

To Begin Again

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/13097799) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/13097799>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Categories:	F/M , Gen
Fandoms:	Fallout: New Vegas , RWBY , Fallout (Video Games) , Fallout Tactics (Video Game)
Characters:	Summer Rose (RWBY) , Ruby Rose (RWBY) , Yang Xiao Long , Ozpin (RWBY) , Ulysses (Fallout) , Courier (Fallout)
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2017-12-22 Updated: 2018-02-19 Words: 37,743 Chapters: 6/?

To Begin Again

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Summary

Natives of the Wasteland invade Beacon Academy. The Courier, still amnesia-ridden, follows them and fights to protect Beacon. She meets Team RWBY, two particular members appearing too familiar for the Courier's liking. In the midst of battle and blood, an unexpected reunion unfolds.

Battle of Beacon

Today was, at first glance, just another joyous, merry day at the Vytal Festival.

Student Huntsmen teams were battling it out in the first rounds of the tournament. Victors and losers alike left the stage to explore the various shops and game stands scattered throughout the fairgrounds. Though the competitive air between each Kingdom persisted, tourists formed quick friendships with the locals in their shared enthusiasm of the celebrations.

The summer sun overhead shone with a radiance that only amplified everyone's spirits.

The blue streaks of lightning that sporadically flashed every few seconds were the first signs that today was no longer the festive holiday everyone was hoping to enjoy.

Many assumed the lightning bolts were a preamble for some grand exhibition put up by overly theatric showmen. They also assumed that the hulking metallic figures that appeared after the flashes were also part of the celebration. The lean yellow eye slits and the feral shape of the horns on the helmets should have been telling signs of something more sinister, but too many were too high on adrenaline and battle lust to come to such a conclusion. Civilians and student huntsmen looked on not in doubt and suspicion but with fascination and curiosity.

No one was certain who fired the first shot. Perhaps a drunken huntress or huntsman was being too liberal with their newly purchased Dust rounds, or perhaps the giant human-like tanks were set to instigate a hostile conflict immediately once the cloudless lightning storm ended. Regardless of how exactly the battle began, the battle itself was one all of Remnant would remember for years to come.

Ruby Rose could not hear the blaring screams of panic and pain or the rapid, messy succession of gunshots. The smell of sizzling smoke and burnt cloth and armor eluded her senses. She could barely feel the blood splattered across her face. What captivated Ruby into a never-ending, hypnotic trance was the dry pile of ash before her. A kind old man who had been serving her team a well-earned lunch once stood where the ash lay. A single stream of white, crimson light from one of the metal men had changed that in an instant.

Fortunately, the battle cries of her teammates soon returned many of Ruby's senses. Shoving a flat piece of partially destroyed wood off her leg, Ruby whipped out Crescent Rose and assumed a defensive stance. The endless months and years of training kicked in and took over. Weiss, rapier drawn with the recently modified Dust chamber rotating, took her place beside Ruby. One of Weiss' glyphs formed in front of the partners and shielded them from a volley of lasers. Ruby look through her scope and fired back at the metal men. Faintly, she could hear Blake's rare but ferocious howls of determination and Yang's semblance-fueled shrieks.

Eventually, there came a lull in the fighting. The metal men surrounding Team RWBY were either incapacitated or had chased after the other festival-goers and Huntsmen. The

fairgrounds were in a smoky, torn ruin. Bodies upon bodies were lined alongside ash piles. Stragglers were weeping to themselves, looking through the wreckage, or doing both. There was also blood, too. Ruby pretended that the bloodstains were just ketchup stains that got everywhere, like during one of their past food fights. The blood didn't feel or smell like ketchup, obviously, but it still helped Ruby keep her mind on the here and now.

Before Ruby's heavy breathing could relax, Yang pulled the younger girl into her arms. "Are you okay, Ruby? Where are you hurt? Did they hit you? Is your Aura still good? Is that your blood?!"

"She's fine," Weiss cut in, eyelids blinking hastily as she tried to stabilize her own breath. "We're fine. One of those - those monsters just vaporized dozens of people, right in front of us. I don't know who, but..." Weiss' gaze drifted to a mutilated arm, the rest of its body buried under the rubble of a food stand. "What are these things?"

Blake, blackened dirt and ash covering all over her body, was kneeling near an unmoving, un-vaporized stranger. Her fingers were pressed against the body's neck, under the fish gills. Frowning, Blake looked toward the direction of Beacon Academy, of the towering school buildings pass a line of trees. "The fighting's getting closer to the campus. We should go help, regroup with the other students and the professors." Blake was about to say more, but Ruby upchucking her lunch to the side took priority.

"Ruby!" Yang shouted, hugging her sister protectively. Yang tried to wipe the blood off Ruby's face, leaving reddish smudges across the girl's cheeks and forehead. "Talk to me, Ruby. Are you okay? Do we need to get you to a medic?" Ruby couldn't form any words. She just buried her head into Yang's shoulder.

Straightening her back, Weiss consulted her scroll. "Whoever these metal men are, they seem to be jamming our communications. I have no signal."

"Neither do I," Blake added.

"Don't know where my scroll is," Yang said. Gently, she pulled out Ruby's scroll, only for it to explode in fiery sparks.

Another one of the metal men had his odd, intricate energy rifle poised to fire. Tossing it aside, he pulled out his sidearm and began firing. Yang dove to the ground in an attempt to shield Ruby. Blake and Weiss, through a combination of speed and dexterity, closed in on the man and disarmed him. Now on his knees, Blake held her gun to his head. Weiss's sword was an inch away from his throat. The armor of the metal men were hardly plastic costumes, but enough force with their Dust-infused weapons at this range would be enough to knock him out.

"Why are you attacking Beacon?" Blake growled. "Why are you killing so many innocent people?"

The metal man was silent. His vacant stare conveyed nothing.

Weiss glanced at the sisters of Team RWBY. If they could, Yang's raging red eyes would have killed the man on the spot. As it was, Yang was more concerned with taking care of Ruby. "Tell us who you are," Weiss demanded from their prisoner.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the man answered, in a gravelly, echoing voice. "We are the only salvation for a tortured world and its people. Without us, humanity is sure to perish."

"Salvation?" Weiss repeated in disbelief. She waved her arm to gesture at the battlefield. "What kind of slaughter like this constitutes as salvation?"

Before an answer could be had, another flash of lightning blinked before them.

The new figure that suddenly appeared was easily twice the size as one of the metal men. Its muscles were enormous, rudimentary armaments placed over rough green skin. In its hands was a giant mallet, not too unlike Nora's signature weapon. The beast gave a guttural yell as he swung the hammer. Weiss dodged the blow, but Blake was sent flying off into the distance.

Yang and Weiss stood at the ready. Ruby, though still feeling sick and exhausted, stood with her teammates. The green giant looked at the three with a curious expression before turning to the metal man.

"Why you use codeword?" the giant asked. "Codeword only for Phase 3. Phase 3 not happen until Commander gives signal. Commander give no signal."

"It was an emergency," the metal man said, retrieving his fallen weapons.

"Emergency? Ha! Four puny humans mean emergency?"

"It's not just them. The other Huntsmen, even the younger ones. They're stronger and faster than the eggheads predicted. Look around us." The plethora of metal men bodies was very evident, but it still hardly compared to the non-metal bodies or the ash piles.

"Bah! Power armor weak. Super Mutant strong! Little girls not so tough. Already tossed one far away."

"Hey!" Yang shouted to the bickering duo. "If you're done talking, we still need to finish this!" She readied her gauntlets and prepared to launch herself at them.

While the metal man took a hesitant step back, the green giant barked a laugh. "Golden human talks tough. Can golden human beat Super Mutant? I don't think so." The giant stepped forward, but the metal man caught him by his oversized wrist.

"Wait a second. Where's the rest of your team? They were supposed to teleport with you."

The confidence the giant portrayed was now replaced by nervousness. "Uhhhh, about that. Phases 4 and 5 might not happen until very, very later. Home base attacked by strong humans. Rest of squad went to stop them."

"The base is under attack? Is the teleporter secure?"

"Uhhhh..."

With another blue flash of lightning, a new human-looking figure appeared.

A flurry of movement followed that Weiss and Yang could barely keep track of. The new arrival had some sort of long rifle with a scope attached to it. He fired point blank at the green giant. Blood-drenched skin and brain matter burst into the air. The metal man fired at the new stranger hopelessly. Dodging the green orbs of energy, the stranger pulled out a revolver and shot the back of the metal man's knee. The metal man gave a cry of pain as he fell forward onto his stomach. He could do nothing as his rifle was taken from him. More green orbs were unloaded onto his face, his entire head melting into a green goop similar to that of the ash piles.

The helmet on the new figure wasn't like the metal men's. This helmet had a dented dome covering the back and top of his head. The visor glowed a distinct red color. Over his mouth was what appeared to be a gas filter. Instead of donning a completely metal body, he wore a brown trench coat and blue jeans along with bandoleers and various pieces of metal and leather armor attached all over him. A hood seemed to be hanging over his collar and lay suspended over the back of his neck.

Reloading the giant sniper rifle – an anti-material rifle by the looks of it, if Ruby's mind was clear enough to make the distinction – the trench coated man regarded the junior Huntresses with a tilted head, expressing intrigue.

"And who are you supposed to be?" Weiss questioned him. Her tone was oozing with distrust.

"Not an enemy," the slightly muffled and surprisingly feminine voice responded. After taking a gander of the surroundings, the trench coated woman gently set down her rifle and her pistol. She held her hands up, stretching her gloved fingers. "I come in peace. Mostly."

"Those weapons say otherwise," Weiss pointed out, remarkably cool-headed given the situation. The need to fight and survive trumped the need to think too closely about the macabre scene and the dead bodies, it seemed. "And you just killed a man." The armored fellow was probably a man. The grotesque giant was another story.

"Yes. Yes, I did. Hence, mostly in peace." The stranger lightly kicked the green mutant's side. "Not them, though. They came here to fight. I came here to stop them."

"So you're supposed to be on our side or something?" Yang asked, still ready to launch forward. "Who even are you, anyway?"

It took a long pause for an answer to formulate. "They call me the Courier."

"Yeah, we're gonna need more than that."

Ruby spat out some excess vomit and gulped. She eyed the Courier warily. Even without weapons, whatever semblance she might have would still make her dangerous. Despite that, the Courier setting down her weapons just had to be a good sign. It wasn't a taunting gesture,

like something Roman Torchwick might have done. The Courier appeared honest in her actions and words.

"Who are these metal people?" Ruby asked. Her voice felt strained, probably from all the vomiting and screaming. "They're just... killing so many. Why?"

The Courier's shoulders slumped slightly. She looked to the ground, almost shamefully so. "It's a long story. The short version: everything you have, they want for themselves." The Courier nodded to her weapons. "Can I, or...?"

"Don't move!" Weiss commanded, positioning her sword to thrust forward if need be. "You can't honestly expect us to take some stranger's words and –" Weiss shut her mouth. Behind the Courier, past all the carnage and waddling survivors, was the absolute last thing any of them needed.

A legion of Atlesian Knights General Ironwood had brought to Beacon were meant to keep any potentially lingering Grimm from the nearby Emerald Forest at bay. Either the metal men had taken out the Knights or the collective negative energy generated from the on-going battle was too much for the Grimm to ignore.

Blake was hopping over Beowolf after Beowolf with the odd Ursa mixed in, slashing each one's backside as she made her way toward her team. "Run!" she yelled to the civilians. "Get out of here! Run, now!" Some were already on the run, and some were already caught by Grimm claws and jaws. Blake shouted to her team, "A little help?!"

The Courier forewent the attempts at conciliatory negotiations and dashed for her weapons. Yang and Weiss were too busy taking on the Grimm to stop her.

One Beowolf lunged for the Courier as she picked up her magnum. She shot at the Beowolf's thigh, staggering the beast, but the Grimm managed to pin the Courier to the ground with its heavier body. The Beowolf lifted its claw to cut into the Courier's insides. Fortunately, Ruby's scythe dismembered its arm before it could hit flesh. Ruby sliced off its head for good measure. The Grimm fell to its side, allowing the Courier to sit up and stare at the rapidly deteriorating wolf.

"Are you... okay?" Ruby tentatively asked. The Courier shook her head, muttering to herself.

"Déjà vu," the Courier murmured. She looked over her anti-material rifle and glanced at Ruby's own scoped weapon. "Is that a gun?"

"Uh, yeah."

A howl louder and stronger than all the others attracted the Courier's and Ruby's gazes. Standing with a hunched back atop a ginormous pile of ash was an Alpha Beowolf, its eyes set on the two snipers.

Ruby and the Courier cocked their rifles, looked through their scopes, and fired.

X

Professor Ozpin of Beacon Academy had been preparing to prevent all-out war that would consume all of Remnant for the longest time.

If the defenses of the Academy and the resolve of its students and staff were to be tested to their limits, he had expected it to be against an onslaught of Grimm and an assortment of that woman's lieutenants and servants.

Instead, it was an entirely new, unknown enemy that was threatening to destroy everything Ozpin and his friends and allies had fought so hard to build together.

Most of the civilians and tourists who were fortunate enough to avoid ground zero were quickly evacuated thanks to James' quick coordination of his airships. That left the professors, the students, and Atlas' army to combat the "metal men," as the reports were calling them. Ozpin took some gratification in that these metallic warriors' movements implied that they held no intention of assaulting Beacon Tower. Amber did not seem to be their primary objective. Instead, on a more negative note, an indiscriminate high body count was what they seemed to be trying to achieve.

The laser and energy-based weaponry of the metal men had made easy work of most of the Atlesian Knights. On Ozpin and Glynda's recommendations, James repositioned his forces to help fortify their safeguards against the Grimm. Student and professional Huntsmen and Huntresses from all Kingdoms battled the metal men throughout the campus grounds. The fighting was messy, to say the least. The lasers burnt through Aura-generated shields faster than most Dust-based munitions, but the agility, ferocity, and ingenuity of the Huntsmen teams proved to be a great challenge for the invaders.

Glynda and the other professors were on the ground, assisting with the fighting directly. Ozpin and James had opted to remain in their respective command centers, Ozpin in his office and James in his lead airship, to coordinate their people with the larger battlefield in mind. Their coordination was hindered by the signal jammers put against everyone's scrolls, but they had their tech-savvy people already on the case.

From his elevated tower, Ozpin watched on as explosions went off, unmoving bodies and collections of ash piled up, and the sound of weapon discharge reverberated from the distant ground to even his own ears.

Still, Winter Schnee's reinforcements were due to arrive within the hour, and assuming Taiyang, Qrow, and the other veteran Huntsmen currently in the field received his messages, Ozpin was confident his forces would end the day in triumph.

Then, more of that mysterious blue lightning flashed before his eyes.

Instead of strictly striking the area around the fairgrounds, the lightning sporadically appeared across the entire Academy. It took Ozpin a moment to realize the flashes coincided with the placement of metal men troops spread about the campus. After the flashes, human-like behemoths with olive-colored skin began to fight alongside the metal men.

In minutes, the tide of the battle turned for the worst. These boisterous and self-proclaiming "Super Mutants" were pushing the Huntsmen back.

The metal men were the vanguard. Now that Beacon's forces were more or less scattered, the Super Mutants were meant to overwhelm them.

Ozpin, setting down his mug and picking up his cane, sauntered to the elevator. Though friendly reinforcements would surely arrive soon, and Ozpin was fairly confident in his Huntsmen's ability, there was too high a chance that woman's agents will take advantage of this ever-growing chaos to pursue their goals. Further preparations had to be made should the vault be attacked, either by these strange invaders, Grimm, or them.

Ozpin and the others will need to accelerate their plans for Pyrrha Nikos and Ruby Rose, assuming that they survive the battle.

X

Ruby can't remember the last time she's felt so dead inside.

She's fought Grimm. Grimm are inhuman, nightmarish monsters. Grimm are the things that took away her mother. Grimm easy to fight and cut up and kill.

She's fought criminals. White Fang and thieving thugs deserved a good kick to the head for their racism and breaking the law. They usually had just enough residual Aura to take a direct shot from Crescent Rose and feel it in the morning. It was a delight to play superhero, fighting like a real Huntress for the sake of the innocent, just like in her old storybooks.

She's fought other Hunters, during classes and the tournament. Those were always fun adventures in their own right. All the cool, customized weapons to admire, the unique semblances to overcome, the satisfaction of beating them in a fair fight...

These "Paladins" and "Mutants," as the Courier called them, weren't things Ruby would have ever imagined having to fight as a Huntress.

"What's wrong with their Auras?" Ruby whispered to herself. Her blade and bullets immediately drew blood from the Mutants' thick hides. Armor was generally supposed to subtly augment one's Aura, reinforcing both the outer and inner layers of the armor, yet whenever Ruby managed to cut through the Paladins' metal plating, there was always more blood that stained her scythe. If these people were supposed to be expert, elite soldiers like the Courier said they were, why weren't they taking more advantage of their Aura and semblances?

"What's an Aura?" the Courier asked Ruby.

"You don't know what Aura is?"

"Sounds like I should, but I don't, no."

"You're... not from around here, are you?"

"Maybe, maybe not. I'm not really sure."

More of Atlas' robots and soldiers had come to the fairgrounds to handle the Grimm. The soldiers told Team RWBY to help with the fighting near their dorm rooms, and the Courier ended up tagging along. The Courier hadn't turned on the Huntress team and was doing nothing but helping fight the monsters and Grimm, so Ruby decided she was trustworthy enough to keep with them.

Trying not to think too hard about the carnage surrounding her, Ruby took up a sniping position at on the roof of their dormitory, where Jaune and Pyrrha often held their training spars. Ruby made a mental note to look for Team JNPR if they don't run into each other once the fighting dies down. Weiss was currently helping Team CRDL and CFVY deal with the Paladins who were moving inside the dorm building itself. Blake, Yang, and other Huntsmen teams were on the ground floor keeping the Super Mutants occupied.

Hunters from the other Kingdoms who were also designated snipers joined Ruby on the rooftop. The Courier had also accompanied Ruby. They picked their targets and pulled their triggers with very little chatter or banter in between.

The Courier was a strange one. In almost any other situation, Ruby would be more suspicious of the Courier's unusual arms, attire, and her appearance through that blue lightning happening at the same time as Beacon's invaders. Ruby would also probably be gushing over her anti-material rifle and cool-looking helmet with a barrage of questions and requests to examine them. Unfortunately, the sights, smells, and sounds of the invaders' handiwork numbed Ruby to a point of not really caring who exactly the Courier was, just so long as she helped in defending Beacon.

The Courier slapped her hand against a device attached to her left forearm. It had a screen that was almost the size of a tablet's. "Arcade?" the Courier spoke into the object. "Arcade! Marcus? ED-E? Hello? Anyone still alive on the other side?!"

"Is that your scroll?" Ruby asked. "Do you have a signal?"

"What do you mean 'scroll'? This is my Pip-Boy." The expressionless eyes of the Courier's helmet looked at Ruby. The Courier pressed a finger against her temple, the red visor lighting up. "Have we met? You look familiar."

"I don't... think so?" Ruby was pretty sure she'd recognize someone with the Courier's look and gear. "I'm out of rounds. Do you have any spares, or..." Ruby trailed off, slowly realizing that if the Courier didn't know what Aura or scrolls were, then she probably didn't know much about Dust either.

The Courier didn't answer. She was too preoccupied with staring intently at Ruby's face.

"Um... why are you looking at me like that?"

"I swear that I've seen someone like you before." The Courier slapped the back of her head, as if to reorient herself from a dizzy spell, before resuming her stare. "You have silver eyes."

"I guess so..." Were silver eyes really that uncommon of a thing?

"What's your name?"

"Ruby Rose. What's yours?"

Before the Courier had a chance to respond, Yang suddenly appeared and shoved her away from Ruby. "Hey! Too close! Why the hell are you eyeing up my little sister like that?"

The Courier retained her disquieting stare and directed it at Yang's face. "You have red eyes," the Courier observed. "What's your name?"

"I'm Yang Xiao-Long, the badass Huntress who's going to be kicking your ass if you don't stay away from my sister." Yang turned to said sister. "Come on, Rubes. We're not done fighting."

Ruby nodded absently. "I'm out of Dust rounds," Ruby said.

"That's fine. You've got an oversized scythe in your hands. We'll take these freaks head-to-head."

"You really shouldn't," the Courier interjected. She reached into her dusty duster and pulled out another rifle. By Ruby's estimate, it was a compact variation of a 40mm grenade rifle. "It's better to take them out from a distance. Super Mutants will cripple your legs if you get too close, and then they'll probably try to eat you while you're down." Ruby watched as the Courier launched a grenade to the ever-growing conglomerate of Mutants and Paladins assaulting the dormitories. With Ruby's eagle eyes, through the smoke, she could see three blood-splattered Mutants rolling on the ground with one or two Paladin's crawling, detached from their lower bodies.

"Hey!" one of the other sniping Huntsman called out to the Courier. "Do you have any more of those grenades?"

"I've got plenty. "

"There's a bunch of those green guys gathering on the west and north sides. Help us out, will you?"

"On it." The Courier pulled out another grenade rifle from the innards of her coat. She held up to the Ruby. "You know how to use one of these?"

"Uh, yes?" Ruby's was a gun nut. Of course she knew how to operate a wide assortment of stock weapons. She took the rifle and tried to get a feel for its weight.

"Take the north side." The Courier also handed Ruby an ammo box. It was attached to a sling that Ruby was able to slide her arm and shoulder under. "Extra ammo." Raising her voice, the Courier spoke to the other Huntsmen. "Aim for the Super Mutants! They like to cluster together in packs of fours or fives, to make it easier to rush someone. Make them spread out, divide them, and your people on the ground will have an easier time taking them out."

"Noted!" replied a petite Huntress with her beanie pulled down to cover one of her eyes. "And who are you again?"

"You can call me Courier Six!" was the loud and stalwart declaration. "I'm the woman who's going to save you, your friends, and your families from certain damnation. You do what I say, and the Legion's gonna pray to their dead god that they'd never stepped into your home and pissed all over the place."

The Courier's words seemed to inspire confidence among the student Huntsmen and Huntresses. Their bodies lost their slack, their eyes narrowed, and their rate of fire increased. Taking her position on the western edge of the rooftop, the Courier launched another grenade into the frenzy below.

Ruby felt her feet bring her to the northern corner, but a hand on her shoulder halted her tracks. Yang cupped Ruby's cheeks in her hands. All of Yang's rage had faded. What was left were only her concerned, earnest violet pupils that stared directly into Ruby's soul.

"I'm fine, sis," Ruby reassured, despite the persistent numbness. She could feel grenade launcher in her hands, see the wood and metal texture, but she was unable to feel it slide and scrape against her hands and fingers. Ruby couldn't even feel the warmth Yang's hug was supposed to give. "I'm fine enough to fight, I mean."

"Are you sure, Ruby? This fight isn't anything like the ones we've been in before. Are you absolutely sure that you can handle it?"

"I have to, don't I? I'm team leader. I'm a Huntress-in-training. I—" Ruby gulped again, pushing down another threatening wave of puke. "These monsters – the Legion." The green giants and metal men finally had an overall official name, too. "They – they killed all those people in the fairgrounds. They're trying to kill us now, and then they're going to kill more people. We have to stop them before that happens, don't we?"

That was how Ruby's fatigued and nauseous mind rationalized the situation, at least. Huntresses protected people. The Legion were hurting people, so the answer was obvious.

Yang didn't move away from Ruby. "Are you sure?" she repeated.

"We have to fight, Yang. I'll... I'll fight from up here. You need to go help fight, too."

Finally, Yang stepped back. "If you're sure. Just call for me, and I'll be there in a flash." Moving to jump off the roof, Yang gave Ruby one last worried look at her. Exchanging encouraging nods, Yang blasted off, and Ruby returned fire at the Legion.

"I'm serious. I know you from somewhere, don't I?"

The shy and socially awkward Ruby would have jumped and yelped at the Courier's sudden appearance beside her. As Ruby was now, she only shuddered and blinked. "I don't – I mean, you're wearing a helmet. Maybe if you take it off, then I'll recognize you?"

More grenades were fired by the Courier while she maintained her stare. She seemed to be able to automatically target bands of Mutants without directly looking at them. "You said your name is Rose, and that other girl's name is Xiao-Long."

"Yeah. Those are our names." Ruby fired a grenade. Smoke enveloped a band of Mutants while she reloaded. "Is it important?"

"It's... familiar. It sounds very familiar." The Courier turned back to the edge of the roof. "I've been having pretty bad memory problems for as long as I can remember. That's why I keep asking questions. I can't be too sure of what I actually know if I don't ask."

It sounded like there was a story to that, a story that Ruby didn't have much interest in at the moment. As Ruby fired again, she asked, "Who exactly are these 'Legion' people?"

"Well, I know the answer to that, at least." Courier Six sighed, as if relieved to talk about something with familiarity. "I have no idea where we are right now, but in my neck of the woods, the world's already been through certain damnation. Folks are trying to pick up the pieces now, put the world back into something worth living in. The Legion tried to stomp down on those folks. The Legion failed, so they ran. Their leaders have been trying to reform and rebuild ever since, assimilating and brainwashing whatever schmucks they can get their scummy hands on. Some might say that the Legion's changed for the better, but at the end of the day, they're still just out to take over the world." The Courier paused in her speech. "I guess they're trying to take over this world now. Doesn't make much of a difference. So long as I'm still breathing, I'll be there to stop it."

So, the Courier was supposed to be a hero from wherever she came from. "You're like a Huntress, then, protecting the weak and fighting for what's right."

"I try. Considering that some people like to call me the 'Messiah,' I think I've been doing a pretty good job so far." The Courier tapped against her Pip-Boy device again and twisted some knobs on it. "Is your, uh, scroll working? Mine's still a dud."

"Are you trying to call someone?"

"I'm not the only one who's trying to fight the good fight. My companions and I were tracking the Legion's movements. Traveled all the way from the Vegas to Chicago. We got caught up in a firefight, and I ended up here." In obvious frustration, the Courier slammed her fist against the screen of her Pip-Boy. "But no one's answering. Either they're unconscious, dead, or Arcade was right all along, and I owe him a drink."

"I don't think my scroll would help."

"I can't contact my team, but we could at least contact whoever's in charge of this place. You mentioned this was an academy? Is there a... Headmaster, or any professors you can get in touch with?"

Ruby moved to pull out her scroll before remembering that it was destroyed back at the fairgrounds. One of the other snipers called out to the Courier. "Our scrolls still got no signal. The professors are probably already fighting out there, somewhere."

"I'm not in the mood for a war of attrition," the Courier affirmed. "If we want to end this fight sooner rather than later, then I need to have a talk with the big man in charge."

"You got a plan for getting these Legion guys off our campus?" another Huntress chimed in.

"Sort of. I just need to talk with your Headmaster. I've... got a way with words."

One student Huntsman dressed in regal-looking robes scoffed. "There is no need. Atlas reinforcements should be arriving soon. Once they are here, the battle will all but be won."

The Courier vehemently shook her head. "No. If you get reinforcements, then they'll call for reinforcements. If you call for more, then they will, too, and it'll go on like that until things go nuclear. This has to end before things escalate further."

"And how do you suggest we do that?"

"Like I said, I need to talk with your Head –"

For the second time that day, a wave of dark red blood splashed against Ruby's face.

A thick, heavy blade stabbed its way through the Courier's shoulder blade. Pieces of her accompanying armor broke and flew apart. Her grenade launcher fell as she was raised up into the air by the sword. The agonizing cries of pain sounded awful coming through her muffled voice filter. Ruby could see abnormal shivering in the space below the Courier, and a Mutant with blue skin and a red cloak materialized.

"Antler knew you were a traitor!" the Mutant yelled. "Antler said to wait for the right time to kill you. That time is now!"

More blue-skinned Super Mutants spawned throughout the rooftop with their own giant swords. While the other Huntsmen turned to confront them, the Courier was thrashed around like a ragdoll before being dropped unceremoniously onto the floor. Streaks of blood spread everywhere.

Grimm blood wasn't at all like human blood. Grimm blood was so lifeless, so cold, with no soul. Human blood was fresh, warm, and unnatural to be pulled outside of the body.

Fighting through the numbness and fear, Ruby swung her scythe and caught the Mutant's blade before it could strike the Courier a second time.

The Mutant's contorted frown and yellow teeth were disgusting, but it was his scrunched-up eyes that attracted Ruby's attention. "So, Antler's suspicions were correct," the monster leered. "The Courier raises an army of her own kin to challenge my kin! The Courier will not succeed!" He swung his blade again. Ruby ducked under it and slashed Crescent Rose horizontally across the Mutant's stomach.

That was a mistake. Even though the Mutant dropped his blade and fell back in defeat, Ruby had cut open a series of bandages strewn along the Mutant's gut and sides. Foul-smelling blood and organs pooled out, causing Ruby to throw up yet again.

Ruby quickly recomposed herself. The Courier lay prone, her upper arm and shoulder a mangled mess. Ruby kneeled beside her. Thoughts of first aid and healing injuries via Aura

ran through Ruby's head, but she could only stare at the horrifying injury. Ruby's hands were shaking uncontrollably, and her breathing was starting to spike up.

"Oh my god. Oh my god! What do I do? Are you – where – how much does it hurt? How can I help? What can I..."

The hand on the Courier's relatively uninjured hand clenched into a fist. She muttered something, but it could hardly be heard with the helmet muffling her voice. The Courier spoke again, still indiscernible, so Ruby tried to gently take off the helmet.

Unfastening the various latches and locks attaching the helmet to the Courier's collar, Ruby removed it and finally got a good look at her face.

For the briefest of moments, all of Ruby's stress and anxiety ceased to be. For one small millisecond, Ruby felt safe and content.

In the immediate millisecond after that, rampant shock and confusion completely paralyzed Ruby's mind and body.

Dark hair, a pale complexion, and silver eyes graced the Courier's face.

"Mom?"

You Can Depend on Me

Ruby's mom was dead.

Summer Rose had left home to go on a mission when Ruby was barely two years old. She never came back.

The funeral had been a confusing affair for Ruby's infantile mind. Dad's face was drenched in tears, Yang had lacked her usual lopsided grin, and Uncle Qrow didn't have his foul, drunken stench about him. There were other people at the funeral who Ruby would later come to recognize as teachers from Signal and Beacon, too. As the casket was lowered into the grave, Ruby had kept looking around the lowly hanging heads and black cloaks for any sign of her mother's bright eyes and white hood.

Ruby had long since mostly made her peace with no longer having a mother. Dad and Uncle Qrow were still there to teach her right from wrong and how to be a Huntress. Yang was always there as the comforting, if sometimes embarrassing, older sister that she is. At Beacon, Ruby had made so many new friends who she wouldn't dare trade for anything else in the world.

Still, Ruby made the effort of visiting her mom's grave whenever she found the free time to do so. It helped, talking to her when Yang or dad or Uncle Qrow didn't know what to say when Ruby felt down on her luck. Her mom might not have been able to talk back to her, but Ruby liked to imagine that her spirit stuck around to at least listen to Ruby prattle and babble on about her life.

All of the pictures with her mom that dad kept always showed Summer Rose with a benign smile offset with a wink, usually partially hidden by the hood draped over her head.

Now, mere inches away from Ruby, a complete stranger with Summer Rose's face lay bleeding on the floor. She had her hood off, her hair tied in a little bun on the back of her head. She was coughing bloody drool that poured down her chin. Her teeth were clenched tight, and strands of loose hair hung over one side of her face. There was also a scar on her forehead. It was a thin groove that went down from her hairline to her brow. Near the center of the scar was a circular depression on her skin.

Summer Rose was wheezing heavily. The deep cut nearly separating her arm from her shoulder continued to bleed badly, and Ruby still had no idea what to do.

"Mom?" Ruby asked again, still mesmerized that the Courier had almost the exact same face as her mother.

Shutting her eyes, mom – the Courier – whoever she was, she groaned and grasped Ruby's wrist with her good hand. "Do you... you see my Pip-Boy?"

The device on the Courier's wrist lit up in soft amber light. Ruby held it up and twisted the knobs and pressed the buttons at random. "What do I do with this? What do you need me to

do?"

"Hit... Hit the 'stats' button..." Ruby did so. On the screen popped up a silhouette of a cartoonish-looking character. "Turn the dial... Bring up the... stimpack option..."

Following the Courier's strained instructions, a burst of energy eventually erupted from the mutilated shoulder. Pulsating white light revolved around her injuries with a wave of wind pushing Ruby slightly back. Before Ruby's eyes, the muscle and skin began to pull themselves together and reconnect. The Courier's screams during the mending process were deafening.

Once the Courier's arm was fully reconstituted, she rolled onto her back and gave a grand, tiresome sigh. Her limbs were spread widely apart as she took slow, steady breaths.

"That was your Aura," Ruby whispered, more in shock than anything else. She recalled how she and Yang had researched footage of old tournament fights in the past and seeing Team STRQ in action. Summer Rose's Aura in the footage matched perfectly with the colors and behavior of the Courier's.

"That's Aura?" The Courier raised an eyebrow at Ruby. "It... augments regeneration implants? All the doctor's I've met always called it a... unique mutation."

"Aura isn't a mutation. It's perfectly natural."

Ruby and the Courier were staring at one another again. This time, Ruby had no inclination of turning away. All her life, so many people who were friends with dad and Uncle Qrow have told Ruby about how much she resembles her mother, and never before did Ruby have the real thing to judge the resemblance for herself.

The fighting with the other student Huntsmen and Mutants persisted, as did the fighting all around them that was consuming the whole school, but Ruby couldn't look away from those inquisitive eyes peering into her own.

"I know you, don't I?" the Courier said. She sat up, stopping and starting as she grimaced in pain, and hunched her back to meet the kneeling Ruby's eye level. "It's either that, or you see something familiar in me that I'm also seeing in you."

It was probably an irrational move on Ruby's part, but everything that has happened today did little to allow consistent, rational thought from the young, junior Huntress.

Ruby embraced her mother and buried her teary-eyed face into her chest. The metal part of her armor felt absolutely cold against Ruby's cheek, but she didn't care. Just being in her mom's arms made everything okay and made all of the nausea and stress and pain automatically go away.

It took longer than Ruby cared before mom returned the hug. She rubbed Ruby's back and gently brushed Ruby's bangs. For a moment, Ruby felt like a careless, innocent little kid again.

The Courier's next words broke Ruby's short escape from reality.

"Do you know what my name is?"

Reluctantly, Ruby lifted her head up. Sniffing, she looked at her mom's lost and confused countenance, and Ruby realized that her mom had not fully recognized her own two daughters.

The Courier mentioned that she had memory problems.

She doesn't know who Ruby is, at all.

"You called me something," the Courier said, her voice lowering an octave. "You called me, 'Mom.' Does that mean..."

"You look just like her," Ruby mumbled. "She's supposed to be dead, but..."

Something Ruby said must have amused the Courier since a soft grin took shape. "It's not the first time I've cheated death." The Courier tried to gently push Ruby off, but Ruby held on tightly and refused to let go. "You didn't answer my question, though. Do you know what my real name is?"

The answer of, "Summer Rose," was on the tip of Ruby lips. However, shouts from the other Huntsmen interrupted her.

The Mutants were defeated and laid dead on the rooftop. Half of the Huntsmen resumed their sniping duties while another half were on their scrolls. "Signal's back up!" said one of them. "Professors are telling us to find key buildings to fall back into and defend 'em. Guess we've got the dorms. We hold position until Atlas reinforcements dive in to clean up shop. If more of that lightning brings more Legion soldiers, then Atlas' airships will evact us out of here."

The Courier firmly removed Ruby off of her person. The amusement disappeared from her face, replaced by a scowl. "Evacuation's not an option, either. You can't let the Legion take this place as their own. They'll dig in and make it a helluva lot harder for you to take it back." The Courier walked away from Ruby and fiddled with her Pip-Boy. "If you want to win this fight, I need to speak with the Headmaster."

"If you wanna talk with Professor Ozpin, sorry to tell ya that the professors are saying that he's stopped answering his scroll." The Huntsman pointed to the tallest building in the Academy at the center of the campus. "It looks like he's still at Beacon Tower, though. Maybe he's occupied with some Legion dudes who were trying to get inside the Tower."

"Sounds like that's where I'm heading next, then." The Courier snatched her previously forgotten grenade launcher and holstered it. She picked up her helmet, scrutinized it for any defects, and placed it back on. "Remember to keep those Super Mutants scattered," the now deeper and muffled voice said. "Also, watch out for the Paladins' grenades. You think getting hit by plasma or laser stings like a bitch? Their grenades have six times as much punch. Good luck."

When the Courier moved as if to jump off the rooftop, Ruby ran and grabbed her by the arm. "Wait!" Don't leave again. "There's like a hundred of those soldiers between here and the Tower. You can't go by yourself!"

"I've had worse odds," the Courier said with a shrug. Then she stared at Ruby's pleading pout for a while. "Those other girls – Yang, the white-haired girl, and the one with the bow on her head – you said you're all on a team together? Call them up and tell them to meet us at the Tower." The Courier pointed a finger toward one of Beacon's main boulevards on the ground. Firefights and brawls between Paladins and Huntsmen took up most of the street. "We'll be going up that road. It's the most open and has the least bustle to get in our way."

With a nod, Ruby went to pull out her scroll, but her pockets were empty. She nearly slapped herself, ashamed in shortsightedness as she remembered that her scroll was destroyed early on in the battle. Fortunately, a nearby Huntress handed Ruby her own scroll. Ruby said her thanks as she called her team, and the Huntress in her black scarf and beanie turned to the Courier.

"So, are you supposed to be Summer Rose?" the student sniper asked. Ruby nearly dropped the scroll. "That bigshot Huntress who died a while back?"

She must have overheard Ruby and the Courier's conversation. Many Huntsmen and Huntresses, old and new, were popular celebrities, including the members of Team STRQ. Ruby didn't think some random student from another Kingdom with recognize her mom, though.

After a quick text with the necessary instructions sent to Team RWBY, Ruby looked to her mom. She was giving the student Huntress a sidelong glance. "Summer Rose, huh?" the Courier repeated, testing the name on her tongue. "Summer Rose... Gotta say, I like the sound of that."

The Courier hopped off the roof. Scrambling to return the scroll and to pull out Crescent Rose, Ruby followed after her.

Ruby's mom was alive, and Ruby wasn't going to let her go and get herself killed again.

X

Honestly, if the everlasting struggle against the Grimm ever subsides, and if a new wave of actual, true, tangible peace ever graced the inhabitants of Remnant, Ozpin would resign from his teaching duties and leadership responsibilities posthaste.

Ozpin would have preferred to live the life of a courier.

Remnant is a large, diverse world. Even someone with Ozpin's age and experience still finds people and places that can surprise him. However, wandering aimlessly as a transient hermit had its downsides. For one, such a life would likely get a tad too lonely too fast. Ozpin is all too familiar with loneliness and solitude. Places such as Beacon and the Kingdoms allowed for a sense of community, of identity, but even then, the politics of a community always

frustrated Ozpin, and he had no interest in resolving petty squabbles among his peers. Lord knows he's done that kind of work for far too long.

Hence, Ozpin would like to be a courier. After all, the CCT is a less than ideal system. Consistent and constant communication between the Kingdoms and the various outlying independent villages and city-states has always been an ambition of a few noteworthy engineers Ozpin has met. Until that day is fully realized, Ozpin would like to help maintain that communication even by the most basic, rudimentary means, as a traveling mailman. As a courier, Ozpin's wanderlust would be fulfilled, and at the same time, Ozpin would continue to contribute to the greater good on his own terms.

Reliable communication is something that can make or break a war, and it is a key factor in building a momentous, prosperous society. Though Ozpin and his secret cabal actively seek to keep the world at large in ignorance of the Salem and the Maidens, Ozpin hopes to one day to knowingly omit and deceive no longer. He desires a world where there is true unity, founded by like-minded individuals who envision a world free from the hatred and threat of Grimm.

Hopefully, Ozpin will live to see that new world and be given the opportunity to live a new, peaceful life.

Until that day comes, however, Ozpin surrenders himself to his current obligations; specifically, his obligation of ensuring the Fall Maiden's safety in the midst of this horrible crisis.

The extra security James had offered to place in the Vault had initially put Ozpin in doubt. The Vault was meant to be hidden, covert, and indistinguishable to any and all prying eyes. Appointing any guards – organic, robotic, or otherwise – to constantly watch over Amber would require further maintenance, funds, and resources to keep those guards at work and in top condition. Securing those resources and the trustworthy associates necessary to organize the defenses draws more attention to Ozpin and his allies, attention that only puts Amber further at risk.

Sadly, Ozpin had been outvoted. Glynda and, surprisingly enough, Qrow sided with James. Thus, automated turrets were positioned within the Vault, along the halls, inside the walls, under the floors, and over the ceilings. Though they remained in their deactive state whenever one with Ozpin's approval walked through the Vault, the turrets readied their arms and entered a standby mode if an unknown makes it inside. The turrets would open fire should the unknown move and begin to progress further into the depths of the Vault or if one of Ozpin's chosen few fail to immediately inform the turret system that the unknown was not a threat.

Even while Ozpin was miles upon miles deep under the surface of Remnant, Ozpin could still faintly hear the sounds of battle and feel the vibrations resonate all the way down to even the structure of the Vault. Ozpin stood guard near the entrance to the elevator. He set the turrets on standby mode, specifically the ones situated nearer to Amber's position. That teleportation technology the invaders utilized was far too unpredictable to leave anything up to chance.

Rather pettily, Ozpin wished he had brought his mug with him. The drink was a guilty pleasure, and no matter how little the effect it may have had, it would have calmed some of Ozpin's nerves by a fraction, at least.

And so Ozpin stood there, with his cane in his hand, waiting.

Ozpin consulted his scroll. According to the communications between the student teams and their professors, the battle had become a stalemate once more. The Huntsmen and Huntresses were forced to defend key points across Beacon, but the invaders were not able to break through their defenses. The deciding factor of this conflict would be time. Ozpin pondered on who would arrive first: Winter Schnee and her reinforcements, or any more teleporting monstrosities these metal men may have in their disposal?

Suddenly, the crack of lightning shocked Ozpin's ears. He could see the reflection of the lightning's flash on the walls of the Vault. Something just teleported behind Ozpin, so he spun around and held his cane to the throat of the intruder.

The man resembled neither the green men nor the metal men. He lacked a helmet, though there was a breathing mask of some sort shielding the lower half of his face. Dreadlocks hung over his head. His attire consisted of dark clothes, the most eye-catching piece being his sleeveless, weather-beaten black coat. His muscles were well defined and painted with jagged scars. He had with him the most basic of combat equipment, with a bandoleer here and kneepads there.

Ozpin's cane jammed into stranger's Adam's apple. In return, the stranger held his weapon, a submachine gun of an unknown caliber, to Ozpin's abdomen.

Those brown eyes were what made Ozpin hesitate. The last time Ozpin had encountered a pair of such cold and unrelenting eyes, he had lost a rather extensive and experienced life and was forced to forge a new one directly from the throes of childbirth.

"Stay your arms," the stranger spoke in a deep, grave voice, "and I will lower my own."

The request was made with no hint of duplicity. "I take it you are not an associate of those metal men?" Taking prisoners did not seem to be much of a priority for the invaders.

"There was a time when I called them brothers," the stranger replied. "Some of them, at least. Now... the flag they fight under... It's a flag I fight to burn."

Well, this new arrival was leagues more civil in comparison to the other visitors. Ozpin lowered his weapon, and the stranger did the same. When the stranger turned his head to examine his surroundings, Ozpin raised up his hand. "My apologies, but I wouldn't recommend moving any further. Otherwise..." The many, many turrets in the immediate vicinity were currently aimed at a singular foreign entity. The stranger finished his perusing and met Ozpin's eyes once more. "I am Professor Ozpin, Headmaster of Beacon Academy."

The stranger nodded his head in acknowledgement. "Ulysses is my name," he introduced himself as. "An Old World name, but my own nonetheless."

Old World? Perhaps a known term from wherever all these alien people were teleporting from. They must not adhere to the color-naming rule, either, it seems, assuming that Ulysses speaks the truth. "And why have you come to this place?"

"Wasn't exactly by choice. The Legion's technology is new, unknown... unpredictable."

"Legion? Is that the name of the force behind this invasion?"

Ulysses leaned back slightly and crossed his arms. He gave Ozpin's form a once-over. "Caesar's Legion, they used to be called. After Caesar ended, so did his hold over his Legion. The remnants went east, across untamed lands. They met with the survivors of a fractured Brotherhood. Together, they rebuilt themselves. With their new nation, came their new name: the Legion of Steel."

Already, Ozpin was analyzing and deconstructing Ulysses' words as the man spoke them. "Legion" implied an army. If this "new nation" was named after an army, its strength must certainly not be underestimated in any capacity until further information arises. "Steel" may relate to their advanced technology. "Untamed lands," eastward... east of what? And who was this Caesar? It's not a name that held any familiarity with Ozpin, and he knows quite a few names.

When the sound of buzzing began to erupt from the turrets, signifying the imminent unloading of Dust rounds, Ozpin waved a hand to delay the activation. Once the buzzing lowered in volume, Ozpin said, "You have been very forthcoming with my questions. Why is that?"

"The Legion is now my enemy," Ulysses responded plainly. "They move against you, so I stand with you."

"But why do they move against Beacon? What are their goals? Their plans?"

"They seek to butcher this place, this... Academy. The scars and corpses inflicted upon your soldiers and students will distract them from the Legion's true targets." Ulysses' gaze sharpened. "Your veterans, professors, Generals, and... Headmasters... Once the battle devolves to complete chaos, the Legion's agents will capture them and leave you without your leaders."

So, it's a "cut off the head" plan the Legion are operating under. "Why not simply teleport their targets to a location of their choosing, or teleport their agents directly to their targets? Why forgo any sense of discretion and instead start a war?"

"New World tech, like Old War tech, is far from perfect." Ulysses held up his wrist. A bracelet of some kind was tightly wound around it. "These devices, these... beacons... Only those who wear them can ride the azure lights. Don't know how or why, but the lights, unseen when not in use, sprawl over a maze of invisible paths and trails that spans and wanders to many fixed locations. Looked at the Legion's maps of this academy. The lights all led to open areas, conspicuous places. Little opportunity for discretion, even with Stealth Boys." Ulysses eyed the walls around them. "Except for this place. Legion can't come here, at least. Not now."

Sabotaged their controls before I left. They can't follow the light here, but they may mend the path later."

Azure lights... Ozpin has a long memory. Too long, in fact. He's buried a number of memories under others, but "azure lights," out of all the things Ulysses has said, sounded very familiar. Perhaps a technological innovation or natural phenomenon long forgotten to the sands of time? He'll need to meditate on this.

"What the Legion plans to do with their prisoners," Ulysses continued, "ransom, interrogation, experiments... could be any of these things. Can't know for sure."

Well, the Legion of Steel was definitely not going to be kidnapping any of Ozpin's colleagues if he had anything to say about it. "How large are their ranks and reinforcements? Allied auxiliary forces are on their way to assist Beacon as we speak. If the Legion's teleportation capability is rather limited, then perhaps they may be defeated by outmaneuvering, or with sheer numbers or —"

Ulysses shook his head. "The Legion's numbers are too many, their weapons too destructive, their resolve... too fanatical to be reasoned with. They will not waver until they complete their mission. Then, after your leaders and Generals have been taken, the rest of your people, your... Huntsmen... may not survive what will come after the Legion departs."

A thought quickly clicked in Ozpin's mind. "Once they've disabled our leadership and exhausted our forces, moral will be at an all-time low, and we will be vulnerable targets for the Grimm."

"Yes. The Grimm. I know little of them, but the Legion has studied them well enough. Unless the Legion withdraws of its own volition, Beacon will likely fall."

"Then how do we entice the Legion to withdraw?" Ozpin asked.

Ulysses' eyes seemed to flicker in... amusement? "The Legion wish to choke Beacon's throat, and leave it for the vultures to finish off," the man said. "In turn, Beacon should move to cut the Legion's throat. The blood spilt will be enough to scare the rest off."

Despite his odd way of speaking, Ulysses' message was clear. "Take out their leadership before they get to our own," Ozpin reiterated, mostly to himself. "Is it truly that simple?"

"For today's battle, yes. For the coming war... it'll be a start."

War... Another war was always a looming danger for the people of Remnant. Ozpin had expected the war to be an internal one rather than one initiated by external forces.

At the turrets' buzzing, Ozpin waved his hand. Regarding Ulysses with a straight face, Ozpin remarked, "You have said much, Ulysses. You speak with an honest, benign air about you. However, you must realize that it'd be quite foolish of me to take all the words of a complete stranger, a stranger bearing foreign attire and weaponry who mysteriously teleported into one of the most secure locations in all of Remnant, as infallible truth."

"I'm not surprised. Distrust is expected, considering the circumstances. Still, my only desire is to help. The Legion can't be allowed to win the day and flourish. Beacon cannot fall." Slowly, Ulysses held open the flaps of his duster, revealing the various guns, knives, ammo cartridges, and other tools hidden underneath. "I will do whatever is necessary to earn your trust. Command me to disarm, to use medicine to help your sick and injured, or to fight the Legion in your stead... your choice."

In another life, Ozpin would never have called himself a gambling man. In the many years following that life, making risky gambles and barely lucking out in the end were practically the only things Ozpin truly excelled at.

"Does the Legion of Steel know about the Maidens?" Ozpin asked.

"Maidens?" For the first time since their discussion began, Ulysses appeared vaguely lost. "Looked through most of the Legion's plans on Beacon. No 'Maiden' was mentioned."

Ozpin supposed that would have to be enough reassurance to leave Amber's protection in the hands of the automated turrets. "Keep your weapons," Ozpin commanded. "Follow me. We shall make haste to put a stop to the Legion."

Ulysses and Ozpin entered the elevator. With a push of a button, they began to ascend to the surface.

"One more thing," Ozpin added as the elevator music chimed in. "That hallway we were just in? The existence of that entire floor is unknown to most our allies, with the exception of a particular few. I would like it if we continued to uphold this confidentiality."

"If that's what you want."

Hopefully, putting some trust in this Ulysses character was a gamble leaning towards Ozpin's favor.

X

"Keep your fucking heads down!"

It was hard coinciding the image of the sweet and motherly Summer Rose with the bad-word-spewing and bloody, heavily armed slayer that was Courier Six. Nevertheless, Ruby made the effort, and she failed miserably.

"Get your hands off me, you brute!" Weiss demanded from the Courier. They were taking cover behind the remains of a destroyed parade float. The Courier's larger body was pinning Weiss' to the ground. "Why did you tackle me? I would have defeated that metal man if you hadn't gotten in the way!"

"You're pretty fast, Weiss – It is Weiss, right? Weiss Schnee or something – but there isn't anyone I know that can dodge a shot from a Tri-Beam rifle at that close of a range."

"I would have been fine regardless! He was obviously low on ammo, his armor extremely dented and damaged, and my Aura is high enough to –"

"I don't give a damn about your Aura or semblance or whatever other super powers you kids have. You're wearing a dress in a goddamn battlefield. You get zero credibility in the tactics department." The Courier glanced at Ruby. "You, Ruby, you have a giant scythe that's also a high velocity sniper rifle. That trounces wearing a dress in any situation."

Weiss was infuriated, but her comment about her Aura being high enough was a lie. Ruby had 'borrowed' Weiss' scroll, and out of all of RWBY's Aura levels, hers was the lowest.

"Just listen to her, Weiss," Ruby, ducking out of cover periodically to return fire at the sniper taking potshots at them, pleaded to her partner. "You need the rest. Let your Aura recharge before we get moving again." When a screaming Super Mutant revealed himself from behind their cover, Ruby dropped the Courier's anti-material rifle and sliced open their attacker with Crescent Rose. Ruby didn't throw up this time, fortunately. Whatever was in those pills the Courier had given Ruby did wonders for the girl's mental and dietary faculties.

"We can't afford to wait!" Weiss insisted. She glared at the Courier's expressionless visor. "You claim to know of a way to put a halt to this invasion. I have no idea how you convinced Ruby that you're important enough and trustworthy enough to devote precious time and energy escorting you to Professor Ozpin, but if what you say is true, then we can't waste any more time getting delayed by these soldiers!"

The Courier butted her head against Weiss' forehead. The unexpected closeness and bright light of the visor did more than enough to stun Weiss to silence. "Getting to your Headmaster won't mean much if you're dead, will it?" the Courier questioned with an edge in her voice. "Ruby! Keep an eye on her. I'm going to flank that sniper."

"But how?" Ruby asked with bemusement.

"Yes, tell us of your grand plan!" Weiss added sarcastically. "Your speed is hardly comparable to a Huntress's agility. There's about a two hundred square meter open area between us and those snipers. If not them, someone or something else is going to kill you before you can get in a good shot."

The Courier lifted herself off Weiss. Weiss sat up and leaned against the parade float, all the while giving the Courier a deeply unhappy frown. Ignoring her, the Courier looked over the Super Mutant's corpse. From its belt, she pulled out a small object with strewn wires dangling haphazardly.

"And what is that supposed to be?" Weiss inquired. She got her answer when the Courier, slapping the device onto her Pip-Boy, shimmered and disappeared from sight. "Gah! What the – how did – oh, forget I said anything." With narrowed eyes, Weiss glanced at Ruby. "I will ask you again. Are you absolutely sure that we can trust that ruffian to not do anything wanton against us?"

That ruffian is my dead mom, back from the grave. "Yes, I'm sure."

"Why? How are you so sure? She might be helping us fight these disgusting marauders, but _"

"Just trust me, Weiss." Mom just wants the best for me and Yang. For our team. She knows what she's doing. "Just, uh, hang back and catch your breath. We'll get moving again when the Courier takes care of that sniper's nest."

A loud "boom" resounded behind Weiss and Ruby. Jumping out of a winding plume of smoke, Yang and Blake appeared and landed beside the rest of their team. "Ice Queen's got a point, Rubes," Yang said as she hopped over a fallen light post. "Sure, the Courier's helping us out a bunch, but we don't know a damn thing about her."

"I think the Courier's backstory can wait until after we win this battle," Blake gave her two cents as she laid a suppressing fire over a pair of Paladins skulking by a makeshift barricade made out of wooden benches. "Not saying I believe everything she's said. I'm just saying that until she gives us a real reason to distrust her, we play along for now."

Weiss huffed indignantly. "Does 'playing along' include leading her to Professor Ozpin? She may very well be some elaborate double-agent or assassin playing the long game to get to him!"

"I doubt it," Blake argued. "She's killed a lot of these Legion soldiers. It'd be hard to believe that she's on anyone's side other than ours, or her own. She's no friend of the Legion's. That's clear enough."

"I still don't trust her," Weiss asserted.

"Neither do I," Yang agreed.

Saying, "She's our mom," to Yang would have been so, so, so easy, but there was no telling how exactly she'd react. Confusion was a given. After that, would it be rage? Sadness? Elation? Disappointment? Whatever Yang's reaction would be, it'd be something that would distract her from the fight, and RWBY needed Yang more focused on fighting than focused on anything else.

Another boom, larger and louder than the last, went off. Ruby peeked around the parade float and looked at the distant sniper's nest. White flames were consuming shrieking Paladins who were wildly wailing their fiery arms. Moments later, the Courier reappeared with Team RWBY. Her right elbow was badly burned, something she was trying to hide as the Courier rubbed an ointment-covered cloth against her skin.

"Snipers are down," she announced with a pained grunt, "but they've got sentry bots in position further down the street. I'm all out of Stealth Boys, so we're either gonna have to go around or charge on through." Courier pointed a finger at Blake. "You, Bow-Girl, you're pretty fast. Move from cover to cover. When you get close enough, toss one of these at the bots." The Courier held up a cylindrical-shaped grenade. "This'll send a shockwave that'll send their circuits on the fritz. Their sensors won't be able to tell friend from foe. Weiss, if you're up for it, use another of one of those glyph-shield things to draw their fire. Ruby, back her up and fire from behind the shield. If you can't scrounge up any more bullets, just pick up a laser rifle and start spraying. Jumpstart, I want you to –"

Yang's eyes flashed red, and Ruby tensed as excess heat began to radiate off her sister. "Don't call me that," Yang growled. After all, "Jumpstart" was supposed one of the nicknames Summer Rose had once affectionately called Yang. The Courier saying it made Ruby hopeful that her mom's memory was still salvageable, but at the moment, it only served to exacerbate Yang's already frayed nerves.

"Whatever," the Courier continued without missing a beat. "Jumpstart, those, uh, shotgun gauntlets. How much ammo have you got left for them?"

"Plenty," Yang gritted out through clenched teeth. "Why?"

Wrapping her wound in a tight bandage, the Courier pulled out an energy pistol, one not dissimilar to the weapons that the Paladins were using. "You can use them to launch yourself into the sky and cover a good distance, right? I'll hang off your back, you jumpstart us over that line of bots, and we catch them in a crossfire." The Courier darted her head to look at each of the Huntresses' response. "Let's start prepping. Any objections?"

"Sounds like a good plan," Ruby answered before the rest of her team could. "Let's do it." Ruby hoped the look she gave her team expressed "just do as your told" rather than "please just listen to me." Either way, the Team RWBY nodded in various degrees of reluctance.

Blake snatched the grenade eyed the street, planning her route. Weiss, taking a deep breath, looked through her Dust supply for the appropriate shield-inducing one at her leisure. As she scavenged a fallen Huntsman's body for sniper rounds (and ignoring the state of the body's life throughout the process), Ruby kept one ear open to listen as Yang and the Courier trade words.

"Just hold onto my shoulders," Yang said coldly. "You try anything while we're in the air, and you're dead."

"Hmm..." The Courier tilted her head curiously at Yang. Was she starting to recognize her more just like how she was starting to recognize Ruby? "Noted, Jumpstart."

"And don't fucking call me that. Why are you calling me that, anyway?"

"I see you start, and then I see you jump. Jumpstart. Simple as that. Is the name that bad?"

"You know what my name is."

"I do...? Oh, right. From earlier." The vigor and determination the Courier was running on seemed to waver as her voice became slightly more slow and subdued. "It's... Yang Xiao-Long, right?"

"That's right. What's your name? Your real one?"

The Courier looked at Ruby. Embarrassed, Ruby avoided her gaze.

"Hey, I asked you a question! Why are you looking at my sister?"

"She knows my name," the Courier said, almost wistfully so, "apparently."

"I'm not asking Ruby. I'm asking you."

She's our mom, Ruby almost blurted out. However, Weiss' own screech beat her to the punch.

"Look!" Weiss shouted, lifting her head to face the sky. Atlesian airships were darting across the blue backdrop and opening fire upon Legion soldiers. "Reinforcements!"

Relieved smiles broke out from the members of RWBY. The Courier, on contrary, grumbled under her breath, "Son of a bitch."

Weiss shot a haughty smirk in the Courier's direction. "Do you see that one ship?" Weiss pointed to the speeding vehicle dodging laser fire with ease. It was smaller and sleeker in comparison to the other ships. "That's my sister's personal airship. If she's leading the push back against the Legion, then I doubt we will be needing your services for much longer, Courier."

"Your sister's a bigshot in... Atlas, was it?" the Courier distractedly asked.

"One of General Ironwood's top Specialists," Weiss proudly confirmed.

"If the Legion knows about her, then they're going to be coming after her first."

"What are you talking about –"

The loudest boom that anyone has heard all day suddenly went off. Ruby was sure that the sound nearly rendered her permanently deaf. Her sight, on the other hand, was perfectly unhindered, letting her see the back half of the airship break off. The wings were terribly scorched. The ship fell apart as it descended uncontrollably, a mushroom cloud of smoke rising up its destroyed back half.

Ruby's hearing returned by the time the airship crash landed. It dragged itself across the street, running over Legion soldiers and Huntsmen alike. The ship stopped short a mile or two ahead of Team RWBY and the Courier.

"Always hated Fat Mans," the Courier commented offhandedly. "The collateral damage that comes with them has always been unpredictable. You'll sure as hell kill your target, but the collateral's just as viable to kill you, too."

Weiss sprung to her feet and summoned a plethora of glyphs. "We have to help Winter!" She began sprinting up the street before anyone could stop her.

"Wait!" Ruby shrieked. Weiss ignored her. Ruby was almost sure that she was going to get gunned down. Luckily, most of the Paladins, Mutants, and robots were down for the count, thanks to the crash landing. "Wait for us!" Ruby followed after Weiss. Ruby could hear Yang and Blake do the same. The Courier followed at her own pace, checking the assorted bodies and looting or executing them as needed.

The head of the airship was the only thing that wasn't shrouded in fire. The windshield of the cockpit was shattered beyond repair. People in Atlas uniforms who weren't in the process of dying horrible deaths were crawling through the glass and dragging themselves away from

the flames. Hearing screams on another section of the ship, Yang started blasting and opened up a hole to let some of the survivors out. Blake and Ruby helped pull one Atlas soldier out of a pile of rubble. He was wailing in agony, everything below his knees absent from his legs. Once he was free, Ruby let Blake take the slack and hurried after Weiss.

"Winter!" Weiss yelled into the flames. She hopped up the nose of the ship and peered into the cockpit. "Winter! It's me, Weiss! Where are you? Can you hear me?" The desperation in Weiss' tone became more and more evident by the second. "If you're still in there, just follow the sound of my voice!" She turned to Ruby. "Check the other side! Call if you find her."

Ruby nodded. She hopped over part of the wreckage and landed a few feet away from the ship. Many bodies were scattered about, but few of them had the look of an Atlas soldiers or specialist. Ruby looked further down the street. Beacon Tower wasn't far now.

Gunfire prompted Ruby to run behind a broken wing that was partially buried under the bricks of the street. The bullets, fired from a minigun from the sound of it, weren't aimed for her, though. Ruby took a second glance at her surroundings and spotted the muzzle flashes. Once the flashes stopped and the gunner dropped his minigun in favor of a pair of odd-looking machetes, Ruby managed to get a good look at him.

His armor wasn't like the other metal men's. It still appeared to be made out of metal, but it lacked the smooth, assembly-line aesthetic and looked more personalized. Spikes protruded from his shoulder pads. The armor seemed heavy-set and bulky, but the man moved faster and not as slowly or patiently as other Paladins. Yellow markings decorated the metal plates. His helmet didn't cover his face and had a red frill topped over it.

He had a skirt, too. Though Ruby would defend combat skirts until the day she dies, they weren't exactly military standard, and a strong military is what the Legion was portraying themselves as. The man's skirt put Ruby's mind in for a loop, but she refocused as he began trading blows with a woman covered head-to-toe in scrapes and bruises.

If the white hair, clothes, and the rapiers that she was wielding were any indication, that woman was Winter Schnee.

While the gladiator-esque Paladin gave rowdy battle cries, Winter was more or less silent with the same quiet determination Weiss had. She weaved and swerved around the Paladin, but her sword strikes only dented his armor.

"Retribution!" the man declared as he kicked Winter in the gut, sending her to impact against the side of her burning airship. Moving fast, Ruby closed in to hit him from behind. Unfortunately, he blocked Ruby's scythe and managed to toss Ruby over him. Flying through the air, Ruby unceremoniously crashed into Winter.

Pushing Ruby off, Winter was quick to raise herself and to assume a defensive stance. "On your feet, Huntress!" she commanded Ruby, who swiftly did as ordered. As Ruby swung her blade into the floor, lining up her scope with the Legion soldier, the rest of Team RWBY joined them.

Weiss made a move as if to hug her sister. "Winter! Thank goodness you're —"

"Not now Weiss," Winter interrupted. Weiss instantly shut her mouth. Winter turned her attention to the Legion soldier. "Stand down, lay down your arms, and I will offer you fair treatment as our prisoner."

The Paladin – was he even a Paladin? The different armor could mean that he's something else – snorted as he tapped the edges of his swords together in a taunting manner. "I am Gaius Magnus, Centurion of the Legion! I am a prisoner to no one! You, Winter Schnee, however..."

"Then you leave me no choice," Winter said simply. She lifted her blade. "Prepare to die." Summoning a glyph, Winter was on the man in a heartbeat.

"I think your sister can handle herself," Blake observed. At Weiss' faintly dejected silence, Blake turned to Ruby. "We got the survivors out. Some Huntsmen team from Mistral is getting them to safety. We should get moving. It's only a matter of time until more Legion troops decide to investigate the crash site."

Yang, panting, flexed her neck and cracked her fingers. "Where's the Courier? She was right behind us."

As if on cue, the Courier ran from around a corner of the airship. Specks of blurry, green projectiles flew over head as she hugged the wall and avoided the plasma. In the Courier's arms was a missile launcher-looking device. "We've got a squad of Paladins coming for us," she announced as she patted her new weapon. "On the bright side, I've commandeered their Fat Man and most of their mini nukes. Hopefully, that'll limit the radiation exposure the Legion's spreading across the campus."

"Radiation?" Weiss repeated. "Nukes? You mean nuclear radiation?"

"Yup. Why do you –"

"Nuclear weapons and research was banned years ago!" Weiss exclaimed, throwing her arms up. "Centuries ago, long before the Great War! Their destructive capabilities were deemed even greater and more dangerous than the Grimm! And you're saying the Legion has nuclear weapons and radiation in their disposal?"

The Courier gave a distracted nod. "Great War? Nukes were used during that war."

"What are you talking about? In all the years that the Great War took up, no one on Remnant was stupid enough to build and use any nuclear weapons or technology!"

"... Remnant?"

Exasperated, Weiss slapped her hand against her forehead. Blake was returning fire at the attacking Paladins, and Yang was rolling her eyes. "Are you just slow," Yang snidely remarked, "or do you just like ordering us around and asking questions all the time?"

"The Courier has memory problems!" Ruby interjected, wanting to help and defend her mother in any way she can. "She always needs to ask questions so that she sure that she knows what she's talking about. Right, Courier?"

"Basically," the Courier reaffirmed with a dismissive shrug. "Sorry if I don't come across as the most charismatic of folks, but I'm only trying to save your lives and your livelihoods, Jumpstart. Nothing more, and nothing else."

Yang's eyes flashed red again. "Like I said, don't call me that."

"If you say so."

The Courier popped her head around her cover. Her reward was blast of searing laser energy imploding in her face. She dropped the Fat Man, fell onto her back, and clutched the front of her helmet with an annoyed groan.

Ruby's heart skipped a beat. "Mom!" She was by her side in a second. However, the Courier just waved her off. Vaguely irked at the attack, the Courier sat up and removed her helmet.

The silver eyes of Summer Rose stared into the broken red visor of her helmet. "Broken beyond repair," she said in a despondent tone. "Knew I should've jury rigged it with something." Tossing the helmet aside, Summer gave a supportive pat on Ruby's shoulder. "It's fine. No crippling wounds inflicted. Not yet, at least."

Ruby sighed in relief.

Then she realized Weiss, Blake, and Yang were all staring at the Courier's face.

The Courier stared back. "Is there something... familiar that you're all seeing that I apparently don't know about?" she asked, her eyes meeting Yang's. Yang couldn't decide who to look at, Ruby or the Courier, so she kept darting between them.

"Mom?" Yang finally said in a weak, fragile voice. The Courier was visibly taken back by Yang's question.

"Two daughters? Are you... You're serious, aren't you? You, you and Ruby; you know me, and I'm supposed to know, don't I?"

Yang only continued to stare. The Courier responded in kind. Weiss and Blake were at a loss for words. Ruby was in the same boat.

"Summer? Summer Rose?"

All eyes turned to Professor Ozpin, who was slowly stepping over body after body as he made his way toward Team RWBY. His eyes were wide in shock. He was openly gaping at the Courier. There was also a tall man in a duster and dreadlocks following close behind Ozpin.

"Is that you, Summer?" Ozpin asked. When no response came, his eyes shifted from the Courier's face to her weapons and clothes. Eyes widening a bit further, Ozpin turned to his companion. "Ulysses, is this supposed to be the Courier you were talking about?"

"Yes, she is," the man answered. "You... know her true name?"

"Her true – you mean she doesn't – but –" Ozpin turned back to the Courier and approached her. "Summer, do you know who I am?"

Almost immediately, she answered. "No clue," she said with a deep frown. Her gaze locked onto Ozpin's companion. "Ulysses?"

"He's the Headmaster of Beacon," Ulysses introduced. "Professor Ozpin."

"Ozpin?" Summer perked up at the name. She gave a small grin to Ozpin. "Well, can't say I remember hearing the name before today, but I'm glad to finally meet you, Ozpin."

"And – why is that?" Ozpin was still reeling over the initial shock of seeing Summer Rose again after so long, much like how Yang, who was being hugged by Ruby, was handling the situation.

"Because," the Courier said, drawing her magnum, "you're the one who's going to help us win this battle."

With no hesitation, the Courier jammed her gun against Ozpin's thigh and fired.

Pressing Matters

When he was later asked about how he found himself as an unwilling captive of one of his former and allegedly deceased students, Ozpin placed blame on his old age and antiquated sense of sentimentality as the causes for his downfall.

The bullet, accompanied by an odd sting of music, somehow bypassed Ozpin's Aura entirely. As Ozpin sucked in a breath, he could feel the slug rip into his leg and lodge itself inside his thigh. Ozpin ungracefully plopped to his knees. Acting on instinct, Ozpin threw a punch at his assailant's throat. The pained choke that the woman with Summer Rose's face gave made Ozpin hesitate for the briefest of seconds. Then, the woman whipped the barrel of her gun across Ozpin's face. He swung his cane at the same time, swiping Summer's legs. She tumbled onto her side. Ozpin used one hand to pin Summer's gun hand by the wrist. His other hand held the cane against Summer's neck.

Those silver eyes were the telling factor of Summer's identity. The possession of such eyes was very much a rarity in the recent decades. Ozpin made it a point to etch the face and person of everyone who has ever been born with silver eyes that Ozpin has met into his memory. Summer Rose and her daughter were the latest from a long, old bloodline, a line Ozpin was quite familiar with throughout the years. Summer's untimely death was a great loss, not only for her family and friends but also for the rest of the world. Remnant had lost one of its key components needed to put an end to the Grimm once and for all.

Yet here she was, alive and well, with her white hood and silver eyes to behold. Summer bore an agitated grimace that reminded Ozpin of her cute pouts she had often used to sway her teammates and teachers to succumb to her childish desires. This frown she sported now was hardly cute, however. Summer's face was blemished with scars and grime that the sanitation-obsessed perfectionist Ozpin had once known would never have tolerated.

During their elevator ride to Beacon's surface, Ulysses had described an ally that would prove instrumental in defeating the Legion. "The Courier," he had called her. "She walks as the vanguard for a new nation, the hope of a people behind her. The Legion would see her dead. If she could, she would see the Legion as friends. For now, she would see them fleeting and broken. Doesn't matter to me which end she walks toward. I stand by her side and will see her mission to its finish."

When Summer was still alive and Raven had not abandoned her team, Ozpin had plans of further expanding Team STRQ's reputation as an indomitable force that the people of every Kingdom would readily admire and follow into battle. They would no longer simply be the best, highly competent and popular Huntresses and Huntsmen of the time. STRQ would transcend and become the stuff of legends, immortalized heroes that would be remembered for the generations to come. Assuming Ulysses continued to speak the truth and this Courier truly is Summer Rose, it seems that Summer went on to become a similar heroic figure for another kingdom.

Speaking of which, though Ulysses pledged to give his assistance to safeguard Beacon against the Legion, his loyalty to the Courier most likely took precedence if his reverent words for her were anything to go by. Ozpin looked over his shoulder. Ulysses, submachine gun pointed to the floor, had not moved from his spot. Ozpin glanced at the members of Team RWBY. Fear- or shock-induced paralysis appeared to be the ailment restricting their movement. He would have hoped his faithful, capable students would have instantaneously rushed in to save their dear Headmaster, but since Ozpin had suffered his own temporary paralysis when looking at Summer, he let it slide.

Ozpin turned his head to look back at Summer. He felt the cold barrel of a handgun touch his temple. It was another magnum, its material composed of smooth black metal with a polished ivory handle. Summer pulled back the hammer for emphasis.

"That was fucking uncalled for," Summer coughed out with some difficulty. "I don't punch people in the throat. It's not like I shot you in the dick."

"It was quite painful, nonetheless," Ozpin replied. He found himself wanting to engage in mid-battle banter coupled with lighthearted, condescending lectures, just as he had once done when he was personally overseeing Team STRQ's training. "Why did you shoot me?"

"Had a plan. Thought it out, and tried to execute it." The coughing eased slightly as Summer swallowed and spat out some spit. "Didn't work out, as you can see. Sorry about shooting you, but it would have made things a lot easier."

"Make what exactly easier?"

"Convincing the Legion to leave the Academy and to leave you alone." Summer's gaze drifted to Ozpin's bleeding leg. Her eyes widened. "It's already healing. Do you have Aura, too?" Ozpin did not get the opportunity to reply. Summer shook her head distractedly. "Never mind. Doesn't matter."

Summer fired her second revolver. A bullet nicked the side of Ozpin's head. No lasting damage, but it did momentarily daze Ozpin. When he was kicked off of Summer's person, he tried to skewer her bandaged and obviously wounded shoulder. He missed by the barest of inches, and Summer barreled head-first into Ozpin's stomach.

Wrestling for dominance over the other, they rolled uncontrollably along the ground until Ozpin managed to land a good punch against Summer's facial scar. Her momentary stupor allowed Ozpin the chance to disarm her of her weapons, tossing the magnums in some indiscriminate direction, and to shove Summer back to allow some coherent breathing room. Ozpin readied his cane in case Summer decided to strike again. Instead, Summer kept her distance, pulling out from the innards of her large coat a... a golf club?

Summer's narrowed eyes persisted with their feverish desire to see further combat. Her frown shifted to a... feral smirk. The frown had conveyed bitterness, a want to retaliate against her aggressor. The smirk, however, was a playful taunt meant to entice her challenger to leap wholeheartedly into the battle.

This type of smirk was often worn by Summer's teammates. It came naturally to Raven and Qrow, considering their upbringing. Taiyang, a talented brawler that he may be, was always more of a reactive person. He rarely instigated conflicts, so his battle-fueled smirks tended to show themselves only well into the fight itself. Summer smirked the least often out of the bunch. She had her playful side, as did the rest of her team, but she never mocked or heckled her opponents. She was too honest and kindhearted for such things.

She may share Summer's face, but the true Summer Rose and this woman shared little other characteristics. Ozpin made note of that. Further lapses in judgement on his part will not be tolerated.

The collective echo of the cocking of rifles and the whirring of those energy weapons prompted Ozpin and Summer to turn to the sound. They found themselves outside the cover of the fallen airship and entered a more open area of the boulevard. A line of metal men – Paladins, Ulysses had designated them as – stood before the pair. Their weapons dissuaded any notion of further scuffling between the two, lest Ozpin and Summer be gunned down where they stand.

One particular Paladain appeared to be the leader. Large red streaks of paint coated his silver armor. He wore a thin crimson tunic and cape over his armor. His helmet's horns differed a bit from his compatriots' as well. Instead of sleeking toward the back of his head, the horns pointed forward, as if they were intended to ram into an enemy like a bull.

Before long, Team RWBY was positioning themselves nearby Ozpin and Summer. The team had the advantage of more cover and higher ground with their placement atop a broken airship wing. However, Ozpin and Summer were still completely exposed and vulnerable to fire from the Paladins.

"Nobody move!" Yang commanded in her powerful voice that was all too similar in tone and volume to her father's. "Any of you decides to make a play, you'll regret it."

The leading Paladin stepped forward. He lowered his rifle and raised his hand to fight the glare of the overhead sun. "I suggest you stand down, Huntress," he counter-proposed. "Your Headmaster and the Courier are at our mercy. If any of you decide to 'make a play,' as it were, you will most certainly regret –" The man stopped himself short. He pointed a finger at Ruby Rose. "You, girl. What is your name? You look just like the Courier."

Before Ruby could say anything, Ulysses walked up beside Team RWBY, between Miss Xiao Long and her sister. "Her name matters little, Lucius," he said. At his sudden appearance, half of the Paladins' arms were trained on him. "You underestimate the resolve of these Huntsmen."

"... The Burned Man was one thing," the Paladin, now named Lucius, said with a degree of hesitance, "but you, Ulysses... I had thought the rumors to be untrue, and that the Courier really killed you at the Divide."

"He sure as shit tried to kill me," Summer interjected cheerily, which was wrong in its own right. Summer Rose took death and murder solemnly, not cheerily, not even sarcastically so.

"Only two ways this conflict ends for you, Lucius," Ulysses went on. "With you in chains, or with you in your coffin. Either way, you will bleed. Up you to you how much blood is drawn."

Ozpin decided to cut in. He needed to take control of the situation one way or another. "I'd rather we avoid drawing any more blood today," he said calmly, more than aware of the noises of war and battle cries surrounding them. Ozpin split his attention to Summer and Lucius. Summer was still liable to assault Ozpin further, and Lucius' unique markings suggested superior rank and skill in comparison to the other metal men. "Lucius, was it? I am Professor Ozpin of –"

"We know who you are, Headmaster of Beacon," Lucius interrupted. The Legionnaire raised his rifle at Ozpin. "If Ulysses stands with you, then you surely must know what our plans are."

"Yes. You mean to capture myself and the other professors as your prisoners." Ozpin said as much mostly for Team RWBY's benefit. Between directly combating marauding metal men and determining Ulysses' level of trustworthiness, there was little opportunity to send a coherent, well-detailed message via scroll to the rest of Beacon of what Ozpin had learned of the Legion. "I can't say that you'll succeed in your endeavors."

"You think you can stop us?" Lucius gestured to the broken ruins of the airship. "We have destroyed your flying machines." Then Lucius waved to Team RWBY. "Your Huntsmen are divided and weary. We have watched them at work, and they are not ready for a war of this magnitude. In time, very soon, the Grimm will overwhelm your forces. If we so command it, then Beacon will fall."

Summer gave an unimpressed snort. "You couldn't take the Dam," she said. "You couldn't take Vegas. You lost practically everything east of the Colorado. Hell, you couldn't convince me to even think about throwing you a bone. You won't have much luck convincing these Huntsmen folks of doing anything you say." Summer set her earnest eyes in Ozpin's direction.

She might have believed herself to be discreet as she was pulling out what appeared to be a flashbang out of her sleeve, but Ozpin's eagle eyes caught her carrying out the act. When she tossed it at Ozpin, he summarily kicked it back at her. The flashbang bonked her nose and went off right in front of her face. Her swearing curse became overshadowed by the blue flash screeching like a dying Grimm. Ozpin's vision was only somewhat blurred as he looked away from Summer and turned his attention on the Legion soldiers.

In a blur of motion, Ozpin closed the distance between himself and Lucius. Lucius could hardly react when his rifle was pulled out of his hands. He was already in the process of being toppled over his feet by a swing from Ozpin's cane. Lucius caught himself before he hit the floor. He threw a punch, augmented with some sort of weaponized gauntlet, at Ozpin. Summer, swinging her golf club wildly, blocked Lucius' attack before it could hit. Though slightly dented, the club proved useful in pushing Lucius back.

The Headmaster was relying on his students' superior speed to overcome the Legion's energy weaponry. Thankfully, his judgement was sound as Team RWBY leaped for the squad of

Paladins and caused them to panic and scatter. In the midst of the battle, Ozpin spotted Ulysses unloading his gun upon a downed metal man. Ozpin lost track of him and the individual members of RWBY as the battle grew more frenzied. Lucius was putting up a good fight and required more of Ozpin's attention than anything else.

Giving a sprint, Lucius pulled back his armored fist and lunged for Ozpin. Sidestepping the attack was easy enough. The follow-up elbow to Ozpin's shoulder was not. Ozpin whacked his cane against the back of Lucius' head. The clanging sound left him briefly disoriented. Summer struck him as well to keep him addled and unfocused. She swerved behind him and bashed the back of his knees. When Lucius tried to reach for a disregarded rifle, Ozpin kicked it away and struck him again for good measure.

Summer pulled Lucius' sidearm out of its holster. She aimed for Lucius' cranium, and Ozpin's eyes widened in trepidation. "Wait!" Ozpin yelled. He shouldered Summer away from him. "Don't kill him." Lucius was more useful alive for interrogation. Ozpin whacked Lucius for a third time. Ozpin hoped to knock him unconscious, but he was still relatively alert and scrambling to his feet.

Ozpin was about to carry out a follow-up attack when a body crashed into his own, sending him sliding across the street. The body quickly removed itself from him. The figure stood and helped pull Ozpin to his feet. Initially, Ozpin mistook her for Weiss Schnee, but the taller height and more defined creases on her face indicated her to be Winter Schnee, James' star Specialist.

"Professor," Winter greeted in a clipped, curt breath. Ozpin could tell from the way she was exhaling air that she was suppressing a few more uncomfortable injuries than she was willing to admit to aloud.

Meanwhile, another Legionnaire – his armor much more radically different than the common metal man's – appeared at Lucius's side and assisted him up. "Stand your ground, old man," the newest arrival ordered him. "You're not dead yet."

Lucius only grunted in response. "I am still your superior, Gaius. Speak as such, or I will have your tongue removed promptly."

"Your medicines may keep you able for battle, but it is not enough to best me, old man."

While the two Legion soldiers briefly bickered among themselves, Ozpin turned a question to Winter. "How fares our air support? Is James still stationed at his capital airship, or has the fighting worsened?"

"Our initial assault took out many of the invaders," Winter answered with a distasteful spite in her tone, "but their ordinance managed to take down several of our fighters and Bullheads." Winter glanced at the sky. A number of ships, significantly less than the amount that had arrived, were still flying and weaving through the air. "General Ironwood was busy redirecting resources to route and distract the Grimm when I crash-landed. My squadrons were supposed to help push back the invaders, but..."

Winter needn't go on further. Even with her reinforcements, the Battle of Beacon was still as chaotic and without a clear victor as it was when it started.

Ozpin made eye contact with the Gaius fellow. Gaius adopted a smirk much like the one Summer wore earlier. "Headmaster Ozpin," Gaius said as he unsheathed his dual machetes. "You have my thanks, Schnee. You just saved the Legion the trouble of having to search for his body among the profligates. You've brought him right to us."

"They intend to kidnap our leaders," Ozpin explained to Winter. "The Professors, the other Specialists, myself and General Ironwood..."

"They will fail," Winter declared confidently. She pointed her sword at Gaius. "You will fail, and you will fall, exactly like the insignificant, barbaric animal that you are."

"You describe yourself, profligate," Gaius goaded Winter. "Surrender yourself to me, and I will educate you personally in the ways of the Legion."

"Try it, cretin."

The familiar increased flow in his blood began to make Ozpin angsty. He readied his cane for the next stretch of fighting.

Then a flash of light exploded between Ozpin, Winter and the Legionnaires. It wasn't a lightning strike like the Legion had employed. The shock that temporarily blinded Ozpin and the others was caused by another flashbang.

When the blindness subsided, there was no need to look back at Summer to know that she was now aiming Lucius' laser pistol at Ozpin's backside. Ozpin's intuition was not infallible, but it was a reliable tool nonetheless.

Keeping his eyes on Lucius and Gaius, who were still attempting to reorient themselves after the flash, Ozpin asked Summer, "What part of your plan requires you to do harm to me?" Winter, senses now clear, snapped her gaze to Summer. Understandably, Winter froze in shock. If Ozpin remembered correctly, Summer Rose was an international idol of Winter's during her adolescent days.

"The part where Beacon Academy gets to live to see another day," Summer said as if it was the simplest thing in the world, "and where you've got an improved fifty-fifty chance of doing the same."

Ozpin raised his cane to block a swing from the golf club. His attempts to parry the lasers fired upon him failed, unfortunately, as the leg Summer had shot earlier was shot again. The leg flared in a fiery hot blaze. The burning sensation – a burning that reminded Ozpin a little too much of old wounds – spread all the way down to his foot. Ozpin could no longer stand on his own and fell into Summer's arms. Summer tossed away her weapons and caught Ozpin in a chokehold before Winter could hamper Summer's efforts.

A knife with dry, faded streaks of blood stained along its giant blade was pressed against Ozpin's throat. His Aura fluctuated as the sharp edge threatened to break through and draw

blood.

Lucius, at the sight of Summer restraining Ozpin in a rather brutish manner, called out, "Don't!"

As Ozpin pushed away the burning in his leg to the farthest, farthest part of his mind, he shifted his eyes to see the other Legionnaires halt their confrontations with Team RWBY and Ulysses.

"Mom?!" Ruby, bruised skin taking shape around her sniping eye, yelped in alarm. "Mom, what are you doing? Ozpin is on our side! He's – He's the Headmaster!"

"That's right," Summer agreed. "Headmaster Ozpin's one of Beacon's best and brightest. Ain't that right, Lucius?" Said man had his hands and arms spread apart, to give the impression of not wanting or planning to immediately attack Summer, Ozpin presumed. "Tell me something, Lucius, Gaius. Legion spent a lot of time and energy on building up info and intel on Ozpin. How much exactly is he worth to you?"

Like the cold, professional soldier that Winter was, she raised her blade toward Summer. "Unhand him," Winter commanded. "The Headmaster is not some trinket to be bargained with... whoever you are..."

"Call me the Courier. But don't worry – Winter, was it? Ozpin's not the only 'trinket' at risk here."

Ozpin could see what Summer meant. Ulysses maneuvered himself behind Winter and held his gun against her head. Winter only realized she was at his mercy when Ulysses said, "Don't want to take your life, but won't let you get in the way of the Courier's plan either."

And what exactly is that plan? Ozpin wondered.

With more than a little force, Summer finally cut through a sliver of skin along Ozpin's neck. The pain was hardly comparable to the burns or the fact that someone with Summer's face was the one cutting Ozpin's skin. "I ask again, Lucius. How much is Beacon's Headmaster worth to you?" As the cut began to deepen over so slightly, Lucius became more visibly distressed.

"Don't!" he screamed at the top of his lungs. When Summer displayed no signs of stopping, Lucius pressed a button on his gauntlet. A miniature bulb of light – a bulb matching that of the one attached to Ulysses' bracelet – began to blink. Gaius and the other metal men also wore gauntlets or bracelets that began blinking. Those must be the apparatuses that the Legion use to travel those "azure lights" Ulysses had mentioned.

Almost instantly, the sounds of battle trickled down to nothing. Echoes of gunfire and laserfire ceased. Desperate shrieks of bloodlust resonated throughout the campus shriveled and disappeared. There only remained the cries of the injured and crippled, and the flickering flames that were scattered across the ruined buildings and airships.

"I've commanded the Legion to stand down," Lucius explained. "They shall shed no more blood unless they fight to defend themselves."

"So, those reports weren't lying," Summer observed. "You really want Ozpin that badly, huh?"

"Why am I such a valuable target?" Ozpin asked. He said the question with a carefully constructed deadpan façade. In reality, he was growing ever more nervous. Never mind whatever Summer's situation was. If this Legion was willing to throw away the battle if it meant securing Ozpin's capture, just what do they plan for him? The Legion lacks knowledge of the Maidens, so perhaps they have some inkling of Ozpin's ability to transcend death?

That was Summer's plan, then. Whatever the Legion wants Ozpin for, it required his survival, and his survival was worth throwing away the entire battle. The lull in fighting would allow Beacon's forces, especially the students, time to reinforce their defenses and revitalize their spirits.

Summer's reason for shooting Ozpin was to weaken him, to put him in a position of vulnerability that would disturb the Legion enough to buy time for Beacon.

But what does she plan to do after?

"Doesn't matter why they want you," Summer said, cutting off the answer about to leave Lucius' lips. "Not for now, at least. All that matters now is that they want you alive, and if you die, then it's going to be helluva lot harder for them to take over this place... This place is called Remnant, right?"

Gaius barked a laugh. "The Headmaster may be a valuable asset, but he is not worth surrendering the battle to you. We have grander designs that surpass our needs for him."

Lucius hastily pulled at Gaius' arm. "Be silent! Do not provoke the Courier! Do not put at risk Caesar's plans!"

"I will provoke all I want. Vulpes is a fool for adopting such a roundabout strategy to conquer these profligates."

Vulpes, and Caesar. The current leaders of the Legion of Steel? Didn't Ulysses say this "Caesar" was dead?

"Besides," Gaius continued contemptuously, "if you kill him, Courier, then you vilify yourself among Beacon's people. You say they will not listen to the Legion. What will make them listen to you?"

"I've been forgiven for worse," Summer said straight-faced.

Gaius laughed again. "You gain little with this meaningless ploy. Amusing, but ultimately, fruitless."

"Fruitless?" Summer chuckled herself. "How is this fruitless? Here's the fruit of my labor: The fighting's stopped. No one's trying to kill anyone any more... for the most part. If you

look at the big picture, this battle's done."

"Hardly," Gaius scoffed, brandishing his swords.

"The Battle of Beacon is over, Gaius. Beacon won, and the Legion lost."

"How are you so sure of that, Courier?"

Summer shifted her arms so that she could look at the scroll-like device around her left forearm. Ozpin needn't see Summer's face to know that she was smirking. Her words and tone told him enough. "Because the Legion's going home empty-handed, without a lick of recompense for all of your hard work."

Then, the storm of blue lightning struck again.

Gaius, Lucius, and all of their accompanying metal men disappeared from sight.

X

A part of Ruby wanted to bounce into the air while letting off a rambunctious cheer. The lightning must mean that the Legion retreated and went back to wherever they came from, right? She could hear other Huntsmen and Huntresses cheering in the distance. Her scroll, hanging off her arm by an improvised strap, was displaying texts from Professors and other Huntsmen team leaders, saying that the Legion were gone and telling the teams to take care of their wounded. Ruby's adrenaline was still running high, and she wanted to celebrate.

However, Mom still had a knife to Professor's Ozpin's throat, and Weiss' sister still had a gun pointed to her head, so Ruby set her priorities straight and devoted all of her energy to solving the crisis before her.

"The Professors are saying that the Legion's gone!" Ruby announced, flailing her scroll. "They, uh, teleported off of campus! So, we're done fighting. The fighting's done... right Mom?"

"Yup!" Mom confirmed heartily. "All according to plan... mostly..." Mom, with an embarrassed smile, gave Professor Ozpin a sideways glance. "Listen, I'm sorry for, y'know, attacking you and cutting you, but I can explain everything. In excruciating detail. I'm sure I can convince you that everything I've done today has been absolutely necessary if you didn't want the Legion to win."

The expression on Ozpin's face revealed no emotion, no telling of what he was thinking. The already-healing cut – not at all deep to begin with, thankfully – on his throat didn't seem to bother him much. His Aura must be made of some really stern stuff. "Give your word to surrender all of your weapons and to peacefully submit to detainment and interrogation, then I promise you that I will listen to what you and Ulysses have to offer."

"Best offer I've heard all day." Mom retracted her blade and released Ozpin. She nodded to the man in dreadlocks, Ulysses, and he also put down his weapon.

Faster than Ruby could comprehend, Mom and Ulysses were thrown onto the ground. Glyphs were dancing around them. Winter Schnee was securing two pairs of handcuffs around their wrists.

Fueled by innate instinct, Ruby almost lunged forward to knock Winter away and to free her mother. However, Weiss held Ruby back. Weiss gave Ruby a sympathetic look before turning to her sister.

"Winter," Weiss spoke up tentatively, "though the Courier can be a bit... unpredictable... I don't think there's any need to treat them so cruelly."

"She held a knife to your Headmaster's throat," Winter pointed out. She glanced at Ozpin. He waved a dismissive hand, too busy typing on his scroll. "Her case will be heard and judged, but until then, she is a highly dangerous individual under our custody that must be dealt with accordingly." Winter began patting Mom and Ulysses down for any more weapons they had on them.

"It's okay, Ruby," Mom assured in a calming, soothing voice, and Ruby wanted to break into tears. "I did shoot your Headmaster and partially slit his throat. This is only fair."

"Wait a second!" Yang yelled. She took a step forward toward mom, but a glyph got in her way. Winter didn't even look at her.

"Keep your distance," Winter ordered. "As I said, highly dangerous."

Yang glared at the back of Winter's head. Pulling Ruby into one of her arms – an embrace that Ruby returned tenfold – Yang declared fiercely, "That's Summer Rose. That's our mom. She's supposed to be dead, but now she's apparently alive. We need answers, now."

"I'm not blind," Winter said as she pulled out a slightly bent lead pipe shaped like a mallet from Mom's coat. "I know who she looks like. Can you tell me why your mother would assault Professor Ozpin?"

"Let us talk to her and we'll find out," Yang answered through gritted teeth. Ruby held her sister tighter, not wanting her to start up a fistfight.

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait your turn Miss Xiao-Long," Ozpin, hands folded behind his back, said as he walked up. "Summer and Ulysses obviously know more about the Legion and its intentions for Beacon. They must be promptly interrogated. For now, Miss Rose, I suggest you take your team and seek medical attention for your injuries."

Now that Ozpin mentioned it, Ruby was only seeing clearly out of one eye, her other one too bruised and numb. Parts of Yang's gauntlets were scorched and broken, her knuckles scraped and bloody. Weiss was still breathing heavily to compensate for her depleted Aura reserves, and Blake was limping as she tied an improvised tourniquet around her arm.

Ruby was the team leader. The safety and health of her team was always a high priority for the team leader. Ruby should be more focused on doing just what Ozpin said, getting Yang,

Blake, Weiss, and herself a medic to look them over, but... Yang was right. They needed answers.

Ulysses spoke up. "You are of the Courier's blood?" he asked as Winter roughly pulled him and Mom to their feet. Mom's white hood fell over her head. She didn't seem bothered a lot by Winter's cold attitude. If anything, Mom looked relieved that the battle was over. Ulysses, on the other hand, had his curious, unnerving brown eyes peering into Ruby's soul. "You share her eyes, and you claim to share her true name? Rose?"

"Her name's Ruby Rose," Mom told him in a casual tone. "Jumpstart's her sister, named Yang Xiao Long. I'm apparently Summer Rose, their mother."

"Headmaster," Winter said, speaking over Mom and Ulysses. She tugged at her prisoners' cuffs as more glyphs rotated around them. "Where should I take them?"

"Bring them to the Tower," Ozpin answered, waving his hand toward the nearby building, "to the top floor, my office. Glynda and James will be meeting us there once our borders are secured from the Grimm."

Winter pushed her captives onward. Yang tried to pull out of Ruby's grip to run after them. Ruby would have joined her, but instead, she continued to hold her older sister back. Mom was sending them a sad smile over her shoulder. It was a smile that said, "Don't worry. Everything's going to be fine." It was an expression Yang often gave Ruby whenever Yang went on one of her escapades into Vale's inner city. Even if Ruby couldn't trust her to stay completely out of trouble, she always trusted her to get home safely, and she always did.

"I give you my word that Summer will not be harmed," Ozpin tried to placate Yang. "I promise you that once we are done questioning her, you and Ruby, and your father and uncle once they arrive, will be the first people to see her."

Yang's eyes were as defiant as ever, but Ozpin was the Headmaster. His authority and sincere words were enough to quell Yang's bitterness, at least for now.

Ruby and Yang silently watched as the adults walked off. Needing something to distract her, Ruby faced Weiss and Blake. "Are you guys okay?" she asked.

"I feel like we should be asking you two that," Blake remarked. When Yang looked to her partner, her spark reignited as Yang abruptly picked Blake up, bridal style. "Whoa! What –"

"Your leg's hurt bad," Yang said as if it was the most inconsequential thing in the world. "If your Aura's not enough to heal it, then you need to see a medic."

"I'll be fine," Blake hissed as she cringed at Yang's brusqueness. "Yang, that was your and Ruby's mother. You should go see her."

"Both of our moms left us a long time ago," Yang said quietly as she marched down the street. "We can wait a little while longer."

As Weiss wordlessly accepted Ruby's offer to support her as they made their way back to the dorms, Ruby found herself agreeing with Yang. They could wait. Mom was back. Once Professor Ozpin was done talking with her, there'd be plenty of time for the Rose and Xiao-Long family to reunite and finally be whole again.

X

Ozpin would have made Winter Schnee privy to the knowledge of the Maidens, Salem, magic, and all the secrets he and his cabal constantly conceal from the whole of Remnant long ago. In his opinion, she had the skill, loyalty, and attitude that would make her an ideal ally within the inner circle. Plus, her membership into the exclusive club would have made her all the more compliant to Ozpin's orders of keeping watch over Ulysses and Summer at Beacon Tower.

Technically, Winter was under no obligation to arbitrarily adhere to Ozpin's commands. Her allegiance was to the Atlas military and General Ironwood, first and foremost. Ozpin had to do some persuasive schmoozing to convince Winter to act as overseer for their prisoners instead of letting her leave to report directly back to James. Convincing Winter wasn't too difficult, but having Winter in-the-know would have saved him the time.

But that was neither here nor there. He will have to bring it up with James at a later date. For now, Ozpin had other appointments to attend to.

Interrogating Summer and Ulysses were definitely on his to-do list, but Ozpin really shouldn't hide away in his office quite yet. As Headmaster, Ozpin had a duty to inspect the damage dealt upon his school personally. He had to stand alongside his fellow professors and his prospective students, bearing his own battle scars and sharing the burden weighing them down. Morale would increase, and Ozpin's reputation among the Hunters and general public would remain in good standing.

Ozpin found himself wandering to the fairgrounds, where the Battle of Beacon first began. The corpses, ash piles, and fallen carnival stands were being tended to by Atlas soldiers. Most of the bodies of the Legionnaires were absent, likely teleported along with the rest of their comrades. Professor Peach, waving a hand in Ozpin's direction, had assumed command of the fairgrounds and was coordinating Huntsmen teams in conjunction with Atlas soldiers. The occasional civilian was scattered here and there, kneeling over a body in mourning.

Every single person who crossed Ozpin's path looked too many years older than whatever their actual age was. As the saving grace, each one who caught sight of Ozpin notably brightened up. His presence engendered an atmosphere of security and strength. Exhaustion was widespread, but they were still motivated and willing to fight should the Legion or Grimm launch a counter-attack.

Eventually, Ozpin encountered a student of his who few thought would make it very far studying under Beacon's standards and curriculum. Despite the overhanging doubt, Ozpin was confident the young Arc would grow into a fine Huntsman worthy of the title.

"Professor!" Jaune cried out in a high-pitched voice. His jog toward Ozpin was hindered with a wobbly leg. His right arm and entire right side of his torso lacked clothing or armor,

replaced by bandages. Ozpin was fairly sure the boy's right hand was missing a finger or two. "Professor, thank god you're here. We," Jaune wheezed in and out a breath, "we need your help with something. The other professors are too busy and –"

"Help with what?"

Jaune continued to wearily pant as he told his story. "When those – those metal guys and green guys disappeared, there was another group of them that appeared by the tree line. I'm pretty sure they were trying to surrender, but, uh, Team SSSN won't listen and are trying to kill them."

Team SSSN. Sun Wukong's team. If his team was anything like its leader, then they must have a habit of circumventing lawful orders – such as the one Ozpin had sent via scroll telling everyone to apprehend any straggling Legionnaires they find alive – to follow their own trivial impulses.

"Lead the way," Ozpin prompted. Jaune nodded enthusiastically, likely excited and relieved to have an authority figure on his side, and ran off. Ozpin quickened his pace and followed.

They traveled deeper into the outskirts of Emerald Forest than Ozpin anticipated. Perhaps the relative remoteness of their destination is what inspired Team SSSN to ignore standing orders. Regardless, Ozpin hoped they would still refer to the judgement of the Headmaster of Beacon with little resistance. He was in no mood to enact disciplinary action on a few rebellious teenagers.

Soon enough, Team SSSN and Team JNPR and their arguments came into earshot.

"They surrendered!" shouted the voice of Pyrrha Nikos. "They are giving up! We don't have to kill them. No one else has to die!"

Ah, and there was that respect for life Glynda had pointed out to Ozpin when they were looking over Pyrrha's file. Securing the Fall Maiden powers for Miss Niko was another pin on his to-do list to get to eventually.

"They killed Sage!" yelled Sun Wukong in that boisterous voice of his. "They killed Scarlet! They don't get to get away with that!"

"They won't. That's why we're arresting them. We're not killing them!"

"They have to pay!"

"Not like this!"

Stepping past Jaune and over a bush, Ozpin reached a small grassy opening amid the forestry. A bundle of fallen trees formed a makeshift tent. Ozpin could see vague humanoid shapes through the leaves moving under the tent while Nora Valkyrie stood as a guard, her giant hammer held at the ready. Ozpin spotted Lie Ren tending to an unconscious Neptunes Vasilius' blood-drenched skull beside Nora. Pyrrha and Sun stood at the center of the field.

Pyrrha had the usual cool-headed, graceful countenance about her while Sun was a bubble of uncontained rage.

Another fight was about to ensue. Not particularly in the mood to witness one, Ozpin whacked the back of Mister Wukong's head. He was down for the count before anyone could blink.

Team JNPR all shouted in reaction to Ozpin's arrival. Their words all coalesced into some indiscernible blurb of speech. For the most part, Ozpin ignored them. The object of his attention was the apparent remnant of the Legion who were left behind.

When Ozpin approached the tree tent, Miss Valkyrie fell into step beside her. "We've got your back, Professor Ozzie!" the exuberant young girl exclaimed. At least one of them was in a good mood. "I wouldn't worry too much, though. These guys are actually pretty nice!"

One of the figures under the tent began to emerge. It was a Super Mutant, green skin and all. His face had a few unnatural lumps and scars along it. A large piece of orange metal acted as a shoulder pad. He wore mismatched goggles on his forehead and half of a headset over his right ear.

"So, you're Headmaster Ozpin," the mutant said in greeting. "Name's Marcus. My team and I aren't looking to start a fight. We aren't with the Legion, if that's what's worrying you. One of ours is bleeding pretty badly. Think you can lend a hand?"

Interlude 1 - Human Error

Lucius would have Gaius beaten to a mangled, bloody pulp and crucified posthaste if it wouldn't have been an unpopular move. Many in the Legion still respected Lucius' experience and expertise, but many still admired Gaius' confidence and ferocity on the battlefield.

"You fool!" Lucius, doing his best to ignore the burning sensation threatening to pierce through his forehead, screamed as he wrapped his broken fingers around Gaius' throat. "I am your Legate! You adhere to my commands, my will! Not to your own petty predilections!"

"You are a Legate," Gaius spat back, visibly unconcerned with neither Lucius' attempts to choke him nor the blood running down from Gaius' nose, "but you are hardly one I would willingly follow into battle."

Before Lucius could follow up on his threats, one of his fellow Legionnaires forced them apart. "Have your pissing contest later!" yelled the raspy-voiced man in red-streaked power armor very similar to Lucius' own. "Gaius, find a Vexillarius and get a sitrep on the other platoons. Lucius, help me organize the rest of the boys. We need to get the wounded out of here and let the scribes and bots handle the cleanup."

Like the true, loyal soldier of the Legion Lucius always was proud to be, he followed his brother's orders. Though Lucius was technically the higher ranked Legate, his comrade's instructions were more than reasonable. The platform on which Lucius' platoon used to travel through the azure lights was on fire and in great disrepair. The various control consoles and electrical wires around the room were also sparking erratically and looked as if they could completely explode at any second.

The specific science behind the azure lights escaped Lucius. One thing that he did understand clearly enough: teleporting when not within the immediate vicinity of one of those nexus points, hotspots, or whatever new term the Scribes were calling them, rampant and uncontrollable health defects were guaranteed to follow.

A number of Lucius' surviving platoon were not as fortitudinous as he and his fellow Legionnaire veterans. If it wasn't their wounds inflicted upon them during the Battle of Beacon, it was the nauseous puking, abrupt loss of limbs, hallucination-induced hysterical panic, and the scorched skin that was keeping the men hysterical, confused, and heavily disorganized.

"Legion!" Lucius roared into the air, using the megaphone function built into his helmet. He remembered the days when he had no need to use such technology to louden his voice. Sadly, those days were long gone. "Per angusta ad augusta!"

Lucius' words quickly prompted the men to regain a semblance of composure and discipline. While Gaius walked off with a limping gait, Lucius and his fellow Legate were pushing their brothers and underlings to evacuate the teleportation platform. Those who were able to stand on their own dragged their damaged and distraught brothers with help from some of the

nearby medical robots. The machines were also clearing away the teleported corpses. Lucius led the way to the infirmary, letting the Scribes and their security detail move to repair the damages dealt to their teleporter.

The Courier's companions must have proved too powerful and clever for Legate Decker's defensive stratagem. Lucius couldn't say that he was surprised. The Courier and her three-man army were successful in decimating Fortification Hill only a few years before. If the Courier so wished it, infiltrating the new Legion's latest highly fortified stronghold was only a matter of time.

Vague white walls stained with varying shades of crimson soon enveloped Lucius' vision. The doctors and auto-docs treating the men's injuries could only be seen as a blur of motion. By the time they had reached the infirmary, Lucius was nearly completely blind. Were it not for his fellow Legate supporting Lucius and guiding him to an empty chair to rest on, Lucius would have likely fallen over and passed out.

"Many thanks, brother," Lucius spoke with a slight stagger. An indistinct green shape formed in front of Lucius' eyes. Lucius felt his helmet be gently removed from his head. A needle injected uplifting medicine through his neck and into his veins. His vision cleared, and Elliot Nesting's malformed face was frowning at Lucius.

"Jeez, Lucius," the ghoul muttered just low enough for Lucius to hear. Elliot swiped some gauze and other medical supplies and began treating Lucius' face. "Take it from someone who knows something about old age. You gotta quit while you're ahead. Otherwise, you'll probably lose your head."

"You are far older than I," Lucius pointed out. He hid his grimace and any other outward reaction that would reveal that he was in pain. Elliot could already see the obvious damage. He needn't see any more weakness. Lucius had too much respect for Elliot and for himself. "You and the Matriarch still remain in service. What example would it set for the men if I stepped down?"

Elliot chortled quietly. "If Gaius doesn't get himself killed before he finally gets that promotion, the Caesar might throw his hat in the ring."

Lucius snorted before he could stop himself. "The Caesar is a brilliant strategist, but an average warrior." The second Caesar of the Legion displayed a level of confidence and care in developing his strategies and battle plans that the Burned Man and Lanius severely lacked. That earned himself a good portion of Lucius' respect, regardless of Caesar's personality traits in other areas. It was thanks to him that the Legion was able to reach the Midwest and reform with the remnants of the local Brotherhood chapter. If only the second Caesar shared the previous Legates' skill and ferocity on the battlefield itself. "He is better off remaining and overseeing things here than running off into some foreign, dissolute world."

The more traditionalist Legionnaires and Legates would have likely accused Lucius of treason for merely spouting these thoughts. Elliot only gave him an easy, amused smile. "Ah. You still don't think we should have gone into Remnant."

"We should be more focused on securing our own borders," Lucius asserted. Despite the off-putting nature of Elliot's ghoulish appearance, Lucius was eternally grateful for the man's ability to tolerate Lucius' "senile rants." If only more of Lucius' other human Legates were as open-minded as Elliot. "Our fallen brothers still reign and perpetuate the instability in the west, machinations from the rumored malfunctioning G.E.C.K. is preventing us from expanding southward, and the radiation storms in the north and east are threatening to spread further into our own territory. The Legion's time would be better spent dealing with these immediate problems at hand rather than chasing fantasies and fairy tales."

"The Scribes and Frumentarii are pretty sure we can find solutions to our problems in Remnant. Trust me, I didn't believe the first reports they gave about the place either, but now we've seen it for ourselves. Dust, Aura, Semblances, Grimm..." Elliot's crooked grin widened. There were more missing teeth lining his mouth than Lucius remembered. Some were probably lost as a result of the abrupt teleportation, but the ones that remained were still as rotten and as loose as ever. "You can't tell me that the Legion wouldn't be tempted to take all of those things for themselves."

Of course Elliot would say that. Though he remains Legion by name, his heart still lay with some of the values of his former Brotherhood, of actively and constantly seeking advanced technology and utilizing it for his people's benefit. "These Auras and Semblances are far too reminiscent of the Courier's abilities," Lucius shared. "One of their junior Hunters was the spitting image of the Courier; the same face, same hair, eyes, and hood." Elliot's relaxed expression finally faltered. He never met the Courier, but the stories the Legion told were vivid enough to paint a clear picture of the woman. "The Courier orchestrated the catalyst that nearly destroyed the Legion. Elliot, do you honestly believe that the Legion as it is can defeat armies tens of hundreds strong with powers comparable to the Courier's?"

Once, Lucius dismissed the Courier as a profligate whore who would have ultimately been stripped and taken as the first Caesar's personal trophy to keep with him in Vegas. After the Second Battle of Hoover Dam, Lucius learned his lesson to never underestimate a woman until she portrays her full, true character.

Before Elliot could respond, and before Lucius could continue his rambling, a sly, cool voice spoke up. "The Courier nearly destroyed the Legion. We have long since rebuilt ourselves to twice our former strength. Do you doubt the Legion's capability, Lucius?"

Caesar, flanked by his power-armored Praetorians, calmly approached his Legates. Instinctively, Lucius attempted to drop to his knees and bow his head before him. Elliot rested a hand on Lucius' arm and kept him from doing so. Then Lucius remembered that among the reforms made to the Legion, the laxer and less formalized worship and admiration of the Legion's leadership was one of them.

"Not at all, Caesar," Elliot answered without hesitation, joshing Lucius slightly. "The man's probably got a concussion, saying stuff without thinking through 'em. Honestly, it was a pretty gnarly fight in Beacon. The emergency teleport didn't help much."

"So Gaius has informed me." Ah, Gaius. It did not come as a surprise that the ambitious, arrogant brown-noser contacted Caesar first and foremost rather than letting one of the other Legates or Centurions handle it. "It was the Courier and her companions' doing that was the

cause for that teleport." Caesar's eyes fell directly upon Elliot. "They had help. The man you had sponsored for membership within the Legion."

Lucius remembered that man. He was young, intelligent, and quite skilled with his customized shishkebab sword. He was a perfect candidate for rushed entry as a Knight in the Legion.

"What?" Elliot appeared stunned and at a loss for words. "You mean... but he said... I thought he –"

"He never lied, but he was far more flexible with the truth than I gave him credit for." Caesar held up a 10mm pistol – a vault dweller weapon, and a weapon of Elliot's sponsored candidate – and held it before Elliot. "After sabotaging our teleporters, he ran off with several blueprints and prototype weapons on his person. I suspect he travels eastward, back to his brothers on the coast. I bestow you the responsibility of eliminating him before he succeeds in his mission."

Elliot's mouth continued to gape until he finally recomposed himself. He took the pistol into his hands humbly and lowered his head. "By your command, Caesar."

Caesar placed a hand on Elliot's shoulder. It was likely intended to be a kind, supportive gesture, but kindness was merely a façade this Caesar often used to deceive and mislead others. Lucius should know. He's been a victim of such kindness from him for years. "Your ability in reading people may be at fault, but I have trust in your aptitude in combat and your expertise in voyaging across the wastes." Caesar removed his hand slowly. He tolerated ghouls for the skills and experience. Their bodily mutations were another matter. "You leave immediately. The other Legates and I will continue with the Remnant campaign."

Wordlessly, Elliot nodded. Giving Lucius one last reassuring, easygoing smile, Elliot walked off.

That left Lucius wholly and fully to Caesar's mercy.

"You mean for Elliot to go alone?" Lucius questioned.

"From what I can tell from his short time with us, I believe that the Lone Wanderer shares the Courier's conviction and sentiments to friendship. Nesting was a friend to the Wanderer. The ghouls can use that to his advantage." The smile that formed across Caesar's cheeks was as wicked as a fox. "But never mind that. The Lone Wanderer is irrelevant to our plans for Remnant. You never answered my question from before, Lucius. You don't believe the Legion can subjugate the profligate world and take it as our own?"

Lucius frowned. Caesar wasn't angry or offended. He was teasing Lucius. "The invasion was a failure. We slaughtered without care to age or gender, as was decided, but we failed to capture any of the key targets; Ozpin, the Schnee, and so on. They still remain on Remnant." Ignoring the aches and soreness, Lucius lifted himself from his chair and stood straight. He met Caesar's eye-level. "Their Hunters are tired and drained, but with their leaders with them and now being advised by the Courier, and with the teleporters damaged, the later phases of the invasion plan will prove to be costlier than we initially foresaw."

A soft grunt was Caesar's response. "So, am I right to assume that you wish to halt the Remnant Campaign?"

With a sigh, Lucius rubbed his fingers against his forehead, suppressing a wave of pain that suddenly sprouted. "You know my position on the matter, Vulpes. I will do whatever you and the Elder Legates ultimately command, but by my estimate, the Legion is incapable of conquering Remnant with our current arms and numbers."

Lucius realized his misstep a second later. Ever since Vulpes was crowned as Caesar, few bothered to use his former name as a form of address. It became an unspoken rule, and Lucius wasn't sure what the consequences of breaking that rule would be.

Thankfully, it seemed that there were no consequences, as Vulpes merely continued to smile.

"Ah, but Lucius, while you and the invasion force had the main bulk of Remnant's forces occupied, the other Legates and I were handling preparations for the contingency should the Battle of Beacon not go in your favor.

Contingency. Lucius was not informed of any contingency. "What contingency?"

"You underestimate the Legion's reach, Lucius. Remember, we are many." Caesar held up a fist and began extending each individual finger. "The Bull. The Steel. The Mutant. Now, with the help of the White Fang, the Hunter will soon be ours."

This Will Be the Day

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ruby counted her team lucky amongst the other student Huntsmen teams. The members of RWBY, with black eyes and drained Auras, were dragging their feet along cracked floors when they reached the small plaza in front of the dorms. Meanwhile, students two to three years older than Ruby were either shrieking in pain as Beacon and Atlesian medics treated them or were in silent mourning over bodies with white blankets draped atop them. A makeshift border surrounding the plaza built from airship debris and concrete rubble was being patrolled by a few students, probably in case of another attack. The students weren't really patrolling, though. They were more worried about yelling into their scrolls about the whereabouts of their teammates or too busy weeping to themselves.

The adrenaline and the drugs Mom had given Ruby was starting to wane. If it weren't for her concern and responsibility to her team, Ruby would have probably joined the others in their hysteria.

Getting Weiss' Aura to a steady level was easy enough. One of the Professors had a semblance that augmented the general health of living things; the fertility in a plant, the night vision of a Faunus, and even the Aura of a human. Unfortunately, plenty of other students were afflicted with depleted Auras, so the rest of the team's injuries had to be healed conventionally. The deep cuts on Blake's leg and arms were promptly disinfected and bandaged, and she even got her own stretcher and a pillow to lay down on.

For once, Yang let her bloody and bruised hands be treated by the medic without complaint. Yang never liked sitting still, especially during their trips to the doctor when growing up. However, Yang's voiceless compliance was pretty understandable. She and Ruby had a lot on their minds.

Ruby applied an ice pack against the side of her head, along her black eye. Her vision was still blurry, but her Aura was high enough for it to start slowly clearing up. Ruby took a glance at her team. Yang was pointedly staring at her feet, not giving away any indication of what exactly was bubbling inside. Blake seemed to be the most exhausted, eyes struggling to stay open, as she let her head fall ungracefully onto her pillow. When her cute bow, now streaked with bloodstains, began to loosen, Ruby kneeled and tightened the knot. Weiss's face said that she wanted to say something aloud, but no words came out of her.

Reaching into her cloak, Ruby pulled out a revolver, the sound of guitar strings faintly chiming. It was one of Mom's revolvers. Professor Ozpin and Winter Schnee had taken all of Mom's and Ulysses' weapons save for the magnum. It had a weathered frame and a complex engraving lined along it. Ruby checked the cylinder. The gun looked like it used .44 Magnum rounds. No Dust, though. The scent the gun gave was rather plain and dull compared to the vibrant fragrance of Dust. So what was the propellant made out of? If not Dust, what was used to fire and launch the bullet?

She can ask Mom about her gun later. There's a lot of things Ruby will get the chance to ask her once Ozpin's done talking with her.

Ruby looked up from her fiddling with Mom's Mysterious Magnum (that was the perfect name for such an intriguing weapon and no one could change her mind about it) and nearly leapt up in overjoyed relief.

"Jaune!" Ruby dashed forward and wrapped her arms around everyone's favorite blonde doofus. "You're okay!"

"Ow! Ruby I – Ow!" Jaune winced and tried to gently push Ruby off him. "Ruby. Yeah. I'm okay. Team JNPR's okay, but I think you're breaking my already broken ribs."

The bandages on Jaune and his hunched back weren't lost on Ruby, and she didn't care. Injuries can be fixed. You're still alive if you're in pain. That means you aren't dead yet.

"We've all been through a lot, Ruby," said another voice with an elegance and calmness that only served to excite Ruby further.

"Pyrrha!" Ruby released Jaune and readily embraced his green-eyed partner. "You're okay, too!"

The redheaded spartan returned the embrace easily. Pyrrha slowly separated herself from Ruby more calmly than Jaune did. Her soothing smile uplifted Ruby's spirits, just a bit. "Like Jaune said, Team JNPR survived the battle without too many injuries. What about you and your team, Ruby?"

"Same. We're alive. You're alive. Everything's gonna be okay!"

Jaune awkwardly coughed into his hand. "Um, well, I wouldn't say everything is okay. I mean... uh..."

Ruby looked over Pyrrha's shoulder, hoping to see Nora and Ren. Knowing those two, Nora would probably be happily piggy-backing off Ren with Ren struggling to maintain his grip on her. Instead, Ren was strolling down the street with a pair of bodies hanging over his shoulders.

Sun and Neptune. They were still breathing, but the severity of their wounds made Ruby turn away.

While Ren went to speak with a medic, Ruby spotted Nora striding proudly toward the plaza with her Magnhild in its grenade launcher mode. Professor Ozpin was trailing directly behind her. Near them were the members of Team CFVY. Considering their seniority and reputation among the students of Beacon, it wasn't a surprise to see CFVY not too worst for wear, though Velvet seemed to be missing.

Team CFVY circled around an odd group of characters: a green mutant wearing patches of mismatched armor pieces, a metal man with a suit and helmet that differed from the ones Ruby has seen the Legion wear, someone in a cowboy-esque outfit with bandoleers and a

wide-brimmed hat, and a spherical, metallic object floating a few feet above the ground. Nearby Huntsmen eyed the group nervously and with suspicion, but when they spotted Professor Ozpin, they relaxed and went about their business.

As the group neared the plaza, Yang marched past Ruby and up to Professor Ozpin. At Yang's wordless inquiry, Ozpin shook his head. "I've yet to speak with Summer. I'll be making my way to my office now." Ozpin motioned to the unusually-dressed strangers as he raised his voice to speak to the rest of RWBY and JNPR. "I realize that you all have just begun recovering from the damages and pains you've suffered during the battle, but I have a new assignment for you. Your teams will keep watch over our new guests."

The metal man raised his hand like a schoolboy wanting a teacher to call on him. "Watching is good," he said with a hint of sarcasm, "but a doctor who knows his or her way around that 'Aura healing' you mentioned would be really appreciated." The man lifted his leg. His foot was a mangled, bloody mess. It took Ruby a second to register the blood trail he was leaving behind. The cowboy was by the metal man's side and helping him stand.

"And who are you guys supposed to be?" Yang questioned hotly.

"We're not Legion," the cowboy said in a gravelly, old voice. His face was hidden by the brim of his hat. "Just the opposite, in fact. So, if you can lend us a hand and help treat Arcade's leg instead of trying to burn us at the stake like the monkey boy was trying to do..."

"If you're not with the Legion, then who are you?" Yang's arm twitched. Ruby grabbed hold of her sister's wrist to keep it from shaking further.

Professor Ozpin smiled at the sisters. "Like Ulysses, they claim to be companions of the Courier."

Ozpin made his departure, and all of Ruby's attention was trained on the strangers.

Team CFVY's leader, Coco, called out, "Medic! Pull up a stretcher. Rest of you kids keep these boys out of trouble." Coco narrowed her eyes at the mutant. She lifted her Gatling gun and rotated its cannons. "We better not hear about any trouble."

"Duly noted," the mutant replied in a voice devoid of the feral sneer or animalistic growl the other mutants had shown. "You won't."

"You're leaving us with the aliens?" Jaune tentatively whined. Ruby suppressed a snort. Aliens? Aliens were silly. If her days to the comic book store taught Ruby anything, it was more likely that the invaders and these guests were from another dimension rather than outer space.

"Your teams are all accounted for," Coco responded to Jaune coldly. "Velvet's still MIA. We need to find her. Deal with it."

As Coco left with her team to find her missing teammate, Pyrrha patted her partner's shoulder reassuringly. "It's alright, Jaune. Like they said, they aren't affiliated the Legion, and they have no desire to turn away our help."

"Yeah, no fighting. We promise," the metal man – Arcade, the cowboy named him – reiterated. "Medical attention, though; that would be really appreciated." The Professor from before dragged along a stretcher. Arcade plopped onto the cot. Ruby was surprised the weight of his armor didn't outright tear apart the material. As the medic began to use his semblance to treat Arcade's leg, the cowboy muttered something that Ruby couldn't make out.

The cowboy turned to Ruby, and Ruby took a step back in shock. He was bald and hairless aside from the thin moustache placed over his lips, his face a sickening tinge of orange. His skin appeared cracked with flakes of it peeling off. It looked like all the cells and tissues that made up his face were dead. If it weren't for his easygoing smile and relaxed brown eyes making him look more benign rather than a bloodthirsty zombie, Ruby might have shrieked in fright and hid behind Yang.

"Thanks for helping us out," the cowboy said in a grandfatherly voice. Ruby remembered meeting her grandpa on Dad's side a long time ago. He had had a similar casual, laid-back air around him like the cowboy. "Name's Raul. You've heard Arcade express his everlasting gratitude for treating his leg. Our walking tank over there is Marcus." Raul motioned to the floating sphere. It made a beeping sound as it floundered over Arcade. "We call the eyebot Eddy."

Jaune stepped forward and extended his hand. "Nice to meet yaaaaa–AH!" Jaune jumped back when Raul turned towards him. Everyone else was staring at Raul now. "What happened to your face? Your friend's complaining about a broken leg, and you aren't getting help for your face?!"

Raul raised an eyebrow. "I guess you don't have ghouls around these parts."

"The hell's a ghoul?" Yang asked. She clenched her fists, stretching her bandages. "What the hell are you? Ozpin said you know our mom. How do you know her?"

Raul faced Yang and squinted his eyes. "Sorry, eyes and ears aren't like what they're used to. Did you just say –"

"The Courier's real name is Summer Rose," Ruby cut him off. She stood next to Yang, and the pair caught the attention of all four of the visitors. "She's been missing for thirteen years. I'm Ruby Rose. This is my older sister, Yang. We're Summer's daughters."

Eddy tilted its body, as if giving the sisters a curious sidelong glance. Marcus didn't have a visible reaction on his face. Raul's mouth gaped and began opening and closing at regular intervals. "Daughters?" Raul whispered in disbelief. "I can see the resemblance, but..." Under his breath, he muttered more sounds Ruby couldn't understand. Maybe he was speaking in another language?

Arcade's reaction was the most animated.

"Oh, of all the improbable, inconceivable..." Arcade's face was hidden under his helmet, but the tone in his voice expressed all the emotion he needed. "Super-powered teenagers, I can accept. Rainbow-colored gunpowder, I can accept. I even gave the teleportation a pass, because that can actually be reasonably explained. But Six, having teenage daughters, in a

parallel dimension?" Arcade swerved his head to Ruby. "You sure you aren't a clone of her that the Legion made, or... or something?"

A clone? Is the resemblance really that good? Ruby's response to Arcade was a shake of her head.

"There's been a lot of things that's surprised us ever since we left the Mojave," Marcus chimed in, rustling Arcade's shoulder. "The Courier's past has always been a mystery, especially to herself. That's not even mentioning her unusual abilities."

"Pre-war experimentations causing post-war mutations!" Arcade exclaimed. "Those were more than reasonable and believable explanations! Then we run into the Legion's scientists and find a whole other pack of worms..."

Yang's hair shimmered, but she maintained control over herself. "Don't talk like we aren't here. Ruby and I are Summer's – the Courier's daughters. Get that through your heads and answer the question. How do you know our mom?"

Arcade and Raul were still processing Ruby's reveal, and Eddy seemed incapable of normal speech, so Marcus answered for the group. "Your mother's a remarkable woman," he said respectfully. "I don't know her as well as the others here, but she's accomplished a lot of good in the short time I've known her..." Marcus trailed off as he eyed Yang and Ruby warily. "You said she was missing for thirteen years?" He turned to Arcade. "That might match up with the records we found in the Legion's database."

"You mean the records our 'partner' stole and kept for himself," Arcade said darkly. "Six shouldn't have trusted him. We hardly knew anything about him."

"He kept up his end of the deal."

"He still left us out to dry."

Raul got between the two, putting up a placating gesture. "Hey, we've already gone over this. Ulysses and Eddy still got us got our own copies of the Legion's progress reports. As long as Six can get them to House or the Big Empty –"

The visitors were getting lost in their own personal dilemma. Ruby's seen her own team get distracted and lost in their little single-minded grudges and arguments. She was no exception to the pettiness. Ruby has no idea how she manages to get her team focused back on the more important task at hand half the time. Being a leader can be rough sometimes.

Since Ruby had leader experience, she tried to get the visitors back on track. "Yeah, thirteen years," she said as she raised her voice. "Mom was a Huntress." Mom didn't know what Aura or Grimm were when Ruby had first asked her. "She hunted monsters and kept people safe from them," Ruby explained. "She went on a mission when Yang and I were still kids and disappeared. Do you know what happened to her?"

Raul was the first to sober up and answer Ruby. "I don't think this is the boss's first time traveling through parallel dimensions," he told her.

"According to the records we found," Marcus followed up, "a group called the Institute has been experimenting with teleportation technology for a long time. They apparently managed to make a major breakthrough, breaking through the dimensional barrier and –"

"Oh, can we please not go over this again?" Arcade sighed. "Dimensional barriers... really sounds like something out of a bad Captain Cosmos comic."

Yang's profuse frown relaxed marginally. She was getting the answers she was asking for. "What, our mom was kidnapped through dimensions and forget all about us? About her family?"

Marcus and Raul shared uneasy looks. Arcade let out a harsh breath into the air. "More than likely, Six was experimented on extensively before she managed to escape," Arcade said quietly. "Couple that with the Cloud, and getting shot twice in the head, she's lucky that she remembers how to breathe."

Ruby remembered seeing the scar along Mom's face. Instinctively, Ruby wanted to go find Mom and give her a giant hug.

Nearby, Jaune awkwardly coughed into his fist. "That's, um... a, uh... crazy story you're telling...."

The rest of RWBY and JNPR were wide awake and keenly listening to the conversation between Ruby, Yang, and Mom's companions. Jaune's face was twitching as he tried to absorb everything that was said. Pyrrha was staring, oddly transfixed, at Raul's horribly scarred face. Nora's eyes were wide with attentiveness as she listened in. Ren wore an emotionless poker face. Blake had a contemplative look, and Weiss was sputtering incomprehensibly in disbelief.

"What kind of ridiculous, grandiose tale are you people spinning?" Weiss questioned as she flailed her arms indignantly. "Alternate dimensions? Experiments? The Legion that attacked Beacon is an invasion force from a parallel world? And Ruby and Yang's mother never died but was actually kidnapped and brought into that world?"

Weiss made very good inquiries. Like Jaune said, it was definitely a crazy story, one that Ruby could only barely understand.

Mom was back. Ruby can understand that perfectly well. The details hardly mattered as long as she was here to stay.

"The Legion," Blake spoke up, earning everyone's attention. "What are they? What do they want from Beacon?"

Suppressing a scoff, Weiss sneered and said, "Do you really think –"

"Ozpin let these 'aliens' stand unrestrained right next to dozens of injured students," Blake said. Now that she mentioned it, Ruby finally noticed how the medics, Professors, and other students who weren't too busy mourning, treating injuries, or lying in pain and recovery were

conspicuously eavesdropping. "Until Ozpin finishes his interrogation with the Courier, some information about the people armed with nuclear weapons would be useful."

Yang must be as devoted as Ruby was about learning more about Mom and her apparent companions, but Yang nodded in support for Blake's suggestion. "The Legion," Yang repeated. "If they had nukes, then they probably could have blown Beacon to hell and back if they wanted to. Why didn't they?"

Nora's eyes brightened to a remarkable degree. "The Legion has nukes? That's awesome!" Ruby had her weapons obsession, but Nora's favor toward destruction knew no bounds.

The crowd of eavesdroppers began to whisper amongst themselves, and the whispering rapidly grew louder to blatant discussion and questions directed at Mom's friends.

"They're called the Legion of Steel, right?"

"How can they teleport with that lightning? Even their dead bodies are gone."

"Are you a Super Mutant like the ones with the Legion?"

"Do you have more of that armor? What's it made out of?"

"What exactly's a ghoul?"

"How do the Legion's weapons work without Dust?"

"Summer Rose is alive? She's supposed to be –"

"The Courier used to be a Huntress? How did –"

"What's stopping the Legion from –"

"Can the Headmaster really trust –"

"Alternate dimen–"

"How did you –"

"Where's the –"

"What –"

Before long, Raul, Arcade, Marcus, and Eddy were surrounded. JNPR moved to help keep the crowd from overwhelming them. RWBY remained where they were, able enough to observe the chaos unfold but without the energy to put a stop to it. Blake finally let herself fall asleep. Weiss looked at the mad mob with clearly distinct disapproval. Yang bit her lip, her fingers twitching. Ruby slid her hand into Yang's to calm her down.

"We'll talk to Mom," Ruby told her softly. "She'll tell us everything that we need to know."

"She better," Yang growled. "We've been through too much shit today."

Suddenly, a familiar voice spoke behind the sisters. "I'd tell you to watch your language," it said, "but I know that you wouldn't listen to me."

Ruby turned around and couldn't stop herself. "Dad!" Ruby hugged her father and was more than happy that he returned the embrace without hesitation. She felt Yang join them. Dad's Aura glowed faintly and extended to partly cover Yang and Ruby. A person's Aura typically only shielded him or herself, but more experienced Huntsmen and Huntresses can manipulate their Aura to shield others. It came naturally to Dad, and Yang even mentioned a few stories when Mom did the same for her before...

Dad pulled himself out from the hug, but he still kept a hand on each of his daughter's shoulders. His blue eyes shone with the usual fatherly concern. "Not hurt too bad, I hope," he said, half with levity and half with seriousness.

"We're alive," Ruby said assuredly with a smile that was only slightly forced. Though Yang was uncharacteristically quiet, she also nodded. Mom's alive, too, was the obvious follow-up, but Ruby didn't want to freak herself out or freak Dad out by going down that route. She needed to be more controlled about this.

After a moment of scrutinizing, Dad smiled. "That's good to hear. Your Uncle Qrow and I only got here a few minutes ago. We had to give the Legion a fighting chance, right? Must've given you girls the opportunity to put all that training into good use." Dad looked over to Weiss and Blake. "Those your partners?"

Blake was still asleep. Weiss gave an unenthusiastic salute in acknowledgement. "Yeah," Ruby confirmed for them. "The one with the bow is Blake, Yang's partner. I'm with Weiss Schnee. We've... We've all been through a lot today."

"So I've heard, but like you said. You're still alive. That's what really counts. Before you get any ideas, Qrow's fine, too. He went to find Ozpin while I looked for you." Dad winked at Ruby. "I overheard some of the other professors gossiping on my way here. What's this I hear about a 'Rose' raining hell on the alien invaders and saving the day?"

Back on the dorm rooftop, one of the sniper Huntress had recognized the Courier as Summer Rose, and Mom wasn't exactly hiding her presence during the fighting. Word must have spread fast about the Courier and Summer Rose, but with how chaotic the Battle of Beacon was, the rumors must have already been jumbled up by the time they reached Dad's ears.

To Ruby's surprise, tears began to slide down Yang's face. Dad was clearly taken back. "Yang, what –"

"It's Mom," Yang interrupted with a choke. All the emotion that's been bubbling inside was now bursting out. "It's not Ruby who people are talking about. They're talking about Summer Rose."

Dad completely froze.

"She just – appeared," Yang blurted, "out of nowhere, with the rest of the Legion. She was fighting them, with us. She was helping us, but then she attacked Professor Ozpin, but then

she let him go and Ozpin –"

"Yang," Dad said with an authoritative but caring tone. "Calm down, and slow down. What are you talking ab–"

"Mom is alive!" Yang shouted. She glanced back at Weiss. At the Schnee's handwave, Yang grabbed Dad's arm and began pulling him along. "We need to go see her, now."

"I said slow down, Yang!" Dad turned to Ruby to say something, but Ruby couldn't stop herself. She joined Yang and grabbed Dad's other arm. "Ruby! Why are you two – Summer isn't –"

"You need to see her," Ruby said, sounding the most unperturbed and nonplussed she has all day. She glanced at Weiss, as well, and she encouraged Ruby to go on. Weiss would watch over Blake while Ruby, Yang, and Dad went to see Mom "We all do. Let's go."

X

Generally, Ozpin wasn't the one to experience headaches. He caused others to have headaches – namely, Glynda and James. If it wasn't through Ozpin's direct commands or immediate behavior, it was through his intermediaries, such as Qrow.

As the elevator brought Ozpin up to his office, he could hear the frustrated sighs, the restless pacing, and the skeptical scoffs of his colleagues that Ozpin was more than accustomed to.

The doors opened up. Ulysses and Summ– the Courier were restrained on separate chairs. Specialist Schnee stood guard with her eyes on the watch for suspicious movements. Glynda and James – both looking relatively unharmed, which was comforting news considering the casualties taken during the battle – stood before their prisoners as the interrogation continued. Qrow must be running late again, as usual.

"Then do a blood test," the Courier was saying flippantly. "Do you have blood tests here?" She paused. "I actually don't know if my blood will match up with any of your records. I'm no doctor or scientist, but radiation and cybernetic implants might have screwed my physiology beyond recognition."

"Radiation and cybernetic implants," Glynda repeated in a deadpan. "We'll discuss those items in due time. I suppose we can put off the question of whether you truly are Summer Rose for now."

"Agreed," James said, gazing at Summer in particular with a suspicious countenance. "You've told us that you are an enemy of the Legion. There must be more to that. We know who Summer is. Who are you, Courier Six? What do you stand for?"

Ulysses lifted his head. "The Courier stands as the vanguard for a new nation, the hope of a –"

Ozpin made his presence known, walking beside James. "The artful platitudes are all well and good, Ulysses," Ozpin said politely, "but something more concrete would be more

preferable." At Ozpin's arrival, Glynda gave him a hard look. Winter gave an acknowledging nod, and James appeared more tired than anything else. His wrinkled face and bags under his eyes were showing. Ozpin faced the Courier. "We found your other companions. The mutant, Marcus; the ghoul, I believe he called himself, Raul; the robot, Eddy; and the man in the full-body metal armor, Arcade."

A wave of protectiveness emanated from the Courier. At least that hasn't changed. "Are they alright?"

"A few injuries that shouldn't cause lasting damage," Ozpin informed her. "I have them under watch, of course. If I'm not mistaken, Team RWBY should be pestering them with questions about yourself."

"Team Ruby?" The Courier's eyes became vaguely murky for a moment. "My daughter named her team after herself?"

Technically, it was Ozpin who decided the pronunciation of the team. Regardless, Glynda spoke before he could respond. "We still have no solid confirmation that you are Summer Rose," she insisted coolly.

"My daughter seems to think that I'm her," the Courier countered. "Headmaster Ozpin also seems to think so. Unless you get some hard evidence that my real name isn't Summer Rose, then I vote that we assume that I am her."

The silver eyes were quite the telling factor in the Courier's identity. Personality traits were another consideration to take into account. "Blood tests and memory problems aside," Ozpin said with certitude, "I agree with James' sentiments. Tell us your story. Not Summer's story, that you obviously know nothing about, but the Courier's story."

The glazed look disappeared from the Courier's eyes. Taking a deep breath, she straightened her back. "I know that the 'traveling through dimensions' sounds crazy, but that's exactly what happened today. Maybe I'm from here originally. Maybe not. As far as the Courier's story is concerned, I'm not someone born and raised in the Kingdom of Vale on Remnant. I'm from a place called the Mojave Wasteland, on planet Earth."

As Ozpin expected, Glynda echoed a skeptical scoff. James was more believing, or at least willing to hear more. "Tell us about Earth, then," the General said. "Give us some background." James gestured dismissively at Ulysses. "We've heard enough from you. I want to hear the Courier speak now."

Ulysses took the dismissal without complaint while the Courier told her story. "On Earth, we had our own Great War, give or take a couple hundred years ago. The stories go that, in two hours, the whole world nuked itself to hell. Most people died. Some survived on the surface despite the radiation, and others roughed it in underground vaults.

"The Mojave Wasteland wasn't hit as badly as the rest of the world, but that isn't saying much." The Courier's words become more carefully reverent. "There's this city in the Mojave. New Vegas. You can see the lights shining from it miles and miles away... It's where I'm from. A man named Robert House is in charge of the city. I work for him. He and I, and the

rest of the folks in the Mojave; we're trying to rebuild the wasteland into something safer, something that isn't a disease ridden, raider-invested post-apocalypse. Hopefully, it'll be something worth living in."

A subtle sting of aversion began to seep out of the Courier's tone. "The Legion – Caesar's Legion, they used to be called – wanted to take over New Vegas. All in all, Caesar was an insane sociopath. His Legion enslaved, brainwashed, and raped just about anyone and everyone who got in their way, and they were planning to do the same for Vegas."

James' frown grew larger. "And you, the 'Messiah,' stopped the Legion and saved New Vegas."

"Not alone," the Courier corrected. "I was exaggerating earlier. House, myself, Ulysses here, my other companions, others in the Mojave; we pooled our resources together and beat the Legion back. We saved the day, sure, but it's been a few years since then. Now the Legion's reorganized, and you've seen what they can do. I don't know exactly how many you've got dead or bedridden, but believe me when I say that they're capable of a lot worse."

Ozpin sensed no deception from the Courier. Glynda was more doubtful. She hadn't known Summer very well during their days as students. That must have helped fuel Glynda's cold exterior in this interrogation. "We'll take that under advisement," Glynda said. "You and your companions report to this Robert House, then?"

"I work for House. My companions work for me." The Courier shot a knowing smile at Ulysses, likely sharing an inside joke.

James cleared his throat. "I'll concede that the Legion are a credible threat. The results and accounts of today's battle speak for themselves. Your stories about this 'Mojave' and 'New Vegas' will have to be more thoroughly investigated, of course."

"Feel free," the Courier said happily. "Whether you call me Summer Rose or whatever names you want to call me, I'm only here as a friend."

Winter shuffled her feet. "A friend that attempted to slit Headmaster Ozpin's throat," she reminded. She, James, and Glynda looked to said Headmaster.

Ozpin shrugged. "The Courier claimed that she can justify threatening my life." Ozpin gave the floor to the Courier. "Go on, then. Justify it."

"It's simple," was her answer. "Despite what Gaius might have said, you, Ozpin, are one of the Legion's primary targets, one of the most important things that they want to get out of invading Remnant. You're worth even more than the other professors or specialists." The Courier glanced at Glynda and James. "You two are major military leaders. Take you out, and that leaves your armed forces disorganized. If the Legion got you, Winter Schnee, your people would lose a heavy hitter like yourself to help hold the line." The flattery did little to alleviate Miss Schnee's cold demeanor.

"You, Ozpin," the Courier said, a curious grin spreading across her face. "The Legion thinks that you're immortal."

Glynda and James instantly became rigid. Ozpin remained calm, and Winter raised an eyebrow at the Courier.

"That old rumor?" Winter asked in a tone that suggested she could burst out in unimpressed, joyless laughter. "Ulysses, you said the Legion is a military society dedicated to the craft and study in all fields of warfare, yet they're targeting the Headmaster of Beacon based off information gathered from childish tall tales?"

Throughout all the lives Ozpin has lived, he always keeps his original name in mind. Though Ozpin has learned much from his various hosts, he will ultimately slide into his own original habits and idiosyncrasies. His cane and shaded spectacles were his preferred pieces of attire. If he could, he would wear burly green cloth, bearing his favorite color. The tint of his hair inevitably shifts to gray-white. His posture is always tall and calm, seemingly without a care in the world.

Ozpin secures secrecy over the Maidens, Salem, and his own abilities partly thanks to his influence with Remnant's historians. Time and time again, it was the historians and archaeologists who first discover Ozpin's true nature. Those key characteristics of his constantly resurface in ancient texts, cave wall drawings, song lyrics, and so on. The resemblance becomes too obvious if one looked too closely across history. Fortunately, most of the historians had a good enough grasp of the history they've researched to understand Ozpin's situation and to become willing members and confidants to his secret agenda.

The "childish tall tales" Winter mentioned happened with every generation. Children learn about Remnant's history and theorize that the highly respected Headmaster Ozpin of Beacon Academy is an immortal, ageless god or deity who oversees the land. As the children grow older, those conspiring theories are forgotten, leaving to it the next generation to reintroduce to the playground gossip.

If the Courier was speaking the truth, then the Legion weren't basing their intelligence off of old rumors. They had with them agents in Remnant who were more than willing to share the world's historical records to them in excruciating detail.

"I'm guessing that the Legion scientists want to experiment on you to see if they can transfer that immortality or something," the Courier hazarded. "Super Mutants and ghouls can essentially live forever, but they're sterile and otherwise deformed. The Legion are proud lots. Getting a dose of immortality would be something right up their alley, especially considering that a few shit storms are threatening to blow into their territory."

"Their scientists must be less intelligent than what their titles indicate," Winter said sardonically. In actuality, they weren't too far off the mark. It simply wasn't immortality that was the cause for Ozpin's longevity. It was reincarnation.

He could tell Glynda and Ozpin were itching to discuss the matter in greater detail, but not with Winter in their vicinity.

"Miss Schnee," James said in a commanding voice, "please escort our prisoners to an appropriate holding cell. Keep watch over them. The professors and I need to plan Beacon's next course of action."

"Actually," Ozpin interjected, double-checking his scroll, "bring Ulysses and the Courier to one of the conference rooms on the sixth floor. Keep them there. Once Qrow arrives, I'll have him take over your post."

Winter wore a scowl as she removed the prisoners from the chairs. "General?"

"Do as Ozpin says," James said. Wordlessly, Winter obeyed.

The Courier directed a smile at Ozpin, all the way until the doors of the elevator closed shut. The smile was actually reminiscent of Summer Rose. It held no ill will or aggressive excitement. It carried only a want for friendship.

Of course, Ozpin could be fooling himself, blinded by his want to see Summer Rose's hopeful gaze again, just as any parent would want to see their child happy and well. Regardless, there was work to be done.

"I suppose we should contact the council," Ozpin announced to his cabal, "inform them personally of the casualties taken during the attack. We'll have to contact the other Kingdoms, as well. Our PR departments will have to cooperate to keep the tourists and locals calm and —"

"Oz," James said tiredly. "Please. We have interdimensional invaders on our doorstep and a resurrected Huntress back from the dead in our midst. Let's not dance around the issues at hand." His eyes hardened. "I told you that my fleet was necessary for Beacon's defenses."

James had brought the Atlas fleet as an extreme precaution against Salem's agents, not the Legion, but Ozpin did not want to argue semantics. "It was a welcome and fruitful decision," Ozpin acknowledged. "The fleet saved many lives."

"We still have the damage the Legion left behind to contend with," Glynda said. She consulted her own scroll. "Civilian casualties are far and few, save for those who were at the fairgrounds during the start of the battle. Student deaths number only in a few dozen so far, but hundreds are reported as too injured for immediate service or deployment. Since so many of our own Huntsmen were out on missions or patrolling the borders for Grimm, we're lucky the visiting Huntsmen from the other Kingdoms were where they were when the fighting broke out. Plenty of them are injured, as well, and a few dead, but they and the professors did commendable jobs in rallying the students in so short an amount of time."

"As they should have," James said with a hint of pride. "It's what they've been trained for, and what we're paying them for."

"The property damage is also quite minimal," Glynda continued. "The streets are riddled with debris and downed airships, but most of the buildings are still standing. There's no need to evacuate the school, though I'm not sure where we could retreat to if the Legion has the means to teleport wherever they wish."

"They don't have that ability," Ozpin corrected, his mind reeling back to his initial conversation with Ulysses. "Their teleportation is somewhat limited, at least, and there should be a delay until they begin a counterattack. Ulysses told me that one of his

companions – the robot, I believe – has a map that shows the nexus points across Vale where the Legion is able to safely teleport to."

"The robot," Glynda repeated. She stiffly set down her scroll on Ozpin's desk. "Summer's robot, you mean."

And here came one of the more nagging mysteries that was on everyone's minds. "I believe Courier Six is truly Summer Rose," Ozpin declared resolutely. "The silver eyes are unique enough characteristics. Her personality is clearly different, no doubt due to amnesia and whatever hardship she's experienced in this wasteland she mentioned. Still, her Aura remains the same as it was thirteen years ago. I've felt it, nurtured it, and helped harness its power. I know it."

Glynda stared at Ozpin and neglected to give a verbal response.

With a sigh, James paced toward the window facing the main boulevard of the academy. The hands of a large clock rotated on the other side of the window. "I never knew Summer," he admitted. "I've only heard the stories you, Glynda, and Qrow have told. I can't tell if she is who she says she is, but you're right, Oz. She has silver eyes. Summer or not, we're going to need that. Especially now, in our moment of weakness, when Salem's agents will seize the opportunity to further their goals one way or another." James turned back to Ozpin. "You have two armies after you now, Oz. One composed of Grimm, and another composed of a foreign army with unknown weapons. It's a lot for one man to carry on his shoulders."

Ozpin couldn't help but smile at his old friend. "You know very well that I am more than simply one man," he said in good jest. James shared the smile, but Glynda wasn't in the mood to share in the momentary frivolity.

"There's simply too many variables," she muttered to herself. "We've been preparing for a war, but not a war on two fronts. We have plans and contingencies in place for Grimm and Salem. This Legion... knowing about you, Ozpin... dimensional travel... It's going to cause more disorder and pandemonium across Remnant than revealing the truth about magic." Glynda's whispers grew quieter, though Ozpin could still hear her. "Can you imagine it? A world without Grimm?"

Ozpin did. Every day and every night. "A world still feeling the aftereffects of a nuclear war centuries after the fact," Ozpin pointed out. "Aftereffects bad enough to push the Legion to travel through dimensions."

"Then that's something we can use," James said with a tone that spoke of sudden inspiration. "The Courier said that she works for someone, someone in charge of a city that survived her Great War. Robert House, she called him. She said she and House are working together to rebuild a broken world. We go through Summer and offer our help. Then, perhaps we can have the might of technology and warriors comparable to the Legion on our side."

"You're making a few hasty presumptions," Glynda warned James. "We need to question the Courier and her friends further. We have no idea of the current state of her world, of the Mojave or New Vegas. This Robert House may or may not be a trustworthy ally willing to

negotiate with us. The Legion may be more advanced technologically than whatever resources House has."

"The Courier said that she and House have beaten the Legion before," James insisted. "If we work together, I believe she can do it again. Those silver eyes all but guarantee it. If she is anything like the Summer you've told me about, she is going to be a key player that we want working with us than not at all."

"True enough," Glynda granted, "but we still need to thoroughly question the Courier. She recognizes none of us. Not even her own daughters. Her allegiance is not to Beacon or to Remnant any longer. We must remember this while dealing with her."

Ozpin nodded in agreement. "Yes, we must." Ozpin strolled to the window to join James. Glynda followed soon after. The three gazed at the campus, at the destruction and blood scattered throughout, and at the professors, soldiers, and students hard at work picking up the pieces.

The scene was a familiar one to Ozpin. Today, the Legion of Steel was its illustrator, and more than likely, they saw Remnant as a blank canvas ripe for artistic creativity.

In the corner of his eye, Ozpin watched as a miniscule black-feathered bird flapped its wings and perched himself on one of the clock hands.

"About time," James murmured. Ozpin grinned.

Summer will be a definite shock for Qrow and Taiyang, and vice versa, but Ozpin had faith it would all work out in the end.

Chapter End Notes

Coming soon, "Dreams Come True." Save for a lost raven, the Rose/Xiao-Long family finally reunites!

Dreams Come True

The Courier let the handcuffs be removed from her wrists with a grateful smile. Plenty of her companions would have complained about the cuffs blocking the blood flow and numbing their fingers. What they wouldn't know was that handcuffs were a million times better than the Brotherhood's bomb collars, getting nailed onto a Legion cross, or getting manhandled and thrown in an unmarked grave by Great Khan druggies. As far as humane treatment of prisoners goes, Winter Schnee won the gold fucking medal.

One of Winter's hands was still on the grip of her fancy sword, though. She wasn't hiding her unhappiness at Ozpin's order on the scroll device telling her to uncuff the Courier and Ulysses. The Schnee had that military curtness and discipline typical of your average NCR trooper, but she might also be the type to disobey orders if it means preemptively taking out a potential threat she clearly didn't trust.

"You're fortunate the Headmaster and General Ironwood have given you the benefit of the doubt," Winter said scornfully as she uncuffed Ulysses next. "See to it that you don't take advantage of their lenience."

"Of course we're going to take advantage of it," the Courier retorted. Massaging her wrists, she sat back on one of the leather chairs with wheels at its base. The backrest bent backwards as the weight of her tired body and worn armor pushed against it. She rested her feet atop the edge of the wide conference table, mostly to keep up the flippant attitude that Winter obviously detested. "Good hosts are hard to find in the Wasteland. You take what you can get."

Winter had a scowl that was all too reminiscent of Colonel Moore. "Your family will be here momentarily," she told the Courier while Ulysses flexed his hands to get his blood pumping. "I hope you don't try to brutalize them as you did with Ozpin."

"I don't plan to," the Courier replied. Winter's scowl never wavered. A ring from her scroll prompted the Specialist to take the call rather than to continue conversation with the Courier.

While Winter took care of her call, the Courier let her persistent smile finally fall. She had run out of chems ever since that confrontation with Lucius, and her implants and Aura (a topic that she was going to have to ask someone about) could only do so much to suppress the pain and fatigue after a long day of fighting. It was a literal day, too, for herself and her companions. The Legion had them made the moment Lucius had laid his eyes on her signature white hood. Beacon thinks they went through hell? They had it lucky. They had an army on their side. The Courier's crew is good, but they didn't exactly make it across America and into Remnant unscathed.

The Courier was conscious of the burns and bruises, but the giant cut that brahmin skull-obsessed nightkin Davison had made along her shoulder was the most prevalent injury on her mind. As far as she could tell, the super stimpacks and Aura did their jobs in sowing her arm back together. Now, though, the stimpack sickness was kicking in. The Courier was usually

able to suppress those stubborn side-effects, developing a tolerance of them over time. Unfortunately, being saddled with twenty-four hours' worth of adrenaline-fueled stress and a "notable amount of Aura depletion," as that Goodwitch woman called it, the Courier could drop dead right this second and not even care.

Ulysses gently placed a hand on the Courier's good shoulder. Reacting from his touch, she looked up and was drawn to his dark eyes. He still wore that damn breathing mask. People give her shit for wearing a pretty recognizable white hood, but no one whined about Ulysses' mask. The Courier didn't know why. Between his typically stoic demeanor and his unique way of speaking, you'd have a hard time getting a good read on the guy. The mask hardly helped much.

That's why the Courier learned to focus on the expression conveyed by Ulysses' eyes. The little things with how open they were, how his brow creased, how much the bags under his eyes sagged can tell his entire life story if you knew where to look and how to recognize them.

The story that Ulysses' eyes told today: We finally have our moment of respite, so let us mend our wounds. We will need our strength for the coming battles.

Ulysses even said as much, adding, "You favor your left side. What ails your right?"

Carefully, the Courier detached pieces of her armor off her right shoulder. They were somewhat loosened already, beaten down by the hits she's taken during all the fighting. The armor pieces dropped to the conference table, and the Courier pulled the fabric of her duster and undershirt out of the way to reveal her injury. She grimaced as the pain and soreness spiked up slightly, but Ulysses placed a hand over hers and helped clear off the strands of cloth to expose her skin.

A jagged red streak lined where the bumper sword had made its mark. The Courier had already written it off as yet another addition to her wide collection of scars, but Ulysses applied the healing poultice anyway. While she'd probably feel even more sore in the morning, the ointment would remove practically any trace of the scar (it only worked on recently formed scars, sadly, so it wouldn't do jack for her older ones) and leave the skin on her shoulder looking as good as new.

"You spoil me sometimes," the Courier commented quietly. "Did Caesar ever get any special treatment like this?"

Ulysses managed a shrug while he went on with his work. "Was always walking the lands, scouting, carrying messages," he said in that old, worn voice of his. "Found centuries worth of knowledge, and many secrets, though only some were significant enough in Caesar's eyes to warrant personal meetings." As Ulysses made his finishing touches on the Courier's shoulder, inciting a small groan from her, he pulled out a clear bottle of water. "For the old Legion's medicines, Caesar preferred scars than none at all. Scars are the best reminders of your victories, your failures, your history; Burned Man's living proof of that."

The Burned Man. It's been a while since the Courier last talked with Joshua. She wondered how he'd react to undeniable proof of a parallel dimension right around his doorstep. If his

God made Earth, did the same God create Remnant? "I've had my fill of scars," the Courier drawled out dryly, "physical and otherwise. Don't need any more."

Removing his mask, Ulysses took a quick swig of his drink. When he offered the bottle to the Courier, she caught the subtle twinkle in his eye. "I know," he said deliberately, which was the reason why he took out the scar-healing ointment to begin with.

The Courier took a gracious gulp of the water. With a satisfied yawn, she relaxed again against the leather chair as the tension from the ointment treatment alleviated a fraction. Ulysses sat in a chair beside her. When he leaned back, he struck out his leg. One of his kneepads was sliced completely in half, held together only by the tight straps strewn around his knee, and it was accompanied by a dried splatter of blood.

From the innards of her duster, the Courier's Pip-Boy hand gripped a soda bottle and tossed it toward Ulysses. While the Courier wouldn't call herself a skilled survivalist craftsman like Ulysses, she knew enough on how to spruce up Hydra. She's been stockpiling them ever since that Hubologist gang in Dog City almost irrevocably broke her legs. Ulysses caught the Hydra easily. Removing the broken knee pad and folding up his pant leg, he began carefully pouring the limb-healing agent on his dark skin.

Ulysses left his breathing mask on the conference table, revealing his sharply cut, well-groomed beard. Leaving the mask off was quite the rarity for Ulysses, but you won't find the Courier complaining when he does remove it. Not one bit.

Winter made a, "Sir, yes, sir," sound as she packed away her scroll. She turned to the Courier. "Your family members have arrived," the Schnee said with the same coldness. "Once you're done familiarizing yourself with them, you and Ulysses will report to General Ironwood and Headmaster Ozpin for further questions."

Oh. That's right. The Courier wasn't just Courier Six, the Messiah of the Mojave, House's Wild Card, the Caesar's Killer (even though it was Boone who killed him), the Brotherhood's Soft-Hearted Devil, the Republic's Dark Hero, and the Lady King.

The Courier was also Summer Rose; someone who had an entire life, a career, and a family in another world separate and far from the American Wasteland.

If that ain't a kick in the head, the Courier didn't know what was.

As Winter left the conference room, the Courier turned to Ulysses. "How should we play this?" she tentatively asked. "The younger girl, Ruby; she seemed the most into the idea of me being her mom. We can probably use that. Not too sure about the blonde jumpstart. She's protective of her little sister, but that at least means she's a little predictable. Any other relatives that arrive will be total unknowns. I think they mentioned a brother-in-law, and a..." The Courier trailed off and wiped some sweat off her forehead. "... a husband. Jesus Christ. The biggest war since the Great War is going to blow over into two worlds, and I apparently have a husband and two daughters on my plate to deal with. The amount of shit Cass and Boone would give me if they were here..."

Sometimes, the Courier wondered if she should have taken up Ringo's offer to join the Crimson Caravan and plant some roots in New California. Maybe if she had, her life wouldn't have become such an unpredictable rollercoaster ride.

Ulysses gave a contemplative grunt. "I assume they seek companionship, rapport, fellowship. You seek the same from others, more often than not. Simply act as you are. It should come naturally."

Maybe. Maybe that would work out. Maybe not. "I know I've been asking myself who I am for as long as I can remember," the Courier admitted. "I didn't know what to expect when I finally got a straight answer. So I'm Summer Rose, a stranger who has my face. What the hell am I supposed to do with that?"

"To your advantage," Ulysses suggested. The Courier couldn't tell if he was joking or if he was being serious. Either way, he followed up with, "You've already built a family for yourself, Courier. Families argue, struggle, nearly destroy themselves from misguided goals and petty grudges. Yours has gone through these trials, and it still remains strong. The same can be done for Summer Rose's family." Ulysses gestured ceremoniously toward the Courier. "Your true name, and your true family. After all these years, you have finally discovered the truth. Congratulations... Summer."

Real name or not, it's going to take a while to get used to it.

Suddenly, the conference door slammed open. Ulysses and the Courier were on their feet and ready for a fight in an instant.

It was the reactionary, instinctive moments to defend themselves that took hold of Ulysses and the Courier. When they loosened their holds, the Courier no longer saw vague humanoid shapes that may or may not be enemies. Now, she saw a teenage girl who shared the Courier's face, a young woman with an illustrious golden mane, a man with similarly colored hair who had to be the jumpstart's father, and another gentleman with red eyes, a gaping jaw, and a foul, drunken stench about him.

Here was Summer Rose's family, her family.

And they were just... staring... wide-eyed and all... at the Courier,

What the fuck was she supposed to do now?

Then, "Summer..." the blondie with blue eyes murmured in stupefied shock. If the jumpstart – Yang, her name was Yang. Yang Xiao-Long – was supposed to be one of the Courier's daughters, then this man was probably the mysterious husband. The giant hug from the blondie that encompassed the Courier lent credence to the idea. Resting his forehead against the Courier's in a clear act of intimacy was another sign. Him pressing his lips against hers all but confirmed it.

It was reflex if anything that made the Courier headbutt blondie to make him back up a step. The last thing she wanted to do with her newly reunited blood family was to act in violence, but there was no turning back now.

"Sorry," the Courier said quickly. Blondie barely stumbled when the Courier bashed her head against his. The others probably didn't even notice the headbutt. "I don't know if anyone's told you, but I have amnesia. From that kiss, I guess that I can assume we're supposed to know each other pretty well."

Blondie overcame his little stupor pretty fast. "Right, right," he said as his face flushed in color. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to – It's just that, you've been dead for so long and –" Blondie shut his mouth and took a deep breath. "My name is Taiyang Xiao-Long."

Yup. Definitely jumpstart's dad. "They call me the Courier," the Courier replied, out of habit. "Or I guess you know me as Summer. Call me whichever sounds right to you."

The Courier felt someone else wrap their arms around her. It was Ruby, hopping over the conference table and barreling into her side. "Do you remember him, Mom?" she asked with an innocence that the Courier just adored. "Do you remember me, Yang, Dad, or Uncle Qrow? Anything at all?"

Crow? The Courier didn't like crows much. Or ravens. Or birds in general. The only thing they were good for was free target practice. "I take it Uncle Qrow is tall, dark, and drunk over there." Summer nodded to the red-eyed man. His mouth was closed now, but the smell was still there. There were plenty in Legion territory that still kept up the no-alcohol rule, so now being in the presence of the familiar stench threw the Courier in for a minor loop.

"Yeah," birdie muttered in a raspy voice. "I'm Qrow." He was still staring with foggy eyes straight at the Courier. Then he shifted his gaze to the mask-less Ulysses. "Who's he?"

A thousand answers leapt along the Courier's tongue. My favorite boot-licker. My arch-nemesis-turned-best-friend. An ex-Legion spy who's working for the good guys now. Lots more answers came to mind. Ultimately, the Courier decided on, "He's family."

Yang, who had strolled around the table to stand beside her father, sputtered uncontrollably for a second before asking, "Excuse me?"

"Ulysses is family," the Courier repeated firmly. "My family. We've been through too much together that it'd be a crime to consider him otherwise." The Courier turned to him. "Come on, Ulysses. Introduce yourself to the rest of my family." Since he was still here, he might as well make himself useful.

With a polite nod to Summer Rose's side of the family, Ulysses said, "The Courier saved my life, and I hers, many times over. Our bond has been built on the shared blood split and shed between us. Family... is an apt term." Ulysses sat back down. "However, if her true name is Summer Rose, let her true family rebuild the bonds that were lost to time. Don't want to get in the way of that."

Bastard, shoving off all the responsibility of handling her new relatives onto the Courier's shoulders. She shouldn't really be surprised, but still. "That's fine. Ignore him, then," the Courier continued without giving the chance of letting silence fill the room. "I'm sure you've all got a lot of questions for me. I've got plenty of my own for you. For the sake of clarity, I say we all start off by reintroducing ourselves."

Ruby remained by the Courier's side. The Courier let one arm wrap around her shoulders, and the girl deepened her hug. If the kid really was her daughter, then the Courier counted herself lucky. While the Boomers were generally decent folks, Peal's daughter was as much as a bitch as Pearl's granddaughter was a shit kid. Good kids were harder to find throughout the wastes than the Courier would have liked. She was glad to find some decency in her own daughter.

"While I usually go by the Courier," the Courier said to her audience, "as I've been recently told, my real name is Summer Rose. I've been having memory problems for as long as I can remember, and I've been living in another world for the past... at least thirteen years, so don't be surprised if I say or do anything that doesn't match up with the Summer you used to know."

The Courier shouldn't feel this nervous. She is already accustomed to random people, especially those in Legion country, developing a premade image of her based on her reputation alone. All of her alternative names and titles were proof of that. Using someone's preconceived picture to her advantage or knocking down the misconceptions were routine at this point.

This was different, however. Much more different. All those times before were mostly impersonal affairs. In this case, everything was personal.

Ruby was the next person to speak up. "I'm Ruby Rose," she said in a quiet tone that suggested she was holding back from releasing a tidal wave of emotion, likely in the form of tears. "I'm your daughter. I was only two when you disappeared, but I still remember how you took care of me and Yang. We missed you, a lot. I missed you. Now you're back, and we have all the time in the world to catch up with each other."

The kid ended her introduction with a hint of optimistic hope. The Courier wished she could feel as the kid sounded, but she couldn't muster up the energy.

Nodding to shotgun-gauntlet girl, the Courier prompted, "Your turn, jumpstart."

"Yang Xiao-Long," she responded. Her voice was more solemn than Ruby's, more controlled. She was holding something back, too, minus the optimism. "Ruby's older sister. Technically, I'm your stepdaughter, but you're the only woman I can remember raising me."

Stepdaughter? Meaning there was another in-law running around?

Before the Courier's mind could spin into a tangent, birdie spoke next. "I'm Qrow Branwen," he said lowly. His wide eyes had relaxed. The way he leaned against the conference table carried a casual demeanor, though the way he eyed up Ulysses and the Courier suggested he was on the fence about this whole family reunion. "Taiyang's brother-in-law. Summer and I were partners, combat partners, on Team STRQ. Do you remember Team STRQ?"

The name didn't ring any bells. "I don't, unfortunately," the Courier admitted. She returned birdie's scrutinizing gaze. He had a soft, unkempt stubble of a beard. The tattered cape on his back looked straight from a villain out of an issue of *The Unstoppables*. Weighing the odds, the Courier was fairly sure he would win a fight between him and her if it came down to it.

Fatigue aside, birdie's physique and familiarity with Summer Rose's innate combat habits would more than likely give him the edge. Ulysses could probably take him, though. Nothing less than a mother Deathclaw juiced on psycho could kill Ulysses. "Don't remember you as my combat partner, either. Sorry."

Birdie made a noncommittal "humph" sound. If Ruby and Yang were hopeful about having their mother back, then birdie was doubtful and skeptical at the sudden return of his combat partner. The Courier didn't blame him.

At last, the husband stepped up. To be fair to blondie, he had a charming smile that would have given the King a run for his money. Few men could make the Courier blush like the King was able to, so she gave Summer Rose points for marrying a man with a natural appeal to the Courier's tastes.

"Taiyang Xiao-Long," he said. His intro came out the least forced out of everyone. He had nothing to hide, no suspicions to put him off. Just like House all those years before, Taiyang wanted to make his intentions obvious from the get-go. "Yang and Ruby's dad, brother-in-law to Qrow, former member of Team STRQ and, most importantly, your husband."

The Courier liked him already. The husband denotation she was still conflicted on, but his confident attitude was a welcome change of pace. "A pleasure," she said. The hug and kiss were too forward, so the Courier chose the hand shake route and extended her hand. Blondie held it firmly. The Courier took the opportunity to glance at his fingers. "No wedding ring," she observed, which makes sense if the Courier was gone for so long. "Do you have those around here? Wedding rings?"

"It's at home," Taiyang said, still wearing that endearing simper, "on Patch, in a little box with your ring. It's the same pair my parents wore." If he was hoping to stir up any old memories within the Courier, he failed. She only learned about wedding rings and the symbolism behind them a few weeks ago. The Wanderer had kept a pair on him.

"Can't wait to see them," the Courier said brightly, mainly for the sake of making noise. If silence lingered for too long, someone was bound to get bold enough to ask her a question that they won't like the answer to. "So..." The Courier made herself comfortable on a chair. She and Ruby narrowly fit in between the armrests. "You mentioned a Team STRQ. As far as I've seen, your Hunter teams come in quartets. Who's our number four?"

Birdie and blondie tensed. Their facial expressions remained frozen in time, meaning they were obviously hiding something. Yang shook her head distractedly and said, "She doesn't matter. You're here now. That's what matters. And, since you're here, you can tell us exactly where you've been for the last thirteen years – in excruciating detail."

Well, if blondie and birdie were in-laws, and the Courier was blondie's wife, there was a good chance that the fourth member of the team was Yang's mom who had some sort of falling out with the family. The Courier was just grasping at straws with that train of thought, however. Instead of speaking those thoughts aloud, she said, "There's a lot to tell. Keep in mind, though; memory problems. Of the thirteen years I've been out of touch with you folks, I can only really tell you about four and half of them" The Courier nodded at Ulysses. "He knows more. Ulysses knew me before I got to shot in the head."

"You were shot in the head?!" Taiyang exclaimed in shock. He must have overlooked the scar on her face. Her hood or her messy strands of hair might be shrouding it. His hands went to move them off her forehead and to caress her cheeks. The Courier let him touch her, but she didn't much enjoy getting manhandled.

"If it's any consolation," the Courier said as she found herself drawn to just how amazingly blue Taiyang's eyes were, "I killed the guy who shot me." And may his greedy soul rest in peace.

"You shouldn't have gotten shot here in the first place," Taiyang murmured in a soft, delicate voice. The Courier was starting to see why she married him. "What happened to you, Summer?"

Taiyang wanted a close embrace. Thinking on it, the Courier decided to indulge him. With one arm still around Ruby, the Courier wrapped her other one around Taiyang. He returned the gesture heartily, burying his head into the Courier's neck. She winced as he brushed against her shoulder wound. The hug might have been intended for mutual warmth and reassurance that everything was going to be alright, but the Courier only felt awkward at his intimacy, even if the warmth felt nice.

Ulysses was suddenly at the Courier's side. He had a hand on Taiyang's upper arm. "I treated some of the Courier's injuries," Ulysses said. "Not good to irritate the wounds."

Blondie's arms remained enclosed around the Courier as he lifted his head to glare at Ulysses. The glare quickly softened, however. "Ulysses, right? Summer said she thinks of you as family. We might not know the full story, but that makes you part of our family, too, in my book. Thank you for watching her back while she's been gone."

"We are partners, the Courier and I," Ulysses said with a nod, detaching his hand slowly from Taiyang's person. "As you said, we are family... though the Courier's family goes beyond myself."

Oh no. The Courier wanted Ulysses to help smooth the waters, not potentially throw everything out of whack. "Let's not overcomplicate things," she said, hoping to sound naturally dismissive rather than desperately so. "I want to know more about Summer Rose's family. Let's ignore the Courier for now and focus on Summer."

"But you're also the Courier," Yang spoke up. Almost mockingly she recited, "Courier Six, 'who's going to save you, your friends, and your families from certain damnation.' I get that you've got amnesia and don't remember us, and the teleporting-through-dimensions thing is confusing, but what kind of family kept you from trying harder to find your real family for over a decade?"

Goddamn it, Ulysses. He's prompted a question the Courier's new family won't like the answer to. Taiyang, God bless his soul, tried to rein in his daughter. "There's no need for that accusing tone," he told her sternly. "The battle's stressed everyone out. You don't need to take it out on Summer."

"I don't know, Tai," birdie chimed in. "Yang's got a point. Summer's got amnesia. It's not like she came back from the dead and everything's back to normal." Birdie narrowed his eyes at the Courier. "You've got priorities on your plate other than Oz, Beacon, and us. You've got a new boss in that other world. Mister House, running New Vegas, right? So now you've got a family there, too? Do you even want to get back your old memories?"

Birdie spoke a lot of truth. The Courier's had a pretty eventful, full life, and she was hardly willing to throw everything away to jump at the chance of joining a group of strangers as the resident matriarch.

That didn't mean the Courier wanted to immediately dismiss a group of strangers who were her family and wanted to get to know her. She wanted to get to know them, too. Even if the Courier wasn't professionally obligated to try to keep relations relatively calm and conciliatory until talks formally start between House, the Mojave council, and Remnant's leadership, she felt personally obligated to see through this family reunion to the end.

While Taiyang distanced himself from the Courier to give Yang and birdie a verbal third-degree, Ruby tightened her hold around her mother. "Mom," the girl pleaded in a hesitant, pensive voice, "you're here to stay, right? Even with the Legion and all, you're going to come back home with us to Patch and live with us again. Right?"

The Courier felt an overwhelming urge to not disappoint Ruby. Unfortunately, she was going to have to.

She might as well rip off the metaphorical bandage now. If anything, the Courier didn't want to be accused of lying or deception by anyone later on.

"I want to get to know you," the Courier said honestly and as gently as she could, "just as much as I want to get to know more about myself, but I can't say anything about staying on Remnant and permanently living here. I've got a duty to Mister House, to Vegas, to others back home... to my son."

Birdie, Yang, and Taiyang ended their heated exchange. Again, they were all staring with gaping mouths at the Courier. Ruby was the same, except her crestfallen devastation was accompanied by shocked, weeping tears.

The Courier felt an incredible desire to make Ruby stop crying and to see her smile brightly again.

That desire was also coupled with a want to see her baby boy again. It's been months since she and her companions had left on their expedition eastward. She wanted to see her son smile brightly, too.

Those thoughts took a back seat as the room suddenly shook uncontrollably. Everyone struggled to stay on their feet. Ruby and the Courier were knocked off their chair and hit the floor.

For now, the Courier put all thoughts about her Ulysses, her husband, her son, and her daughters to the back of her mind. Now, she brought up her Pip-Boy and swiped through the

settings. The upgrades the Lone Wanderer have given it were fucking godsend.

According to her Pip-Boy's sensors, the radiation levels across Beacon abruptly went from practically nil to through the roof.

X

Ozpin caught himself on his desk to prevent his fall. James fell back against the wide window. Glynda and Winter remained steady on their feet, even as the shakes all along the building continued. The explosion of noise was also quite deafening. Ozpin subtly used his Aura to brace his ears for the duration of this sudden instability.

When the quakes finally ceased, Ozpin pulled out his scroll and checked the vital signs and Aura levels of his Professors. All relatively still stable. He glanced out the window. Across the campus, mushroom clouds of varying sizes rose above several buildings.

"Another attack?" Winter gasped. She, James, and Glynda were also on their scrolls. "So soon? Did the Legion leave behind bombs or saboteurs when they teleported away?"

"They must have," James, also on his scroll, grunted. "I didn't see any of that blue lightning when the explosions went off. The fleet is still spread over the academy and haven't seen any either."

A message popped up on Ozpin's scroll. It was from Doctor Oobleck, and the jumbled line of text Ozpin read made him quietly scowl. "It's the White Fang."

Winter whipped her head in Ozpin's direction. "What?"

"Faunus students and some tourists have put on White Fang masks. They are currently engaging Atlas soldiers and other students on the outskirts of the bombed locations."

While James and Winter relayed commands to their troops and Glynda attempted to get a casualty report on the damages the bombs caused, Ozpin thought on this second attack's implications. Mushroom clouds could only mean nuclear weapons, of which the Legion had readily used against James' fleet during the Battle of Beacon. The White Fang – at least their Vale branch – must be allies of the Legion. But the White Fang were supposed to be unwilling tools of Salem's agents, just as Roman Torchwick was. Perhaps the Legion made a better case to enlist the White Fang's help than whatever deal Salem's puppet had proposed. Perhaps the Legion had Super Mutant and ghoulish followers to negotiate with the White Fang and found common ground in their "deformities" to the typical human.

Ozpin halted his train of thought. He was staring absently out the window when he spotted something that gave him pause. "James, your capital airship is the largest one of your fleet. Correct?"

"Of course, Oz," James said distractedly. "Why?"

"Well, that airship appears to be traveling at a steady pace towards my office."

Glynda, James, and Winter looked up. The sun hung lowly along the horizon, so buildings along the campus casted long, heavy shadows. Most of the airships floating above Beacon had searchlights shining the ground to provide more visibility around the bombed locations. James' capital ship, on the other hand, had no such lights in use and was moving on a vector aimed for the summit of Beacon Tower.

"Admiral," James growled into his scroll, "report. Why aren't you assisting with the Huntsmen on the ground? Where are you going?"

An amused chuckle resounded from James' scroll. "Hmm, let's see," said a playful voice. "What does this button do?" A moment later, the capital airship doubled its speed. "Oh, fun! How about... this one?" The cargo bay doors opened, releasing dozens of Atlesian Knights to fall to the ground.

"Torchwick," Glynda remarked venomously. "The White Fang must have infiltrated your airship during the battle and broke him out." Glynda's eyes met Ozpin. "They must be finally making their power play," she said, wherein they meant Salem. After all, Winter was still in the room. Discretion was needed until a group consensus was made concerning her.

"Those bombs imply that the Legion are backing this White Fang attack," Ozpin mused. "Regardless, that ship is on a one-way trip for us. We two should –"

James cut him off. "All airships," he gritted out as he spoke to his scroll, "this is General Ironwood. The capital airship is compromised. Focus all your fire on its engines. Ground that ship. Now."

As the Atlas airships within range fired upon the capital ship, Glynda whipped her head around to give glare at James. "What are you doing? The ship will crash and cause untold amounts of collateral damage! You're putting our people on the ground at risk!"

"Whether it's the White Fang or the Legion orchestrating this attack," James responded with his focus devoted almost entirely to his ship flaring in flames, "they have nuclear explosives at their disposal. My capital airship gives them too much mobility. I'd rather risk one more giant explosion than allow them the chance to drop more bombs across Beacon, or even, God forbid, Vale itself."

It was a calculated risk. Hopefully, it was one that would cause the least amount of harm to the school and their people compared to retaking the airship conventionally. "Doctor Oobleck," Ozpin said to his scroll, "Atlas' lead airship has been hijacked by the White Fang. The Atlas fleet is aiming to disable it by forcing it to crash land. Evacuate the main boulevard. If any White Fang stragglers stay on the street, leave them behind. The flaming airship will hopefully take care of them." Oobleck gave his affirmative.

Glynda's heated surprise was replaced by a keen, sharp look. "Specialist Schnee, from how far away can you be to conjure up your glyphs effectively? We can use our semblances to slow down the airship's descent."

Winter took a quick second to look out the window and judge the distance. "It's close enough." She and Glynda raised their weapons, as focusing points, and a lightshow of purple

and white danced all along the airship.

Before long, a giant explosion overtook the ship. Fire and smoke shrouded it entirely as the ship's nose dipped downward. It began its sluggish fall.

"That's one problem taken care of," James whispered with some relief seeking out. The reveal that nuclear weapons were now a factor to take into account must be disturbing him more than he expected. Glynda hid most of her feelings about the matter, as did Winter. Ozpin was wary, of course, but he's dealt with literal nuclear threats before, long ago. They were dangerous, but many things in life were. They will find a way to overcome this new threat, one way or another.

Two balls of light blinked from out of the smoke cloud and streaked through the air toward Ozpin's office. Ozpin has seen such glimmers of light often enough. Heightened speed derived from precise Aura manipulation was a common ability in most huntsmen. Even without a speed-related semblance, one can appear as a blur if they managed their Aura correctly.

The red blur hit its mark first. It smashed through the window. Accompanying the blur was an arc of searing red energy. Ozpin and his allies evaded the attack, but they were momentarily blinded by the sheer intensity of the arc.

The second blur, white in color, landed in the middle of Ozpin's office. Before he could try to get a clear look at him, light grey smoke emanated from the blur and immediately filled the room. From the smell, they were the nonlethal type intended to hinder visibility rather than poison those exposed to the smoke.

Gunshots from James' personal hand cannon rang out. Ozpin could hear the sound of blades clashing against one another. Glynda was shouting something indiscernible.

A footstep from behind Ozpin prompted him to swing with his cane. His weapon made contact with something composed of the same material from his cane, if the resonating echo was any indication. Ozpin traded blows with his invisible attacker, avoiding from stepping on broken glass all the while until Glynda used her semblance to force the smoke screen through the shattered window and out of the office.

Situated between Winter and James was Adam Taurus in his signature black suit and White Fang mask. Standing before Ozpin was Roman Torchwick wielding his own specialized cane. Taurus had an air of rigid professionalism about him with his combat stance. Torchwick's posture oozed with his trademark arrogance and flippancy.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet the world-renowned Headmaster Ozpin," Torchwick taunted with an exaggerated bow. "If nothing else, I have to say that you have fine taste when it comes to weapon choice." With that, Torchwick charged forward to continue his assault. His run was interrupted by Ozpin's desk crashing into him, courtesy of Glynda.

"Surrender," Winter sneered at Taurus. "You're outnumbered and outmatched."

Taurus neglected to dignify her with a response. Holding his sheathed weapon by his hip, he dejected his sword, missing James by fractions of an inch. James fired his handgun. Taurus weaved around the magnum rounds with incredible precision. Winter lunged for Taurus. His sword rebounding off a wall, he caught his blade and resumed his duel against her.

Ozpin directed his attention onto Torchwick. Glynda used the countless pieces of sharp, broken glass to her advantage, but despite the faint cuts lining his clothes, Torchwick remained a stubborn target constantly on the move.

Seizing an opportune weakness in Torchwick's stance, Ozpin leapt and thrust his cane into Torchwick's stomach. Gasping, Torchwick fired a Dust-infused bullet, skidding across the side of Ozpin's head and knocking off his (granted, fake and unnecessary) glasses. Ozpin was undeterred and used his free hand to grab his opponent's wrist. Torchwick fired wildly. Unfortunately, his persistence paid off in that Ozpin lost his grip before he could follow through with disarming him. A heavy kick shoved Ozpin back. It also allowed Glynda free reign to pelt Torchwick with another wave of glass shards.

Despite the onslaught of glass, Torchwick maintained his facetious, careless attitude. "Just had this jacket dry cleaned, too," he said in a falsely disappointed tone. "Dry cleaning's gotten pretty expensive over the years."

James, Winter, and Taurus still battled on, but Ozpin decided to indulge the lull in fighting between himself, Torchwick, and Glynda. Ozpin wanted to try to appeal to the thief's monetary desires. "If it's a matter of money," he said calmly, "then Beacon Academy is willing to negotiate a deal. James might have been unwilling to reach an understanding. I can assure you that I can be far more flexible."

Glynda's infuriated glower toward him was not lost on Ozpin. She never considered bribery as a morally acceptable tactic to use regardless of the speedy rewards it offered. He ignored the glare, too busy with gauging Torchwick's reaction. It wasn't the best laid out proposal Ozpin had given, but Ozpin was willing to try almost anything to settle things with the thief and to assist with the Adam Taurus' arrest. In Ozpin's experience, a man fueled by a grand vision was much more dangerous than a man fueled by greed.

Ozpin was not surprised when Torchwick only barked in laughter. "Are you kidding?" the criminal rhetorically asked. "The Legion and Cinder are about to turn the whole of Remnant upside down, and you're trying to buy me off with money that'll be worthless by the time the Legion takes over?"

Cinder? "I take it this Cinder is your contact within the Legion?" Ozpin guessed.

Torchwick laughed again. "I still can't believe she's managed to practically live in your own house without getting caught for so long." Casually, Torchwick set a fallen chair upright and plopped down on it. "Here's a deal for you. Let Adam and the Atlas tools have their fun. You get your lovely secretary to stop ruining my favorite suit, and I'll tell you everything there is to know about Cinder and all her plans for your precious Maiden."

He must be stalling for time, for some magnificent second wave for the White Fang attack. Glynda's glower persisted, but the nod to Ozpin meant that she would ultimately defer

judgement to him. "Very well." Ozpin set his cane in front of him, straightening his back and placing both hands atop his cane. Glynda stayed in her combat stance, but she let her hold over the glass dissipate. "We'll pause for now. Who is this Cinder?"

With a conceited leer, Torchwick said, "Cinder Fall, Mercury Black, and Emerald Sustrai. They were the crew who put your Fall Maiden into a coma. They posed as a student Huntsmen team and lived right under your noses." Torchwick leaned back and folded his legs over each other. "Cinder had this plan. Hack the CCT, sabotage the tournament, hijack Atlas' war mechs, and bring a whole load of Grimm to invade Vale. And during all that, she was going to get inside your 'secret' vault, get the Maiden powers, get the relic, and, at least I'm assuming, kill you, Headmaster."

The name Sustrai had no meaning to Ozpin. Mercury Black sounded too similar to Marcus Black, an ex-Huntsman and skilled assassin who Ozpin occasionally and privately contracted work from, to be a coincidence.

Ozpin vaguely recognized the name Cinder Fall. He had scanned through the team leaders' files of all the student teams who came to visit for the Vytal Festival. If Ozpin found a team leader that had some skill or background of interest, Ozpin usually took time to visit him or her. The Headmaster of a rival academy visiting a foreign student seemingly out of the blue would make an impact on the team leader. Hopefully a positive impact that would prove fruitful down the line as the student becomes a Huntsman who would remember Ozpin's kind words and supportive advice.

Cinder Fall had made no such memorable impression to warrant a visit. Perhaps Ozpin should have looked harder, been more careful when he and Glynda studied the visiting students' profiles. No, he was too careless and remiss in reviewing the files. Had he been more vigil in his investigations, he could have eliminated another one of Salem's pawns and removed Cinder Fall from the game board entirely. Perhaps they could have avoided having to look for a replacement for Amber so soon and returned her Maiden powers outright instead of vetting for a last-minute replacement if they had discovered Cinder's true identity earlier.

"The good news?" Torchwick continued. "Cinder's plans are over and done with. My Neo's taking care of her and her cronies as we speak. The bad news? The Legion's taking over now. You think Cinder and the Grimm are scary? Just wait until the war finally breaks out. Then you'll have something to fear."

So Cinder lost the loyalty of Torchwick and the White Fang to the Legion of Steel. That may have put a dent in Salem's forces, but it also deprived Ozpin of potential allies, as well. Ozpin had been developing plans alongside his many other ones to barter for Torchwick's allegiance and to suppress the more misguided influential figures of the White Fang. Those plans will have to be altered significantly to account for their new loyalties to the Legion.

The door to the elevator suddenly opened. A golden blur sped out and collided with Torchwick.

After blinking, Ozpin was honored with the appearance of Taiyang Xiao-Long, the man's arm outstretched and its coinciding fist held tightly. Oh, how Ozpin longed to make Taiyang a fully-fledged member in the conquest against Salem. Had Taiyang not have daughters to care

for, and if not for Qrow's requests, Taiyang would have been constantly sent on missions instead of being relegated to strictly teaching duties and the occasional field deployment long ago.

Taiyang flexed his body with steady breath before regarding Ozpin and Glynda. "You didn't tell us that Summer has a son in the other world," he said flatly.

Summer has a son? Ozpin shook his head before his mind could dwell on that tidbit of information. Glynda spoke up. "We can talk about Summer later. For now," she raised the pieces of glass once more, "we have a battle to win."

"Agreed," said another voice. Ulysses strolled out from the elevator. He had a giant rifle in his arms. His eyes were drawn to the fight between Taurus, James, and Winter. Ulysses raised an eyebrow. "A bull? Shouldn't be surprised, I suppose. Legion can't forget the old symbols."

"Why are you here?" Glynda questioned Ulysses before he could ramble further. "Where are Qrow and Summer?"

"They're going to help things on the ground with my daughters," Taiyang told her as he cracked his knuckles. "Ulysses and I came here to back you guys up."

Torchwick was on the floor near the broken window. He raised himself to a sitting position, clutching his upper arm. Taurus evaded another wave of glyphs and bullets and landed beside Torchwick.

The five Huntsmen and the lone Wastelander had the pair cornered in moments. Taurus and Torchwick were welcome to attempt jumping out the window. There was just the caveat of having to avoiding a hail of gunfire and semblance-related attacks should they try it. Even with their Aura-enhanced reflexes, they wouldn't escape unscathed.

Ozpin expected Taurus to stare with the deep hatred into the eyes of James and Winter. In reality, Taurus was starting with deep hatred as Ozpin. The others may or may not be able to distinguish the hate through Taurus' mask, but Ozpin was more than accustomed to reading through masks and understanding the message conveyed by body language.

What wrong has Ozpin inflicted on Adam Taurus to warrant such hatred and contempt? No credible answer came to mind. Ozpin's policy when it came to Human-Faunus relations was nothing if not egalitarian, and Winter was a much more logical target for him to direct his hate towards. The SDC doctrine toward Faunus was hardly as equitable and fair as Ozpin's code of conduct.

"I think you dislocated my shoulder," Torchwick whined as he brought himself to his feet. After twisting his arm with a crack, Torchwick's grimace was instantly swapped for a grin. He stepped in front of Adam. "That was actually a very lucky hit. Aim a little lower and we'd have all been blown to kingdom come." From his sleeve, Torchwick pulled out a dark greenish object that—

That resembled the very old designs of nuclear warheads. Give or take a few hundred years ago, Ozpin had eliminated the scientists who had created the designs and destroyed the

blueprints personally.

"Stay our arms!" Ulysses called out to the Hunters with in urgency Ozpin hasn't quite heard from him before. "He holds nuclear fire in his hands! One misstep will end us all!"

"I'd suggest listening to the man," Torchwick added, dangling the warhead between his fingers. "Not many people can handle nuclear fire. Too bad for you that the Legion has more than enough nukes that can burn Remnant to the ground twice over."

"He exaggerates," Ulysses reassured.

"Maybe, but as you can see, they still have enough to burn Beacon down."

Ozpin was so fixated by the nuclear device that he only caught Taurus' movements a half second before the bull Faunus unleashed his semblance.

Taurus' semblance, not unlike Yang Xiao-Long's, revolved around absorbing the energy and momentum of his opponents' attacks into his sword and then releasing it in an overwhelming wave of energy. Now, that wave of energy impacted against everyone's Auras. Ozpin felt his own Aura levels drop a good amount, likely into the orange-yellow range between green and red. In the corner of his eye, he saw Ulysses only be caught by the tail end of Taurus' attack, receiving a nasty cut that stretched along his hip, his right arm, and his right leg. Still, without an active Aura to ground his feet, Ulysses was thrown across the office and all the way to the back of the elevator.

When Ozpin reoriented himself, Taurus was gone. Torchwick was standing at the edge of the window. He fell backwards, giving a mock salute as he did so. He tossed the nuclear device into the air. Before Torchwick disappeared completely from view, his cane was raised and poised to fire at the miniature warhead.

Ozpin lunged for the device. If he was fast enough, then he could prevent yet another explosion from gracing his school. It would also limit the nuclear radiation exposure, keep Beacon Tower still in a repairable, salvageable condition, and –

The device went off right before his eyes.

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