**Chapter 104**

After a few more days, allowing those that had been out on missions to limp back home, our next move in the face of this overwhelming Grimm threat was…

To go to class?

Asking him about it, the Wizard had smiled. “Heroic actions have their place, Jaune, but rushing in, while a surprisingly effective strategy for winning a battle, will see one lose the war. And this is only the beginning of this campaign. Trust me,” Oz had mused, swirling his drink as I tried to maintain two separate, distinct, and moving shapes with my Flame, “I have fought enough of them. How are things with your team?”

“Good,” I’d offered absently. “Everyone’s decided to pick a different type of Dust to specialize in. I’m going for Hard-Light.”

“Ah, that’s that *new* type that Atlas devised, isn’t it,” the wizard mused. “Artificial Dust, Artificial people, what will they think of next? Any luck so far?”

Losing one of the shapes, I had to resist the urge to focus *entirely* on it to fix it, slowing the spinning of the second transformation of the other to shift more towards the first, the delay causing it to further destabilize, but I was able to kick it back into a spin, having learned that *direct* conception was only good for static creations, and that thinking in *vectors* was what needed for this.

Sparing a glance towards my mentor, he *knew* that trying to make conversation was making this more difficult, which, likely, was *why he was doing it*, though the man had an *impressively* inscrutable poker face when he wanted to. Getting the first Flame back to how it *should* be, I finally answered, “Haven’t started. Weiss is our Dustcasting expert, so she’s putting together some lesson plans. And, well,” I nodded to the incandescent prismatic tesseracts, “*I’m kinda busy.*”

That got a chuckle from the man. “Delegation is a necessary skill, and it is good to see that you have learned it, young Jaune. It took me *several* lifetimes before I stopped trying to do everything myself.”

“I’ve only got so much time in the day,” I had shrugged, accidentally syncing up the spinning of both four-dimensional shapes, needing to flip and reverse one to put them on the sort of course The Wizard had asked. “And while I’m undoubtably more *powerful* than they are, power alone isn’t everything. After all, I very well may be more powerful than *you*, if I pull out the all stakes, but I have no doubt the outcome if we were to fight.”

Momentarily firming up my image of both Flames, I had paused their movement, glancing over at him, “Not that we have any reason to.”

Setting them spinning once more, on all four axis, I’d kept working, as the millenia-old reincarnator took another sip of his tea. “That’s something I’ve never had to consider,” Oz finally remarked. “When I was young, there were many stronger than myself, and, when I became powerful, I was *also* the most skilled, at least in the combative arts. That said, I’ve seen far too many believe their bit of strength is all that they require to succeed to take such knowledge for granted. That said, you are doing well, so I suppose it’s time we added a *third* construct.”

Pausing them again, I’d turned to look at the man. “I’ve only got the two hands!”

Lifting an eyebrow, dozens, then *hundreds* of points of green light had bloomed behind him, expanding into spoked wheels that formed an enormous mosaic of energy, clicking with mechanical precision, each tooth marked with an arcane sigil, forming interweaving runic circles.

“… And?”

They had twisted, shifting into a legion of blades, before closing up on themselves and vanishing into nothingness.

Sighing, I’d split off a bit of Flame from the two I had, combing it into a third, and, trying to start with step one, making a cube, *all* of them looked decidedly… *lumpy.* I could firm two up, but the third always lost cohesion, into a floating ball of Fire, though I could at least main its state floating in the air, an act that I achieved not through the Flame itself, but by a *tiny* bit of magic that it sat upon.

And, with Oz content to watch me give it the old college try before he offered some help, I got back to it.

The next day, when classes resumed, as we all filed into Oobleck’s class, a couple days later, everyone was just kind of… there. While the energy in the morning class wasn’t ever *high,* now it seems almost *morose*, which, we were still alive, we could keep going, what was the issue? Like, *I* wasn’t exactly raised to fight the Grimm, and Jaune had been deliberately kept *out* of a Battle School, but, this *is* what these people trained for, right?

The rest of my team were ready to go, to varying degrees, and even if Nora was only working at half-blast, that was *still* several times the standing energy of your average Huntsman Student.

“Good *morning,* students,” Oobleck greeted, zipping to the front of his desk, seeming tired himself, but starting off his lesson as he always did. “In light of… *recent events,* the report that was due today will instead be due at the end of this week. Today we will be continuing our review of the post-Great-War period, and the events leading up to, depending on who you ask, the Faunus Uprising, the Faunus Rights Revolution, or the Faunus War. Now, last time we discussed how the elimination of those Humans of fighting age provided opportunity, of many sorts, in decreaced guards to oversee Faunus Slaves in Mistral and Atlas, and in the opening of new positions that enterprising Faunus, who, due to a wide variety of factors, had been kept out of various fields, now, by necessity, were allowed into said protected trades.”

“*Both* factors increased the ability of Faunus, as a group, to make war, against *all* of Humanity, not merely those who had oppressed them,” the Professor noted. “though, as they would argue, all were ‘complicit in the system of oppression,’ which, though it successfully galvanized them as a people, and ultimately secured them a Homeland in Menagerie, did a great deal of damage to ongoing efforts to reduce racial tensions which are only, within the last decade, returning to previous levels. Now, open your books to pages two-seventy-three and- yes Ms. Kallis?”

The bear Faunus from team LVND had lifted a hand, and Blake, who was *theoretically* trying to keep her own non-Human nature a secret, perked up, having to hold her tongue after the *fifth* time in a week the catgirl was vocally pro-Faunus and Pyrrha had, discreetly, pointed out that the black-haired teen was making it *really easy* to guess what she *really was.* As such, she settled for chiming in whenever someone *else* made a comment first, which… *wasn’t what my partner had suggested,* but close enough.

However, that was not what Lave wanted to talk about. “Mr. Oobleck?” she questioned.

*“Doctor* Oobleck,” the green-haired man corrected. “I did not earn my accreditation for nothing! But, yes?”

“What about Sapphire?” the girl asked, and I frowned, confused.

The professor, however, hesitated, “What *about* Team SFRE, Ms. Kallis?”

The brunette hesitated, casting a glance to the seats that the team normally used. The *empty* seats. “Well, um, where are they?”

“Ah. We… are not certain, but it is highly likely that they will… *not be returning,* as they are not answering their scrolls, their Huntsman has been… *forcefully retired,* and the town they were sent to assist… *no longer exists,”* Oobleck stated. “At least as more than ruins, and another dark reminder that de-prioritizing defense has a nasty-habit of de-prioritizing any long-term plans, as you will no longer be present to enact them.”

“Shouldn’t we be out looking for them?” Kobe, of team SLMN questioned. “They might need help!”

The green-haired man shook his head, with short, forceful motions. “A bullhead and Huntress were dispatched, and as an efficiently deep scan was performed, but with the ongoing difficulties, of which several of your comrades have struggled quite mightily against, it was deemed that her time would be better spent elsewhere. A conclusion that I cannot bring myself to disagree with. While their bodies, nor their weapons, have been found, it is most likely they have perished, and, until they make contact, which they have no reason not to do at this point. Rest assured, if we receive word of their survival, Headmaster Ozpin *will* mobilize us to retrieve them.”

From the back, Cardin sneered, “If the Headmaster’s *so concerned* he shoulda shared what’s keeping Beacon safe with Vale. If he hadn’t been so selfish, then there’d be a lot less deaths. But he doesn’t care about *them*, does he?”

The class went completely quiet.

Ooobleck stared at the Councilman’s son for a long moment, the boy’s own chin thrust in defiance, the older man removing his glasses to clean them with a sigh, “…I am aware, Mr. Winchester, given your *appalling* performance in my class so far, that geography is *not* your strong suite, nor is politics, logistics, culture, or history in general, but Beacon is not *part of Vale*. It is located within the borders of the *country* of Vale, however, by its founding charter, this institution is not *answerable* to Vale, City or Country. Furthermore, as you seem to have somehow overlooked this fact, Headmaster Ozpin is not the *King* of Vale, and is thus not responsible for the safety of its peoples.”

Donning his eyewear, instead of speaking with almost frantic excitement, the Huntsman’s words were slow, and measured. “There *is* no King of Vale. No, there are instead *five Councilors* of which *your father is one*, Mr. Winchester, so, perhaps, if you are *truly* concerned for the well being of your countrymen, you would ask why it was that City Hall, as well as your father’s *familial* domicile, that retained the defenses originally slated for installment all *over* Vale, while the plans for public shelters were scuppered for, I believe your grandfather claimed, ‘budgetary reasons’. A conclusion that your father, who took over for Samuel, despite the position *not* being a hereditary one, agreed with, as, while the places that *he* frequented were suitably protected, as were the other four, those locales not regularly patronized by such peoples of premium privledge, were left bereft of such things when they *needed them most*.”

I could almost *see* the brutish racist mentally flipping through his pre-prepared script, and come up empty, finally demanding aggressively, “What’re you tryin’ to say?”

“Ah, I see you still do not understand. Then again, given your *other* avowed positions, a level of willing ignorance is likely seen as a *feature* in your subculture, not a flaw,” the teacher mused dryly, and with dark humor. “Let me try this explanation again, but slower. *The Vale Council is in charge of Vale.* When *Good* things happen, they, rightly, receive credit. When *Bad* things happen, they, rightly, *receive credit.* They, like *many* leaders throughout history, *do not like this.* Because of this fact, they try and convince *others* that, while the *Good* things are theirs, the *Bad* things are not. For instance, that the Relic, which was buried into Beacon’s foundations when it was built, can somehow be *copied*.”

Rallying, Cardin declared, “Well, Vale deserves it more! More people would’ve survived if-”

*“****Where. Were. You?****”* Oobleck, good nature gone, questioned, each word spat out with tones that seemed academic on the surface, but under that held a simmering *sea* of anger.

Blinking, and taking a subconscious step back, the instructor no longer seeming scatterbrained and good natured, but like a predator about to strike, the brawny teen sputtered, “I, uh, what?”

“When the Nevermores Swarmed? I was there. Slaying them in the thousands. *A third of this class* mobilized. Knowing it was voluntary. Wishing to help. Another third couldn’t. They were *dealing with their own Grimm attacks on their mission.* Some who helped were of limited assistance. Others, like Ms. Schnee, Ms. Davies, and Ms. Poledina were of *nearly incalculable assistance.*”

“By my estimation we killed a combined Thirty-eight thousand, four hundred and twenty-six Nevermores, plus or minus four thousand, eight-hundred, and fourteen Professor Oobleck!” the Atlesian automaton added, *completely* unable to read the room.

“…Yes. And for that I’m *sure* Vale is grateful. I know *I* am,” the green-haired man informed her with a nod, giving the ginger gynoid a sincere smile, though the expression fell off his face with his trademark speed as he turned to regard the Vale Councilor’s son. “But tell me, Mr. Winchester. *Where. Were. You?”* The green-haired man questioned.

“I, uh, well I, uh, no one said we *had* to go!” the boy tried to rally, but, from the looks of the rest of the class, he’d lost any moral ground he’d originally held. “And *Dove* went!”

“Dude… Just… Don’t bring me into this,” the blonde boy muttered, looking down and away.

Still utterly, *unnaturally* still, Oobleck noted, tone respectful, “And you acquitted yourself with Honor, Mr. Bronzewing.” Surprised, the trainee Huntsman looked up, met the green-haired man’s gaze, and nodded in thanks. Returning to, for lack of a better term, his *quarry,* the Doctor stated in icy tones, “Mr. Winchester, if you do, one day, *finally* decide to study History, you will learn that it is those that risk themselves, those that *contribute*, that then determine how society functions. Those societies who do not work that way practice *slavery*, though many will cloak their abominable practices in a shroud of sweet smelling sophistry, bearing patterns of hypnotizing complexity to trap those who cannot, or will not, look beyond them.”

“But for that to function one must have power over those they seek to oppress,” the Huntsman stated, hand casually reaching over to pick up his thermos, which, with a single, fluid flick, extended out into a combination club *flamethrower,* as he continued, “and to be so foolish as to attempt to attack a *Huntsman Academy*… Let us just sale that Vale has suffered *enough*, and that while your father’s protections are sufficient to stop *small birds*, well, some members of our staff have… *storied* histories, and none so much as Madam Sepper. ***The Blade of The King****.* Who was… *quite* vocal in her displeasure involving the dissolution of the Monarchy, and retired in protest, half a century ago, give or take a few years.”

“Wait, Mrs. Sepper is *that old?*” Yang questioned quietly. “Damn, I hope I look as good as *she* does at that age.”

Casting an amused look my way, Pyrrha idly commented, “Perhaps.”

“I, I, you can’t just say that!” Cardin exclaimed, *terrified,* hand grasping at the weapon he *did not carry*, and, seemingly, only noticing *now* that over half the class were still armed. I’d checked with Oz, and, given the current issues, waiting for a rocket-locker delivery seemed *unwise.*

Lifting an eyebrow, the Professor calmly questioned, “And is there anything that I have said that is *false?* Be aware, *Mr. Winchester,* of the two of us, one teaches history, and one *barely* maintains a C average in it.”

As Cardin struggled to respond, Dr. Oobleck nodded, folding his weapon back to its thermos configuration once more “*Indeed*. Now, perhaps you should take your seat, and leave your rabble rousing for the commons, where you will not be wasting everyone else’s time, and are not *guaranteed* to cross verbal swords with your intellectual superior, though the chances of you doing so regardless, given your *current* armament, are *still* quite high.”

*“Damn,”* Blake commented under breath. “I would normally say that’s harsh, but…”

“*Cardin,”* Weiss agreed, shaking her head, as, after a moment, class continued, though I noticed the others paying *far* more attention than they normally did.

Dustcasting class was… *just like it’d been before,* and this week’s Field Trip had been cancelled for… *obvious reasons.*

Which meant that, with the extra time, we all tried our hand at working with our respective Dust types, and…

Well, Weiss hadn’t been lying, Dustcasting using Hard-Light Dust was *hard as balls*. And that was *with* me cheating like an absolute *motherfucker*, my **Talent** working so strongly I could *feel* it spinning away, Weiss making ample use of her Glyphs to arrange for targets, give demonstrations, and so on for everyone else on our team, but, with all of that going for me, as well as my being, you know, *A Freaking Dragon*, with *oodles* of Aura to spare…

I made a ripple.

It wasn’t even a particularly *large* ripple.

Just kind of an odd… *Pulse* of Light, that pushed some air around, and only extended for about three feet.

*Woo.*

And, checking, grabbing some Ice Dust, I *filled* my target with icicles in about twenty-five seconds of casting, getting the visualization down enough to turn them into *actual spears*, though I focused a bit too much on the Creation so a fourth of them just bounced off, not moving fast enough to do serious damage.

But *Hard-Light* Dust?

It was another twenty minutes before I made another *ripple.*

And this one was smaller than the last!

At least the *others* were having luck, an *astounding* amount of luck, actually, according to our resident expert, but, well, my Blood *had* been empowering them, so a natural talent with Dust, while not what I expected, wasn’t too far outside the realm of possibility.

Thursday, however, began with Port’s class, as he had us take turns telling *our* tales, which were… eye opening.

Not because they offered new insight to the Grimm that we were facing.

No, it was because, for the most part, of how *little* happened to them, yet, simultaneously, how *harried* they were by their experiences.

One had even faced a *Grimm Alpha!*

It was a *Beowulf*.

And, props to Lave for using her Semblance to trap it, tanking its bite while it was fighting Quinn, whose Semblance helped him match his foe, setting it up for Alex to finish it off with her rocket tanfas, while Dusty used *his* Semblance to keep the other lesser Beowulfs at bay, but… glancing over at my team, *any one of us* could’ve taken it out solo, even Ren or Weiss, who both weren’t *terribly* proficient in direct combat.

Penny’s team, when asked, clammed up, the Indian looking girl with a golden sun symbol instead of a dot on forehead who I was *pretty* sure was named Ciel merely standing up and stating, “That information is classified,” and sitting back down.

“I, that’s it?” Ruby questioned, disappointed.

Standing once more, Ciel nodded. “It is.” And then she sat back down.

“And sometimes it is best *not* to speak of what happened,” Port smiled, “Especially when dealing with the military of other nations, which the Atlas Academy teams are all considered. Now, Ms. Rose, perhaps you would wish to share *your* team’s exploits?”

Perking up, the mini reaper smiled. “Oh, sure! We killed a Tide!”

*“Pull the other one,”* Cardin sneered, having recovered from his tongue lashing a few days prior.

“But, we *did!* Well, they kinda ran, but Weiss and I took out a Windigo!” the speedster bragged. “It. Was. *Awesome!”*

Glaring, the larger man started to respond, “Oh, come on, *you?”* Ruby smile wilted, as he insulted her. “You *really* think we’d believe-”

*“****Cardin?***” I growled. *“****Shut the fuck up.****”*

“*Or we’ll* ***shut*** *you up,*” Yang added, eyes crimson.

Turning his ire my way, the boy hesitated, before, glancing around, and clearly thinking himself safe with a teacher present, ignoring the fact that Port *wasn’t saying anything,* the Human demanded, “You think you’re better than me, *Animal?”*

Smiling at the asshole, my answer was simple. *“****Yes.*** Because I kill *Alphas* like you kill *Common Grimm*.”

The trainee Huntsmen once more hesitated, before he laughed scornfully, though it *was* forced, as Dove and Sky both leaned away from the boy who declared, “If you’re gonna lie, at least make it *believable!*”

Turning towards the *actual* Huntsman in the room, I requested, “Port?”

“Ah, Mr. Arc, you *are* mistaken,” he stated, taking out his Scroll and tapping away at it, with a humor that caused me to hold my tongue even as Cardin sneered in victory, opening his mouth, but cut off as our professor stated, “As you, personally, killed eleven Alphas, of varying strength, while Cardin, from his Mentor’s report, only killed eight Grimm in total. It would be *unfair* to state those numbers are the same.”

*“Bullshit!”* The spoiled brat spat. “He probably had another *Animal* as his *handler*. We all know how they lie!”

*Slap!* went Yang’s hand, as she facepalmed, while Blake *glared* at him, and Pyrrha merely sighed, shaking her head.

Port, *deeply* amused, questioned, “Mr. Winchester. Am *I* an ‘Animal’?”

“No, of course not, sir,” the Councilor’s son stated respectfully, “but just cause whoever the lizard was working with was a Huntsman doesn’t mean he was a *Huntsman*, if you know what I mean.”

*“HAH!”* Nora laughed, covering her mouth, Ruby giggling, Ren greyed slightly as he kept his poker face, and Weiss lifted an upraised palm in the universal gesture for ‘*How can you be this stupid?’*

“What?” Cardin demanded.

“Mr. Winchester,” Port stated. “Given I *was* Mr. Arc’s Huntsman Mentor, I can attest to his prowess as *I was there.* In fact,” he turned, clicking a remote, and, behind him, an image of Yang slamming a flaming uppercut into an Alpha Beowulf’s heat, Ember Cecelia having fired at the exact right moment to blow out the top of its head, her hair a blaze of yellow fire, appearing on the whiteboard, “I have *video evidence* of team ABYN’s performance at Gabbro, along with my own, and those defenders that had survived by the time we arrived.”

“Oh, *nice form*,” I complimented the blonde, who was staring at the image as if she didn’t recognize it.

“W-What?” she questioned, glancing my way, unsure how to take the praise. “Thanks?”

Pyrrha nodded. “Indeed, Yang. Did you double-charge your weapon?”

“I, uh, yeah, I did,” the brawler smiled. “Needed the extra oomph to break through, ya know!”

“Quite well done, Ms. Xiao-Long,” the professor nodded, clicking the remote, showing Blake the edges of her form oddly blurred, taking out an Alpha Brucha, hanging in the air amidst an upwards rain of deadly quills, Gambol Shroud’s Kama form buried in its eye to, from the still image, crack the things fairly dense *mask*. “You as well Ms. Belladonna. It takes great skill, to thread a Brucha’s volley, which is why *I* normally just charge straight through them!”

The next image was of Pyrrha, reaching upwards, Miló a red-gold blurred streak as it exited the back of a descending Taotile Alpha’s back, the dog, crocodile, thing clearly dead, even if it didn’t know it yet.

*Wait,* I realized, *None of these images show the Grimm formations*. They were clearly taken with the city’s cameras, but zoomed in so far that the more wild Grimm around them seemed normal for a Tide, and didn’t reveal the *regimented* Grimm further back. Furthermore, while she *was* wearing the backpack of Ruby and my Seraphim System, it *hadn’t* been deployed yet in this shot, keeping its functionality secret.

My suspicions were confirmed, on the last photo, which showed my tearing the throat out of the Catoblepaux Alpha, both of us so large that it was impossible to *fully* obscure the background enemies, and, from Penny’s, “*Hmmmm,”* I could tell she’d spotted them in the background.

“Uh, is that a new kind of Grimm?” someone asked.

“No, *that* would be Mr. Arc. Can’t be dissolved by a Catoblepaux’s poison gas if you burn it up before it touches you, after all!” Port grinned. “Has Timonious been giving you pointers, Jaune?”

I shook my head, “No, I just saw him do it at the last Tide Trip we took, and figured, ‘Why not?’”

Turning around in her seat to look back at me, Steff of SLMN stated, “Uh, dude? You’re kinda nuts.”

“*I* like to think he’s *effective,”* Pyrrha smiled indulgently.

The blonde girl gave the redhead a skeptical look. “Yeah. When the *Invincible Girl* thinks you’re ‘effective’? *You’re nuts.”*

The gladiatrix’s expression turned a little plastic at that, as she turned away from the girl, and regarded Port, questioning, “Professor, do you wish a report from ourselves as well?”

“No need, Ms. Nikos,” he deferred. “But the important thing to remember, is that you should *not* compare yourselves to others, students, as you all have varying degrees of strength, skill, and suitability for the mission you have undertaken, *or found yourselves on,* as the two are often *not* the same! No, you should take what you have done, refine it, and improve upon it, becoming a *magnificent* and *marvelous* specimen of a Huntsman or Huntress. *Like myself!”*

Rolling my eyes, the bell rang a few moments later, and I realized the man had *timed* it that way, shaking my head at the understated skill the man possessed, which, given how *overstated* he was about all his others, could easily be overlooked.

“Come on!” Nora urged, grabbing her bookbag, and, with two steps, vaulted the fifteen feet to the floor. *It’s Chicken and Waffles!* It’s like pancakes, *but square!* Isn’t that *weird!”*

While the others slowly gathered up their equipment, and slowly made their way down the stairs, I followed our resident Ginger, Pyrrha practically floating down after me, the rest following a moment later, as we headed off to lunch, leaving Cardin behind.