

Its alive! I guess the hiatus didn't survive long.

Fair warning, this chapter goes into some dark shit

This chapter is edited by yours truly. I'm sad to say that I'm not the best editor ;p

"Been a while since I've been here."

Jaune looked around at the familiar view of Arcade. He hadn't visited his mindscape for a couple of days now, but it seemed something had changed. Something felt... different. He looked around until he found the anomaly bothering him. A large stone bowl attached to a waist-high pillar. It almost looked like a fountain, but instead of water, it contained some sort of material made from mist and fog.

You have noticed.

"What is it?"

It would be best if you touch it and find out.

Not seeing the harm of exploring something in his mind, Jaune reached out and touched the white fog...

And his vision exploded.

He could see thousands of images rushing through his mind. All of them seemed random and haphazard, and trying to focus on any one of them gave Jaune a headache. After a moment, he figured something they all had in common. The aspiring huntsman removed his hands and the vision abruptly halted.

"It's some sort of monitoring system."

Close. Did you discover something interesting about it?

"The images were too fast," Jaune frowned in thought. "But I did notice it was always nighttime."

Indeed. This is a boon from the Moon Deity whom you have invoked last night.

Jaune's eyebrows rose. "I did? Ah," he remembered his vow to the moon and how it shined brighter for a second. "I guess I did."

This is a scrying bowl that allows you to view anything the light of the moon touches. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the broken moon, it might be hard to control and could give you unexpected results.

“Interesting.” Was this why he was able to have such vivid dreams the past few days?

“Perhaps it works like **Search** and I need to focus on my target?” Jaune thought for a moment, and since he had just talked to him earlier in the day, he decided to check on his father.

Once he placed his hands on the bowl, his vision was inundated with random images. After waiting for a moment to no avail, he gave up on finding his father, so he focused on Maya or Bleue instead.

Instantly, his vision jumped thousands of miles to Vacuo. It was barely evening, as the last of the setting sun’s light could be seen on the horizon. Jaune found the twins leaning against a wall behind his father, who appeared to be on a video call.

Maya was her usual messy self, while Bleue was the complete opposite of her twin with her clean clothes and short blonde hair in a ponytail that reached her shoulders. Looking out of the window, Jaune realized they were in one of the Hyperion military bases scattered all over Vacuo. This one was built next to an old complex containing an oil rig and refinery which even at nighttime were operational, turning crude oil to refined fuel. Jaune never understood his father’s obsession with the material as it was completely made obsolete with the advent of Dust.

“Your bombers have done well, Mr Lichter. All along the western coast, the Grimm are in disarray and easy pickings for our Huntsmen and the army.”

Jaune turned to the screen and was shocked to find that it was Ozpin whom his dad was talking to.

“I did have to convince my brother to approve of this operation on short notice, so I’m glad to hear they have done their job well. His pride and joy, state-of-the-art bombers and fighters did need a test run, so it all worked out. And, Ozpin? I already asked you to call me Lucas.”

Ozpin smiled through the screen, a steaming mug in his hand. *“Very well, Lucas. How soon could you scramble another squadron.”*

Lucas sighed, “The bombing runs were neither cheap in material nor in lives, Ozpin. Nevermore and other avian Grimm swarms greatly inhibited our efforts, and we lost a few fighters and a couple of bombers already. I swear, it’s like every flock of Nevermore and Griffon in Sanus had decided to target my squadrons. Not to mention the hordes of Ravagers here on Vacuo, I’m hoping your huntsmen will be able to rescue my pilots. Aircraft can be replaced, but John hates wasting his precious personal. There is only so much I can do to convince my brother that their sacrifices will be worth it in the end.”

“And I sincerely thank you for your efforts in the war and assure you that my Huntsmen are already recovering your pilots as we speak. Still, I’m surprised you were able to scramble so many squadrons within hours of first contact. It was almost as if you already had those squadrons at the ready for something.”

"What can I say?" Jaune's father shrugged. "It always pays to be vigilant. Back to your question, we should be able to scramble the next squadron in a couple of hours. Once they are in the air, give them three hours for them to arrive to Sumire. I pray for your men to be able to hold until then."

"Thank you. I'm sure I can count on Mr Caspian to lead the militia there for a few more hours. Hopefully, things will go well enough that Qrow can head east soon to meet your representative and their survey team. He will have my full authority for that matter we discussed."

Jaune raised an eyebrow. Who's Qrow? Suddenly, Ozpin frowned in his direction from the screen and he felt a headache approaching. He instinctively looked to the skies. A cloud had covered the moon, and his surroundings were fading to static. Jaune couldn't maintain his focus as he felt himself getting ejected from the scrying bowl.

"Damn. What a rush." Jaune noticed that the white mist-like material in the bowl was depleted enough to show the base of the bowl. What was that, though? Did Ozpin notice his presence? Or was that his imagination?

Indeed. It seems the bowl is limited in its usage and looks to be in need of recharging. What have you learned about its usage?

"Well," Jaune rubbed his head as the aching gradually disappeared, he filed the matter with Ozpin for later. "I couldn't track Dad, but my sisters were much easier to track. I'm guessing It works better on those with Arc blood? Moreover, moonlight is necessary for it to work. It's a nifty but limited tool, all around."

So it would seem. Regardless, I had attempted to communicate with the Moon Deity on your behalf.

"Really?" Jaune felt a smile bloom on his face. He would certainly love to meet his patron and thank them properly for their help, so long as they don't expect him to do something ridiculous like preaching for his greatness.

Unfortunately, I suspect that due to the broken nature of the moon, the Deity will not be able to communicate directly with you. I could barely understand them myself but I did manage to figure out a request of theirs.

"What is it?"

Foremost, it gave you that bowl with that understanding in mind. The Deity only repeated this line whenever I asked how we could repay it.

"Put me back together."

"...Why couldn't it have been something as simple as preaching..."

T*A*M*S

Unknown location, early morning, July 5th

Three figures walked into a dimly lit cave. They were greeted by a pair of guards, though to call them as such would imply some sort of organization or discipline. They were merely bandit goons who were foisted with the ungrateful job of the night sentries.

“Who’s there?”

The leader of the trio, a well-dressed man with brown hair, a goatee, and a pair of bat wings sticking from his back, stepped forward. “It’s Yuma, your boss expects us. Tell him that Adam sends his regards.”

“Uhh, yeah. I think he mentioned something like that. Spider bitch is also here, she’s with you, right? Give me a mo’ and don’t move a muscle.”

“Bitch?” A frown graced the bat-faunus’ face.

The goon shrugged carelessly as he entered the cave. “That’s what Boss man calls her, and she seemed to like it.”

The goon moved further in while the other fiddled nervously with the gun in his hands. Eventually, the first goon returned, “A’ight, you can follow me. The boss lady is busy, but the boss man will see you.”

Yuma, exchanged glances with his two companions, a brown haired woman with an apprehensive look on her face, and a towering man with short cropped hair and a face hidden by a white mask.

They followed the goon deeper inside, which opened up to a large cavern with multiple tunnels. There was plenty of activity going on despite the late hour; some bandits were playing a game of dice, others were shooting needles up their arms with whatever narcotics they could find. Some were drinking vile liquor that Yuma could smell its stench from here, while more were fornicating in some corner; whether some of them were actually bandits or captives he didn’t care. Still, there were a fair few who were doing some actual work as they moved weapons and supplies to and from the tunnels.

There were easily a hundred bandits just in this cavern alone, humans and faunus alike. A surprising sort of camaraderie had blossomed between both races in their mutual love of chaos and villainy. With the weapons and supplies gathered, one could easily guess the purpose of gathering so many unhinged and unstable people in one place.

They were led deeper into the tunnels where they started hearing screaming and moans of pain, as well as the occasional deranged cackling followed by the unmistakable slapping sound of flesh

against flesh. The walked past a particular room where an adolescent's sobs could be heard and Yuma noticed his female companion shudder terribly as it turned into a loud scream.

"Something on your mind, Ilia?"

The woman looked at him uncertainly with her blue eyes, "It's just – those screams. There are children here!"

Yuma calmly nodded, "Indeed, those are certainly children. What the bandits do to them is none of our concern. Only our mission matters. You know that Trifa helped capture a couple of them. What bothers you?"

"They are children!" Ilia repeated in shock. "They did nothing to us, how could our mission even be connected to the torture of innocents like this? Especially when the two Trifa captured were Faunus! Aren't we supposed to be fighting for the freedom and betterment of our kind?"

Yuma sighed tiredly, already having had this conversation a dozen times with a dozen different people. "Sacrifices need to be made for the good of our cause. If a couple of nameless Faunus kids die in the process of bettering a hundred other Faunus' lives, then that's a fair price to pay."

The chameleon-faunus woman looked shocked at his monotone reply. Ilia was very talented and resourceful but too soft at times to the point it might cause others to question her commitment to the cause.

She turned to her other companion, but he interrupted her before she could even speak.

"Leave it, Ilia. Focus on the mission, and keep them off your mind. They have chosen to live among the humans, they have already made their choice." As expected of Walter, cold-hearted and efficient. Exactly why Yuma liked him.

"Here."

Before they could argue more, their guide pointed to a cavern where they could see a slender pink-haired man with piercings sitting behind a glass table with several lines of white powder on it. He took a deep snort of one line as he leaned back with a satisfied moan, his green eyes dilating.

He looked at his visitors in disdain.

"Finally, you retards sure took your time. Oi, Trifa. Your buddies are here."

They turned to a side room where their last companion strutted out half-naked to join them. They could hear further sobbing and moaning from the room, combined with the woman's bloody fingernails, it did not take a genius to figure what that room was for.

Trifa sat on the couch beside the man instead of joining them, causing Yuma to frown at the disrespect.

“Hey guys. What took you so long?”

The pink haired man guffawed, “I just said the same. Ya know, I keep calling you a bitch, Trifa, but you can be just as fun as any of us filthy bandits. If you get bored of those chumps playing victims, you can always join us instead.”

The white haired spider faunus giggled and sniffed heavily. Yuma frowned as he could smell alcohol and who knows what else she had consumed.

“How drunk and high are you? Don’t you know we have an important mission here, Trifa?”

“Yes!” She gave a throaty moan as she sniffed one of the remaining lines on the table.

“Bitch! That was mine.” Pink-hair slapped her butt only for her to start giggling uncontrollably.

Yuma scowled at them both. While it was common for people in the frontiers to rely on recreational drugs and narcotics to ward away the Grimm, he expected better from Trifa. He decided to ignore her and get to the matter at hand, if she decided to abandon their cause, then she knew the consequences.

He stepped forward and looked around, “I was under the impression that I would be speaking to a fellow faunus, your boss—”

“Boss Boering is away at the moment. You had taken too long, and she needed to check on something. I’m afraid you are gonna have to settle with me, good old Shiro. So, what’s the situation with Taurus?”

Yuma frowned again before sighing inwardly, “the plan remains the same. It was unfortunate that you couldn’t control your men trying out their new toys, which resulted in the relay tower getting damaged and blocking all communication.”

At that, it was Shiro’s turn to scowl at the reminder. “Don’t worry, the ones responsible have been fed to the pigs.” His scowl abruptly turned into a deranged grin as he giggled. “Some of you animals are capable of eating anything, it was quite the damn show.”

Yuma could feel Ilia shift uneasily next to him, her face going green, and even Walter narrowed his eyes and clenched his teeth.

“Regardless, this has caused us to have to report in person, yet everything remains the same. The train should leave Esmeralda in twenty-four hours or so, packed to the brim with Dust and supplies as well as a contingent of Atlasian Droids for protection. Once we hijack the train, we expect you to fulfill your part of the plan.”

“Yeah, yeah. Our Bait is nearly ready, along with four Grimm hordes we managed to lure in several strategic locations. Celdic will have one hell of a finale to their festival thing, in addition to the other surprise we left for them earlier.”

Yuma arched his brow, “Oh? Did I miss something?”

“Gehahaha, apparently those fools nearly emptied their garrison to escort the engineers back from the tower. I’m not sure about the details, but only twenty men returned. The boss lady is out checking what happened to them. It would be hilarious if they all got lost or were annihilated by the Grimm.”

The three white-fang members exchanged glances, life couldn’t truly be that easy, right?

“Three.”

A voice shrilled from behind them, and they all turned to the entrance of the room to see a massive woman making her way through the cave entrance. She was tall, incredibly tall. At least eight feet tall, and obese to an unhealthy degree, yet one could see bulging muscles underneath the layers of fat. She had short messy brown hair, two boar tusks jutting out of her mouth, a pug nose and small beady eyes. It was easy for Yuma to guess she was a Boar-Faunus.

Curiously, she had a sparrow nesting on her head.

At first glance, one would think that she should not be able to walk, let alone fight. Yet, Yuma could see she carried herself easily, as she walked in like she owned the place and took an entire couch for herself.

“Boss lady! You’re finally back.” Shiro’s previous rude and flippant attitude quickly shifted at the woman’s appearance. “Listen up, fuckers. I might be cool and tolerate insults, but this is Ravena Boering, the greatest bandit queen this side of the Vale mountains. You would do well to be respectful to her.”

So this was the other leader of this bandit alliance, and considering Shiro’s attitude, the *true* leader of the bandits. He recognized the name from wanted posters but those were issued by the free cities *beyond* the Vale Mountains, along the Narrow Sea. What would such a famous bandit be doing so far away from her base of operations?

Regardless, when Yuma was sent to Sanus by Sienna Khan to monitor Taurus’ increasingly violent operations, he was asked to support him instead by his friend Corsac. People thought the White Fang was one unified front, but it couldn’t be further from the truth. He had wondered how several bandit groups had suddenly allied with each other under one banner, and it seemed this woman was the answer.

“What did you mean by three?”

His companion Walter was as blunt as always. The bandit queen didn't seem to mind.

"Three hordes. Those are the ones that remain." Her voice was surprisingly high-pitched for a woman of her size, "The Adventurers and garrison wiped out the one in the quarry." She glared at Shiro. "Our benefactors might have distracted the Huntsmen away from this region, but that does not mean that we should underestimate Celdic."

The pink haired man gulped and rubbed one of the piercings on his face uneasily. "Of course we won't, Ravena. By any chance, did your friend discover more on those adventurers?"

The massive woman lifted her hand and the sparrow on her head landed on a stubby finger. "My *friend* here was not able to spy on all the adventurers, though it did manage to gain insight on one of them."

The bandit boss gazed at the bird softly for a moment... only to crush it to a pulp and gulp it like a snack. The act of violence was so sudden that it made Ilia flinch heavily beside him.

Ravena chewed on the sparrow's remains for a moment before swallowing. "I always hated that part of my Semblance, I'll keep coughing out feathers till morning." She grumbled loudly. "One of the adventurers was called Sylphid. Short girl, green eyes, white hair and a cat-faunus. Does it ring a bell for any of you?"

They all looked confused at the name and warily shook their heads.

"Nevermind then, she looked like such a tasty morsel with an interesting Semblance of her own." She licked her chops as she stood from the couch and walked to the same room Trifa had come from. "Continue your chatter, I'm getting something to eat. Then, we will have planning to do."

They watched in silence as she left and Shiro released a breath he unconsciously held.

"Well, that was interesting. Anyway, with the comms back online, we will need to be extra careful not to cause the town to call for further aid. Vale is busy at the moment, but who knows what they could cook up. Which is when this comes into the picture."

Shiro placed some sort of strange device shaped like a large black orb but with a flat bottom on the table. "Once we get confirmation that your pals have the train, we will be using this baby that was donated by our patrons to render communications useless in the region."

Yuma's eyes widened in shock, "You expect me to believe such a device exists?"

"You will have to trust me on that." The pink-haired druggie smirked, "I can't exactly test it for you or else it will shut down *all* communication devices, and it has some sort of cooldown on it. We're gonna have to count on you with the timing when you attack the train. Too early and we go blind. Too late, and Celdic, and through them Vale, would be warned."

Yuma gulped at the idea of having such a device at their beck and call. It would make their operations so much easier, even if it shuts their comms as well. "Just who are your patrons?"

Shiro's green eyes gleamed with malice, "Trust me, you don't wanna know. Now, which one of you will be staying here for liaison?"

Yuma turned to Trifa and scowled inwardly. She was supposed to be the liaison, but considering her attitude, and the fact the bandit asked for another one, the spider-faunus was clearly compromised. There was no way he could convince Elder Walter to remain here, for he was sent specifically by Taurus to keep an eye on him.

That only left one choice, as his eyes settled on Ilia's paling face.

T*A*M*S

Morning, July 5th
Outside the quarry

"Are you absolutely sure you are not hurting anywhere?"

"Oh, yeah! I feel so damn good, I could probably run all the way to Celdic."

The medic gawped in absolute shock at the woman whom everyone could tell was at death's door last night. Except now, she was in tip-top shape, as evidenced by how she bounced around the medical tent in her new outfit consisting of a denim corset and long slit skirt as well as a yellow long-sleeved shirt.

"T-this...this just makes no sense at all! Even with Aura, your injuries were so severe we worried how we would even move you."

Sara looked at him with a wide grin, "Don't sweat the small details. My Aura reserves are still low, so I'll be taking it easy. Anyway, am I free to go? Me and my dear protégés gotta get going now." She winked at Fie and Jaune who had accompanied her for the check-up.

Fie sighed as she glanced at her blonde friend. Jaune was keeping mum about it, but she was willing to bet her *Chasers* that he was responsible for her sleep getting cut short by the usually morning-hating Sara.

After finishing her check-up, Sara motioned for them to follow her. As they walked through the quickly dismantling camp, Fie noticed the troops were in good spirits. Some of them greeted them jovially, while some of the older ones gave nods of respect.

All of them, however, made a double take at the sight of the healed Sara who waved energetically at Montgomery who gaped at her in shock. Eventually, they made their way to their saddled horses and mounted up.

“Okay, kids. I already spoke with Brocket first thing in the morning. Heh, you should have seen the look on his face.” Fie smiled slightly, but she noticed Jaune maintaining a stoic look. “We will be departing first to act as vanguard and scout ahead. You two have all your belongings, right?”

Jaune nodded, as he idly rolled that crystal necklace of his in his hand, while Fie just patted her horse’s neck. Within a few minutes, they left the camp behind. It was a few miles away when Sara beamed at their blonde companion.

“So, Jaune. What did you do to me last night?”

Jaune gazed at the older adventurer for a moment before sighing. “Don’t make it sound weird, woman. I discovered another aspect of my Semblance.” Fie perked up, “among other things, it allows me to transfer Aura to others. I just shared some of mine.”

“Among other things, huh.” Sara hummed thoughtfully for a moment before giving him a mock glare. “You know, your entire existence is an insult to all hardworking Aura users in the world.”

“What the hell?” The boy nearly dropped his necklace and placed it back around his neck.

The older Adventurer chortled.

“Hear me out; First, your huge amount of Aura. At first, I thought it was countered by your slow recovery, but then your Semblance is an absolute cheat that can somehow replenish all of your Aura instantly! Don’t try to deny it, young man.” She interrupted him before he could, “I can feel your Aura is at maximum, and it is obscenely large. I’m shocked that no Grimm have attacked us yet with how *radiant* you must be. Is that why you adopted the Stoic face? Moreover, what kind of Semblance has multiple different abilities, each one of them more useful than the other?”

Jaune rubbed his head awkwardly, “Nothing I can do about it, Sara. No one gets to decide their Semblance and Aura reserves.”

“That’s not entirely true.” Fie piped in, “it’s been proven that Huntsmen couples with high Aura reserves tend to have children with similarly high Aura reserves. While everyone’s Semblance is unique to a certain degree, Aura is certainly hereditary.”

“Exactly.” Sara nodded her head before grinning coyly at the blonde. “You better watch your back around pompous nobles or greasy tycoons throwing their daughters at you. Especially if they are Huntresses in training when you eventually get to Beacon. Some of those minxes would not even care about marriage, and would attack you in your sleep to get your *seed*, if you get my meaning.”

Jaune blushed slightly, “does that mean I don’t have to worry about you assaulting me in my sleep? Since Fie tells me you have an aversion to having kids?”

“Hey!” How could he betray her so cheaply, she pouted at his apologetic smile.

“Haha, nice try kid, but no cigar. Too young for my tastes, and we’ll be having talks about what can be shared about us, Fie.” Sara’s grin turned flinty at the younger girl who pretended to be busy examining the horizon.

The older woman turned back to the blonde, “But you know all about my tastes now, don’t you?”

Jaune grimaced and patted his horse’s neck absentmindedly. “I miss when you were a blushing and shy mess. Are you sure you’re alright, Sara? That’s a bit too bold even for you.”

Sara froze for a moment before thinking deeply on it. “You know, I think you’re right. I’m feeling *too* good at the moment. Almost as good as when I’m completely plastered but without the pounding headache or upset stomach. Are you sure you only transferred Aura to me?”

Fie frowned as she had an idea what Jaune had done and gazed deadpan at him. “What did you do, Jaune?”

“Nothing I haven’t done to you.”

“Wow, I didn’t realize you two were so close already. Still, does that mean you got handsy while I was unconscious, Jaune boy?” Sara whistled in amusement.

“Nothing of the sort.” Jaune denied instantly, “You already know about my magic, right?”

“Somewhat. You haven’t been fully candid with me, and I respect that.”

“Well, this now affects you both so listen closely.”

Jaune explained how he got his magic and what it meant for them to have those abilities. While Fie had heard most of it yesterday, there were a few things she didn’t know such as him gaining magic by killing Grimm. He was still hiding something, but Fie didn’t care. She trusted Jaune, and if he didn’t feel like they needed to know about whatever it was, then so be it.

Once he was done, Sara immediately focused for a second before both her weapons appeared in her hands. “So that’s where they were. This is gonna be very handy indeed.”

“Don’t forget about **Search**. This would make any tracking mission effortless.” Fie added her two cents.

“Yeah...” Sara fell silent for a moment before turning to Jaune. “I just don’t get it, kid. This is an insane boon you just gave us and for what? We haven’t done anything worth this kind of gift. Don’t get me wrong, I’m super flattered and grateful for this. But – what I’m trying to say is...”

Fie could understand Sara’s confusion, but she simply didn’t know Jaune as well as her. “How could we repay him? I think that’s what you’re trying to say, Sara.”

“Exactly!”

They both turned to the blonde who shrugged, “honestly? I haven’t thought about it. I have the ability to give you a power-up, so I used it. It’s up to you how you use this power, and in your line of work, you will have the opportunity to help many people with it. That’s all I can ask for, I guess.”

Silence followed that statement. Fie looked at Sara who stared back at her before they both huffed in exasperation.

“That’s just not fair, Jaune. I frankly expected you to want to sleep with me or something in return.”

The boy spluttered indignantly, “What? No, I would never!”

“Huuuuuh?” Sara glared. “You would never want to sleep with me? What’s wrong with me? Is it cuz I’m old? Am I not hot enough for you?”

Fie sighed inwardly. If Sara hoped to make Jaune fluster and blush, then she had better luck flashing him her boobs instead. Jaune’s face quickly became stone-faced as he gazed woodenly at the older woman.

After a whole minute of silence and suffering Jaune’s judgmental gaze, Sara awkwardly looked away with a muttered, “never mind.”

“You really don’t know Jaune enough, Sara.” Fie giggled. “He probably had to deal with his seven sisters teasing him on a daily basis and didn’t he mention that his mother tried to pair him up with girls from his town hoping he would forget about becoming a Huntsman?”

“Clearly.” Sara huffed as Jaune gave a slight smile. “Still, you’re quite the cheater, you know? Now I’ll have to really think of a proper way to repay you. The more you deny payment, the more I will insist.”

Fie nodded vehemently, “Yep. You’re a cheater, Jaune. First thing we will do once we reach Celdic is buy out all of Odvin’s stock. Then, it will be training time. It’s the least I can do.”

Jaune looked surprised at them both, which caused Fie to frown. Did he truly not expect them to want to repay him in the slightest?

It was a few minutes later as they traveled in silence along the beautiful, and strangely peaceful, countryside when Jaune sighed loudly.

"Alright. If you want to repay me, then I won't hold back. I'll be counting on you two to teach me your tricks and help me out when I need it."

"Sure thing."

"Not you Sara. You still need to recover your Aura."

"Why can't you just transfer more?"

"Because your body would reject it and..."

They both turned on their saddles to see why the blonde went silent all of a sudden. He had a deeply contemplative look on his face before nodding to himself.

"Okay, we can try an experiment if you'd like."

"What kind of experiment?" Amusedly, Sara's voice had a hint of wariness.

"I'll transfer my Aura, and you have to consciously accept it and circulate it in your body."

"Sounds simple enough," Sara nodded. "Hit me."

Fie felt a haze in the air and she quickly focused on her budding Aura sense. The haze transformed into a line of golden light emanating from Jaune's forehead and latched onto Sara's. It pulsed as if something was being transferred through the connection.

Immediately, Sara gasped. Even as she watched, Fie noticed her mentor get even more lively, and her face gained a healthy flush. It was a minute later when Sara waved for Jaune to stop and the line ceased to exist.

"Damn, that felt good." She hugged herself tightly, "too good. I could get drunk out of your Aura, Jaune."

The blonde boy snickered, "If my Aura is wine, then you just drank a seventeen-year-old vintage straight from the tap."

Sara burst out laughing, causing her horse to trot uneasily. "When I woke up this morning, I could tell I barely had a tenth of my Aura. Now I easily have over two thirds. I tried to absorb more, but it just gave me shivers and I could feel it dissipating into the air. I'm sure with time, and practice, my body will adapt to accept your Aura even mid-battle."

“Well, I guess we can declare that this experiment was a success. Thank you for accepting to be my guinea pig, Sara.”

The older woman mock-scowled. “Happy to be of service, though I might ask you for a refill later on. I could use you when I’m craving a drink.”

Jaune just smiled before moving on, Fie took this chance to ask him something.

“So how much of your Aura did you transfer to her?”

“About ten percent.” Jaune hummed, and both Fie and Sara sighed exasperatedly at how insane that was.

They rode on in a comfortable silence for a few more hours, backtracking every once in a while to make sure the garrison was following them. Brocket had attempted to contact Celdic but only received static. It was unknown whether it was interference from the mountains or if something had happened. Needless to say, the Lieutenant had refrained from telling the men so as to not affect their high spirits, but warned them to stay on their toes.

As they entered the main roads to Celdic, however, they could see signs of devastation as well as many tracks heading to Celdic. There had been plenty of fighting nearby, evidenced by the burned foliage and the trampled trees that must have been done by Grimm. The three of them readied their weapons and proceeded to the town, hoping for the best but preparing for the worst.

It was noon when they turned a corner around a hill and could finally see Celdic a few miles ahead; it did not bode well. There were a couple of small smoke trails, but the real worry was the horde of people waiting by the gates to enter, all of them looking haggard and distraught.

“My eyesight isn’t the best, what do you see, Fie?”

“Refugees.” She answered swiftly. “Easily over two thousand, maybe three. Looks like they left their homes in a hurry with little to no luggage or supplies, though I see the occasional wagon and truck.”

“There’s also the signs of devastation inside Celdic itself. Sara, are we still unable to contact the garrison inside town?”

Sara pulled out her scroll and tried to communicate with Celdic proper, only to receive static. She contacted Brocket instead.

“Valestein, report.”

“Celdic has lost comms. I see signs of an attack. More importantly, there are thousands of refugees trying to enter the town, but the garrison is not opening the gates. Orders?”

There was some silence, before the Lieutenant replied.

"We are an hour behind you. Proceed to the gate and attempt to get one of the guards on the line to report on what's happening. Meanwhile, try to help those refugees as best you can. I will trust your judgment."

"Will do." She disconnected the call before turning to them, "You heard the man. Let's see what the hell happened while we were gone."

A bit of an update on the scheduling since my muse is firmly on Lament, yet I still enjoy writing this story. I have decided to take this story out of hiatus BUT it will have a monthly update instead of weekly.

If you like my works and would like to leave a tip, or read three chapters ahead, you know where to find me. If you don't well, it starts with Pat and ends with reon ;)