DR Fifty-Six

Flying as a Dragon was inherently *different* than flying as a humanoid. Obviously, the air flow, and body mechanics would be different, but while flying as a person was fun, flying fully as a Dragon felt indescribably *right.*

Circling around my little world, I relaxed, while trying to pay attention to how the change Affected me. I hadn’t noticed it before, the experience of *being a Dragon* so new it’d made it hard to notice other things, and the only times I’d changed since was to bleed myself, changing back as soon as I was done.

Theoretically Mind Defense should stop me from being affected by mental effects, but, looking over the wording carefully, it stopped me from *outside* mind control effects, and kept me from degenerating mentally. While I’d argue that being swamped with an Olympic swimming pool’s worth of Draconic Arrogance was *absolutely* degerative, the Company disagreed. In one sense, I could see their position, as the soul deep knowledge that I was inherently *better* than some jumped up bit of darkness in the form of a giant spider that could inflict waking nightmares on people (as if being a giant talking spider made of darkness and hate wasn’t enough) had allowed me to fight.

However, it hadn’t inherently let me fight *effectively*.

If it hadn’t been for my own skills, I may have lost, overwhelmed by its countless young, or at least slowed down enough for the mother spider, many times my own size, to do me in. And I’d had to *fight* myself to nuke it from orbit, just to be sure, instead of getting right in its spidery face and going at it, tooth and claw.

*But, then again, you already knew the Defenses you purchased were. . . lacking,* I reminded myself, as I needed to suppress them for medicine to work, Body Defense treating the healing drugs the same as it would a poison. Soul Defense seemed fairly cut and drive, while Trace defense only protected against *supernatural* tracing, though the Company were considerate enough to specifically state so.

Or there’d been enough complaints.

I *really* had no idea how my, as I’d referred to them to Oz, ‘Patrons’ worked. The fact that the man had *taken* my having supernatural backing as well as he had was surprising, and one of the main risks I’d taken during that talk, but he’d just accepted it and moved on.

That, of course, begged the question of *how common was it for supernatural entities to fuck with Remnant?* I knew Oz was an immortal, reincarnating Wizard but I had no idea *how* he became an immortal, reincarnating Wizard. Did I have to worry about *other* high-level entities fucking with us? It, to be honest, made me a little nervous, though the fact that Oz hadn’t asked to talk to them, combined with *the name of the world,* helped.

This place was *Remnant,* as in, ‘that which remains’. Given the fact that such interfering entities were only found in myth and legend here suggested that there was some sort of non-interference pact, or, even better, that they’d *left.* That seemed a little too on-the-nose, given the world’s name, but, well, what was the alternative? Live in fear that something *far* more powerful than myself would notice, and squish me like a bug?

***No***, something deep withing me responded, the thought cold blooded, vicious, and prideful. ***I will not live in fear.***

Toggling my forms, switching back to human, reduced the. . . *pressure*, but the thoughts were, ultimately, mine. Just that of a me that was *vastly* more sure of himself but. . . I wasn’t exactly wrong. I had no information, and I’d try and sound out the headmaster during our next session, but worrying about it now did nothing for me.

Shifting fully Draconic once more, I took off with a powerful, Aura assisted flap of my wings, and continued my circuit of my pocket dimension. Ironically, while in Dragon form, my issues with Yang seemed to matter a good deal less.

A large part of that I could put down to, in that form, the thought of *not* being able to protect her, even from herself, seemed nearly inconceivable, even as I knew it was all to real. More than that, however. . . Yang, or at least her opinion of me, just mattered . . . *less*.

I had thought, been prepared for, my Draconic Pride to be further stung, but the girl was Human, young, and hopelessly naïve. If she could look upon me, even displaying only a fraction of my true majesty, and not understand what I was?

That was a *her* problem.

It was odd, cycling back and forth, how my thoughts slid back and forth, until I started to get a hold of myself, but, while *dripping* with arrogance, the conclusion I’d draconically arrived to was one that was hard to argue with. I was already with Pyrrha, something that Yang already knew, and there was only so many times I could tell, or show, her that applying the paradigm of sufficiently advanced apes onto me was a foolish thing to do. And, if she continued to do so, well, I was a *Dragon,* I wasn’t going anywhere, and she would either realize that she had err’d, or she wouldn’t.

Switching back to humanoid, I realized that other me was an asshole. But, then again, if I got called one for trying to be clear. . . should I care? *Hung for as a sheep as a lamb,* I supposed, shifting back to my largest form and starting to circle towards my house. *Actually, a sheep sounds quite tasty,* I mused, an image of blasting one with Flame, twisted *just so*, and that snatched off the ground in a swooping dive popping into my head.

*. . . Okay, maybe I’ve still got a way to go before I’ve gotten a handle on this,* I thought.

Returning home, I decided I should probably fill a few barrels before I went back to Remnant, getting this done when Pyrrha wasn’t around. I still hadn’t shown her *exactly* what I was, or what I could become, but was it really that much of an issue? She was *mine,* body, mind, and soul, and if she asked, I’d show her, but it didn’t matter.

Shifting back to humanoid form, I groaned. “A long, *long* way to go,” I muttered, grabbing the Spigot and a few barrels. I hadn’t shown Pyrrha my other forms, because, despite what I might want to think when I was that way, they were *all* me, just in different ways. And, yes, while Pyrrha was mine, I was *hers*, in every way that mattered, even if I didn’t have a mark enforcing it.

Putting the barrels in the sand of the beach, lining them up, I turned full Draconic, and paused to consider my own thoughts when normal, to try and get the other perspective. When I was that way I seemed. . . *weak*. No, that wasn’t right, merely overly concerned with things that didn’t matter. There would be problems, or there wouldn’t be, simple as that. If there were, I’d fight, and if there weren’t, I wouldn’t need to.

That said, I *was* getting mental whiplash from this, and it wasn’t going to be an issue that even someone as I was going to solve in a day. Pulling my Aura back, I shifted, taking a deep breath before scoring a line in my scaled hide, and affixing the spigot to keep it from healing the second my focus wavered, and to better direct the flow of blood. Without Aura, this would’ve been *incredibly* stupid, but with its healing effects, it was merely extremely unpleasant.

Soon enough, I was done, removing the bit of metal and letting Aura flood back into the wound, which knit itself back together over a few minutes. It never got easier, but, if it could make my teammates stronger, make sure they *survived,* I’d do this a hundred times more.

Shifting to mid-form, it was easier to cap the barrels, and rub them down with sand to clean them of blood quickly, carrying them back to the house. Leaving the red-stained beach, however this world worked it’d be back to normal by tomorrow, I put the barrels away in a cold-storage room which had formed when I’d needed it, and refilled the jug I kept in my fridge, setting me up for another couple weeks worth of smoothies.

Having made them a few more times than just for breakfast, everyone was ahead of where I’d projected them to be on when it came to empowerment, but it’d still not be until several weeks before the Vytal Festival when they’d click over from Tier 5 to Tier 6, but as each level was *exponential*, that was going to hopefully be more than enough.

Making a quick sandwich for dinner, I started to feel less drained, replenishing the energy I’d drained. Before I returned to Remnant, I made sure to clean myself fully of blood, now that I knew I had to worry about Blake’s enhanced schnoz. Ready, I opened the portal and stepped through into my dorm-room, and nearly walked into the very girl I’d worried about.

She leapt back in surprise, like, well, a scalded cat, and I lifted an eyebrow as I closed the door behind me, looking around the room, and finding that it was just the two of us. “Are you okay?” I questioned.

“Y-yeah,” she replied, visibly calming herself down. “I, I didn’t hear you coming.”

*I’d be surprised if you had,* I thought, waving it away, “Sorry, my bad. Didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I wasn’t scared,” the cat-girl reflexively denied, and it was only through a herculean force of will that I didn’t roll my eyes.

“Okay. Are the others with Ruby and her team?” I questioned, getting a nod from my teammate. “Okay,” I nodded, turning to open the door, which now lead out into the hallway instead of another dimension, “I think it’s time to-”

*“Wait!”* Blake called, and I froze, turning back around. “I-I’m sorry,” she stated, hesitant and unsure.

*Are we going to do this with everyone?* I wondered. I’d probably have appreciated it tomorrow, but I was *still* done with this sort of thing today.

“What for?” I questioned neutrally, ready to get this over with.

“I should’ve listened to you,” she stated, as if that explained everything.

I winced. That was the kind of thing that *Draconic* me would’ve taken with a nod and an ‘of course’, but, in reality, things weren’t that black and white. “Eh, not if I’m being an idiot, but I assume this is about the Grimm Tunnel?”

She started to nod, before stopping, eyes narrowed. “What else would it be for?” she demanded.

“Fuck if I know,” I shrugged. “So, why’d you do it?”

“Because Yang is my partner,” she replied, hesitating, admitting, “And because you didn’t want to.” While, yes, points for honesty, my look of disbelief prodded her into explaining, “When we became a team. You, you reminded me of my ex.”

“Do I *look* like Adam Taurus?” I questioned, her gaze, which had drifted to the side, focused on me.

“How did you know?” she demanded.

*Fuck,* I thought, shrugging again to give myself time to bullshit an answer. “While you aren’t publicly wanted, I’ve got access to some resources that aren’t publicly available. You said your mentor’s name was Adam, and you aren’t going by a fake name. Running with the White Fang wasn’t smart, but, since you haven’t given me a recruitment speech, I can assume you aren’t still with them?”

“*No!”* she shouted, offended, taking a half step back. “They, they weren’t always like they are now! We just wanted equal treatment! But, but something went wrong. They lost their way. And, and when they went too far, I left.”

I nodded. “Okay.”

The ex-terrorist stared at me. “O-Okay?” she echoed, confused and off-balance.

“If you were a threat, Oz wouldn’t let you run free,” I replied. The Wizard hadn’t known who Cinder was allied with, but he was *well* aware of Ms. Belladonna’s identity. “He knows who you are, but that man’s a sucker for second chances. Not third, though.”

Blake stared at me for a long moment. “Are you on your second chance?”

Wincing, I thought of the Forever Fall Grimm Tide. “Maybe? Didn’t kill anyone, but, well, I’m an idiot sometimes.”

“Like attending Beacon with faked papers. And no Aura?” the cat-girl questioned, smirking slightly.

“How’d. . . . *Pyrrha,*” I sighed, wondering why my lover had shared *that* bit of stupidity. Well, it couldn’t hurt me now. Not when I apparently was the first magic user the Wizard had met in a *long* time. “Yeah,” I grimaced. “Not my best moment. But, *back on topic,* do I really remind you of Taurus?”

Now it was her turn to grimace. “Yes. No. You’re both strong. Confident. *Driven.* But he just wants to hurt people. And you. . . you *don’t*,” she declared, as if that was significant.

“I, um, yes?” I replied. “Not exactly a high bar to clear, there. But, that’s all it took to get on your shit-list? Not being incompetent?” *Not being Canon Jaune,* I added internally. “Where’d the ‘stare at me in the middle of the night’ bit come from, in that case?”

Blake looked away. “I. . . sorry. You just smelt. . . .”

“‘Wrong’,” I finished for her. “Just because I didn’t smell like a *newt*.”

“I, uh, yes. *Wrong*,” she agreed, embarrassed. She let out an annoyed laugh. “I argue that us Faunus aren’t animals, and I treated you like that because you smelled *different*. What’s *wrong* with me?”

Now it was my turn to laugh, Blake turning an annoyed glare my way. “Sorry. I’ve dealt with the same thing. Everyone has instincts, it doesn’t matter who you are. Denying them just means they’ll find ways to express themselves you didn’t expect. Knowing them, and mastering them, let’s you rise above them. Human, Faunus, *Dragon,* I smiled, “It’s all the same.”

The cat-girl rolled her eyes at that, still not believing me, but that wasn’t my problem. “Then, you’re not mad?” she asked, tone oddly hopeful.

“At you? Over the Grimm Tunnel?” I checked, and she nodded. “Like, a *little*,” I offered. “More ‘moderately annoyed’ than anything else. It wasn’t a mission, and you trusted your partner to know her territory. Now you know that Yang’s not confident, she’s *over*-confident, and that I’m not paranoid, I’m *suitably cautious.* Do it again, and we’ll have an issue, but we’re cool.”

Blake stared at me. “We’re. . . good? Just like that?”

“Just like that,” I affirmed.

“But. . . *Yang,*” the other girl argued.

“Is someone who should’ve known better,’ I replied. “I was fairly sure she was my friend, and past that my *girlfriend*, and we’d *already* gotten into that kind of situation and talked about it. She said she understood, and then either didn’t care, or couldn’t be bothered to remember. We *aren’t* friends, Blake, and we haven’t talked,” I pointed out, the girl wincing. “So how could I expect you to know that the world was more dangerous than you thought? Hell, it was more dangerous than *I* thought,” I amended. “And know that you know, will you do something like that again?”

“What? *No!”* the Faunus insisted.

I opened my hands, “And so we’re good. Blake, I didn’t really hold what happened against Ruby, because she is *young,* and Weiss, well, she at least had good reasons, *and* apologized unprompted. You, you had your own issues, and if they’re no longer issues, then we can move forward. Yang’s situation was. . . *different,* for all the reasons you heard.”

The girl stared at me. “But. You still saved me.”

Blinking, I lifted an eyebrow. “Um, yes? I wasn’t going to let you all go into danger without being there to help,” I pointed out.

“Not then,” she insisted. “When I was, when that spider got me. You saved me.”

I nodded, “I know. I was there.”

“But,” the dark-haired girl argued haltingly. “You did it even after I sided with Yang. Even though I didn’t like you.”

“Yes?” I replied.

Blake shook her head. “You didn’t even hesitate.”

“Yes?” I repeated.

“Even though the others were safe,” she insisted.

I stared at her. “I don’t really see how that matters,” I stated, not getting where she was going with this.

Blake smiled slightly, “You really don’t. Do you?”

“. . . No?” I more asked than said. “You were going to die. I said, ‘not today’.”

“Even thought it meant fighting that, that *thing?*” the Faunus questioned incredulously.

I shrugged, reiterating, “You were going to die.”

The cat-girl frowned. “And if it wasn’t me? If it was, Lave? Or Alex?”

*Who?* *Oh, right, the Bear Faunus and the rocket-tonfa girls on team LVND.* “I’d still do it,” I replied. *After all, the rest of my team would be safe.*

“And, and if it were someone like Cardin?” Blake questioned.

I looked the ex-White Fang terrorist dead in the eye. “Being a Huntsman is dangerous. Casualties happen. It’s regrettable, but I have to protect my own team.”

The other girl looked back, before shaking her head. “It’s nice to know you aren’t some storybook hero.”

“We don’t live in a storybook world,” I retorted, somehow managing to say that to the cat-girl who used her weaponized soul to fight shadow-monsters in our dorm at battle-school with a straight face.

“I’m aware,” Blake nodded. “Trust me. But. . . Jaune,” she said, seriously, staring at me. “When you went after me. You. . . you were a dragon,” she stated, sending a searching look my way.

*Well. . . shit. Guess she wasn’t as out of it as I thought,* I considered, keeping a confident smile on my face. “That’s because. . . *I am a Dragon,*” I retorted.

The Faunus’ searching look turned into an annoyed one. “Not like that. You turned *into* a Dragon.”

“I don’t need to turn into a dragon. Because I *am* a Dragon,” I insisted.

“*No,*” she insisted, stamping a foot. “I mean a *real* dragon. With wings-”

I manifested my wings.

“And claws-

I tapped my claws together, small in this form, looking almost like fingernails unless you really looked at them.

“And fire-”

I coughed up a bit of prismatic Flame into my hand, regarding it, before waving my hand, dismissing it into the air.

We stared at each other.

“. . . you’re an asshole,” Blake declared flatly, before flinching, cringing away from me.

“Yeah, a bit,” I agreed easily.

And now the other girl was just confused. “You’re. . . not mad?”

“I *was* being an asshole,” I shrugged. “So calling me one is just being honest. But, Blake, keep three things in mind.”

The Faunus peered at me. “And they are?”

“One, we were fighting a Grimm of incredible power that specialized in illusions,” I pointed out, which, while true, was a *little* misleading. “Two, it was draining you of your Aura and you passed out right as I got to you. . .”

Blake frowned, deep in thought. “And three?” she prompted.

“Three, *I* ***am*** *a Dragon,”* I insisted.

The Faunus stared at me for a long moment, before she rolled her eyes. “*Ass,*” she insisted, walking towards the door, and playfully pushing me out of the way. I went with the push, and she opened the door, telling me. “We’ve kept the others waiting long enough.”

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“And that’s what we fought down there,” I finished, having explained what Behemoths were, what they could do, and why their existence was hidden. Unsurprisingly, Weiss already knew about Grimm evolution, and had studied the Geist Behemoth incident, or at least the *public* version of events.

“That was one of the first deployments of the Atlesian Dragoon class battleship!” she’d exclaimed, once I started to describe the incident.

I looked at my gathered team, whose good cheer had dampened as I’d continued. “So, any questions?”

“I. . .” Ruby said, pulling her fists in to her chest, looking pitiful. “I’m sorry! We should’ve never gone down there! And you told us not to! And I didn’t listen! And if I’d- *ow!”* she exclaimed, as I took two quick steps and flicked her in the forehead. “Hey! What was that for!”

“It’s fine Ruby,” I told the small girl. “You’re young, thought you knew the territory, weren’t on my team, and you’re the leader of your own team. Oz made you the leader of RRWN, but that was meant to be a role you grew into, not one you were already ready for. The fact that you left half of you team *behind* wasn’t okay, and neither was the fact that you had *no* good reason to go down there. But learn from it, and don’t just jump headfirst into trouble, okay?” I asked, patting her on the head.

“O-Okay!” she agreed, blushing in embarrassment. “It won’t happen again!”

“We’re gonna find ourselves in danger. Let’s just make sure it’s for a good reason,” I reiterated, looking around. “Anyone else?”

“How’d you fight it!” Nora questioned. “It was *huge*, and we, were like, *super* dead, but you just fought it yourself!”

I lifted an eyebrow, “I blew up a small city, and only was able to make it run. If they hadn’t had as much Dust just lying around, I wouldn’t’ve been able to pull it off.”

Weiss shook her head. “Even with that. According to you it took a Dragoon to kill a Behemoth. And you were able to drive one off?”

“Yes,” I answered simply, “Because of this.” Holding a hand out, I spat a Flame into it, condensing its power until it was a solid ball, burning like a prismatic sun in my hand. Now that I’d been immersed in it, I could subtly feel it burn away the small amounts of Grimm Mist in the air, creating a pseudo-breeze that had *nothing* to do with the movement of air.

“Weiss, a stand?” I requested, and the girl nodded, one hand reaching into a pocket, and a glyph forming a thin pillar of ice near the wall, with a flaring base and a repeating crystalline pattern running up it length.

I dropped the sphere of Flame onto the top, and, on a whim, breathed a thin stream over the structure, sinking the fires into the ice with a gesture, the formation seeming to brighten as I did so. Mentally connecting the ball to the residue of the Flame still in the pillar, I decoupled it from myself, and stepped back, turning to the others, who were staring at the, admittedly Magical, torch.

“When it comes to fighting people,” I told them, “Pyrrha’s the best among us, no contest, and probably the best out of *anyone* in Beacon. Teachers excluded,” I added, as the woman in question opened her mouth to object. “But when it comes to killing *Grimm,* I very much doubt *anyone* is better at it than I am. Ask me to scout,” I nodded to Ren, “or protect,” a nod to Weiss, “or even hit something from extreme range,” a nod to Ruby, “And I’ll do an okay job, but in my specialty, I *excel*. Unfortunately, I excel because of my natural abilities, not because of a skill I can teach, but that doesn’t change the fact that, when I cut loose, anything less than a Tide, or a Behemoth, is almost certainly going to die.”

I chuckled, “Mind you, if you want anything *other* than a molten crater. Like, say, *saving* the town the Grimm have overrun, I’m still working on that.”

Silence greeted my statement, though not an awkward one, broken by Weiss. “There is something else. Behemoths. . . *exist.* But the images showed seven stages. Not five. Does that mean there are even *more* powerful Grimm out there?”

“If there are, Oz didn’t know about them. But he had no idea about the underground city either, so that just means that, if they do, they’ve stayed hidden for all of recorded history,” I shrugged.

“Or no one was able to record it,” Yang countered. We turned to look at her, and she explained, “Well, like ya said when you freaked out. What we found wasn’t something anyone had ever told anyone about. So, what if someone found one of those Super-Behemoths, but they didn’t live to tell anyone?” She winced, adding, “If it wasn’t for you and Pyrrha, we wouldn’t’ve.”

That. . . was absolutely possible. “And if the Behemoths show human-levels of intelligence, the. . . let’s call them *Titans* almost certainly would be the same,” I agreed. “And if Behemoths generally rampage, getting wiped out, the next step up would probably be more discrete.”

“Ugh, Grimm that attack you as soon as they see you are bad enough,” Yang spat. “Ones that stay hidden?”

Ruby frowned, “The big spider was hidden. Could it have been a, a Titan?”

“No,” Weiss disagreed with confidence, and I turned to look at her, not that sure myself. “I’ve been studying the footage we took. Step six, for *every* Grimm, was encased entirely in armor. As, as terrifying as that Aranea was, it still had gaps.”

“You mean it could’ve been *worse?”* Yang questioned, eyes wide. “*Holy shit.”*

*Agreed,* I thought. “Well, on the bright side the chances of us meeting one at Beacon are absolutely *zero,*” I reassured them. “And, if, *somehow*, something happens, we have an entire *combat school’s* worth of fighters to kick its ass. Plus all of the visiting teams from other schools for the Vytal Festival.”

Ren and Nora shared a look, the boy letting out a sigh, relaxing slightly, while the ginger girl grinned at her partner. At the same time, Ruby perked up. “Oh, right! They’ll be here too! I hope they’re nice!”

“Some will probably be, some will not, and some will likely pretend to be nice to get an edge in the tournament,” Pyrrha replied.

“Used to that, are ya?” Yang prodded with a smile.

The gladiatrix nodded. “Sick of it, would be closer to the truth. I do appreciate having friends that I *know* won’t use what they learn to try and use my relationship with them to win, nor cut off that relationship when they lose.”

“We’d *never* do that!” Ruby promised, aghast that anyone would do such a thing.

“Yeah,” Nora added. “We *know* you can kick our butts, and what’s a few broken bones between friends!”

Pyrrha laughed, shaking her head. “Thank you. Not all of them will be like that. Not being professional fighters, but Huntsman in training, *most* will likely not be, but *some* will, and they will be some of the seemingly friendliest.” Smiling, she added, “As odd as it may sound, I would suggest you be most suspicious of those from Haven.”

“But, *you’re* from Mistral!” Ruby argued. “And you’re really nice!”

“And I chose *not* to go to Haven,” Pyrrha pointed out. “For several reasons. Attempting to find a place where my fame would not define me, for one,” she said, smiling my way. “But I also wished to find friends, and not merely allies of convenience. And I do believe I have succeeded.”

“Aw,” Yang said, giving the gladiatrix a one-armed hug. “I’m glad we’re friends too!”