

We are approaching the climax of this arc, or should I say... *the prologue*? Only three more chapters and we are on to Vale!

**Earlier,
In the skies over Vale,
Qrow Branwen.**

"... And that's the report from Valestein on the situation in Celdic."

Qrow hummed as he ate his fried chicken sandwich and washed it down with soda, his *Carrion* flying on autopilot. His pride and joy was *requisitioned* by him when he cleared up a human trafficking ring, which was a fancy way by the Vale authorities to call a smuggling/slaving ring. The aircraft was only a bullhead by designation but after he had tuned it up, it could not be compared to the standard lumbering aircraft.

With the ability to fly at a top speed of three-hundred miles an hour, it was only limited by the small amount of fuel it could hold. Running entirely on Dust; a mixture of Fire and Wind for fuel, Water and Ice for cooling, Lightning for it's only gun placed on the nose of the plane, and finally Gravity to help in the vertical lift and descent – Qrow had spent a lot of his personal funds into turning a slightly fast fighter into what was in his opinion, the most versatile plane in Sanus.

Its only downside was its small size, barely the size of a truck. *Carrion* only allowed a relatively short range and could only fit two passengers, four if he added seats in the baggage compartment, so there went his plans on inviting chicks for parties in the sky. But for faraway missions where his slow crow form would be a hassle to get there? It was perfect.

That his nieces had taken a shining to the grunt work of being a grease monkey was a bonus, whether it was weapons or bikes. Still, Qrow had to return to Patch when he found Ruby and Zwei had sneaked onboard and left them for Taiyang to spank.

Cheeky little brat, she's nearly seventeen and will be joining Beacon in a month yet he sometimes felt like she's still that precocious ten-year-old kid who wouldn't shut up about how cool *Harbinger* was.

Shaking his head, Qrow drained the last of his soda, and crushed the can as he was reminded of the upcoming mission. He was tempted to drink something stronger, but that would be very unwise in front of his obtuse coworker. The sandwich was the last of the care package his nieces had made a few hours ago when Glynda called him.

"And you say you got another call earlier from the Guild regarding a possible escalation?"

"Indeed. Kilika is not one to cry wolf, and the fact we are incapable of contacting anyone in Celdic gives credence to our fears."

"Let's hope it's not worse than Sumire, then." Qrow sighed, that town was a clusterfuck but they still managed to secure it only half a day ago. "Any word from Hyperion?"

"Similar situation. They lost comms with a contact in the region and are hurrying as best they can. Their ETA should be a couple of hours after yours."

Qrow sighed tiredly. Fighting non-stop for the past week had taken a toll on even a Huntsman of his caliber. The past two days have been especially hectic with the rescue efforts he lead – those surgical operations required a more refined hand rather than the blunt force of the military or some other inexperienced Huntsmen. He had planned to get a few hours of sleep at Taiyang's before setting out for Celdic in the morning, but...

"You're really working me to the bone, Glynda."

"I do not say this lightly, but believe me, you really are our only hope right now. Ozpin had taken to the field, and I am the only one holding the fort in Beacon. At least the conflict is in its dying stages, with the Grimm steadily losing ground by the hour."

The huntsman nodded soberly. Most of the faculty were still on the front lines, and some of them were already wounded. Not to mention the students who were called up and were not ready for war... Qrow had not heard of any deaths yet, but considering the ferocity of the attacks, it was only a matter of time.

And all of this was just a flex by the Witch, merely reminding them of her presence. Qrow clenched his teeth as he tried once more to recall those fools who had gone after Amber, but whoever that illusion user was, they were good; good enough to fool his Aura sense, and he considered himself decent enough.

"How's your Aura levels?" Glynda's sudden question woke him from his stupor and his hand unconsciously went to his flask before stopping himself.

"A little under half."

"Not ideal, but it will have to do. Hopefully, you would–"

Qrow stared bewilderedly as the screen flickered a few times before it went to static. Checking his navigation system, it was also acting weirdly. He frowned as he realized he must be within range of whatever was stopping communication to and from Celdic. Thankfully, his heading was straight ahead, and he did not need to worry about any detours. As he continued with his flight, he noticed the signs of devastation on the ground and stared ahead as dawn was breaking over the mountains.

It did not take a genius to figure out that Celdic was most likely under attack.

“Well, time to crash the party, then. Let’s just hope they haven’t started it without me.” The huntsman grinned as he grabbed his flask and took a swig. Then, he pushed the throttle to the limit and within minutes, he saw the burning fields in the distance.

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“*A woman after my own heart.*” Qrow grinned at the sexy lass’ clumsy attempt at seducing him, yet he was still mightily impressed with her. From his vast life experience, he had learned that it was always the girls with strange hair color who prove to be the most interesting. At least those whom he could not describe the color at first glance – was it purple? Or pink? Something in between?

Glancing around the devastated battlefield, he could feel her dissipating Aura encompassing most of it. It was difficult to tell with her Aura depleted, even with his talent in sensing aura, but Qrow had no doubt that Sara Valestein had an impressive amount of it. To throw so much Aura around that its effects could still be felt hours later was proof of her prowess.

The veteran huntsman turned to the grinning girl, noticing that despite her bravado, she was beyond exhausted. The bags under her eyes as well as her shattered aura and the many bruises on her body clearly showed that she was on her last legs.

Before he could speak to her, the sound of galloping horses from the gates had him turn, and only then did he notice many workers were busy fighting the fires and collecting the dead by the walls.

“Valestein!”/“Sara!”

Three riders rushed towards them, their carbines and cuirasses designating them as the dragoons he had been briefed on. He noticed a rabbit-faunus riding double with one of them and she was the first to jump off.

“I’m okay, guys. I said I’m fine, Meg.” Valestein waved them off as the faunus woman fussed over her while the dragoons watched him warily. Qrow ignored them to drink from his flask before pointing his scroll at his still floating plane and frowned. He sighed when he realized that the communication blackout included the most basic of remote functions, and the backup remote control was on the plane instead of his person. Channeling aura to his legs, he jumped the couple of dozen feet in the air to his cockpit and landed the plane, before hopping out again.

If Ruby were here, she would claim that this cost him some cool points and how lame that was.

“Don’t mind him, boys.” Valestein said hastily as the Dragoons pointed their guns at him when the plane landed, its gun *accidentally* aiming a bit too close to them. “This is the huntsman who had played truant a few days ago. He’s finally here to help, aren’t you?”

“Guilty as charged. Was a bit too busy in Vale, but here I am.” Qrow shrugged as he opened the hatch of his *Carrion*. “Now, how about you debrief me on the situation here? Just what in Remnant

is going on, and how long has the town been attacked? Last we heard was you wiping that horde in the quarry, so what happened?"

Valestein's countenance got serious as she leaned on the two-seater aircraft. "We suspect a band of outlaws to have somehow disabled all communications in and out of the region. A couple of hours after we lost comms, the first Grimm horde attacked and this is the result."

"The first?" Qrow paused from where he was dragging a bag of military grade Dust from behind the seats.

"Yeah, you arrived just at the tail end of it. The second horde attacked about two hours ago on the east side, by the mountains. That's where my team and the majority of the defenders are at, defending the walls. Last I heard, the walls were breached, the gates had fallen and the fighting was dragged into town but they managed to hold the horde at bay."

"I see, I suppose I do not have time to waste." Qrow jumped into the pilot's seat once he finished reloading his weapon, *Harbinger*, and dropped the bag of Dust in the passenger seat. "Your Aura is shattered so I suggest you seek shelter and—"

"No can do, handsome. I'm coming with you and don't worry about my Aura." The girl groaned as she vaulted over the open hatch and into the co-pilot seat, browsing through the Dust bag as she retrieved a gun from...*wait*, where did she pull that gun from?

"Not to be rude girlie, but I don't want any extra baggage while I fight."

"Oh, it is so nice to be fussed upon by a gentleman." Qrow's eyebrows twitched at the girl's flippant attitude, he had thought she was a professional but if she truly thought that— "I can regain my Aura once I link up with my teammate. Jaune's semblance allows him to refill people's Aura."

The veteran Huntsman froze, his eyes wide in surprise. "Well, in that case, welcome aboard. I could use a pick me up myself. You are welcome to load up, I suppose." He added with a shrug when the woman held a canister of ground Lightning Dust.

"Hell yeah! Thanks for the Dust as well. I was completely out when you came in with the save. Oh, and boys?" The Adventurer turned to the three dragoons who had stared at them silently so far. "Tell the Lieutenant we are moving to reinforce the east side of town. I doubt any more attacks will come from this side, but I'm sure he will know how to handle any stray Grimm that remains."

"Yes, ma'am." The dragoons saluted and stood back as the rabbit-faunus approached.

"Take care of yourself, Sara."

"Thanks, Meg. What happened to your camera?"

“Got a pinion through the lens, I’m afraid. At least the recordings were saved.” The woman shrugged, and Qrow was getting impatient.

“Are we ready to go?”

“Oh yes, can’t wait for an early morning cruise, let’s go.” He could feel the girl’s grin as he lifted off and she waved at her friend on the ground. Closing the hatch, he sped over town, the trip so short they didn’t even get a chance to speak before they were confronted with a sobering sight.

The gatehouse was destroyed and the rubble had clearly not stopped the hordes of Grimm from pouring in and demolishing half the eastern quadrant of the town. Nevertheless, it appears they were too late anyway.

Qrow could see no sign of Grimm, but the devastation and the fires inside the town were evidence of a major battle. Not to mention the dead and wounded lining up the streets. Finding an empty spot, he expertly landed the plane between two destroyed harvesters and opened the hatch.

The veteran huntsman’s hands instantly grabbed an offending dagger aiming at his face and pulled its owner in for a punch before freezing at the last moment. The gun/dagger hybrid was held by a wide-eyed white-haired cat-faunus who couldn’t be older than Ruby.

“Fie, lower your toy before the big bad huntsman takes it away and gives you a spanking. Come here and help me out, I’m so sore I could feel my muscles turning to stone.” Sara’s voice sounded next to him, and the now named Fie stared at him until he released her. She flicked her hands sending her weapons...*somewhere*. Seriously, what was going on? This was the second time he had witnessed some sort of ability that did not at all feel like Aura. It was almost like...*nah*, it couldn’t be.

Once they were outside the plane, Qrow finally took stock of the place. There were still the occasional Grimm in the distance blindly charging at the breach but they were easily killed by the men on the walls. Many buildings were on fire, and even more were destroyed. Body bags lined the main road all the way to the center of town where he could see a field hospital and a few trucks moving back and forth ferrying the wounded and supplies. Families grieved their dead, mostly men, as their women wailed and children cried.

Qrow took a swig of his whiskey. This was way worse than Sumire. At least the conflict was done and over with, though he wished he had made it earlier. It irked him greatly – this feeling of powerlessness, to know that he could have helped save many of those people if he had not wasted time. Realistically, Qrow knew this was survivor’s guilt and it was an old companion of his, yet it did not make it any easier.

He twitched as his senses acknowledged the insane amount of Aura encompassing the town and the grounds beyond the wall. It almost drowned him in its potency and the sheer amount of it that had been thrown around like candy was unbelievable. Qrow thought the Aura was familiar and it took him a moment for him to be reminded of an old battle buddy of his. Adrian Arc was a bit

cocky for being ten years his junior but he was a reliable guy in a fight, with nearly half again as much Aura as he had.

A shame what happened to him.

“Where’s Jaune?”

He turned to find the white-haired girl supporting the older adventurer towards a blonde man kneeling over a body bag. Instantly, he recognized the owner of the Aura, and the kid even looked like his uncle, except for the golden blonde hair instead of the platinum blonde Adrian inherited from his Schnee mother. They approached to find about a dozen open bags of men wearing the same uniform. Dragoons.

“Are you alright, Jaune?” For once, Valestein did not smile as she stared at the dead man. He looked his age, with dark hair and dull blue eyes. The blonde, Jaune, closed the man’s eyes and stood to face them, and Qrow silently clenched his teeth.

This was no man, even if he was similar to him in height and his potent Aura was easily more than he currently had; it was just a boy, barely Yang’s age. Looking over his messy hair, gaunt face, and dented armor, he had clearly been through the ringer. His blue eyes seemed to be staring a thousand miles away, at something only he could see. The tight pursing of his lips and his furrowed brows spoke of someone who had seen the worst of the world in a very short time.

No, this was not a boy. This was a man who was forced to grow a lot sooner than he should have. Qrow hated seeing this, this kid should be in school with his nieces, not in the middle of a battlefield.

“As well as anyone else here. Someone will have to let Anita know about Duncan. I would do it but...” Jaune Arc stared at the deceased dragoon before his gaze wandered over the other dead bodies. “I will have to grieve for them later.”

The words came out in a dull tone, as if they were a mantra the kid had been repeating all night.

“It’s all right, she’s a strong girl and the town will take care of her.” Valestein looked around them as the townsfolk continued their cleanup, and even the grieving families pitched in despite the tears flowing down their cheeks.

“Let’s pray she does.” Jaune Arc glanced at him before focusing on Sara. “You look like shit.”

Even with the light-hearted attempt at humor, Qrow noticed the kid did not smile once. His face was as if made from a block of granite.

“Tell me about it,” Valestein groaned as she leaned heavily against the younger white-haired adventurer, Fie, he thought was her name. “Would my dear wunderkind kindly do something about it?”

"...Don't move." The blonde kid placed his hand on the older adventurer's shoulder, and within a heartbeat, the previously shattered Aura of Sara Valestein suddenly rose exponentially until it leveled to a little over his current reserves. The woman's countenance immediately got healthier as she let go of her younger companion and her injuries rapidly healed. They were not serious injuries in the first place, but the sheer speed of their healing was phenomenal.

"That should do it." Arc removed his hand from Valestein's shoulder and then placed it on Fie's. The same thing happened as the girl's Aura levels shot up to reach somewhere around the level of his niece.

"Interesting ability you have there. Is that your semblance?" Qrow was mightily interested as such a semblance would be an absolute game changer depending on its limitations.

The young man retracted his hand before looking at him strangely, and suddenly Qrow had the feeling that he was being analyzed. It was as if his soul was getting an unannounced inspection, and judged accordingly. He flared his Aura agitatedly and he unconsciously moved his hand towards *Harbinger*, causing the blonde to narrow his eyes.

"You're strong. Interesting semblance as well and... something else." What felt like an eternity later, the young man suddenly declared; his face still stoic and blank in a way that was starting to – wait, what?

"How did you know that?"

"Trade secret." The annoying brat shrugged before looking at his plane. "Jaune Arc, Adventurer and aspiring Huntsman."

"Qrow Branwen, Huntsman and part-time school teacher."

"*Branwen*?" The kid's face remained impassive but Qrow could detect a hint of disdain at the name.

"I want to say I have no relation to a certain tribe in Anima, but that would be a lie." He shrugged, and took a sip from his whiskey. Perhaps it was Qrow's fault for sticking to his tribe's name, but to change his name would be to deny his past and that of his sister. No matter how much they hated each other now, he still held hope that she would come around.

Probably not after what he had done when they last met.

"Fair. I suppose we don't get to choose our family."

"No... we don't."

"Can I ask you for a ride?"

The sudden question gave him pause and the surrounding townsfolk who had been watching the interaction in silence suddenly shuffled in unease.

“Depends. What do you have in mind?”

“I have a few bandits that need culling.” The cold words were said in such a matter of fact way that it took Qrow aback.

“Wait a moment, Arc. You're leaving us now? What if another Grimm horde attacked?” The question came from one of the villagers and looking around, Qrow noticed that everyone was looking at the blonde young man in worry. Not just worry, but clear respect and veneration were in their eyes.

“I have already healed as many of you as I can. Sarah and Fie are also recovered and shall remain here to protect the town in case another attack happens.” Jaune Arc glanced at the two adventurers who, while clearly miffed about the sudden decision, nodded their support. “This conflict is not one where we could just endure it, and hope for it to pass over – we need to get to its root cause to end it. The reason for the attacks on this region can be blamed on a band of outlaws who shall not rest until all of us are either dead or in chains.”

The declaration caused many of the villagers to stiffen and widen their eyes. Qrow had to hand it to the kid, he knew how to work up a crowd.

“I promised that we shall survive the night, that we shall hold for dawn and victory. It may have come at a cost, but victory was achieved.” The blonde man produced a very familiar sword from seemingly nowhere and stabbed it on the ground as he gazed at the myriad of eyes looking at him. “You believed in me then, and I ask you to believe in me now. Only I know where the culprits are hiding, those wretched bandits need to die in order to secure peace in these lands. Would you rather I stay and pray that the bandits don't attack us again, or worse, escape justice?”

“No!” The answer came from a grizzled old man in a dragoon uniform. “We trust you, lad, and you have proven yourself a man of your word. Many of my brothers at arms are dead because of those fuckers, but even more of us would have died if not for you. If you know where they are, then I say we gather a posse and march upon them at once.”

“I could gather and arm twenty good men in as many minutes who would be willing to follow you to death and beyond, boy, if you would have us.” Another old man, this one with a sheriff's tin star, grinned at Arc as he spun a revolver in his hand.

“You won't need twenty minutes! I came here with my family running away from those monsters that destroyed my village. If it wasn't for Arc, we would all be dead now.” Another sheriff, clearly a refugee, exclaimed and more and more people were shouting their approval, waving their fists and weapons in the air as they volunteered to join.

It appeared the young Arc had greatly endeared himself to the populace. Even the Vale troops stationed here looked enamored with him as he could see the captain he had been briefed on to be a potential problem also throw in his full support.

"I appreciate the offer, everyone, but that will not be necessary. Speed is of the essence, and that plane doesn't look like it can hold more than two passengers."

Jaune looked at him questioningly and Qrow realized that he still didn't give his support. He was unsure how they would find the bandit lair but the kid was confident about it. The rest of the townsfolk all stared at him, and he had the feeling they were not exactly fond of him, or at least didn't trust him. He supposed it had to do with his late appearance, and to their eyes, he had reneged on the contract he and Amber agreed with them. The veteran huntsman sighed as he scratched his head before walking to *Carrion*, his hands in his pockets.

"Well?" He glanced back at the troublesome blonde. "You coming or what?"

Jaune Arc nodded and hopped onboard the co-pilot seat, Valestein and Fie coming over to say farewell.

"Don't worry about the town, we'll keep it safe." The older adventurer clapped the blonde kid's shoulder as Qrow started up the aircraft before remembering something.

"Oh yeah, expect Hyperion to be here in a couple of hours or so. I'm sure they will be able to provide security as well."

"Will do. I'll see you soon, handsome. Get back quickly and we can have that drink, and maybe more~." He chuckled at the smoldering look the woman gave him and then laughed outright when the white-haired girl smacked her bum causing Sara to yelp.

"Bad Sara, flirting so shamelessly in front of so many people." Fie ignored the woman's protests and turned to Arc. "Jaune, how's your Aura?"

"About a third. Take this bag, it's in the way." Qrow nearly bumped his head on the hatch from shock. *Third?* The kid has as much Aura as his maximum and it's only a third?! What do they feed those Arcs? Moreover, did he just give away his bag of Dust?

"Take care, and don't be afraid of going all out. I noticed you holding back for the sake of the town, but where you are going... kill as many of them as you can for me." The girl's harsh words had him wonder if she also had a stake in the matter.

"I will. Tell my sisters to follow along when they come. We might need an airlift if there are any hostages there. You know how to track me, and I will find and disable the cause of the blackout, so expect a call soon."

The cat-faunus nodded and Qrow took this as a farewell. Nodding to the gathered crowd, his eyes straying on Sara's smiling face for a second longer, he closed the hatch and they lifted off.

"Keep flying south. I'll let you know when we approach, and I'll boost you up then." The kid pushed his seat back as he brought out a large revolver and started cleaning it.

"So, how could you tell my semblance?" He glanced sideways at the kid, wondering how best to get him to fess up to the truth on how he came to have—

"Magic." The troublesome blonde shrugged, and Qrow grimaced at the complete nonchalance of the kid in just so easily confessing it.

"Are you sure it's smart to just say that so easily?"

"What's there to hide? You also have magic, don't you?"

"And how could you tell?"

"Magic." Blondie finished cleaning his gun and stored it away in whatever magical box he was hiding.

Qrow growled inwardly, this was getting nowhere. They continued flying for nearly half an hour, the older man forced to fly at low speeds due to the rocky and mountainous terrain. Finally, the Arc had him land the plane behind a rock outcrop and within a minute, they were lying face down on a cliff.

"Are you sure this is the place?" Qrow looked at the entrance of the cave they were spying on from their position on an overlooking cliff.

"Positive. The lowlifes are scurrying like rats inside, preparing to march on the town now that it has been softened up. I can sense many of them idling around, though. They could be sleeping, or the hostages, I could not tell." Jaune Arc stared through the rocks using whatever magical ability he refused to elaborate on. He hoped they would build up some trust after this operation because there was no way Qrow wouldn't report to Ozpin about this.

"Let me scout ahead first. We need to make sure any hostages are secure before we go in guns blazing."

Jaune's face looked reluctant for a moment before nodding his assent. "Do you want a boost? My semblance allows me to empower your physical abilities as well as refill your Aura."

Qrow thought about it but shook his head. "Just the Aura. Any boost to my physique would make me waste time to acclimate."

Jaune Arc nodded approvingly and placed a hand on his shoulder, and Qrow felt a strange sensation. He frowned as he felt his Aura drop massively and was about to push the kid away before his Aura instantly jumped to the maximum. It was strangely invigorating, but he also felt something...*different*.

"You did something."

"Your semblance was mighty interesting. It would be a shame not to give it a boost of some kind."

Qrow gritted his teeth and badly wanted to punch the kid. "You fool, my semblance gives bad luck, and I can barely control it. Now its..."

It's... easier? What in Remnant? Qrow focused on his semblance and suddenly, it was as if he had never known it all his life. Normally, his semblance would activate at random and only when he was drunk or feeling lucky would he be able to control it. Now, he could feel it at the tip of his fingers, waiting obediently to be used.

"How... How did you do that?"

The blonde looked at him strangely. "I just boosted its effects. You can affect negative causality, right? I'm not sure what that really means or how it works, but with the boost, you should have better range now. I confess this is probably the first time I boosted a semblance, but I'm sure it will be fine"

"You haven't answered my question, how did you know about it and how to boost it in the first place?"

"Magic." Arc shrugged like it was the most obvious thing in the world, and Qrow was seriously tempted to whack him before remembering something Ozpin had once mentioned. Magic could not be explained, it defies logic and those who use it would find it difficult to explain how they make it work.

Just as he had no way of explaining how to turn into a bird. He just could.

"Whatever, I'm going now." Qrow shook his head and prepared to transform.

"How will you sneak in?"

"You aren't the only one with a few magic tricks up your sleeve, kid." Qrow grinned as he transformed into a crow and enjoyed the wide eyes of the blonde hardass. He flew around his head, just to annoy him, before speeding through the cliff's entrance, trying to ignore the niggling feeling in the back of his head as something seemed to latch onto him for a second before fading.

T*A*M*S

**Earlier,
SDC train en route to Vale via Celdic,
Blake Belladonna.**

She stared in sorrow as the train's separated car trailed behind. Adam's eyes might be hidden behind that mask but Blake could tell he was glaring murderously at her. They will get enough supplies and arms from the freight cars to continue their operations, but considering the path Adam was taking the White Fang, it was only a matter of time until he led them to ruin. Blake understood there was no going back now, she had chosen her path and her former friend would not hesitate to kill her if they ever meet again.

Shaking her head, Blake sheathed *Gambol Shroud* and quickly rummaged in her bag, withdrawing a brown cloak to hide her features and stored her weapon inside the bag, before sneaking inside the train. The train was not crowded, probably so they could pick up more passengers at Celdic.

Using her expertise in blending in, and the fact the train conductor was a robot that got obliterated earlier, she entered a passenger compartment. The windows were sealed by metallic shutters, presumably as a safety measure from the attacks, and Blake found herself an empty seat next to a faunus family of all people.

"Papa, is everything alright?" The little kid asked his dad, a badger faunus if she had to guess.

"I'm sure everything will be fine." The man comforted his child and the scene solidified Blake's resolve. To think Adam was willing to kill so many innocents just because it was inconvenient to avoid collateral damage.

The cat-eared girl had been contemplating leaving the White Fang for months and had prepared an escape package when the time came. Last night was the final straw, especially when she overheard that newcomer mentioning how they had basically abandoned Ilia to those bandits. Liaison her pretty bum! If anything, the bandits were the ones who should have kept a contact with them, not the other way around.

Thankfully, Ilia managed to sneak a message to her through her belongings that she left in the Bullhead that Walter and Yuma returned on. Now she was able to escape and had a quarter of a plan on what to do with her future.

The train sped through to their next destination, Celdic, but she was unsure how long they would stop before continuing to Vale. Regardless, she planned to warn the populace of the Grimm horde that should be attacking soon. Hopefully, they would heed her warnings and maybe help her in whatever she decided to do with her future.

Should she return home to be an Adventurer like her parents? Her father was the guild master of the Menagerie branch and had used the guild's resources to start the White Fang when it was a peaceful political organization.

He had planned to have her join the guild but her child self had heard many horror stories about the Tyrant and how he secretly controlled the guild and planned to enslave all faunus-kind!

These kinds of ridiculous conspiracy theories always existed and she was ashamed to admit she had taken them a bit too seriously.

It was when Blake was older that she realized those rumors were from people wishing to undermine her father, and to this day, she never even knew who that so-called Tyrant was. Some claim it was some ancient human warrior who killed many Faunus in both the Great War and the Revolution, while others insist he was the old Mistral King who faked his death and was preparing for a comeback.

Suffice it to say, Blake paid no credence to any of that, and the idea of returning to her parents in shame grated on her. No, it would be best to reach Vale and from there, plan her future properly. There were a few contacts she knew in the city from her time in the White Fang and Blake was certain they were more in line with her father's ideals.

Glancing around the car, she felt herself secure enough that she might take a nap. Celdic was about an hour away, and she had stayed up all night preparing for her escape.

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"Now arriving in Celdic. The SDC would like to apologize for the unscheduled delay earlier, and assure all its customers that this train employs state-of-the-art security drones and your safety was never in question."

Blake jerked awake as the train stopped. The irony of the announcement was not lost on her, as she stretched her arms and stood with the rest of the passengers as they prepared to disembark. She looked outside the windows only to frown at the metallic shutters; They did not bother retracting them since the attack. With no way of seeing outside, the announcement of their arrival came as a surprise. The cat-faunus had considered sneaking out of the train before it arrived at the station, but that option was taken from her.

As the passengers hurried to leave the damaged train, Blake followed them into the station. She frowned as a familiar smell came from the town but she did not have the chance to identify it as she followed the crowd outside, only to freeze at their welcoming committee. She was not the only one, as nearly everyone in the crowd gawked and shuffled uneasily at the sight of armed men and women looking at them coldly. Clearly either militia or soldiers, and they were led by an older man in a Vale captain uniform.

"Welcome to Celdic. I am captain Herbert Montgomery of the Vale contingent stationed in the Celdic region." The captain announced, and Blake couldn't help but notice that almost every one of the soldiers looked like they fought through the hell and came back harder than ever. "I shall not mince words with you, the town has been attacked by two separate Grimm hordes in the past few

hours. I ask everyone to remain calm and allow us to do our jobs of securing the train and making sure no hostile elements are hidden amongst you.”

The declaration caused many of the passengers to fidget and murmur uneasily but the captain did not give a chance for panic to set in as he waved the troops on. Everybody remained where they were, allowing the soldiers to do their work, and Blake cursed her misfortune. To think that the attacks were already over - now she had no leverage to secure any form of amnesty.

Of course, there was a chance that they did not know about her, and she was confident that she did not appear in any wanted lists. Blake had learned why Adam refused to send her into any risky or dodgy operations, or at least not against targets protected by the Kingdoms. She was more useful to him alive as a rallying image than a combatant. Having the daughter of Ghira Belladonna, the founder of the White Fang, supporting Adam Taurus and his ideals, was much more useful.

That was all she was to him.

Shaking her head, Blake decided to retreat; even if they did not recognize her, there was a chance they might detain her, as she did not have any kind of identification or paperwork. Her only option was to sneak away and continue on foot to Vale, where she will have to make new plans – hopefully, Ilia would be able to escape and think similarly.

Thankfully, she was at the very back of the crowd and her cloak hid her features well. As naturally as she could, Blake backed away before slowly walking back into the station. She could not risk running or else that will grab attention. The only path outside was through the tracks in front of the train, and it didn't take her a minute before she was already on it and running as fast as she—

It was only due to her cat ears and instincts that she heard the subtle sound of metal cutting through the wind. She jumped sideways off the tracks, dodging three sharp throwing knives that sank into the wooden planks of the railway. Unfortunately, she fell down into the rocky ground, grunting in pain when her aura had to tank the damage from the fall.

The former member of the White Fang did not have a chance to even think before she created a clone that pushed her away just as a hail of bullets turned the clone to dust. Blake lamented the fact she had to hide her weapon and meager Dust reserves in her backpack or else risk exposure on the train. There was no way she could have enough time to retrieve them, and before she could decide how to fight her assailant, she found herself face-to-face with a green-eyed girl with white hair stabbing at her with a gundagger.

Another clone took her place as it pushed her away once more, only for her assailant to impossibly turn midair, as if she jumped on the air, thoroughly ignoring her clone and pointing her offhand at her. Blake stared incredulously at the unrelenting girl as she sent her *scarf* flying at her. Blake was midair and weaponless, burdened down by her heavy bag, and she couldn't create another clone to take her place.

The scarf latched onto her and she tried to fight it off only for the girl to drag herself towards her and, within a couple of seconds, tie her up in such a way she couldn't even stand. Blake struggled mightily as she fell on the ground, flaring her Aura in hopes of overpowering what she recognized as a Dust weaved scarf. The white-haired girl sat on her back, causing Blake to grunt, and aimed her dagger at her eye, causing the former White Fang member to freeze. Even at full Aura, she would be dead if the girl stabbed her eye.

"Don't move. Or do, and I will stab. Blink if you understand."

Blake couldn't blink any faster if she could, and breathed a sigh of relief when the girl pulled the dagger slightly away but kept the point close to send the message across.

"W-who are you? Why did you attack me?" Blake tried to glare at the girl, only to freeze when she saw a white appendage waving lazily over the girl, holding another throwing knife. She was a faunus?

"A Cat-faunus with more Aura than me, trying to flee an inspection when the captain had clearly warned about hostiles. Considering the train she just left was missing a few of its cars and had clear signs of attack..." The girl explained in a bored tone, as if it was the most obvious thing. "I was unsure how to deal with you, especially as my teammate is resting, and I'm not in the best fighting form. I truly hoped you would just surrender and explain your situation, but you running away made it easier for me to think of you as hostile. Now, will you come quietly or will I have to knock you out?"

Blake groaned in disappointment. She didn't even make it outside of town before getting caught. The sound of horses approaching and men shouting, made her choice for her. "I'll come quietly."

Yes, Ruby is the same age as the rest of the cast because being younger did not add anything at all to the plot. She would be a few months younger than Yang still.

In the fight between the best cat-girl, the Black Cat loses the first round to the White Cat.

I didn't show it in the chapter since it wasn't Jaune's POV but here's Qrow's status page if you're interested.

Profile:

Name: Qrow Branwen

Class: Veteran Huntsman

Age: 40

Height: 6'3"

Build: Lean-Muscular

Race: Human

Stats:

Aura Points: 1611/3262 (381/hr)

Aura Control: 117%

Magic: 10

Strength (STR): 96

Vitality (VIT): 92

Dexterity (DEX): 127

Agility (AGL): 115

Perception (PER): ??

Intelligence (INT): ??

Perks:

???

Semblance (Misfortune): Allows control of negative causality on targets. Requires ?*#?.

???

Skills:

???

Abilities:

???

As you have noticed, Jaune didn't manage to glean a lot from Qrow before the man flared his Aura, causing the Observe to fail, but not before giving enough information to Jaune. Do not take too much stock in the physical stats, though. Ultimately, a fighter's lethality will always come down to AP, AC, their training, experience, and how they use their abilities.