**Chapter Twelve**

“*Dust*,” the newest professor, one I hadn’t seen in the show, stated blandly. “Lifeblood of our society, and what allows us, with Aura, to fight the forces of Grimm. It is the magic that we wield against the unending forces that seek to destroy us. It is, by any definition, *magic,* and the purpose of this class to understand its forms, its dangers, its uses, and, if possible, to begin to truly wield it yourself.”

To the side I could practically see Weiss’ inner struggle, finally ending as she thrust her hand up in the air. “Professor!” she said, to further get his attention. The man blandly looked over at her and nodded. “Dust *isn’t* magic,” she proclaimed, “it’s *science*!”

He nodded understandingly, “Coming from Atlas, that’s an understandable position to hold. Are there any other Atlasians here?” Hesitantly, a girl the next row down held up a hand, as well as a guy with feathers nestled in his blue hair.

“It might be science that allows us to build ships that fly, breathe life into human-looking machines, and make it possible to talk to someone else half a world away,” Professor Tim noted, agreeing with the Schnee Heiress amicably, his voice soft, but somehow carrying throughout the room. “Even though to some these feats seem magical, at place in the tales of old, alongside spirits, gods, and demons. It is said that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic,” he put forward.

“*Indeed!*” Weiss nodded, glad he was seeming acceding to her claims.

“However, it is also true that any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology*,*” he continued. “Tell me, Ms. Schnee, where does Dust come from?”

She reddened, “If that’s a comment about my family, *sir*, I do *not* believe it to be professional!”

Professor Tim shook his head, “No, I am not asking how it is collected. I am asking where it comes from. How is it formed?”

“I. . . I don’t know,” the Schnee heiress replied, reddening.

“No one does,” the older man said, looking to the others. “There are tales, that Dust is the condensed blessing of the gods, that is the lifeblood of the planet, that it is the souls of our ancestors made manifest. The last one is probably not true, as the amount should’ve grown after the great war, and it hasn’t,” he added, as an afterthought. “But tales of old are Oobleck’s domain, as you’ll find next year. No, the one thing that we know, is that we don’t know where it comes from. What we do know, however, is what it can do.”

The man slowly started to walk back and forth and, as he turned, he suddenly held a fist-sized red crystal, from where I hadn’t seen. “The first, and hardest way to utilize Dust is in its raw form, the art of Dustcasting.” The crystal lit up, and embers danced along his other hand.

“While Aura can assist, it is only sufficient *will* that’s required to wield it. A strong enough desire can, if one is careless or lacking the discipline to control it, provoke a wild reaction,” he stated, most of the class flinching as an explosion of fire blossomed out from him, seemingly uncontrolled, but dying away before it reached us. I still felt the heat, and those in the front row were likely sweltering. “The results can be disastrous,” he finished unnecessarily.

“*Mine collapses*,” the bluejay Faunus muttered into the ensuing silence, tensing as he realized what he said.

“Indeed,” Professor Tim remarked, stopping to look at him directly. “A strong enough blow can also trigger it, as can certain kinds of electrical current, and a few other methods, but, more often than not, a strong desire activates it.”

Blake spoke up, “Maybe if they treated the miners *better*, that wouldn’t happen.”

“But one whose will is broken will have no strong desires,” the teacher countered, before Weiss could respond, and the Faunus’ bow twitched as her hackles rose. “Evil is often petty, or short-sighted, but, sadly, it is not always without reason, or without intelligence. Life would be easier if they were, but, again, that is the domain of my fellow professors. Regardless, it does not have to be a negative desire that activates it, though that was often the case in the past.”

Weiss looked like she wanted to say something, but paused as she seemed to realize something, hesitantly leaning back in her seat to watch the teacher carefully.

The man started to pace again. “Strong, wild feelings produce strong, wild effects. With the application of will, those effects can be directed.” Again, the crystal exploded into flame, but a stream that reached from one end of the room to the other. “With *more*, you can somewhat control the *effect*.” With a gesture, and a smile on his otherwise placid visage, a fireball shot from his hand, which streaked across the space, exploding against a bare wall, creating a blast which stopped right before it hit the floor. “With *more*, your constructs will ***grow!***”

The smile spread further, his tone becoming more energetic. He flicked a hand out, and a long tendril of flame, flickering and burning, sprouted from it like an infernal tentacle. With a twist, he lashed out, cutting a dark, burned line against the wall behind him. “*And with* ***more****, the elements themselves become* ***all the weapons you’ll ever need!***”

The tentacle shrank, solidifying, until it was a solid bar of flame, With a twist he slashed, sending a crescent of fire to slam against where he’d sent the fireball, this time the force of the blow cutting into the stone, leaving a red-hot scar. **“And *then*, if your will is *unshakable*, then you can face the forces of destruction with a *smile* as you *rain death UPON THEM!”***

The liquid flame spread across his body, in the cloak he’d worn when he’d arrived, as a demon stood before us, the heat oppressive.

Then it shut off, the temperature of the room, and the battered and burned walls the only indication that anything had happened. “But, by the time winter break arrives, we’ll see if you can control a fingernail sized crystal enough to direct it, instead of individual grains,” he remarked placidly, only a small smile offsetting his unnaturally calm demeanor. “Any questions?”

<DR>

The eight of us filed out at the end of the class, in mental shock from the repeatedly whiplashed mood. None of his other explanations had been quite as. . . *extreme* as his Dustcasting demonstration, but they weren’t exactly calm either. There was the infusion of Dust into clothing, which let one use specific techniques of Dustcasting without the required willpower or concentration. My question, of if the effects were like specific spells woven into gear, as opposed to the myths of lost magic written on ancient scrolls, got me a cross look from Weiss, but nod of agreement from Professor Tim.

Then there was the infusion of Dust into one’s body. A process which put a great deal of strain on one’s physique, and, if one went beyond their limits, was debilitatingly painful. That was paired with an instruction to not do so without direct staff observation, as one could also *seriously* injure themselves if they went about it the wrong way. Bandits and barbarians since the start of recorded history favored that, and, while it wasn’t forbidden, it was generally discouraged.

And finally, there was using Dust to enhance one’s Semblance. The ‘highly scientific’ process of just trying to use said Semblance while holding Dust at the ready to ‘see if something magical happens.’ The rest of the class had been training to activate Dust, each student given a single granule of Ice Dust to work with, not enough to do more than peg someone with an icicle, or encase your hand.

Weiss had gotten it down in less than a minute, firing off a bolt of ice, much like the ones she could shoot from her glyphs, though it was rounded off and malformed, much to her displeasure.

I’d only gotten it in the last few minutes, after half the class had managed it, but considering I’d never even *touched* Dust before, I thought that was pretty good. I’d somehow managed to encase my hand up to the *shoulder* with the stuff, but before I could do more than stare at it, a thin wire of fire had wrapped around the construct, melting it to the point I could break free easily, before the flaming thread had vanished.

Looking around, I saw that Professor Tim was staring directly at me, frowning slightly.

Whatever it was that had displeased him, he hadn’t said anything else to me. Rather than poke that likely insane bear, I’d turned to try to help Yang, who still hadn’t gotten it, along with Pyrrha, who’d been the one that’d helped me figure it out in the first place.

Homework had been to review the different forms of Dust, and their basic properties, by Friday, with office hours on Thursday for anyone that wanted extra practice trying to activate their Dust.

Extracting promises to work on it after dinner, as everyone was feeling pretty fried, that left me with nothing to do for the next several hours. I’d pulled away from everyone else, ready to step into my pocket dimension to relax for a bit, when the scroll in my hand buzzed, *Glynda Goodwitch* of all people calling me. “Hello?” I answered, wondering what this was about.

“A training hall has been set aside for you to train your Semblance, given its. . . *destructive* nature. Report to Scoria hall, Room 2B48, You’ll need to hit the button for the basement twice. Please do so at your earliest convenience.” She paused, and as I opened my mouth to reply she added, “That means *now*, Mr. Arc.”

“I’m on my way, Prof,” I told her, rolling my eyes. With the original Jaune, that’d probably be a comedic moment, maybe he’d fumble his scroll or something, but when you *weren’t* a moron, her comment had just come off as patronizing. Matronizing? *Rude*. It came off as rude.

I could feel the part of me that was still Jaune be mildly offended, but, as I’d been going over my memories of what’d happened originally, he’d gotten quieter and quieter.

It didn’t take that long before I was in the sub-basement, not terribly surprised that the Wizard’s college *had* what appeared to be secret sub-basements. On one hand, having me go to one was a bit. . . *odd,* but on the other, having someone wander in while I was testing out a potentially dangerous and uncontrolled Semblance *was* very, *very* bad.

At least the place didn’t *look* creepy, just window-less, and soon enough I found the door, leading into a large open area, like the hall I’d booked for sparring a couple days ago, but one with targets, ranging from wooden posts to metal plates to bright-orange mannequins, stacked against the wall.

And, standing in the middle of it all, was Goodwitch, who didn’t look particularly happy as she walked over to me.

“This hall has been set aside for your training,” she informed me primly. “Please refrain from destroying the room completely, as I will be the one who will be putting it back together. After you are done, please do not return until you are told to, as we do not wish you to compromise the building’s structure.”

I had to ask, “Professor, have I done something wrong?” She stared at me, sternly, but I didn’t back down. She’s either tell me, or she wouldn’t but at least-

“Your assessments were flawed. Tell me, Mr. Arc, why did you hold back during your previous schooling, then choose to no longer do so the *moment* you arrived at our doorstep? What use did underplaying your combat ability serve?” she questioned.

“I, what?” I muttered, wondering what she was talking about.

“Your transcripts stated you had a below average amount of Aura, middling amount of combat ability, and made *no* mention of your Semblance *at all*. Then, you walk into my class, take a blow that should’ve sent you sprawling without flinching, then almost seriously injure your classmate. Tell me, what do you *think* you did wrong?”

*Oh, she* ***wasn’t*** *going to pin this on me.* “I *assumed* that you’d set up the training hall like how the *previous* one worked, and until I heard a buzzer I assumed my opponent still had Aura to *spare*. As to my transcripts, a *lot* can happen in a few, short weeks, and showing I was stronger than everyone else back home would do me *no* favors. I assumed *Beacon* would be different. Apparently, I was *wrong,*” I practically hissed, the anger, not just at her, but at so many that’d blamed me for things outside of my control rising up. *Yes*, my transcripts were faked, and I was in the wrong in that respect, but they’d *said* they would be observing the initiation, and if they *had* they should’ve seen that I was many things, but *weak* was not one of them!

I’d taken having other people push their own failing on me before, *had* to take it, but I wasn’t who I used to be, and I *sure* as hell wasn’t Jaune. I was a ***dragon***, and I wasn’t going to let another self-righteous, high-off-their-own-position, hypocritical, bull-

“I apologize,” Glynda said, with a sigh, the annoyance and anger at me draining off her face.

“I, uh, what?” I asked, confused at the sudden turn the conversation had taken, ready for a verbal fight, only to have my opponent, after striking the first few blows, suddenly surrender.

The woman looked at me, still sternly, but with a slightly embarrassed mien. “I. . . sometimes forget that, despite being in Sanus, not every place is as welcoming of Faunus as Vale. And that you would assume the hall would work as the one you used before. Most students do not train in their first few days.”

That took a second to parse, but Oobleck’s lesson, combined with Jaune’s memories, helped fill in the blanks. The ‘kingdoms’ of RWBY were more like city-states, and places like Patch, despite being an island off the coast of the same continent as Vale (Sanus), was entirely independent. Different governance, different customs, different everything. Similar enough to Vale to not cause problems, the travel of people between them smoothing out the culture somewhat, but also different. The only time Patch, and the other towns, weren’t independent was when war had broken out, when the peoples in each continent had banded together, only to go their separate ways afterwards.

It was an interesting effect of the Grimm that they heavily balkanized any land in which they were present, making the normal empire-building of Earth nearly impossible. That is, with the exception of Atlas, given its historically low Grimm density due to it’s harsh conditions.

Back on topic, Goodwitch was obviously rationalizing the hiding of my capabilities as my being a Faunus, instead of my awakening as both a Dragon and *not an idiot.* Believing my coming forward with my true abilities being due to Vale’s *vocal* stance on equality, as opposed to Jaune’s hometown which had been overtly accepting but quietly. . . *judgy.*  None of that was what I’d meant, but I was more than happy to run with it, and the fact that she *actually* apologized for getting mad at me for something that wasn’t my fault was. . . *different.*

“Uh, okay,” I replied lamely, trying to say *something* before my silence got awkward. “And um, well, if I’m going to be working with my team, I figured I should know what they can do. And what better way than sparring? And with Yang and Ruby being sisters, it made sense to work with them too. Are you saying most people don’t? It wasn’t that hard to find the form.”

Goodwitch looked at me consideringly, before nodding, and starting to walk out of the room. As she did so, she flicked her hand to the side, and a trunk opened up, revealing a set of colored vials. “To use with your Semblance,” she remarked. “Professor Tim indicated you possessed the required skill. Single grains only.”

And with that, she walked out of the room.

*Well. . . that was different,* I thought. I still didn’t like the woman, but. . . maybe I was wrong.

Still didn’t make sense for the person who didn’t use a weapon to teach the class that was all about using weapons, I noted, though it was more of a nitpick than an objection.

But, that was for later, and I had both Pyrrha and my Martial Talent to get me up to speed if she wasn’t the teacher she acted like she was. From there the two of us would be able to help the others, and then, when the time came, we *might* be able to hold the line. However, to do *that,* I needed to figure out my draconic abilities.

Looking around the room, there were a lot of targets, and the aforementioned case, and that was pretty much it. No computer terminals, no cameras, it looked more like a well lit store-room rather than anything else.

“Well, time to get started,” I muttered to myself, grabbing one of each of the three kinds targets and lining them up, each one with a thick metal base to keep it upright. Stepping back, a good fifteen feet, I breathed deep, took a stance and tried to hose them down with flame.

Nothing happened.

I paused, and had a ‘how do I shot web’ moment, trying to recall how I did it the first time. Closing my eyes, I remembered it wasn’t as much *breathing* as it was *releasing* the flames. Concentrating, I felt that inner well of power, and brought it up, releasing it outwards, just as I had before.

Prismatic flames poured out of me, spreading to completely encompass the middle, metal plate, and I turned my head, hosing down the other two as well. Feeling it start to peter out, I cut off the flames, and blinked.

All three targets seemed to be on fire, the wooden target already half burned away, and the top of the mannequin was just *gone,* the stiff gel that made up the rest of the body melting. The metal target was glowing a dull orange, and part of it had been bent over.

*Okay, there’s an aspect of physical force to it,* I thought, reaching out as I concentrated on the flames. I’d been able to physically handle it before, but could I *control* it, fire-bender style?

The answer was no. Or I just sucked at it.

The rainbow flames, still burning, *somehow*, danced merrily, ignoring my will completely. And my waving arms. And my verbal commands.

Sighing, I reached out and mentally pushed the flames *down,* putting them all out, still able to do at least that much. Moving over to the targets, they were still hot to the touch, parts of the target burned smooth, and almost glassy. I didn’t know you could *do* that to wood, and the mannequin bits apparently charred blue-black. However, I didn’t have that much experience with burning things, as I had only been a *theoretical* pyro when I was younger, enjoying the idea of turning gasoline and orange juice concentrate into functional napalm, but never actually doing it.

Moving them off to the side, I saw I’d already burned the floor a little, the glassed stone the same dirty-orange color as it had been before. Shaking my head, I grabbed another metal target, moving it to the side, and tied something different.

I’d poured out the flames, like turning on a faucet, and I could somehow feel my internal resevoir building back up, but I wasn’t back up to full yet. *Time based use limit,* I noted, taking a stance thirty feet away from the target.

Trying with just a little bit of power, I tried to blow a tighter stream, but the flames just spewed out of my pursed lips messily, setting the area around me alight. Pushing those flames away, I tried again, trying to tighten my throat with a bit more success.

Giving in and looking up hose nozzle structures, and then trying to both physically and mentally model it, spewing little bits of fire everywhere with every attempt, I finally got a handle on it. Instead of a stream that started thin and then quickly billowed outward in a cone, I instead released a column of flame that hit the target dead on, the concentrated fire knocking the heavy metal over and making the entire thing glow orange.

*Nice,* I thought. I still needed a *lot* of practice before I dared use it in combat, but being able to place my shots would help greatly. It was only then that I realized that *I* was on fire, the flames merrily burning on my armor, doing seemingly nothing at all. Indeed I was standing in the middle of a large pool of the stuff, having been spitting it all over.

Pushing the fire away, the ground had been glassed, *again,* but without burning me or my equipment at all. Well, mostly, as there was a bit of an odd sheen to my armor, or had it always been that way? It didn’t matter that much, I was already thinking of an upgrade.

Checking my scroll, I froze, two hours having gone by in the blink of an eye. Shaking my head, I turned back to the Dust at the back of the room, looking forward to giving that a shot. That would either take no time at all, or less than the hour and change I had left before dinner. Either way, I was fine.

I took a moment to stretch as I slowly walked, my muscles feeling tight from the strain of constantly pulling and releasing my inner flames, and I wondered if I could get Pyrrha to give me another massage. I would, of course, return the favor, and I grinned, not seeing her turning me down. The smile dimmed a little, as I didn’t want to set off Blake. Again. Not that I cared, the girl obviously didn’t give two shits about me, but as the leader it *was* my responsibility, if only a little, to help the team work together.

*I’ll ask Pyrrha,* I decided. While I might actually be older than any of them, dealing with someone who’d come off of that kind of toxic relationship was *not* in my wheelhouse, and it apparently was in hers. Focusing on the here and now, I leaned over the Dust crate, grabbing a vial of each, returning to the ‘firing range’ area and careful to put them down off to the side. Trying to activate Dust, when you were holding several different *types* of Dust, was according to Professor Tim, how *many* novice Dustcasters had blown themselves up.

Starting with the red one, because *fire*, I carefully popped the top off, measuring out a single small red grain, re-capping it and putting it with the others. Grabbing a metal target, I put it down, and walked fifteen feet back. It’d be best to try it normally, and *then* try the concentrated spray.

Concentrating, I primed the Dust, not taking the final step to cast, but enough to *connect* to it. I wasn’t sure this would even *work* as, despite what I insinuated, my ‘fire breath’ *wasn’t* a Semblance at all, but my innate Draconic ability.

Staring forward, I tapped into the well of *Power* that churned within me, pulling it up, and letting it flow, while also trying to keep the Dust ready. It was difficult, and *not* something I’d be able to use in a fight yet, *if* it worked, and I opened myself up and let the fire *flow.*

I could feel the Dust flare, but, instead of exploding, the essence of *Burn* raced up my arm, and into my throat, the flames that poured out of me not calm and prismatic, but blood red, and *raging.*

The *inferno* that overtook my target only lasted a second at most, before the Dust expended itself. The feeling made me cut the flow of flames immediately, and I stared at the results.

*The target was gone.*

No, not gone, I realized, it’d *melted,* a pool of slag slowly expanding into the glowing orange bit of floor that’d been heated enough to shift phases as well. While both the target and floor cooled fairly quickly, the metal and stone mixing together, the heat in the room was *oppressive.* The flames, whatever they had been, didn’t stick around, having vanished just as quickly as they’d appeared, with no Dust left to power them.

“Okay, mark that down in the ‘yes’ column,” I commented to myself, shaking my head, dragging over another metal target to an unmarked part of the floor, something that I was half out of, and practically skipping over to the Dust vials, grabbing a single grain of dark blue Water Dust.

Quickly moving over, and priming it, I tried again, ready to see how *this* would turn out.

It didn’t.

Oh, I still breathed flames, but they were the normal ones, the primed speck of Water Dust in my hand not doing anything. Frowning, I tossed the primed Dust at the still burning target, the magical flames hissing as the Dust hit and burst into about a gallon of liquid, before I pushed the flames down, and out.

Electricity Dust was also a bust, as was Steam, and the bright orange Rock Dust didn’t do anything either.

*Wind* Dust had an effect though, my flames turning a brilliant translucent green and practically *blasting* out of me, spreading out *fast.* The conflagration hit the target, picking up the several *hundred* pound piece of metal and slamming it against the back wall with a thunderous crash.

The backblast started to come towards me, feeling like I was in the middle of a hurricane, but it faded in an instant, the winds dying supernaturally fast. The target had been folded in half, as I went to inspect it, finding it barely warm to the touch, and I put it to the side, grabbing another, only having three metal targets left.

Collecting the Vials that had been blown around the room by the windstorm, I put them away, except for the three I had left, one white, one black, and one cyan.

Starting with the white, the Ice Dust, I almost didn’t use it, as I was breathing *fire*, and if water hadn’t worked, why would Ice?

And, once again, I proved, if only to myself, that I had *no idea what I was doing*.

The flames, white and rimmed with pale blue, poured out of me. They enveloped the target as the blaze, after streaming from me, froze, *literally*. Carefully reaching out, I took hold of a frozen tongue of flame, and broke it off. It was hard, more like crystal than actual ice, but it was *bitingly* cold, and I quickly dropped it, where it bounced on the ground, not shattering, acting just like Weiss’ did right after *it* was formed.

Down to two metal targets, and two kinds of Dust left, I moved to the far side of the room, most of the space absolutely wrecked. I was glad I wouldn’t have to pay for the damage, Glynda’s Semblance letting her put things back together, but I wondered why I couldn’t’ve just done this outside. Then again, I’d just be tearing things up there as well, so maybe it was actually better to do it here?

Taking a single grain of Gravity Dust, I primed it, and carefully stood in front of the target, nervous. Would my fire increase gravity? Would it negate it? Would I breathe a black hole? That sounded cool, right up until you thought about it, and then it was *terrifying.*

Okay, it was kinda both.

Taking a moment to commit to actually doing this, I pulled deep and opened myself up, ready for anything.

My normal fire came out.

I was disappointed for about three seconds, until I remembered that I was *breathing magical fire*, which was *already* really fucking cool, and I was being a child.

Un-priming the Dust, I put it away, extinguished the flames, and grabbed the last vial of Dust. The *Hard-light* Dust. It was apparently ‘new’, the first truly ‘synthesized’ Dust, created by ‘cleaning’ regular Dust of what made it elementally aligned.

Priming it, I took a deep breath, and tried to pour out my flame.

*Nothing happened.*

No, that wasn’t exactly correct. The Hard-Light Dust was gone, but it seemed to have simply evaporated, and I felt a good chunk of my inner reserves of Flame was gone as well. I stood, not really sure what had just happened, but I noticed something else: *my fire wasn’t replenishing.*

Closing my eyes, trying to feel it out, I could practically see it trying to coalesce, like it did when it built itself back up, but it was being drained just as quickly, disappearing into nothing at all.

I started to panic. Had I managed to screw something up? Had I hurt myself? How do I explain this? Should I go to Goodwitch? Tim? And what was that sound?

It started as a low hum, but one that started to oscillate. A low, soft waa-waa-waa-waa that started to rise, both in pitch and in speed. I turned towards the door, ready to leave in case I’d set something off, but as I started to move the sound followed me, still rising, getting louder with every second.

Looking around, I couldn’t see where it was coming from, but the room was starting to get brighter as well, soft shadows thrown around the room, but they became more defined, *harsher*, as the glow intensified, and I realized where it was all coming from.

*It was coming from me.*

*Absolutely* panicking right now, and practically half a minute from when I’d tried to breath only to have it up and *vanish*, I moved to the other side of the room. It was away from where I’d first started, and I tried to take cover, moving the last metal target between me and where whatever the hell was going to happen, *hopefully*.

The sound increased until it was blaring, and vibrating back and forth so violent it sounded like a propellor plane was taking off in my head before a sense of ***POWER*** surged up through me. I couldn’t hold it back, couldn’t stop it, and my mouth was forced open as a blindingly bright beam blasted out from me, through the target in front of me, tearing it out of my hands as the beam *wouldn’t stop.* I tried to stop it, but my mouth refused to move, and I shook my head violently in panic,, carving the beam carving a path back and forth about the room.

It only lasted a few seconds, but those were some of the longest seconds in my life, finally able to stop the flow and drop to my hands and knees, throat raw, as I felt *exhausted.* After a long moment, my Scroll dinged with the alarm I’d set to tell me I needed to leave, and I laughed, then gasped in pain.

Checking my Aura level, I blanched as I realized I’d managed to carve off *half* of it with that stunt, and I *felt* like it. Whatever the *fuck* that’d been, it *sure* as hell hadn’t been natural, and I’d paid for it. And that’d been a *single grain*.

I stood up, looking around, and took in the sheer destruction, the beam that I’d sent everywhere having seemingly carved a path through *everything*. The ice I’d made had been cleanly sliced, like with a knife, but the parts that I’d hit had been blasted *everywhere*, pseudo-snow falling down around me. Trails of compacted stone lined the walls, floor, and ceiling, as I’d looked around. Splinters from wooden targets, and blobs of yellow gel were splattered everywhere, the metal I’d hit intact, but blasted away as if Noras slammed it with a hammer.

The seemingly endless blast I’d let out hadn’t been hot, or cold, or anything else other than a tight beam of *Unrelenting Force.*

“Well. . . *fuck,*” I rasped.

<DR>

Ozpin regarded the feed that’d been piped to his desk, one hidden camera still intact. Feeling the ripples of Magic finally calm, he smiled as the wards he’d erected finished absorbing the excess energy, collecting and purifying the Mana as it ran through the spell-wheels of his tower. Monitoring the flow, he noted with muted, but not displeased, surprise that it appeared that he’d gathered a month’s worth of charge in only a few hours.

Great workings might be *her* specialty, but he’d learned a thing or five in the last few centuries, and without her network he was limited. *Was* apparently being the key word. The small array had already paid for itself, and with a few more of these, he could move forward on a project he’d had to keep shelved for a long, *long* time.

“Fascinating,” he breathed, as he watched the energy shift and spin along what would, to anyone else, seem like merely an excessive amount of gears. Following his intuition, he sent a message off to his contacts. Ironwood had his people, and he didn’t begrudge the man for not sharing and keeping them close to the vest, even if things *would* go much easier if he cooperated. Imitation was the sincerest form of flattery after all. However, when one lived as long as he had, one built a much more. . . *extensive* list of talented individuals.

*This* one preferred to stay in solitude, to avoid distractions to her work, but for *this,* she may just deign to visit his humble institution.

And if one couldn’t call in a fifty year old debt, what was the point of being an immortal wizard?