury said, back still to Emerald.

"Eh, you had it," Emerald collapsed the blades on her pistols and put them back into their holsters. "I just wanted to be awesome, which I am all the time anyway, but yeah," she blinked and realized he wasn't looking her way, so she walked around to stand in front of him. But he just turned his head so their eyes wouldn't meet. "Okay, so what's with the whole not looking at me thing?"

"You don't want me as a partner," Mercury stated, already feeling old ghosts start to rise in his mind. "Trust me."

Emerald sighed. "Oh please don't tell me you are one of those 'I am a super depressed person because x happened in my past so I am always serious now' kind of people," she walked over and put her hands on either side of his face, tilting it up so he was looking into her eyes. "You are obviously a good person, Cinder told me that much. You are strong, and you want to become a Hunter. I plan on teaming up with a Dust Mancer and whoever she ended up partnered with. She is my best friend and that means that I need to make sure I can help keep her safe. I am a Weapon Specialist, and with you on the team, that makes us three of four for the perfect squad."

"That… is extremely rational," he admitted, knowing that after making eye contact he was already stuck in the partnership anyway. "The name is Mercury by the way."

"Better than what I was going to call you," Emerald stepped back and pointed toward the forest. "Let's go!"

"Wait, what were you going to—" before Mercury could finish a massive roar shook the forest, causing a multitude of birds to fly out from the tree tops. Following the roar was a loud scream, a number of them actually.

"We need to go," Emerald said, knowing that Cinder would most likely run toward the noise. She always leapt into situations that were dangerous if it meant helping people, and something that could make a noise that loud was surely dangerous.

"Right," Mercury said, tossing away his question and breaking out into a run after Emerald.

"So…" Jaune looked at the entrance to a cave and tapped his foot a bit. "Do you think that the thing we need to get is in here?"

Pyrrha looked at the painting to the side of the cave, seeing clearly that it was something meant to keep people away. "I… somehow doubt it."

"Well maybe that's the point?" he said, thinking out loud more than actually talking. "Like hide it in a place that people wouldn't expect and then have them enter it as a test of bravery or something?"

"That makes sense…" she said, still holding a lot of doubt in her mind.

"Look Ren, more people!" a rather cheery voice rang out from the woods as two figures exited the area and moved toward the cave. Nora waved toward Pyrrha and Jaune and walked over with Ren following closely behind. "Hi there other people!"
"Hey," Jaune waved, not sure what to think of the two people. They seemed nice, or at least the girl did. The guy was hanging back and didn't seem to be saying much of anything.

"Pleasure," Pyrrha said with a smile. "What brings you this way?"

"I detected two other Aura signatures, thought it would be a good idea to meet with other people with all of the Grimm running around," Ren finally spoke, his voice loud enough to be heard but no more than that.

"It makes sense from a tactics stand point, larger numbers offer better protection," Pyrrha looked toward Jaune. "What do you think?"

"Yeah, new people," he smiled. "Name's Jaune Arc."

"Pyrrha Nikos," the red head said, introducing herself.

"Name's Nora," she pointed toward Ren. "His name is Ren, he doesn't talk very much," that earned her a slight glare from Ren, but he didn't make an issue out of it. "So what's with the cave?" Nora asked.

"Well we thought—" before Jaune could finish a roar shook through the forest, followed by a number of screams. "Sounds like someone's in trouble," Jaune looked toward the other three. "I know we are supposed to focus on the artifact, but I think we should go help them."

Pyrrha smiled and nodded her head. "Right."

"Woo, kick butt time!" Nora looked around a bit and pointed. "That way!"

Ren put his hand on her shoulder and adjusted her. "That way…"

"This way!" Nora broke out into a sprint toward the sound, and the rest of the group quickly followed after her.

Cinder and Roman paused at the edge of the forest, and what they saw froze both of them in place. Standing in a spot devoid of trees was a small structure with a number of artifacts sitting within. On the ground around the structure where the fallen bodies of students who had been knocked out in battle, looking badly hurt.

Behind the structure loomed a massive ape-like Grimm which stood fifteen feet tall, pitch black body covered with a thin layer of black hair. It had four massive arms as thick as tree's with pulsing crimson lines running through them. At the end of each finger sat long, bone-like claws, and on the top of the arms sat bone-like blades that extended past its body. Covering the creatures face was a bone white mask with red lines running throughout, covering four pure red slit eyes that glowed with malice. It opened its mouth to let out a blood curling roar, revealing its rows of shark-like teeth.

Roman took a step back and looked down to his hands only to realize they were shaking. "I don't think this is a part of the test," he said under his breath.

Cinder nodded in agreement and looked at the monster. "We have to fight it," she stepped forward to face the Grimm. Even if she had to do it on her own, she would not let this monster hurt anyone.

Roman watched her and cursed her, himself, and the entire world before stepping forward. He wasn't ready to live like a coward, so he might as well die as a Hunter.
A human figure miles away put down a pair of binoculars and let out a grunt that almost sounded like laughter. The figure's body was covered by a black robe and hood, which only left room for one to see the white mask with two black eye holes and a long beak sticking out from it. On the figure's back sat a massive rifle, easily two times its size. "Hm… so then, what will you do now Ruby?" he looked toward the battlefield and tilted his head. "Whatever it is… let's hope it holds my interest."

Chapter End Notes

Glynda Goodwitches Lesson of the Day: Hunter Classes

Welcome students to a prerecorded lesson. Today I will be teaching on the various classes that Hunters are commonly divided into in order to form effective squads. There are four common classes with more specific underlines to them depending on the person classified as such. The four classes are: Aura Fighter, Weapon Specialist, Dust Mancer, and Conductor.

An Aura Fighter uses their natural Aura and Semblance in harmony in order to create an effective fighting style. One need only look to Mr. Oobleck in order to see an example of such. He forms his Aura into deadly attacks, striking and defending himself with his soul.

Weapon Specialists focus more on using their Semblance and a weapon in harmony, sometimes training in one weapon and other times developing skills with multiple weapons. One need only look so far as Mr. Port and his personal favorite weapon, which he keeps on display in his classroom.

Dust Mancers use their Aura to tune in with the power within Dust, fusing the two together to perform powerful attacks and destroy their enemies. I, myself am a fine examples of this, drawing our energy inward and directing nature's wrath against our foes.

The final class we will speak about today are Conductors, those whose souls connect others. A Conductors main ability is setting themselves up as a line of communication between a number of people, allowing instant transmission of thought and strategy into multiple people. They can also allowed a sort of shared vision among those they are connected to, allowing allies to see the enemies moves even from cover. Headmaster Ozpin is one of the best known Conductors, said to be able to link up to thirty people at the same time with no stress.

By the time you complete your training here at Beacon, you will rise to an A rank in at least one of these classes, and either a B in another or C's in two. For more on these classes please see the tape marked 'Subclasses'.

The New Light

After many years, humanity finally managed to push the Grimm back enough to build civilization, coming together and forming massive armies to oppose the monsters. Three of the great beasts fell in combat, destroyed with massive and overwhelming attacks that not even their own dark powers could resist. The fourth and final beast vanished with the defeat of his brothers, leaving humanity in the most powerful position they had been in for years. Of course there was still to be strife. The people who dug in the deepest mines to find the most powerful Dust had transformed into humans with animal like features, who came to be known as Faunus. With the absence of a greater foe humanity and Faunus warred with each other, until reaching a shaky peace.

But as with all things, peace can never be held, the world is a thing of constant flux and change. And so the story, as it always shall, continues.

"This isn't good," Goodwitch said under her breath as she looked over the footage on her scroll, watching as the unknown Grimm tossed the students around like they were nothing more than stuffed dolls. "We don't have that beast collared, we should…"

"No," Ozpin said, cutting his second in command off. "I think that things will turn out to be fine, and we need everyone here on campus."

Despite her faith in the headmaster, Glynda still raised an eyebrow at that. "But the students…"

"Knew exactly what they were getting into when they signed up to be Hunters," he said, his voice cold. At times Ozpin could be kind, almost like a father to those under him. But at other times, one could see where he earned his nickname 'The Cold Hearted Wizard'.

"Understood," she turned away from him. "Do you think she has anything to do with this?"

The headmaster didn't bother looking back toward Glynda. "There isn't a doubt in my mind."

Glynda continued walking, planning on putting the other teachers at full alert. If she was involved in this then it was best to be ready for an all-out war on campus. That was her style after all.

Though many students didn't know of it until after the fact, the initiation test was actually filled by the multiple camera's that kept track of their process. The view of these cameras were opened up for public view to those who were interested, giving the people a good idea of the students that would be attending for the first year. Many gambling places used these exams to bring in the crowds to place bets on the people who would make it through, and those that would drop out.

The Nightshade was one such establishment that was known quite well for not only its drinks but for the best quality video and the best odds for the event. It was located under a building and had a bit of an old world vibe to it. Except for the multiple video screens that is.

"Man these losers are dropping like flies," one patron said, raising his mug. "Hey bartender, what are the odds now?"

"Well there appear to be only twenty students left, and they are all either away from the location of the artifacts or only just now arriving," the man behind the bar answered, pointing at the screen which showed the remaining students.
"Knew I should have put money on that Torchwick kid, probably just paid for the best stuff," the same patron moaned to himself, resting his head against the table. This was of course a common reaction for the past hour or so, as each person seemed to fall further and further into despair as the would be students were knocked out by the massive Grimm standing guard of the artifacts.

The bartender moved toward the end of the bar, where a regular was sitting on the stool, taking his time drinking from a large mug of the Nightshade's signature ale. The man wore a large cloak that covered his entire body, with a hood that was brought up around his head and even went so far as to hide his face. The bartender knew why the man wanted his privacy, so he didn't find it too odd. "You seem in high spirits today friend."

"I am always in high spirits to steal money from you," the man lifted his glass and took another drink.

"So you say," he turned toward the screen. "You only made one bet, and she has been doing quite well. Is there something I should know about her before any late bets arrive?"

"Just this," he tilted the drink back and lowered the empty mug to the bar. "I never bet on something that isn't a sure thing, and she, she is a sure thing," the man stood up and placed some Lien on the table. "Just put my winnings into my tab, I have somewhere I need to be."

The bartender nodded, picking up the empty mug. "Before you go, that new Grimm, that's supposed to be there right?"

The man paused for a moment before nodding. "Of course, after all do you really think that Ozpin would make that kind of lapse in judgment?"

With a laugh the bartender nodded his head. "Right, sorry. Just seemed a bit too powerful. But maybe that's just how things are outside of the cities."

The hooded figure laughed and made his way toward the bar's exit. I don't know what you are doing Ozpin, but you had better not let anything happen to her. If so, we will have words.

"Man, this is boring," Ruby said as she moved her hands as if controlling an invisible puppet. "I mean honestly, it's like they are hardly even trying."

Yang laughed a bit and moved the magazine she was reading down. "Well you are using an S class Grimm sis. I mean come on, it's not like a bunch of newbies that are still wet behind the ears would even know where to start fighting something like that, yah know?"

Before Ruby could respond a sudden coughing fit ran through her, causing her entire body to visibly shake. When it finally stopped a thin line of black ooze ran down her mouth and dripped off her chin. "Damn it," Ruby moved her hand to her face, cleaning away the liquid. "What is taking them so long?"

Yang's phone went off in her pocket, and after placing the magazine she was reading down on her stomach, she answered it. "Yang speaking."

"How much longer before we can begin the attack?" Blake asked from the other end of the phone. "Remaining idle so close to Beacon is dangerous for any amount of time, and I don't want to risk more of my people than I have to in this attack."

"Calm down," Yang said with a smile. "There is no way they will be willing to risk to lives of every one of the new students," she said this with confidence, but in the back of her mind, scenarios where
they did ran amuck. It was still possible to use that to their advantage, discrediting Ozpin and maybe forcing him to retire, making someone less prepared step up and attacking during the chaos of the power transfer. But that was better left for later. "Just wait a bit longer."

"I don't take orders from humans," Blake said in a dangerous tone.

"And I don't give orders, just suggestions, and I suggest you stick to the plan," Yang hung up and sighed, understanding Blake's frustration but not being able to actually go beyond that and sympathize with the Faunus leader. All that mattered to Yang was fighting and her sister, everything else was a moot point.

Quite suddenly Ruby flinched and stood up. "Oh… this should be fun."

Yang looked over toward her sister. "What's up?"

"Something fun," Ruby smiled and stopped talking, focusing on what was happening on the other end of her control.

Cinder gathered up a ball of fire above her hand and stepped out of the protection of the forest, throwing it directly at the monsters face and watching as it exploded harmlessly against its massive form. Her efforts seemed to draw the Grimm's attention to her, all four red eyes glaring directly at the young Huntress to be.

Before he could think to hard on his decision, Roman also came out of the forest, raising his cane and firing off a number of shots from it. The shots hit, as it was hard to miss a target that was easily the size of the broad side of a barn, but none of them seemed to do much damage. "So, I am starting to think we may have made a horrible decision," Roman said, voice dripping with snark.

"If you want to run away, now would be the time," Cinder brought her hands together and focused her energy, forming two small balls of flame in her hands.

"No, just… commenting," Roman took a deep breath and connected his Aura to Cinder's, forming a balanced connection quickly.

The massive Grimm Ape leaped forward and slammed its fists into the area where the two had been standing, forcing them apart in order to dodge out of the way. But even after dodging the main hit, the aftershock from the creatures blow made the ground shake for a few moments, almost throwing them off balance.

The beast took this momentary distraction in order to launch a fresh attack on Cinder, moving forward and attempting to impale her on one of the blade-like bones on its arms. Before the hit could be made, Cinder moved her arm out and turned the ball into a small jet of flame, propelling her out of danger and throwing the other orb at the monster. It exploded against its side, but like all of the other attacks it didn't seem to do anything.

"Watch out!" Roman said, reaching under his coat and pulling out his secret weapon. It was a small round orb with a button at the very top. While tinkering with a few new ideas for explosives, he had come across a potent mixture that could pack the explosive force of a missile while retaining the size and shape of a baseball.

He pressed the detonator and tossed it toward the Grimm. Its attack on Cinder had managed to draw it away from the various unconscious students on the ground, which allowed him to safely use the weapon. As soon as the explosive hit the Grimm, it blew up in a massive show of fire and electricity as the Dust within it activated. "Woo-hoo!" he said to himself, throwing his hand up in the air.
"Torchwick Incorporated 1, Grimm 0."

Cinder gulped and looked at the storm of dust and dirt that had been thrown up from the explosion. It seemed any celebration was too soon, for the Grimm stepped out of the cloud as untouched as before, except maybe looking a bit more angry. The beast turned its attention toward Roman and made a full sprint toward him. With amazing speed, it cleared any gap between itself and the young man and struck.

Before the blow could land though, a figure darted out of the woods and blocked it with a kick. "You know, dodging would probably be a better idea than standing still and letting the monster hit you," Mercury smirked at Roman and pooled his Aura around his foot, pushing forward and forcing the creature back a step.

Before it regained its balance, Emerald leapt from a nearby tree onto its back, both her guns at the ready with the blades on them already unleashed. She delivered a number of slashes along the creature's back before jumping off its head and landing next to Roman. "Stuck the landing!" she said with a smirk.

Cinder quickly made her way around the beast and moved over toward Emerald. "Looks like you found a partner, and it's an attractive guy. Shocker," she said with a smile, feeling much more confident with her friend around.

"Oh yeah, well you found," Emerald looked at Roman and recognized the description she had been given of the jerk from earlier that day. "A… guy."

"That is indeed an accurate description," Cinder said.

"Ladies, the gossip should probably wait until we aren't looking down the blade arms of a massive Grimm that knocked out just about every would be Beacon student," Roman said with an irritated tone.

"You are just mad because they think I am more attractive," Mercury said with a smile, feeling much more light hearted with Emerald around. It was just like the old days with him and his old partner, and for once, he actually felt balanced.

"So not the point," Roman said, though a bit of his tone proved his annoyance on that matter.

"Right, we are going to need to strike effectively as a unit on this. Roman?" Cinder turned her head toward the heir. "How well can you conduct three people at once?"

He smiled and tapped his cane on the ground, extending tendrils of his Aura and invisibly connecting the three of them to himself. "Easy as pie."

"Okay then, let's go," Cinder sent a volley of fireballs at the Grimm in order to cover the others movements. Emerald and Mercury took the front and attacked the Grimm's body while Roman and Cinder covered them from behind. But despite their best efforts, the creature didn't actually seem to be taking damage, rather it just shrugged off their attacks and kept moving at the same speed.

"It's like this thing has a force field," Emerald moaned as she slashed at its legs, only for her blades to not cut through the creature's body.

Roman scoffed and pulled out a vial of Burn dust, adding the sand-like substance into his cane. "Impossible, Grimm don't have Souls in order to produce an Aura, and only A+ class and above Grimm can create a shadow force shield around them."
It was known to most that Grimm of higher levels were able to create fields around them produced by their pure and concentrated malice, known as shadow force shields. They were invisible to the naked eye and could absorb enough damage to allow them to charge straight into a highly defended area without taking even a scratch.

"Well I don't see many other alternatives to it," Mercury brought up his hands and focused his Aura in front of him as the beast swung its arm at him, knocking him back a few feet.

The Grimm raised its head in the air and let forth a massive roar once more, except unlike its previous roars of anger, this one sounded different. To the ears of a skilled Hunter the call was quite obvious, the Grimm was calling in backup.

Within moments, the area was suddenly filled with Beowolves and Ursa, minor D level versions of them, but enough to swarm toward the four young hunters and cause them to have to divert their attention away from the main threat.

"Great, more of them," Cinder summoned a number of flaming pillars in order to divert the Grimm from attacking any of the downed humans, forcing her to take attention away from the massive Pitch Affree, or Mega Ozero.

"I don't think…" Roman brought up his cane to block the strike of a Beowolf, forcing it back and cracking it right on the neck with his cane. "That we can survive this much longer."

Emerald dodged out of the way of another hit from the massive Grimm, only to be smacked forward by an Ursa into the massive creatures grasp. "Crap…" she attempted to struggle free but found the beast's grip too tight. With a roar the creature lifted its arm up and threw Emerald toward the trees.

Before she could hit though, another person jumped from the treetops and saved her, landing with both feet on the ground. "Are you okay?" the calm voice of Lie Ren asked as he looked down toward Emerald.

"Being saved by a cute guy?" she gave a thumbs up. "I am doing just fine. That being said," she rolled out of his arms and fired at an incoming Beowolf. "I kind of hope you brought back up."

As if to answer her, three other people burst clear of the forest. Nora jumped forth and began to strike down various Grimm while laughing like a school girl. Pyrrha provided covering fire and landed a few kills where she could. And Jaune moved over toward Cinder, attacking when he could but mostly just dodging the blows. "So uh… this doesn't look like much fun."

"I believe you have deduced the obvious," Cinder said with a small smile. "I see you found some new friends."

"Looks like you did the same," he said, trying to keep his cool and doing a surprisingly good job under the circumstances. Unlike the others, he wasn't formally trained in fighting back these monsters, but he wasn't about to wet his pants and run away. He had seen those who had fallen, and knew that leaving also meant letting them die.

"Indeed, but time for catching up will be available to us later," Cinder looked toward Roman. "Connect them!"

Roman dodged out of the way of two Beowolves and tossed a grenade between them, watching as it exploded and turned the two Grimm to Dust. "Give me a second, will you?!" he said with an irritated tone. Three was easy for him, but connecting seven people together was reaching his limit, especially in this situation. Despite this though, he managed to accomplish it, connecting all seven of them and
holding the connection.

As soon as the connection was made, all eight Hunters in training managed to fight as a single unit, doing a much better job against the hordes of Grimm that were attacking them.

"Wait a minute…" Jaune moved out of the main fray and allowed the information coming from the others to set in his mind. Being connected allowed him at least a brief glimpse into what they were seeing, and as that information went through his mind he realized something. The Grimm were fighting with a strategy. Not a complicated one by any means, but a strategy all the same.

As he did with many things, Jaune fell back on years of gaming in order to come up with a solution to the problem. He stopped imagining the Grimm as Grimm, but more like simple AI. All they could do was attack and occasionally surround an enemy, but the only real coordination happened when they were near the big creature. So if they could separate the two forces, the battle would become much easier.

"Cinder!" Jaune called out, trying to talk to her over the chaos.

"Hey you idiot, just talk through the mind link, its not like I am holding this connection with you plebeians for fun," Roman voice rang loud in Jaune's mind before he fired off a shot and turned toward him. "I set up an open connection, just think what you have to say and they will hear it."

Jaune nodded and moved back from the fighting. "Okay everyone, listen up. The Grimm seem to work best when they are around the big guy, so here is what we have to do. Cinder and Pyrrha, focus on keeping the big one busy and create some room. Once we have that, the rest of the monsters should be a lot easier to take on."

Everyone nodded to the plan and began a fresh attack. Cinder created a circle of pillars around the massive Grimm and flared them up, causing the smaller ones to back up. At the same time, Pyrrha put her hand to the ground and began to focus her Semblance. After a few moments focus, she was able to magnetically lift the various fallen weapons around the battlefield and form them into a massive wave of metal and destruction, slamming it against the Grimm and forcing it back a few feet.

With the massive Grimm distracted, the rest went to work attacking the minor Grimm.

Nora slammed a Grimm away into the tree lining and Emerald appeared next to her to provide covering fire and watch her back. "Hey there, names Nora," she said with a smile, swinging her hammer behind her and knocking a Grimm charging toward Emerald to the side.

"Emerald, thanks for the assist," the tan skinned girl continued fighting alongside Nora. "So you are cute guy number two's are partner?"

"His name is Ren," Nora said, a very, very slight hint of annoyance in her voice at him being referred to as a cute guy by another girl. Not that she was jealous. No not at all. Her and Ren were just friends. Just friends. No one should question that. "And yeah, you and Mercury are on a team, right?"

"Yep, he is pretty neat," she paused for a moment. "So guessing you two have history? You said his name was a bit weird."

Nora took a pause in her actions, seeing the Grimm around them were either dead or retreating toward the forest. "No, its just… he is a really nice guy but he has some stuff… just be careful with him, okay?" she said, dropping her usual cute act and smiling a bit sadly.

Emerald nodded, seeing the seriousness on her face. "Yeah, he is my partner after all."
Ren moved through the Grimm around him like a hot knife through butter, using the blades on his guns to slash at the creatures, reinforcing his weapon with his Aura in order to make the reach longer and the bite of it more dangerous. He was forced to block a massive Ursa who took a swing at him, but before the beast could continue the assault, Mercury jumped up and landed a shot in its neck.

"You," Ren said, glaring at the other Aura fighter.

"Yeah, yeah, we don't like each other. Can we save that until after the big fight?" Mercury asked, returning the glare to Ren.

Ren didn't bother to answer, instead lifting his gun and firing a volley of shots behind Mercury to divert a Beowolf away.

"Taking that as a yes." The two Aura fighter went back to back and knocked away the various Grimm that came at them, eventually scattering them and causing them to either flee or fall before them.

All that was left was the massive Grimm now, which despite Pyrrha and Cinder's best efforts, didn't seem to be any worse than before.

"This is growing comical," Roman said with a sneer. "How the hell are we supposed to kill something we can't even scratch?"

Cinder moved back toward Roman and put her hand on his shoulder, connecting her Aura more fully to Roman's in order to speak to everyone. "I need everyone to buy me ten minutes, if you can do that then I might have something that could end this with one blow." Using Roman's ability, she placed an X on the ground with her mind, showing everyone the spot she wanted the Grimm to be on. "Hold the creature in that spot, and once I am finished leave it to me."

Despite their doubt, everyone nodded and stepped in front of Cinder, forming a line to defend her. As they did, Cinder clapped her hands together and closed her eyes, drawing in a deep breath and began to draw energy into herself from the world around her.

The massive Grimm charged forward and the rest of the Hunters to be rushed toward it. The name of the game was distraction, and each of them threw themselves behind that with gusto. Ren slammed the beast with multiple Aura charged fists, striking hard against the invisible armor that surrounded it. Nora fired her weapon in its gun form, launching explosives that left behind clouds to block the monster's vision.

"Mercury now!" Emerald called out.

Mercury nodded and called out, "Missile mode!" He raised his leg and launched out a number of kicks, firing out a small burst of Dust rounds with each move. The attacks were completely focused on the beast's head.

As he did this, Emerald quickly circled the creature and jumped on its back, grabbing on to the fur and leaping her way up it. Once she reached its neck, she made a massive leap over it and launched down two shots with her guns, striking the area above where Mercury's shots were hitting. With the combined force of the two hits, her Dust rounds made it through and shot out two of the massive creatures eyes.

The Grimm let out a roar of pain and arched its head up toward the sky. As it did, a black ball of energy began to form above its mouth.
"Oh shit," Roman began to back away, knowing exactly what that was. The Grimm was summoning the dark energy from within its core and converting it into a devastating blast. Only Grimm of S class could do that, and for one of the few times in his life, the young man felt real terror.

The Grimm straightened its head and launched a massive burst of energy straight toward Cinder, containing enough destructive force to level a mountain. If it hit, she would be erased in an instant.

"No!" Jaune leaped in front of Cinder and raised his shield, not knowing if he could do any good but also not willing to sit back and let someone die.

"Jaune!" Pyrrha called out, losing focus on her attack and being forced to block one of the massive Grimm's blades.

Jaune closed his eyes, knowing that this was probably it for him. As the blast struck his shield a sudden burning feeling went through his body, and a voice in his head screamed at him in a way he couldn't describe. The boy opened his eyes and felt a sudden power rushing through him, and with it he pushed back against the beam. Those around him saw Jaune seemingly radiating pure white energy, not only forcing the beam back, but eventually knocking it to the side with a massive flash of light.

The Grimm roared in pure agony at the light and used two massive hands to cover its face, which seemed to drip black liquid down it.

Ruby screamed in agony and fell to her knee's, clutching her own face and shuddering. She ripped the ring off her finger and threw it to the other side of the airship, a thin wisp of smoke rising off it. She did the same with the crown.

Yang jumped up and put a hand on her. "What's wrong?" she asked, concern easy to hear in her voice.

Ruby couldn't answer through, she only howled in agony and pain.

"Damn it," Yang looked forward. "Take us back to base, the mission is off and we need a medic now!"

The pilot nodded and opened up the radio channel. "This is Chameleon 1, the mission is off and we are returning to base."

Yang wrapped her sister in her arms, hoping that whatever had happened didn't destroy her sister completely.

Blake tossed her phone against the wall of the ship and began to toss out curses. "The mission is over," she said between her curses. "Return us to Black Fang headquarters now!"

The pilot nodded, moving the Black Fang ships away from the position they had been waiting to launch an attack from.

"You better have a damn good reason for this Ruby," Blake said, sitting down and grinding her teeth. "Or else I don't care about alliances, I will kill you."

With the Grimm now weaken, the Hunters fought with renewed vigor, pushing the blind creature into the spot Cinder had marked on their shared Aura vision. It still swung around violently, but
didn't fight with the same grace that it had before.

Cinder finally opened her eyes, both of which glowed like two massive golden fireballs. "Now!" under the feet of the Grimm, she formed a massive circle of energy. "Taiyō no hi!" a massive pillar of golden flames erupted and engulfed the massive beast, producing a heat that could be felt even by those far away from it.

The beast gave a new roar of pain and began to try and move out of it, almost making it before suddenly falling back into the flames, almost as if struck by something. Cinder brought her hands together and collapsed the pillar into a single ball of flames, before making it vanish all together. The Grimm stood in the same spot, body charred by the attack. Within moments it began to break apart, its body becoming ashes and blowing away in the wind.

"We… did… it," Roman said with a smirk.

"Yeah…" Cinder said before falling forward out of pure exhaustion. The others moved to help her, but suddenly felt all of the pressure from the battle fall on them and passed out as well.

Ozpin smiled and closed his Scroll, pulling out a small radio. "Send the second year students in to retrieve all those who are fallen and send them to the infirmary. Any of them that still want to be Hunters after that are more than welcome in my school," he turned away from the forest and walked back toward the school, knowing he would have a speech to prepare for later that night.

After a few hours resting in the infirmary, the students were let out, with most of those who entered into the forest being allowed to make a choice between staying and leaving. Of course a few people were scared by the incident and decided that the life of a Hunter wasn't for them, leaving the school on an airship after they were fully healed.

But as for Cinder, Emerald, Roman, Mercury, Jaune, Pyrrha, Nora, and Ren, they had decided to stay the course, knowing they had seen what the world had to offer and being more than willing to fight through it.

They waited as the two last teams of four in line. After they had decided to stay, their team assignments had been given to them. Jaune, Pyrrha, Ren, and Nora in one, and Cinder, Roman, Mercury, and Emerald in another.

Jaune and his group went up first, and had their names each called out. "From here on you will be known as team Juniper, led by Jaune Arc," Nora hugged Ren and Pyrrha gave a playful punch to her partner, knocking him over by accident and looking mildly embarrassed by it.

Before long however, the group left and Cinder and her group were called up. "Cinder Fall, Roman Torchwick, Mercury Black, and Emerald Almas, the four of you along with team JNPR managed to defeat the massive Grimm guarding the treasures at the end of the trial. For this, both you and they deserve special honors," the crowd cheered. "Together the four of you will be known as team CREM, or rather Cremation, the fire that brings about change. Your leader, Cinder Fall," the crowd cheered. "Congradulations," Ozpin said, more to Cinder than for the sake of the crowd.

Roman looked at Cinder with a look of bemusement on his face, and Emerald moved over and
hugged Cinder tightly, before pulling the whole group into a hug.

"This will certainly be an interesting year," Ozpin said with a smile.

Blake stormed into the meeting room with a look of pure anger on her face. "What happened?!" she yelled, glaring around the room. Sitting at the usual meeting table were Yang and Weiss, but Ruby wasn't anywhere to be seen. "Why was the attack called off?"

Before anyone could explain, Ruby entered the room, looking more calm and confident than she had in months. The usual air of minor pain that usually hung around her was gone. "The plan was interrupted and events happened that we didn't plan for."

"I have had enough, the Black Fang is pulling out of this alliance," Blake said simply, no anger in her tone. "I am done with this."

"Now wait a minute," Yang stood up and began to move at Blake, but Ruby lifted her hand to motion for the blonde to stop.

"You are free to go," Ruby said calmly, sitting down in her own chair. "If you think the Black Fang can do better without us, then you are welcome to leave, no strings attached."

Weiss looked toward Ruby with cold fascination, and Yang simply stood awe shocked.

Blake didn't seem to trust her words much, but still turned around and began to leave. "If I see any of you again, I promise it won't be as friends. Don't get in our way," she left without another word.

"Interesting choice," Weiss said, looking at her fingernails. "With those dramatics out of the way, I will also take my leave, I have winnings to collect. I put my money on us losing, and many people bet against the students near the end," she got up and made her way out of the room.

Yang turned toward Ruby and began to speak, but Ruby shook her head. "Not now, please… go."

The murderous woman clenched her hands into fists, but did as she was told and walked away, leaving confused and angry.

"You can come out now," Ruby said, speaking to what appeared to be an empty room.

From the shadows stepped out the masked figure from the forest, giving a small bow to the scythe wielding killer. "Ruby Rose, as beautiful as ever."

"Cut the crap," Ruby said, glaring at the bird masked figure. "What the hell happened back there, the ring and the crown cut connection and then I was in more pain than I've felt in my life."

"And how do you feel now?" The figure questioned.

Ruby paused and put a hand over her heart. "I feel better than I have in months."

"I thought so," the figure crossed his arms. "The light from that boys Aura is special, a healer's ability, a warriors strength, and a child's innocence, a powerful combination of elements. It stuck against the negative energy used by the rings and followed the connection back to you. If I had to guess, I would say the power cleared away some of the damaged parts of your soul."

"So, what does that mean?" she asked, sitting her chin on top of her hands.

"The infection from the crown and ring is slowed and you will have more time. I estimate you have
five months with minor use of the artifacts and regular Dust treatments," the figure shrugged. "But
that is more of a guess."

"I see," Ruby stood up and nodded. "Five months then, that is more than enough time." She looked
over to the figure. "Oh, and Shade?"

"Yes?" he asked, looking toward Ruby.

Ruby pulled out her weapon and flashed herself in front of him, the front of it pressing hard into his
stomach. "Bye," she pulled the trigger and the man's body shot back, leaving a blood splatter against
the wall. Within seconds the cloak and mask disappeared into smoke. After about a minute her phone
rang and Ruby pulled it out. "Yes?"

"That was rude. But don't worry, I am far too interested in what happens next to be mad," the voice
of Shade laughed over the phone and the call ended.

"This… will be an interesting year," Ruby said to herself, dropping the phone and smashing it under
her foot.

Ozpin entered into his office with a weary look playing about his face, tired from what he had almost
been forced to face that day. The thought of young people dying was never a pleasant one, but the
idea of a full blown war happening on his campus because of an attempt to save their lives. However
the day he was having only seemed to be continuing, as he quickly noted he wasn't alone, and
someone was sitting in his chair. "Qrow, if you had told me you were coming ahead of time I would
have brought out the liquor."

"Don't be cute Oz," Qrow stood up and lowered his hood, revealing his face to the older man. "What
the hell were you thinking, dropping something like that into the test?"

The headmaster shook his head. "You know I would never put my students in unnecessary danger,
this was the work of our enemy, a gambit to get us to abandon the academy most likely."

Qrow nodded and sat on Ozpin's desk, a weary look playing about his face. "So she is after the
sword, we knew she would be once the crown disappeared."

"We won't let it fall into her hands, no matter what," Ozpin said, his voice full of conviction.

"Of course, oh, but one more thing," Qrow leapt from the table and grabbed Ozpin by the collar. "If
you ever put my daughter in that situation again I swear to everything holy, I will make sure you
don't live to regret it."

Ozpin starred down his old friend. "She made the choice to be a Huntress."

"That doesn't mean I want to see her life thrown away facing something that she isn't ready for," he
said.

"I understand, I would never willingly sacrifice one of my students," he replied.

Qrow held his spot for a few moments before letting him go and moving to the window. "I am sure
that comforts Anomina in her tomb," with that said, Qrow leapt out the open window, disappearing
as a black bird rose and flew off into the night skies.

Ozpin sighed and went to his chair, slumping down in it and pulling out a photo from his desk.
"Things change," he said to himself before placing the photo back into its place. "Things always
change."

The moon that night was full, granting light upon the world. And for that night, peace held.

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Peter Port Lesson of the Day: Grimm Ranking System

Hello Young Hunters and Huntresses of the future, it is none other than I, the legendary Peter Port here to hand down some of my knowledge to the next generation. I had thought that maybe I could tell you about the time I took down a Nevermore with nothing more than my wits and a truck filled with butter, but my dear friend Ozpin requested a do a brief introduction to the Grimm Ranking system, so by his request here we go!

The lowest ranked Grimm are classified as E-class Grimm. Monsters under this class are usually newly spawned and are without the hardened darkness and bone mask and blades that are normally seen on older Grimm. E-class Grimm will hunt together in large, leaderless packs in order to take down prey. They will turn on each other once they come of age in order to absorb the strength of the weaker members, thus ensuring that the strong will remain so, and that no weak creatures will be left.

Next are the D and C ranked Grimm. These creatures have grown past the E-class with age and developed their hardened bodies and bone like masks and other various accessories. These creatures are known to still stay in packs, but are also just as likely to travel alone and wreak havoc. Which reminds me of a fun story from my... I am being told to move on so I will save that for another lecture.

B ranks are next, these creatures are higher class versions of their D and C ranked counterparts. Take for instance an Ursa-Major and compare it to its C ranked counterpart. The Ursa-Major absorbed more mass when it grew from E ranking, making it bigger and more deadly. Despite their size, these creatures are still quite swift. You see the size of a Grimm is quite irreverent, as the creatures most vital area is its core, the small round object that acts as the core of the Grimm’s existence. Once a large enough wound has been opened, the natural Dust that travels through the air of the world will quickly corrode the core and destroy the beast. Most large Grimm are actually quite hollow inside.

Now then, A ranking creatures are the largest and most deadly of the normal class of Grimm, and should only be fought in groups or by experienced Hunters. These beasts spawn at E rank but rather than traveling in packs and growing by devouring others, they instead take longer to raise but come out at full power. Creatures such as the massive Nevermore and Death Stalker are two such examples.<br />
They have natural defenses such as the razor sharp feathers of the Nevermore, or the spear like stinger of the Death Stalker.

S ranked beasts are creatures of legend, normally unique and very hard to find. These creatures range from massive to the size of a normal human. Because of their rarity, very little is known about these beasts, but after having fought one myself back in the day here is my knowledge. These creatures are built of a different breed than the others, its core contains more malice and dark energy than should be held by one being. Using this power, it can create an invisible shield that is near impossible to pierce, requiring many powerful hits in order to create a crack. They can also draw their dark energy from within themselves and utilize it to create devastating attacks.

The SS ranked Grimm were said to have served the four SSS-class Grimm in the days of legend, and
are as much a mystery as those four are. It is said that none ever fell in combat, and that they simply wait in rest for one of them to return in order to awaken them to attack this world and bring humanity to an end.

And finally, as previously mentioned, the SSS-class Grimm. These are creatures of pure darkness and malice, said to have the intelligence of humans but the darkness of demons. It was said that each one could destroy an army without a thought. Three were recorded in the records of old as having been defeated, with the fourth disappearing when his brothers fell. The records are as followed:

The first was lead into a Dust mine by a number of brave souls who detonated the entire mine when the creature followed them in. The mine burned for ten years before finally going out, and when it was finally explored, only a single spot on the ground was not burned.

The second was confronted by the four greatest Hunters of legend and was battled against for ten days and nights without rest. Three of the four fell in battle, but the beast was finally laid to rest by the final member, who ripped the Grimm apart and burned even the dust left behind by the body.

The third was surrounded by an army and attacked for days on end, being hit with more Dust and attacks than could be counted. It took five days for the attack to finally end, and when it did, the creature was felled. A palace was built on the beast’s resting place, the bottom lined with pure Dust as a way to keep even the creature’s memory trapped under humanity’s strength.

The fourth Grimm was their king, and with its generals destroyed, it faded away into darkness, never to be seen or heard from again.

And that finishes our lesson of the day. Now then perhaps you might be interested to hear…

Recording ended.
Roman Torchwick had a certain way that he liked to wake up every morning, which was trained into every team of the service staff at his mansion back home. Each day they would wake him up to a fresh cup of tea, two spoons of sugar and a dash of honey, the right smell to wake him up. Not that he actually drank it, tea was a commoner's drink as far as he was concerned. No it was just a nice smell to wake up too. He would then proceed to go down to his indoor gym, a personal training helping him go through various exercises to train every bit of his body to tip top shape. Following that was a light breakfast, studying, and then assorted other activities depending on the day.

Which was to say when a whistle went off right next to his ear at seven in the morning he was a little more than surprised. Despite years of training the most the young man could do to being woken up by the sound was to fall flat on his face out of the bed in a mad rush to defend himself in a half asleep state.

"Good morning team Crimson!" Emerald spat out the whistle in her mouth and grinned toward her newly founded team. Mercury rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and gave a loud yawn but seemed to adapt a bit faster than Roman, stretching himself out. Cinder woke up with a small yawn but seemed to take the whistle blowing in stride. One could only know Emerald for so long before this kind of thing became the norm after all. "I will now be giving the floor to our amazing and beautiful team leader, Cinder!" Emerald jumped onto Mercury's bed and landed directly on his lap, using him as a comfortable chair.

"Um…right…" Cinder scratched the back of her head, a small but very awkward smile on her face as she looked over the team that she was now supposed to be leading. "So with this being our first official day as a team I thought it might be useful for us to do a team building exercise together, something to help bring us closer together as both teammates and friends." Hopefully one that didn't involve having their lives put into danger by the appearance of an S class Grimm.

Mercury raised up his hand for a moment. "Could our first task be throwing away all of Roman's boxes before it collapses on us and we drown under a sea of junk?"

With that said all four of the young Hunters to be turned their heads to the left corner of the room and the massive pillar of objects that had been stacked on top of each other the previous night to make enough room for all of them to sleep, each marked with 'property of Roman Torchwick'. The stack reached all the way to the roof, was stacked fast enough to make it very likely to fall over with just one wrong breeze.

"I second this agreement," Emerald said with a smile, looking toward the collection of boxes. "I say we burn them and dance on the ashes."

"What?" Roman stood up and pointed his finger at them. "No I veto that vote."

Emerald jumped up and grinned, crossing her arms over each other. "Only the leader has veto power, your request for a veto has to be approved by the chairmen of affairs."

"Chairmen of what?" Roman blinked in confusion. "Who the hell is the chairmen of affairs?"

Mercury raised his hand into the air. "Right here."
"What?" Roman threw his hands up into the air. "I didn't vote for you, I demand a reelection."

"Denied." Mercury said with a smile. "It's a lifelong commitment, and I don't take those lightly you know, wouldn't be very responsible of me if I gave away my position after only having it for a few hours."

At this point the orange haired young man was without words, simply sputtering impotently and moving his arms in very violent pantomimes.

Cinder gave a chuckle and stood up. "As fun as it is to send each other into violent rages I do believe I might have a better solution then throwing away all of our worldly possessions," Cinder reached back onto her bed and laid out a small map of the room along with locations for them to store their things, which seemed like it would fit the majority of what was there for the group. "I had a bit of trouble going to sleep last night, and I figured this would come in handy."

Roman stared at the paper, mouth open for a moment as he realized that Cinder had even taken into account the dimensions of the room, most likely just from eyeballing it. He had seen contractors who worked for his father come up with much sloppier designs with days to spare, and she had just thrown something like this together.

"Heh, leave it to Cinder to go all out on something like this," Emerald gave a quick shake of her head and grinned, moving around Cinder and jumping on her from behind with a hug. "Let me guess you are letting this whole leader thing get to you and are going to be that overprotective parent that doesn't let us get a single thing out of place right?" she began to poke Cinder's cheek a bit.

Cinder blushed a bit at her friend's accusation. "I would have done the exact same if I weren't the team leader and you know it, it's not exactly like I want power to go rushing to my head."

Mercury jumped up from the bed and looked over the plans before clapping his hands. "Well not like we can sit around all day and talk about it, come on fancy pants let's get this place looking nice."

"Do I look like the help?" Roman asked, a bit of a sneer to his voice. Moving about a room was supposed to be what someone hired a butler for, doing it all himself seemed like a demotion of his rank.

For a moment Mercury didn't say anything, before a vicious smirk came over his face. "Well if you would rather a guy like me had his hands all over your stuff I guess that's fine, just don't expect me to return anything valuable."

Roman felt his heart drop as he moved toward his stuff. It might have been beneath him to deal with such things, but he wasn't about to let that brute ruin anything of his, no matter what it was.

For most of the morning there was mostly silence in the room as the four went about setting it up to Cinder's designs, only broken by the occasional joke or curse from a stubbed toe.

Finally the room was completed, and the result wasn't actually half bad once they had actually started to work together on it. By the end they had finished and had a room that actually looked halfway presentable, with their four beds centered in the middle of the room and all of their various supplies and knickknacks around them for easy access, effectively splitting the room into four parts for things they wanted to keep.

"Heh, looks like we took that one down," Emerald said with a smirk, jumping down on Mercury's bed.

He raised an eyebrow and looked at her. "You realize that isn't your bed right?" he asked with a
slight smile visible on his face.

"My bed is boring, why the heck would I lay on my bed when I can just as easily lay down on a different one?" Emerald asked with an almost innocent expression on her face.

"You spent literally ten minutes picking out the softest bed for yourself!" Roman exclaimed, throwing his hands into the air to signify just how close to his wits end he was.

"Well yeah, I mean of course I want the best bed, duh." Emerald gave a shrug toward Roman's questions, brushing them off.

"Speaking of time, I don't suppose any of you have been keeping track have you?" Cinder asked, looking at the three other members of her team, who had suddenly taken on a rather 'doe in the headlights' style of look. Cinder slowly pulled out her Scroll and looked at it, seeing they had maybe a handful of minutes before class started. "So…we need to run."

The four nodded and burst out of their room, getting the attention of their roommates, team JNPR as well. As soon as they saw the other team rushing they joined in, nearly tripping over themselves to ensure they wouldn't be late for their first classes. Once inside of the building Jaune gave a wave toward his team and broke off from them with the other members of team CREM.

"Mind if I sit with you guys in class, still really don't know anyone so…” Jaune scratched his neck nervously at having to ask something like that.

"Of course Jaune, I imagine we can free a seat for you." Cinder said with a kind smile.

Emerald suddenly jumped between the two and batted her eyelashes. "Oh Jaune you should take a seat right next to me, fill my lonely heart with your light, something like that hm?" she gave a wink to the two of them as their faces turned scarlet.

"What no it's nothing like that!" Jaune said, still beat red and waving his hands around.

Cinder leveled a death glare at her friend, which caused Emerald to let out a small squeak and hide behind Mercury. "Hey when did I become the meat shield?" he asked with a hint of offense to his voice.

"You are taller than me, thus by you should provide me protection from the scary fire girl." Emerald explained, still taking shelter behind him.

Roman pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed deeply at the idiocy of his teammates. They were supposed to be hunters in training, not common riffraff that would be caught joking around while wandering the hallways. Ever since he had gotten onto the team he had seen nothing but them joking around and getting to know each other. No discussion of strategy, or formation. As if they were supposed to be friends and not just fellow soldiers. It was pathetic. At the very least he wouldn't be caught dead acting like one of them.

Finally the group reached their destination and migrated toward the front, but only found four seats waiting for them. The group paused for a moment and looked around at each other before Emerald spoke.

"So good luck finding another seat Roman." she said casually as she slid into the seat on the furthest end of the row.

"What in the name of sanity are you talking about?" he asked, looking toward the green haired girl.
Mercury took a seat next to Emerald and rested his head on his fist. "Well I would hazard a guess that she thinks that either you wouldn't want to sit with us, or we would all rather the goofy blonde sat with us in your place," he shrugged. "I mean, either or honestly."

Jaune cleared his throat and took a step back. "Actually I think I will just go find my own seat, this is one of the few classes you all have together, and I don't want to break up the team."

Cinder gave a small nod and a smile to him. "Much appreciated Jaune, I am sure we will have time to meet up soon."

He offered a smile at that and turned to go grab one of the other open seats as the rest of the class began to enter into the room.

"We huh?" Emerald said with a small wink and playful tone.

"We, as in our teams, I realize it's your humor but must you be vulgar in every interaction?" Cinder took a seat next to Mercury and prepared her papers to take notes.

"Cinder and Jaune sittin in a tree-" Emerald's song was paused by an eraser being thrown directly between her eyes. "Ow!"

"And maybe next time you will think before you talk." Cinder said with a sly smile.

For a moment Roman thought about escaping to another part of the room, but finally thought better of it and sat down in the chair next to Cinder without any further discussion.

For a few moments there was noise throughout the room as people introduced themselves or met up with old friends on the first day of class, however the door to the teacher's office opening signaled the end to the chatter as they waited to see just who would be teaching them. Instead of an actual body what the students were treated too was a small mountain of books being held up by a man who was quite hidden behind them.

"Hello future Huntspeople and welcome to Grimm Sciences 100, Anatomy and Tactics," the voice behind the books sounded rather youthful, if a bit strained by carrying the books. "Normally Professor Port would be here today to teach you, but he is a bit busy dealing with an outbreak of Beowolves in his hometown, so for today," the man tried to take a step up the podium but missed his footing by one step, falling and sending his books flying into the air, landing atop his prone form on the ground. "Let's pretend that didn't happen, kay?"

Roman let his head fall against the desk with a groan as he realized that the teacher was just as bad as the rest of the idiots at the school. "I am the only competent one in this entire place aren't I?" he asked with a tone of horror to his voice.

The young man pushed himself up from his place among the floor and turned his back to the class, revealing that he was wearing a black coat and his hair was red, and quite messy. "Normally I rotate out with Ms. Goodwitch with your combat training, and also help with advanced weapons training, you guys can call me," he quickly reached into the pocket of his coat and pulled out a piece of chalk, his hand moving like a blur across the board until his full name was written in white across the board. "Professor Taurus," he turned around, revealing a pair of horns sitting atop his head and a smile on his face. "So, any questions?"

Roman looked to the teacher head in shock for a moment. A Faunus teacher, at Beacon? In his mind there was nothing more impossible then that, after all what happened if it turned out he was sympathetic to the Black Fang? He knew that the school held itself to some weird sense of equality,
but even they wouldn't push it to the point of insanity.

The Professor looked around the room and scratched the back of his head with a small frown. "Okay so it doesn't look like we have any questions, I guess that means we just move into the lecture?" he kicked one of the books up to his hand and flipped a few pages before nodding. "Everyone pens and paper out, we are going to start with a basic review of the Grimm ranking system before moving on to your first paper topic, the various evolutions of the Beowolf."

The class let out a collective groan at hearing that they would already have a paper on the first day, but quickly got their supplies out to start taking notes.

It took a moment for Roman to get back into the swing of things, but found a piece of paper and pen already in front of him. When he turned his head he saw Cinder with a small smile on her face, giving a small nod before turning to her own supplies. He didn't exactly know what to say, or if he was supposed to say anything. Did she not think that he had his own supplies? Was this some sort of power play from her as a leader to bring him under her thumb? Roman realized the lecture was about to begin and promised to find out later, getting ready to take notes.

"Okay, so the Grimm ranking system starts with E class, although not actually much danger to humans with any sort of defense they can still cause plenty of trouble if the pack grows to quickly…" Adam closed the book and spoke at a quick but bearable pace, taking small pauses now and again to let people catch up.

Roman smirked to himself, remembering back to his hired tutors and online instruction. This was going to be cake for a man of his caliber.

"So we got our butts handed to us yesterday," Yang said while finishing a long stretch in her chair, eyeing the other three women around the table. "We lost the Grimm, the Black Fang, and Ozpin still has the final artifact."

"If you intend to just state what we all already know then there is no real purpose to this meeting."

"Okay, so the Grimm ranking system starts with E class, although not actually much danger to humans with any sort of defense they can still cause plenty of trouble if the pack grows to quickly…" Adam closed the book and spoke at a quick but bearable pace, taking small pauses now and again to let people catch up.

"Yeah just keep it up with the attitude Princess." her eyes flashed red for a moment.

"Oh, do you intend to do something to stop me from acting however I wish?" she asked, a sly smile coming onto her face. "If so perhaps I should take my money, weapons, and manpower and find use for them elsewhere."

"Oh but that would be a total waste," from seemingly nowhere Ruby appeared behind Weiss, wrapping one slender arm around the woman's neck and resting her head on Weiss's shoulder. "Especially when things are looking up for us."

Weiss froze as she felt Ruby's arm against her throat, slowly counting backward from five before responding. Mocking Yang was one thing, she was just crazy. Ruby was a sociopath and utterly insane, one wrong word in a position like this might end up with her in the grave. "Oh, are things looking up for us?"

Ruby held her arm in place for a moment, before suddenly jumping away and clapping her hands. "Yep, our time table just got a bit longer, turns out that one of the brats had some wacky Aura that managed to cleanse some of the infection away."

"Then we should capture whichever one did it, " Yang's attention snapped to her sister as the news.
that way we can make sure…”

Ruby held up a finger to stop her. "As nice as it would be to just grab whoever we like I doubt it would be that simple. We know that one of two teams that fought the Mega Oozaru…"

"Still not its name." Weiss pointed out.

"… has the member, but that is still picking from a group of eight potential fighters, and I doubt Ozpin will let them just walk around without guards, besides," Ruby frowned a bit. "Without the Black Fang we are at the disadvantage of no longer being able to play the race card." Ruby finished, shooting a glare toward Weiss for having interrupted her.

"And that is where I come in," a voice spoke from the corner of the room, stepping out of the shadows and toward the three women. The person was dressed in a tattered black robe with its hood pulled to cover the back of its head, their face being covered by a white mask with a bird's beak on the front of it, and painted red eyes. "Greetings, my name is…”

Before the man could finish his speech Weiss idly waved her hand and summoned a spear of ice in front of her, launching it into the man's heart. "No one is allowed in here other than us." she said simply.

The man fell down to a knee and coughed a few times, before his coughs suddenly turned into a laugh. "Yes, as ruthless as ever, you really do take after your father. While in every way except for the whole pathetic failure sense," the man yanked the spear of ice out of his body before tossing it to the side and standing up. "As I was saying my name is Shade, and I have come to offer you assistance."

Ruby gave a nod and smirked toward Weiss. "Don't worry about him too much, I was the one who invited him."

"Is that so, and why were we not privy to this invitation?" Weiss asked, getting ready to attack again if this was some sort of trap.

"Oh don't blame Ms. Rose, I asked her to hold off invitations in order to test just how you would react," Shade touched fresh hole over his heart. "And might I add your beauty is matched only by your murderous intent?"

Weiss looked over the man and turned to Ruby. "You think he can be an asset to us?"

"We can use him so long as our goal is to fight against the entire world, isn't that right?" Ruby asked the strange man.

"Oh of course," Shade gave a deep bow to the three. "I am but a humble servant to those who week the end of all things."

"Oooh so he is an anarchist?" Yang asked with a grin. "I like him already."

"Something akin to that, now I heard you were having a numbers problem and deniability, I wish to offer my help to that end," he snapped his fingers and the door to the room exploded inward, followed by five figures dressed in full black body armor, with a crossed out wolves head on the front of each one. "Ruby asked me to prepare a plan in case we ever lost the Black Fang’s support, to that end I created my own little group, the Humanity Reform League."

"The anti-Faunus terrorist organization?" Weiss leaned forward and glanced outside, seeing that her own forces had been knocked out or were being held at gun point.
"Sorry about this ma'am!" one of the soldiers in red armor called out. "But to be fair, this is pretty much all Grif's fault!"

"Hey!" another soldier with light orange armor cried out. "I wasn't ready to ninja soldiers, I am hired very specifically to open fire at large crowds of people, not fast moving freaks!"

"It is fine Sarge, I believe if our friend here wished to kill us it would have happened by now." Weiss laced her fingers together and looked toward Shade. This was just a business meeting, and in the end no matter what label Shade intended to use he was just a man showcasing a new weapon.

"One time terrorist group," Shade reached under his coat and pulled out a pistol, executing one of the soldiers and letting him drop. The other four didn't flinch. "A mutual friend of mine spend a number of weeks turning them into perfect machines, you might all know him as Ashford Mangle?"

Yang and Weiss shivered as Shade casually dropped the name of one of the most monstrous serial killers in the world. He had once been a scientist working in Atlas under the Torchwick research and development department, but once it had been discovered he was using live test subjects to try and create super soldiers he was quickly ejected and thrown into a jail cell, where it had been reported he had died.

"Impressive to be sure, so then," Weiss waved for him to take Blake's empty seat. "Shall we?"

Shade laughed briefly and walked over, taking a seat and leaning forward. "Indeed, let's discuss our future plans."

Roman cursed under his breath as he felt his hand begin to cramp from trying to follow the teachers every word. It turned out that a class like this was nothing like the online courses or tutored sessions he had grown accustomed too. He was used to structure, control, getting exactly what he needed quickly.

But this was different, as Mr. Taurus would regularly go on small tangents, bounce about, or even fly into small stories to explain what he was talking about. By this point he had scratched out more than it seemed he had written, trying to cherry pick what was and wasn't important to know.

He briefly glanced toward his other classmates and saw that none of them were having the same difficulty, indeed they seemed to be handling it with ease.

Mercury and Emerald were even passing a note between each other as they listened to their teacher. And the worst of it was that Cinder seemed to excel at the lesson, asking questions or making small points at times when a question was asked.

How was he supposed to prove that he was more suited for the role of leader when in substandard conditions such as this?

"Okay class go ahead and put down your pens, that's all for the lecture today," the class let out a collective sigh of relief as the teacher finished up the lecture. "We still have some time left over through, and Professor Port happened to leave a special treat for you guys," Adam moved over and pulled the cover off of a small metal cage, which began to rattle and shake as it was revealed. "A little bit of combat training for extra credit."

Roman leaned forward and saw his opportunity to prove himself in front of not only his team but the rest of the class and even the teacher. He would show just how much skill he had, and then once word got around he was sure Ozpin would realize his mistake and place him as the true leader of the team. "I would like to volunteer!" Roman bellowed, throwing up his hand.
"Hm, eager," Mr. Taurus looked Roman over before nodding. "Okay kid go change into your combat gear and get ready."

Roman stood up and looked toward the rest of his team, expecting to see disappointment or some such in their faces. Instead they smiled and gave him thumbs up.

"Kick its Grimm butt Roman!" Emerald said, raising up a small flag with his name on it.

"You can do it man, show 'em how tough you are." Mercury said with a small wink.

Cinder simply smiled and gave him a nod.

They might joke around at each other, but the other three knew that at the end of the day they were a team, and each of them would willingly support each other. They might not have really liked Roman, but at the very least he had stood with them the day before, and that told them all they needed in their eyes.

Roman simply looked at them in confusion, not having expected this positive of a reaction. "I…uh…right of course I will," he said with confidence before walking out of the room toward his locker. "Nothing in this place makes sense." he said under his breath.

Chapter End Notes

The Three Uses of Dust- An abridged lecture by Professor Ozpin

Dust in its many forms is now synonymous with life itself on Remnant, having become the main energy source that keeps the world running. I will keep this lecture brief, as going into more detail would require a classroom environment. For today I will be going over the three uses of Dust in today's society.

The first use is domestic, Dust fuels the generators that provide various basic needs. Flash Dust generates electricity to fuel the various machinery, Aqua Dust purifies the water we drink, Terra Dust allows us to safely build structures without heavy machinery, and much more. Each of these jobs are done by Dust Casters from various Universities. Without their aid much of things we take for granted in our daily lives wouldn't exist.

The second is of course for hunting down the creatures of Grimm. Dust in any form is harmful to Grimm, but when converted to bullets or energy through a weapon, or channeled into an attack or through Aura it becomes quite lethal. It also makes it ideal for law enforcement officers, as even when it is packed into a bullet Dust will not actually kill humans, at most it will hurt them to the point where they can't fight back, making it a perfect nonlethal solution.

And third but certainly not least Dust offers the most important thing in the world to all living beings, it offers hope. Without Dust the creatures of Grimm would run wild throughout the world, and human and Faunus alike would be forced to cower in caves, hiding like our ancestors did. It is hope for a better tomorrow that drives Hunters to fight their hardest, knowing that they can use the power granted to them through Dust to protect those they love.
For more information on this subject please enroll in classes at your nearest University, and please, have a nice day
There were three things in the world that Qrow hated more then anything. The top of that list was young men looking at Cinder with anything but a passing curious glance. He remembered being young and enforced a stern five second eye contact rule before he chased them off. The second spot belonged to the true enemy of the world. And the third spot was reserved exclusively for Grimm cultists.

"Hear me brothers and sisters!" standing at the forefront of a long abandoned church stood a tall man in a Nevermore mask, wearing a robe of black and bone white as he preached to a congregation of people in similar wear. "For too long have we arrogantly allowed ourselves to fight against our gods, the beings who bring us transcendence through our demise, I say no longer, and to those who make themselves out to be our protectors," the head of the congregation gave a grand wave of his arm, and three more Grimm masked cultists dragged someone wearing a heavy robe and hood onto the front of the stage, forcing them on their knees with a hard kick to the back of their legs. "I say we see how well they can protect us from the afterlife!"

The crowd roared in approval and all Qrow could do was wish that this was one of the religions that served the wine before the executions.

With a grand movement the preacher removed the hood of their captive to reveal a rather short young woman with dual colored hair, one side being pink and the other a dark brown. Despite her current situation the only word that could describe the young woman's expression was intense boredom, as if she were in the line to get her drivers license and not having her life threatened by a group of crazy Grimm worshipers. The girl glanced through the crowd before resting her gaze directly toward Qrow's disguised form and raised a single eyebrow.

"Okay okay I think that is enough," Qrow stood up and cranked his neck from one side to the other. "Listen you aren't the only ones who have wanted to kill the annoying brat," that comment earned Qrow a stuck out tongue, and was returned with an equally mature pointed tongue. "But I can't let you kill her."

"And who do you believe you are?" The leader began to step forward, but soon found his head smashed against the wall by Qrow's hand hard enough to leave a spiderweb of cracks forming in the solid stone of the building.

Qrow used his free hand to pull free the fake Grimm mask and black garb before turning toward the congregation. "Anyone else have a question?" in response most of the assembled cultists pulled free a variety of weapons from under their cloaks. "If you would." he nodded toward Neo, who calmly slipped from her bonds and gave a nod to the older man, stepping forward to the front of the stage and putting on a smile.

And then the assembly started screaming.

Roman kept a careful eye on the cage as Adam's blade descended down on it and split the lock, hand on his cane and his entire body poised to strike. The cage was too small to be a Beowolf or any larger creature, but there were plenty of Grimm whose size didn't give any clue to just how dangerous they could be. Anything from a Boartusk to a fully grown Rapier Wasp could be awaiting
What walked out of the cage was quite a bit less impressive. The creature was about the size of a large dog and had the physical appearance of a rat, however its tail was a spiked mace made of bone and its entire upper body was made of the unnatural armor that all Grimm grew when they progressed in their evolution chain. A Plaguebile, a rather low class Grimm in terms of ranking and most commonly found in older sewer ate raw sewage and could spray the toxins collected from it through the spikes on its back.

For a moment Roman felt like he was being mocked, brought to the front of the class to kill a creature that a Signal newbie would be expected to take on. His eyes went to the professor to see if he could detect some sort of mocking hint to his look.

It was in that moment that the Grimm attacked.

Despite its small limbs the creature managed an impressive leap directly toward Roman, tackling the young man and sending him flying halfway across the room, only barely able to use his cane to recover himself before the monster came in for another attack, charging forward only to spin at the last moment to swing its weaponized tail directly toward Roman. At that point his instincts took over, and he managed to divert the attack with his cane and retake a proper fighting position and gain space between himself and his enemy.

"Rough start but quick to regain form, note that class, a true Hunter can be surprised, but only once in a fight. The second time is death." Adam spoke both to the class and Roman, eyes scanning the young man and the Grimm before him in silent judgement.

It annoyed him to have a Faunus look at him with those judgmental eyes, the same eyes he saw from the workers in the factories, and the ones who worked in the house. Eyes always judging him for who he was, for what his father was.

Another moment of distraction, the Grimm moved forward to take advantage but suddenly jumped back as if something had spooked it, giving Roman enough time to recover his senses and fire a blast from his cane, hitting the creature on the back and creating a crack in its armor. Suddenly enraged beyond reason Roman let out a primal growl and leapt forward, bringing his cane down hard on the creatures already cracked back again and again, striking the creatures fragile form until the crack formed into a wide fissure, allowing him to plant the bottom of his cane into the creatures form and fire a shot directly toward its core, shattering it with the Dust round.

The class gave a small round of applause toward the performance, through his team simply looked to each other with hints of concern plain to see on their faces.

"Excellent," the red haired faunus exclaimed. "Sometimes your enemy won't show a weak point, and attempting to exploit one would lead to some risks. Roman displayed that at times the subtle route must be abandoned in favor of a forward assault," a bell suddenly chimed and Adam gave a shrug. "Well thats it for today, go over your notes and read the foreword and the first chapter and be prepared to talk about them next class. Dismissed!"

With that stated people began to shuffle out, either groaning about the work or talking about Roman's fight with the Grimm. On his part Roman simply watched as the last bits of smoke faded as the Plaguebile disappeared before making a hasty retreat, not bothering to even look at his team before exiting the room.

"You don't think we went to far with the teasing...do you?" Emerald asked, looking toward Roman with a conflicted expression on her face. She knew that sometimes she could go a bit overboard on
her teasing, but she didn't want to think a bit of ribbing had caused that.

Mercury stayed silent for a moment before turning to look at Cinder. "You should talk to him, somethings wrong."

Cinder blinked in surprise and looked toward her teammates. "Why me?" she questioned with a small amount of panic evident in her voice. She had very little social experience besides Emerald, and even that didn't exactly prepare her to deal with whatever Roman was going through.

"Because you're the leader, duh." Emerald replied with her usual devilish smile, trying to return the situation to normalcy and calm down Cinder before she went into panic mode.

The brave leader of team Cremation let out a small whine before pressing her forehead against the desk as she tried to work out some way to fix the situation that had presented itself to her.

"Well all things considered I would mark that meeting as a success," Shade stepped out of the temporary base, followed after by Ruby. Both made their way to the edge of the docks and looked out over the water. "There is something on your mind." it was a statement rather then a question.

Ruby gave a nod and looked toward him. "Ever since that kid did whatever it is that he did my head has felt fuzzy, like when you are tuning a radio and hit a half functioning signal," she placed a palm against her forehead as if it would banish the pain from her mind. "I have been having...dreams."

"Yes, I am told that most people have those." the masked man answered in a droll tone. "Part of the human condition it seems."

"But they aren't typical dreams!" the woman growled in response. "I'm used to dreams of blood, terror, the future, or just things that don't make sense. But these...I see things." the last word was almost spoken as a whisper, so far removed from her usual biting tone that it could have come from someone else.

"Things?" Shade repeated, his full attention now turned to the red hooded killer. "What kind of things?"

"Its fuzzy, but..." her eyes looked away from Shade. "I see the other three, I see us fighting together, I see them in the dreams...like frie~"

Before she could finish her explanation the ring and crown on Ruby's person suddenly began to glow a midnight black as her body convulsed in pain, a scream only being stopped by Shade's waiting hand. "Whatever that boy did was most effective against my corruption than even I realized," as he spoke dark purple energy flowered from his arm and onto Ruby's body. "Its such a shame about your eyes, you would make such a perfect host if not for the rules of the game interfering." as he spoke Ruby's eyes began to glow a bright and blinding white that seemed to cause Shade's form to catch fire for a moment before the light slowly died to a dull grey as Shade poured more energy into the girl. When he was finished the masked man took a step back and collapsed to a knee. "Damn, that took everything this host had." he slowly pulled himself to his feet and looked toward Ruby.

For a moment the woman simply looked ahead without seemingly seeing anything in front of her. But all at once her mind came back and she looked around as if she had forgotten where she was. "What was I saying?"

"Something or other, so the plan will move forward?" Shade asked, trying to hide any discomfort suffered from the process.
Ruby gave a small shrug of her shoulders. "Yang is on board, but Weiss is always about the bottom line. By the time we need to move things should be in place."

Seeing that as the only answer he would get Shade turned to leave.

"Wait before you go," the masked man turned around only to be cleaved in two by Ruby's scythe, both ends exploding into dark smoke and blood red petals as they approached the ground. "That always makes me feel better," the young woman put her weapon behind her and turned to enter the hideout once more and go over the finer parts of the plans ahead.

Cinder had spent a great majority of the day worrying about what she was going to say to Roman when she finally saw him. She could attempt to play it off like nothing had happened, but with how aggressive he had been during the fight and his deliberate avoidance of his team for all of the classes they had together it couldn't have just been nothing. However Cinder had very little experience when it came to dealing with most people, and especially with people like Roman. If her uncle had been there he would have most likely called Roman a 'puffed up prince who probably couldn't wipe himself without a hundred Lien card.' Well that was probably one of the less colorful ways he would go about saying it.

After almost an hour of searching Cinder came across him in one of the many gym rooms where students could come to train. All of the other students were busy eating at the moment, but Roman was busy practicing a number of stances and forms on the training mats, his cane dancing between his hands as he effortlessly shifted from one style to another, capping the exercise by firing a single projectile from his weapon and capturing it with the handle and swinging it around him, sending out short lasting blades of Dust energy before slamming the handle to the ground and creating a shockwave of energy around his feet.

To Cinder it was all an impressive show, when he focused like that his weapon mastery was almost B-ranking with how effortless he made it seem. "That was spectacular Roman." the young woman voiced as she approached him. "I had no idea you were able to form blade beams."

The shock of hearing her voice seemed to pull Roman from his focus, turning his eyes in an almost hateful glare before returning to a more neutral expression. "I don't need your approval." he replied in a dismissive tone.

The anger behind those words hit Cinder like a gut punch, and she found herself almost at a loss for words. "I...I didn't say that you did, I was just..."

"Just what?!" he snarled at her. "We get it, miss perfect has to give a compliment just to show how humble she is?"

"That wasn't what I was doing!" Cinder bit back her pain at Roman's words and tried to match eyes with him.

"Of course it was, just because you showed off in the first battle the other two follow you like good little drones," he stalked towards her and stood in front of her, glaring down at her hatefully. "But I know the truth, Ozpin made a mistake, just because you can make a few sparks doesn't make you worthy of being a leader." he turned his back toward her and moved to the mat. "Why don't you just buzz off?"

Cinder stood there and put a hand over her heart as she felt a sudden tightness in her chest at his words. None of them were true but just the thought of them in her head was enough to hurt. Without a single word the girl turned and exited the building as fast as her feet would carry her.
Roman began to prepare for his next series of stances before the sound of clapping hands cut his
concentration. "Making a girl who only wanted to be your friend cry, man the ladies must fall over
themselves for a guy like you." through the door to the locker room of the gym came Adam Taurus,
hair dripping beads of water and lower half wrapped in a towel.

"What would you know?" Roman asked dismissively, turning back toward the other wall.

"About being a young idiot with a lot to prove?" a tiny smirk came to Adam's lips. "Well considering
I was a foot soldier for the White Fang...back when they were still the White Fang. Quite a bit."

Cinder's feet only carried her so far as the pain continued to pulse in her chest, leaning against the
wall of one of the buildings or support as she rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand, determined
not to cry.

"Out for an evening stroll?" a kind and grandfatherly voice asked her. At the sound of the voice
Cinder looked up, only to find herself facing the smiling face of Ozpin, who walked with his cane
and a cup of what could only be hot chocolate. "Perhaps you would like to join me, its a wonderful
night for star gazing."

The presence of the older man seemed to calm Cinder a bit, through she didn't trust herself to speak
just yet. She instead gave him a small nod before following in step with him. As they walked a chilly
wind began to pick up, and seemingly without thought her Aura began to glow gently and produce
ambient heat around her.

"A penny for your thoughts?" Ozpin spoke after a few minutes of silence.

Cinder thought carefully about her words for a moment, hesitant to speak them. "I'm...worried you
made the wrong decision about making me the leader of my team."

Ozpin didn't speak for a moment, simply letting the statement hang in the air. "Oh?"

Seeing his response as a request for elaboration Cinder simply spilled out her words one after the
other. "I am not good with people, I don't know if I can lead them without making an utter fool of
myself and end of with them getting hurt. I don't even know how to go about understanding other
people, I mean I have only had one friend in my life and she basically just says whatever comes to
her mind, I don't have to play mind reader just to understand what is going on with her." panic began
to set in Cinder's chest before Ozpin let out a small laugh that seemed to drain the tension out of her.
"Sir?"

"I'm sorry I don't mean to laugh, but everything you are saying reminds me so much of another
young lady who once came to me about this sort of thing." the smile on his face was warm, and he
finally stopped walking as they approached a series of benches overlooking the edge of the school.
"Take a seat." he gestured with the hand holding his hot chocolate. Cinder complied and took a seat,
followed by Ozpin taking his own position next to her and looking toward the full moon in the sky.

"Let me tell you a story."

"You were what?!" Roman asked in a disbelieving voice. The White Fang had always been a radical
group, and even if they had only begun to become truly violent after their change to the Black Fang
there had still been scattered reports of violence from the group.

"Yeah, you see growing up as a faunus isn't exactly a joyride even after the laws were passed forcing
others to treat us the same as other humans," Adam rested the back of his head against the wall.
"When it started the White Fang was meant to act as a force that would ensure that faunus were treated fairly and that people who broke the law were punished by the letter of it," his eyes closed for a moment, as if drawing himself into the memory. "It was a great dream, which made it all the more painful when it was stepped on."

"You see back then when a store or workshop went against the law the White Fang could set up boycotts and hold public acts of defiance against the company performing said acts. I am sure you know all to well that these peaceful acts had some effects, after all the Schnee Dust company ended up toppling on itself because the amount of public scrutiny against it dropped their stocks into the ground," a small breath of satisfaction escaped from Adam's lips. "It was proof the system could work for us, that maybe we could stand up without violence and make a better world. Then the reforms happened, other business owners got scarred of what happened to the Schnee family and put pressure on those in charge. The councils defanged us, took away the ability to gather and any attempt to do so would be broken up because it might attract Grimm."

The speech was obviously having an effect on Roman, who looked more and more uncomfortable as Adam went on. His family had been one of the front runners on having that law altered around the same time they started buying the broken bits of the Schnee company. His father had always written it off by saying that faunus were lucky to find work anyway, but despite those biases it was hard to deny that the faunus workers in their building had shown more skill and restraint then most people he knew.

"But we still tried to gather, still tried our tactics that had worked before. More of us had to carry weapons to defend those who couldn't. Eventually the White Fang becomes a terrorist group, and after our leader was killed during one of our peaceful protests..." Adam shook his head. "I was actually a bit misleading before, you remind me a bit of myself, but you remind me more of someone else." Adam turned his piercing gaze to Roman. "Have you ever heard of Blake Belladonna?"

"Quite a while ago I remember a brash young man who thought he had something to prove, and that the only way to do so was to deny any help that could be given to him and prove that he could be strong by himself," Ozpin began, resting his cup on the side of the bench and looking up toward the stars and moon. "brash and arrogant he trained everyday by himself believing that it could make him stronger. But time and time again his team would advance even further then him by working together and training. The young man grew bitter of course, until one day he and his team embarked on a mission to prove their mettle. The mission went wrong however and they were forced back into a corner, and each team member in turn aided and protected him. Seeing their sacrifice opened his eyes to his folly, and seeing it he chose to do better."

Cinder drank in the story with a thoughtful expression. "So you are saying...wait and see?"

"Indeed," Ozpin pulled himself to his feet and stretched himself out. "It has only been a day since you began, and friendships are more often then not built on long term bonds of trust and mutual respect. Some take longer to build those bonds, but it doesn't make you a bad leader for not instantly knowing how to solve a problem or how to mesh with a personality you are unused to. Give it time."

"I think I understand." Cinder stood up and gave a small bow to the headmaster. "Thank you."

"No thank you, the night sky is always more enjoyable with company," the older man turned back toward the academy. "Do make sure you make it back to your dorm before curfew, you do have classes tomorrow to worry about."

"Yes sir." Cinder answered, taking her own path back to the dorm.
"Are you comparing me to the leader of the Black Fang, the most wanted criminal in the world?"
Roman's voice was a mixture of disgust and amazement that anyone could possibly be so brazen as
to suggest something of that nature. It almost defied explanation in his mind.

"Brash, headstrong, believing you can face the entire world by yourself and twist it to your ideals?"
Adam chuckled a bit, through there was little humor to his voice. "Yeah lets just say you two have
things in common. Believe it or not she didn't start out as a killer, she was more invested in the
peaceful side of our work, to the point where it consumed her life, became her reason for living.
When it all came crashing down with the death of the former leader of the White Fang something in
her broke and all of that goodness and desire to be better just drained out and left a monster."

"I don't see..."

"And that is the issue, you think you are the best at everything you do, and you strive to enforce that
worldview so that everyone else believes it as well. But you will meet people who are better then
you at things, even things that you are good at yourself. As you are now you will reject them all and
eventually that part will break and leave you with nothing but black hatred in your heart," Adam's
voice rose a bit, containing an almost wrathful energy to it. "You can't just bemoan the problem and
lash out, you need to learn the lesson and figure out how to answer it."

Roman felt a spike of anger run through him, at being lectured at, being talked down to, and also for
knowing that he was right. He had acted childish toward Cinder, attacked just because he was afraid
that if there was someone better it wouldn't make him as special as he wanted to be. At that moment
he felt ashamed, and suddenly a common phrase his butler had always repeated came to his mind. "I
guess you still can't see the forest for the trees, cub." he chuckled a bit and felt a sudden wave of
nausea as he realized how awful he had been.

"My entire life I have been told that it was my birthright to be the best at everything, whenever my
father had time to speak to me he drilled into my mind that we were supposed to stand above other
people," Roman let out a sigh and broke eye contact with Adam, no longer feeling the same
confidence as he had before. "I'm not blind to the things my family has done, but when you are
taught that you are always right how do you just admit you are wrong?!"

"By admitting you were wrong." Adam answered plainly.

"That easy is it?" Roman asked with a pained chuckle.

"Your leader distracted the Plaguebile so you could land a killing blow."

A look of shock passed over Roman's face. "She did?"

"She did."

"Oh." Roman had no idea how to input that information.

A soft smile came over Adam's face. "You should go thank her."

"I should?" Roman asked, unsure of himself.

"Yes, probably wouldn't hurt to apologize for being a brat while you were at it."

"I suppose it wouldn't." Roman admitted.

"Every journey starts with the first step kid, work on being a better person using that mindset and
even if you stumble they will be there to catch you." Adam turned back toward the locker room.
"Wait, before I go... why were you here?" Roman asked curiously.

"I teach the last class of the evening and the hot water is all used up in the teachers wing by the time I get home. This is the only place to get a hot shower that I can sneak to this late."

"So this entire meeting was..."

"Entirely a coincidence."

For a moment Roman didn't know how to respond, but finally simply laughed and turned to head back toward the team dorm, trying to figure out how to apologize for the way he had acted.

Adam walked back into the gym locker room and slipped on his uniform, checking his Scroll and noticing a message from Ozpin asking how the talk had went. "Yep, entirely a coincidence."

The final bell of the night rang as students turned off their lights and crawled into bed, either with flashlights to continue studying or reading, or just resting their heads against pillows. In the room of team Cremation however three of its occupants were currently resting into their bed. Emerald was sprawled upon the bed and snoring loud enough to wake the dead, while Mercury laid flat on his back on the bunk and hardly seemed to move or breath at all. Cinder was surrounded by open books and pages of paper, leaving only a tiny portion of the mattress left for her to lay on.

The door creaked open slowly as Roman entered into the room, careful to lock the door behind him before walking over to Cinder's bed and kneeling down next to it. Part of him didn't want to wake her, but another part knew that if he didn't apologize straight away he would probably back out of it. So he moved his hand forward and gently nudged her, which seemed to rouse the girl rather quickly. She gave him a quizzical look but before she could react Roman began to speak. "Listen...I am not the best with other people, or getting along with other people. In fact I am utterly horrible at it. So I know at times I am not going to be the easiest person to deal with, or the best teammate or friend or anything else. But I think that I want to try and be better, or at least be better then I am now."

Cinder blinked in response and reached up, pulling out two earplugs and looking at him. "I'm sorry, what was that?"

Roman's mouth fell open and he blinked at her. "Wha-"

"Sorry its just...well if Emerald isn't utterly exhausted at the end of the day she snores like an Ursa with a frog in its throat, so if you don't have them, or the apparent ability to sleep through thunder like Mercury does you won't get a wink of sleep," a sudden thought occurred to Cinder and she quickly reached under her bed and pulled out another set and offered them to Roman. "Do you want a pair?"

Roman simply knelt there for a moment in utter silence before laughing quietly. "Yes, please," he took the pair and let out a sigh. "Sorry for being an ass today."

The apology took Cinder by surprise, but she simply smiled and nodded. "Its okay, its the first day of this whole team thing for all of us. Just means its all up from here right?"

"Well one can only hope," Roman paused again. "Thank you. I was wrong about you being a bad choice for leader, just know that I will support you however I can, so long as you can deal with me."

"Deal." Cinder offered him a pinky. "You know how to make a pinky promise right rich boy?"

"Some things are universal you know." he linked his with hers and gave a nod. "Goodnight Cinder."
"Goodnight Roman, see you in the morning." Cinder turned over and placed her earplugs back in.

"Goodnight Cinder." he placed his own into his ears and laid back on his bed, the movement of which caused the springs to groan for only a moment.

Emerald shot awake and glared toward Roman. "Some of us are trying to sleep, keep it down!"

The shout woke the next three rooms which caused quite a bit of shouting all around.

And from the smile that came to Roman's face, it was apparent he didn't mind one bit.

Qrow looked out toward the frozen assembly before looking back toward Neo, whose eyes had turned from a haunting silver to her normal pink and brown coloring. "Is it done?" he asked, which earned him a nod in response. "Good," he turned back toward the cult leader, who was pressed against the wall and holding his head in pain. "Now you are going to answer my questions before I use this sword on my back to subtract a few limbs from your body."

The cultist simply laughed and looked toward Qrow. "Do you really believe that I care for this mortal flesh?" manic laughter poured out from behind the mask. "I am but a vessel for our god to speak through."

"Oh yeah?" Qrow grabbed the man by his collar and pulled him close. "And what does your 'god' have to say to me right now?"

For a moment there was silence, but then the cultist answered in a voice not his own. "Hello again Qrow, have you missed me?" The voice coming from the cultist was unmistakably Shade's.

Qrow quickly slammed the cultists body into the wall hard enough to leave cracks in the stonework before quickly grabbing the blade from his back and running it through the cultist body in one movement. Rather then blood and screams the cultist simply laughed as dark ichor began to drip from his body.

"Now that is no way to say hello," the cult leader said in Shade's tone. As he spoke the fallen members of the cult began to rise, their bodies cracking and groaning as their forms seemed to shift and change. "Through if we are going to play the killing game its only fair I tell you that I brought a few friends."

"Damn it!" Qrow reached forward and grabbed the cult leaders mask, ripping it off to reveal the face underneath.

The man might have once had average features, but not his face was pure white, with black veins playing about his skin as he continued to laugh in an almost manic way, eyes glowing red as a pitch black began to consume his sclerae and leave him with a haunting look. "Now then, lets play!"

The cultists in the room finished their conversion, and standing in their place were Grimm of various shapes and sizes, hungry eyes glaring up toward Neo and Qrow as both prepared to fight. "Ready kid?" Qrow asked as he yanked his blade out of the stone and destroyed Shade's host.

A nod was offered as the young woman pulled a blade free from her umbrella and readied herself for battle.

"Then lets go." the two charged toward the enemy, ready to fight.
Hunter Ranking System

The Hunter hierarchy begins from the bottom up so to speak, and today we will be going through the various ranks and positions that Hunters hold in our society.

Most Hunters begin their careers from starter Academy's, where they are taught the essentials of combat and various other skills in order to prepare them for the road ahead. These Hunters are called Junior Hunters, and are restricted from accepting missions without strict guidance from one of the teachers.

Once graduation is reached Junior Hunters will sign up to one of the four Hunter Academies around the world in order to hone their skills, through it is also possible to enter into one of these prestigious places by either passing a rigorous mental and physical exam or being signed as ready to enter by a Huntsmen or B rank or higher or a high ranking member of the council waiving the need to apply. Once they enter the school they are labeled as Huntsmen in training, and while still carefully monitored for their first year and a half will be sent on missions by themselves after they reach their second year of instruction.

After four years or equivalent acts of valor proving a Hunters strength these people will graduate from their Academy of choice and be entered into the Hunter Information System as a rank E Hunter, able to accept the lowest of missions until they can build up their rank or show a sufficient reason they should be advanced. Through it is also common for Hunters to enter into the ranks of their kingdoms military after graduation, but those Hunters fall under the preview of the military and their own ranks are kept separate from the more mercenary Hunters.

The basic breakdown of Hunter ranks is thus

E- New Hunters or disabled in some way. They are tasked with low danger missions that pay out at the same level.

D- Outside of Kingdom ranging missions and seek and destroy. These Hunters are trusted to be able to battle against packs of Grimm by themselves or with teams.

C- This is the rank many Hunters hit the limit of, usual missions involve long term protection of either small settlements or merchants. Most never feel the need to advance beyond this position.

B- Elite warriors who are battle tested and can be counted on to lead other groups of Hunters into larger scale missions, such as mass extermination missions or larger projects such as the failed Mountain Glenn expansion. Are also highly sought out bodyguards to the super rich.

A- The best of the best, normally hired on by one of the four Academies to teach the next generation but also known to start up their own organizations to hire out their Hunters privately.

S- The highest honor that a Hunter can be given, signifying the highest skill in the world. It is rumored that those who stand on this level can best A ranked Grimm by
themselves. The current holders of this honor are Headmaster Ozpin of Vale, General James Ironwood of Atlas, Headmaster Tarrant Hightopp of Mistral, Headmaster Hearthwood Pendragon of Vacuo, and Qrow Branwen of Vale. These five are the only current holders of the S ranking.

For more information report to instructors.
There were few things that made Cinder more uncomfortable then having to sit back and watch one of her friends get pumbled around like a rag doll, and yet as she watched Jaune get tossed into the air like a rag doll she knew that really was nothing more she could do but watch. Despite having taken a hit that had sent him flying Jaune managed to pull himself up once more and face Cardin, holding his shield in front of him while trying to catch his breath. But without missing a beat Cardin pressed the attack, mace flying in a dangerous arc directly toward Jaune, who only managed to avoid the powerful hit at the last moment by dodging to the side and moving back to the far end of the arena.

"It's a little sad isn't it?" Emerald watched the fight with half interest, trying not to be caught looking at her Scroll between glances at the fight. "It's like watching an overgrown ape beating up an immortal puppy."

Cinder raised an eyebrow at the analogy but couldn't find a flaw in it. The match was supposed to end when either fighter could get their enemies Aura level into the red, a common enough exercise for Hunter's to train them to always be aware of how much damage they could take and promote dodging and defensive movement to prevent their aura from falling too quickly. The problem in the current match was that Jaune had so much aura that despite having been hit by almost every blow Cardin could strike with his aura counter had only gone down by a small amount. Meanwhile the one or two blows that Jaune was able to get off by sheer luck had much more noticeable effects on Cardin's own aura.

Desperation drove Jaune into another attack, one which Cardin easily blocked with his mace. "This is the part where you lose." the taller boy sneered, sending a foot directly into the unarmored section of Jaune's stomach. The blow winded Jaune and caused him to drop to a knee with one hand over his gut. Cardin meanwhile took the opportunity to raise his mace up for a killing blow. With a mighty swing the mace flew down, but a flash of white exploded from Jaune's body right before he could be hit, throwing Cardin back a few feet and completely off balance.

Seeing an opening Jaune pushed himself forward and threw himself toward Cardin in a flying tackle, knocking both of them to the ground. Before Cardin could react Jaune's arm was pushing down on his shoulder while his sword was pushed against the other boy's throat.

"That's the match." Adam stepped onto the stage and watched as the two young men separated themselves. "Jaune I want to see you clock in an extra five hours in the practice room with extra focus on dodging and speed. Cardin do you know why you lost that match?"

The taller boy grunted and shot a glare toward Jaune. "Because he got lucky."

"Yes, but also because rather then capitalize on any of the advantages you had during the fight you chose to perform the fighting equivalent of playing with your food," he shook his head. "Your enemy only needs one chance to kill you, think on that with an extra three hours in the practice room with extra focus on flexibility training."

Cardin muttered something under his breath before turning away from Adam, making sure to shoulder check Jaune on his way off of the stage.

With a quick sigh Adam turned to face the rest of the class. "Take this as a lesson, showing off during a battle will lead to a defeat, doesn't matter if the opponent is lucky or skilled because no matter how good you are eventually your guard will slip in a longer fight." he pulled out his scroll and tapped the holographic screen a few times. "I have just sent fight recordings to each of your
scrolls, watch them and write a two page essay on the fighting styles used by both parties and the roles they played in the final results of the fight. Class dismissed!"

People began to rise from the benches and talk with each other, discussing their assignments or the match itself as they exited the room. Cinder rose with the rest of her team and began to walk out.

"For a leader he certainly doesn't show any great talent does he?" Roman idly asked as they walked toward the next class.

Emerald rolled her eyes and looked over toward him. "I mean he won so what does it matter right?"

"It matters, without his unreasonable amount of aura he would have lost that battle about a hundred times over." Mercury shrugged and turned to look over at Cinder. "I mean Cinder is his girlfriend and even she has to admit that much."

"Its true he could hav-" Cinder paused as the sentence fully went through her mind and a wild blush caught her cheeks. "We are just friends, it isn't anything like that!"

Emerald leaned over to Mercury and stage whispered to him. "Shh Cinder doesn't like admitting she is crazy for vomit boy,"

Cinder's body exploded with a literal aura of flames as she glared to her teammates. "What was that now?" she asked in a dementedly sweet tone.

"Mercury run, we need to be out of the blast radius of her love explosion!" Emerald snickered and grabbed Mercury's arm, pulling him along into an uneven run.

"Oh neither of you is getting away that easily!" Cinder went chasing after them with a mad glint in her eye. "I am assigning both of you to room cleaning duty for the rest of the year when I catch up!"

Roman simply sighed and shook his head. "Am I the only sane person in this team?"

"You know sometimes it feels like you are the only sane person on this team," Qrow took another belt from his canteen as he looked around the church, covering his mouth with his sleeve to avoid breathing in the fumes coming off of the cult members as each one began to dissolve into black mist.

Neo quirked an eyebrow while she covered her own mouth with a gloved hand.

"Well you actually listen to my plans, I am still stuck in my rebellious phase where after I come up with a plan I break script and just do my own thing." as the black mist disappeared Qrow took a seat at one of the pews and looked forward toward the front. "Grimm cults like this are getting even bigger these days. I can't tell if Shade is involved in all of them or if people are just that stupid."

As if in reply Neo took a seat next to him and rested her head on his shoulder in a quiet show of support.

"Yeah maybe I am just being negative about it, but I can tell he is getting stronger. Even a year ago it had trouble taking over more then one combat form, now its able to divide a mind between an entire group and enhance them." he offered his flask to Neo, who took a swig of her own from it before handing it back. "If it can get the last artifact we might really be looking at a seriously bad time."

Neo didn't say a word, rather she simply blinked and changed her eye color from the usual pink and brown to true eyes, a clear and shining white. She placed one hand on his forehead and softly hummed a tune. After a moment Qrow began to cough violently, bits of black smoke coming from
his mouth and swirling toward her eyes, polluting them with its darkness. Then with a blink her eyes changed back to their typical colors and she sat next to him, exhausted once more.

It took a moment for Qrow to catch his breath again, taking a long drink from his canteen until it was empty before tossing it to the side and standing up. "This was the last lead that we had, it looks like we are out of options."

Neo looked at him with an unreadable expression before giving a stiff nod and standing up.

"You know that if you don't want to come you don't have to right?" he put a hand on top of her head in a comforting manner. "That place is creepy for everyone, but I know that-" before he could carry on she punched him in the arm and shook her head. "Yeah I get it, don't worry we made a deal didn't we?"

She gave a single nod before moving toward the front of the building, shoulders slumped and with an air of melancholy around her.

Qrow sighed and ran a hand through the back of his hair. "Off to Wonderland then," he followed after her with a troubled expression, not seeing for a moment the miniature Nevermore watching from outside the window, crimson eyes burning against the darkness before taking off into the sky.

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Yang cracked her knuckles and looked toward the red haired woman on the other side of the training mat. "I am telling you Carolina, you just can't beat me."

Carolina shot a death glare toward Yang and picked herself off of the training mat before charging directly at her, throwing forth a powerful series of kicks and punches so fast that most would have a hard time keeping up with watching them, much less dodging it. However Yang seemed at perfect ease with blocking and dodging, actually delivering a yawn after stepping back from a particularly brutal attack. "Why can't I hit you?!" she roared.

"A because I am better then you, and two because about eighty percent of me is laced with machinery provided by the princess." Yang casually gripped the skin on her arm and pulled hard, revealing shiny bits of metal directly under it. "I'm a freaking cyborg, and you are a merc with a team of idiots, guess which of us trumps the other?"

"Yang stop showing off to your girlfriend and start helping us finish the plan to re-recruit your girlfriend!" Ruby called from the other room in an annoyed fashion.

"Sorry sideshow, big girl talk in the other room." Yang left Carolina fuming, grabbing a towel for herself before entering the 'planning room' of their current base. Of course for a planning room it wasn't anything to write home about, it was literally a room with a desk, four chairs, and a white board. Ruby was however hard at work writing down words and drawing arrows between them. "So what does 'hotdog stand' connecting to 'aliens' have to do with getting Blake back?" Yang asked with a bit of humor in her voice.

"You just don't see the big picture," Ruby muttered as she continued her work, writing down more words before suddenly breaking into a coughing fit that knocked her off her legs and onto the ground. Yang was there in a second to reach down and help her up, but even then she was still shaky. Her hand was coated in a black substance from where she had coughed into it, which Ruby brought up to examine. "Whatever that kid did to me a month ago isn't sticking, Shade says I have another month at best. The 'good doctor' says I have maybe a week."

"Then we shouldn't be playing around, lets get as much power together as we can and bust Beacon's
doors in." Yang's eyes flashed red as she was forced to witness her sisters pain. Even if she had to assault to school herself there wasn't a chance she was going to die if Yang could prevent it.

Ruby shot a glare at Yang and the blonde found herself thrown back by an invisible force that pinned her against the wall hard enough to leave a dent. "Do not order me," she said with dark tone, both the ring and the crown glowing with black power. "I don't need your help or pity 'sister'."

Yang looked toward Ruby with sad eyes, trying to look for a hint of mercy in the others eyes before simply lowering her head in submission. Despite being sisters in every definition of the word even she couldn't match the pure blood lust in Ruby's eyes. Ever since she had first put on the artifacts her mind had slowly twisted into a dark parody of herself, blood hungry and without a single care for a life that wasn't her own.

Weiss entered into the room and observed the scene with disinterest. "You know this isn't creating a very conductive meeting environment."

With a childish smile Ruby turned her attention away from Yang and threw her arms around Weiss with a childish smile. "Oh come on don't be like that, whats a little wanton murder between sisters right?" she flashed a grin toward the former heiress, who simply pushed her away with a roll of her eyes.

"And people call me a lunatic," the group turned as one to watch as an older looking woman entered in to the room, tan skin covered by a white lab coat spattered with crimson marks, long dark hair wildly going every which way that it wanted, and a pair of wire frame glasses covering blood shot eyes. "Not that they are wrong, but you people are clinical." a large wolf like tail rose to cover her mouth to stifle a yawn.

"And now that the good doctor Mangle has joined us we can begin the planning phase." Shade stepped out of the shadows of the room, this time wearing a fierce lion mask over his face. "Our three goals right now are to return the Black Fang to the fold, hold off Rose's untimely death, and of course to snatch the sword from Ozpin and complete the trinity."

"You make it sound so simple, yet last time I checked Beacon is still home to a small army of trained warriors, and the only method of preventing Ruby's disease from turning her inside into soup was a fluke fired off by a boy so green he could easily be mistaken for grass." Weiss took a seat at the table while sparing a glance toward the whiteboard.

Yang sighed and took her own seat. "Not to mention knowing Blake there is a zero percent chance she is going to come back to us, kitty cat has got major pride issues."

"Well when it comes to hunting cats you just need to know the right bait," Ruby walked toward the white board and gave it a spin, revealing a picture of a young girl with a date under it. "A member of the council who happens to be pretty anti-faunus civil rights is holding a big party for his precious little girl. Thanks to a little nudge from our mutual friend," Shade gave a bow to the women. "We know the Black Fang will be there."

"How does this help us again?" Mangle asked while resting her head against the table. "Just because we know she is going to attack doesn't mean anything. She kills a few humans and runs off into the night."

Shade and Ruby turned to each other, Ruby with a grin and Shade with the same unreadable mask. "Lets just say...they aren't the only party getting an invite."
Cinder walked the halls of Beacon with a worried look on her face, thinking back over the day and trying to figure out at what point things had really fallen apart. The meal break seemed like a good starting point, having to sit back and watch a fellow student get bullied wasn't any fun. Of course payback was quick and brutal after Emerald flashed a nightmarish image into Cardin's head and made biggest jerk in the academy scream like a school girl. Ooobleck's class was as usual nearly impossible to keep up with, but having to hear even more hate speech pumped into the world was seriously putting her on edge.

Growing up in the same house as Qrow had taught her a great many things, like responsibility and poise, but it had also taught her that the quickest way to let off steam was to train it out. The problem was that the training rooms were closed this late at night and most of her team was busy studying or writing out essays. Or in Emerald's case asleep and snoring loud enough to disrupt everyone else.

Before she could become much more enraptured by her thoughts however her eyes caught onto the form of another student in the halls, Pyrrha who appeared to be more then a bit disheartened by something or another. "Hey Pyrrha, you okay?"

Pyrrha looked at her for a moment, as if it took a bit of time just to recognize that she was being spoken too. "Hm, yes I...well maybe not," she looked away from Cinder, frustration and sadness building in her. "Its just...I want to help Jaune, but I can't seem to get through to him. He wants to do everything by himself and has this crazy idea that if he doesn't it somehow makes it invalid." her frustration just bled out, despite her desire to keep the entire situation as quiet as possible. Part of her hated reaching out, especially to Cinder because this was her teams problem. But Jaune was their leader, and if the other girl could do something she was willing to take a hit to her own pride.

Cinder blinked at the outflow of information while trying to figure out how to process it all. Something Jaune had done obviously had upset Pyrrha, which sounded utterly unlike him. Despite being a bit of a flake Jaune had never come across like the type who just randomly lashed out at people for no reason. "What were you trying to help him with exactly?"

At the request for more information Pyrrha quickly fell back to a more quiet mood. "Tell me is Jaune is your friend right?" she debated internally about the information she was about to hand over, but worry over what would happen to him if he kept going down his current path was winning out. He had showed great bravery and a tactical sense in the forest, but without skill and proper practice he wouldn't ever grow beyond his current level. And that only ended one way.

"Of course I am," Cinder raised an eyebrow, never before had she seen Pyrrha act so secretive. "No matter what I will do what I can to help." she had seven friends in the world, it wasn't like she was going to start turning on them now.

"Its Jaune he..." Pyrrha looked around for a moment before stepping forward. "He isn't supposed to be here." For a moment Cinder was confused, but the true meaning fell into place after a moments thought.

How awkward he was in classes and the fact that he seemed so unprepared for the work load that the average hunter class came with. She didn't need all the details, but there was already a basic picture of the entire situation in her mind. "I see," Cinder walked past Pyrrha and offered a smile back to her. "Let me see what can be done."

It was a quick walk to the roof access stairs, simply following the trail that Pyrrha's aura had left behind while leaving the area, seeing Jaune simply looking at the sky as with his back turned to her. "I told you I didn't want to-" Jaune turned and saw Cinder, a confused expression on his face. "Cin-" before he could finish his thought a blast of fire hit him square in the chest and nearly sent him off the edge before he could regain his balance. "What the he-" another blast of flame was fired directly at
him, but this time he managed to dodge back onto the larger section of the roof before it could send him over.

Cinder focused her power in front of her and created a blade made of hardened obsidian, throwing it down at his feet before creating two more massive orbs of fire in either hand, converting both into blades for herself. "Two choices, protect yourself or die." without another word she charged directly at Jaune, who despite a panicked expression grabbed the weapon that had been tossed at his feet and took a defensive stance, blocking a dual strike from Cinder.

"What the heck are you-" despite being smaller in size Jaune was quickly learning that Cinder wasn't a lightweight, quickly losing the contest to stay in his position and giving ground to her, only just staying on his feet. "What heck are you doing?"

Without missing a beat Cinder slammed her twin blades together into a bow, drawing back an arrow of flames onto an invisible string. "You think this is easy?" she fired out the burning arrow, which split into three separate lines of flame, each slamming into Jaune one after the other. "Do you think any of us started as strong as we are?"

Jaune glared at Cinder with a look fit to kill, it was obvious that his stubborn pride was forcing him down an idiotic path. So Cinder would do what any good friend would in this situation.

She would shatter his pride until he accepted help.

Jaune charged directly toward her with a powerful downward swing. "Don't pretend you get everything that is going through my head." Cinder quickly blocked his stroke by converting her bow back into blades, easily holding him off. "No matter what I try, no matter how long I spend in the training room I can't get any better. I am so weak I can't even stick up for myself, I can't even stick up for a girl getting bullied." his eyes welled with tears and he put even more effort into trying to shatter Cinder's defense.

But no matter how hard he forced Cinder wouldn't budge, quickly moving one of her blades away and hitting him full in the stomach with another ball of flame, breaking his own stance and allowing her to deliver a powerful slash with her blade. It bounced off his aura but still staggered him. "You can't get better because you are weak, if you try and beat yourself you aren't going to get any better. You will just end up in the same pathetic condition," her words were cruel and without a filter, slamming into the walls of Jaune's pride. "Someone who climbs the same mountain over and over will only get better at climbing that mountain. Put them against something bigger and they will die."

Jaune tried to force himself up using the blade, but Cinder was merciless, moving over and kicking the sword out of his grasp and letting him fall to the ground. "So you are weak, so you can't do anything. Are you just going to sit and feel miserable about it until you die?" she looked down at him, the flames flowing off of her school uniform reflecting in her eyes. "Get up, I am not done yet."

Jaune slammed his fist into the roof and spat out a number of colorful curses, looking up at her with tears welling in his eyes. "I...am not done." he pulled himself up and drew in a number of pained breaths.

"Hm," Cinder let her swords scatter in the wind, before holding both hands close together and letting her power flow through her, unleashing more of it then she normally did and forming an intricate obsidian scythe, flames dancing along its body. "Still not done?"

Jaune's response was a simple glare and a nod of his head.

Cinder spun the weapon in her hands, making it dance around her before delivering a powerful blow
directly towards Jaune's chest. However right before it could strike Jaune extended his hands in front of him, both covered in his shining white aura. Scythe and hand both met with each other, sparking red flame and flickering white light flowing in opposite directions as the two clashed. Both of the hunters in training let out a battle cry and put the entirety of their effort behind their attacks.

But in the end the stalemate was broken, Jaune's aura cracked and the force behind the attack sent him straight off the edge of the building, only a grasping hand keeping him clinging to the rooftop. Cinder walked over and looked down at him, about to fall from the high building with cool eyes. Jaune met those eyes for a moment and lowered his head in shame before moving his freehand into range so she could help him back onto the building, where he promptly collapsed on his back, body covered in sweat.

Cinder took a seat next to him, eyes trained on him to make sure she hadn't done too much damage. "That was terrible." she offered blandly.

"No kidding, I didn't stand a chance." Jaune closed his eyes and sighed for a moment. "So are you going to tell Ozpin I forged my way into Beacon?"

Cinder tilted her head for a moment as if she was internally debating the subject, but in the end simply shook her head in the negative. "You're here risking your life to try and do something good, that in and of itself tells me that you are either crazy or stupid. If we let you out of sight you will probably end up doing something stupid and getting yourself hurt."

Jaune closed his eyes for a moment and sighed. "I hate it, being this weak."

She couldn't help but laugh at the irony of that, given his aura and the way he could rapidly take to things once he was backed into a corner he was already shaping up to become a high class hunter. The only thing stopping him was himself. "You know, back when I was first training I couldn't manipulate my aura for anything, couldn't even make a spark with all of the dust in the Torchwick company mines," she lifted a finger and summoned a warm flame, flicking it so that it landed just above Jaune's body. "It took a lot of effort, sweat, blood, but you know what it took more of then all of those things?"

Jaune's eyes went to the flame, and a shake of his head was the only answer she received.

"Help, I had so many great teachers who worked so hard to get me where I am today, and most of them had the patience of saints or else I wouldn't be half as strong as I am now. Power has been something I always strived for, power to protect all of the people I care about most in the world," she looked at him, the coldness that had dominated her eyes during the fight was gone, now replaced with a warm glow. "I'm strong, but I can't help everyone on my own, there is a reason hunters operate in four person groups. By ourselves we fall, together we soar."

Jaune looked over his weakened body and sighed. "But what if I never improve, what if I fall you guys despite everything?"

"If you couldn't advance you wouldn't have been able to stop my finishing blow for a second, if you are willing to advance you will."

The two of them sat in silence for a bit longer, simply looking toward the massive tower that made up the highest point in Beacon. It was oddly peaceful, a quiet night in a world full of chaos. A single moment. "Well when you put it like that, guess I can't really refuse can I?" he smiled toward Cinder, but something about the smile was different. It didn't carry the usual childish innocent that usually came
to Jaune's face with a smile. There was something a bit older about it, but also a bit wiser as well. Cinder offered him a hand and helped him back to his feet, before giving him a shove onto his back. "Hey what was that one for?!"

"For making your partner upset, you better come up with something to make it up to her." Cinder covered her mouth to prevent a smile from breaking out and ruining her serious expression.

Jaune put a hand against his head, after the fight had cleared his head it truly hit him just how much of an utter jerk he had been. "Crap, I was kind of an ass."

Cinder leaned down and helped Jaune back onto his feet with a shake of her head. "Well you know what they say, baby steps."

The two of them made their way back into the building, beginning their trek back toward their dorm rooms. A few students who happened to walk by the two would have some odd whispers in the morning about the two heavily breathing students with ruffled clothes wandering the halls with their arms around each other, but rumors came and went in Beacon.

What was another one for the fires?

Ozpin took a slow sip of his tea while looking over into the dark sky, admiring the view and wondering for the hundredth time if he should retire for the night. Despite it being late the headmaster was always able to justify another hour, another paper that needed to be looked over, another report that could be analysed. Another budget to balance another message to be written. It was hard to remember that he wasn't as young as he was before, pulling allnighters was a task best left to much younger men then himself.

But before his internal debate could get much further the elevator to his office gave a ding, the doors sliding open to let someone into his sanctuary. "If its another round of reports Glynda I was just about to get some res-" a dark chill back over him, and when Ozpin turned around it wasn't his second in command standing on the other side of his desk, but a tall muscular young man with both eyes closed and a twisted smile on his face.

"Oh poor Ozpin, you never did know when to quit did you?" Cardin's voice sounded nothing like his own, or rather it only sounded partially like his own voice. It was as if another voice had been layered right above it, giving an inhuman quality to the young mans voice. "Not when you lose, not when you win."

Ozpin fought the urge to reach for his cane and instead looked at Cardin with a nearly blank expression, cold eyes looking over the entire room as if awaiting a trap. "What are you doing in my school?"

Cardin moved a hand to his mouth in feigned surprise. "Oh really now Ozpin, is that anyway to speak to your oldest and dearest enemy, shouldn't there be a bit more snarling, a threat on my life?" Cardin tsked at the headmaster, a rather unnatural sound come from him. "Maybe old age is catching up with you."

It took everything had to prevent Ozpin from playing the game he was being baited into. "Let go of my student and leave my school. You have no real power here."

"Oh thats true enough," Cardin opened his eyes, revealing that both had been consumed by a pitch black coloring. A slow trickle of ooze slowly came from the eye, slowly moving down his face. "Even with all of the hatred and darkness in his soul I can't seem to get a proper grip on him, so sad.
"The bigger ones tend to last a bit longer before burning out." with a shrug Cardin put forward a hand, and just above Ozpin's desk a small black portal appeared, dropping eight white envelops with various names attached to each. "Invitations to a part the Black Fang means to interrupt. It would be such a shame if something happened to all of those innocent people don't you think?"

Ozpin examined the envelops and looked toward the boy. "What is your game, Shade?"

"Game?" Cardin brought a hand to his mouth in shock. "Why dearest Ozpin we are talking about saving lives here, surly you don't doubt my good intentions so far as wishing to do an honest and good deed do you?"

Realizing that further investigation would only lead to further mocking Ozpin simply drew in a breath and directed his full attention to the overtaken Cardin. "Here you stand within my home, and now you are asked to go. You are not welcome you fallen shade, see yourself gone and never return."

Cardin collapsed to his knees, a mad laugh escaping him. "One to one Ozpin, winner...take...all." Cardin's body spasmed and he spewed forth a black and vile liquid onto the ground before collapsing.

Ozpin looked over the fallen student and then the invitations. "The times are changing."

And for the first time in what felt like ages, Ozpin had no idea if he would be able to stop what laid on the other side of that change.

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It feels good to put this chapter behind me, mainly because it contains probably my least favorite episodes in RWBY. Jaune is probably my favorite character in the show, something that is easy to see from my writing history. But his arc made no sense to me, he needed to learn that he couldn't become better on his own, but the arc ends with him defeating a Ursa (from his perspective, he didn't know Pyrrha saved his bacon) and putting the bully into place. He needed a swift kick in the pants in my opinion, something to snap him out of his idiocy and make him realize that he needed his friends.

But anyway a party is being planned and darkness is just over the horizon. Tune in next time for the prelude to a party that changes everything.

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