

**Sorry for the wait. Real life commitments barely gave me any time to write anything.
A bit of a short chapter, but I think I mentioned that this is the word count target I aim for.**

Edited by: Gladiusx ; B. Reader: NoirsLament

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Three horsemen slowly made their way along a rough beaten road surrounded by hills. Two of them had lever-action rifles slung on their horse's flank along with a standard issue revolver and a saber on their hips, while the third had an oversized revolver and a bastard sword on his. They observed the rocky terrain warily as they searched for Grimm. The road to the Repeater Tower went through small forested hills that bordered the Emerald Forest, and it was infested with Grimm. Far enough away from the mountains to not affect the signal as well as high enough elevation to give it a good boost.

Unfortunately, it was also a suitable place for an ambush.

Suddenly, a howl sounded out from on top of one of the hills, and a pack of Beowulfs charged out of the woods. Almost as soon as the first Grimm appeared, a sound of thunder reverberated and the Grimm's head was blown to smithereens. Three more Beowulfs charged out, unconcerned with their fallen kin, only for two simultaneous shots to stagger two of them as they were struck in the chest. The third Grimm continued its charge, but it didn't take more than three strides before another thundering roar sounded out and its chest caved in from the force of the round that hit it.

The two other Grimm had recovered by now, only to each receive another rifle round, this time punching through the thin armor in their necks and downing them for good.

The three horsemen kept a wary eye out for the treeline in case more Grimm appeared, which proved to be prudent as a loud growl could be heard as something large bumbled its way through the trees. A quick glance between two of the riders had them change something in the mechanism of their rifles before they aimed at the treeline. All three riders could see tree tops shaking, birds flying away and the sound of broken wood as they waited for their enemy to appear.

Soon enough, a massive bear like Grimm charged out of the tree line with a bone rattling roar. It was three times as large as the largest horse of the trio, and almost entirely armored in thick bone plate, showing its old age. Its crimson evil eyes barely locked on the three horsemen before a cacophony of gunfire rained upon it.

Two shots landed on its shoulders, setting it on fire and making the Ursa Major howl in pain as its armor melted from the flash heat. It started to charge at its attackers only for another thundering roar to sound out and a round to hit one of its weakened shoulder armor causing it to shatter. The Grimm was relentless, however and continued its mad charge at the three riders who continued unloading Fire Dust Rounds and regular rounds at the beast until it collapsed barely halfway to its potential prey. One final thundering roar sounded out, and its head was blasted apart, putting it down for good.

The riders checked their surroundings for more targets, but after a minute with nothing happening, they allowed themselves to slightly relax. The youngest among them was a blonde young man wearing a brown leather vest over a tan hoodie and a mix of green and brown camouflage cargo pants. He looked at the disintegrating corpse of the Ursa Major with an annoyed gaze as he reloaded his gun before holstering it.

"So close to a hundred years." He muttered under his breath.

The two other riders wore similar cargo pants as the younger man along with tactical green shirts under a bulletproof vest that held many pockets. They also wore metal bracers and chausses over their forearms and legs respectively as well as an ammo belt. They finished their uniform with a metal helmet over a dark three-pointed leather hat in addition to neck gaiters.

One of the riders, a brown haired man in his early thirties, turned to the blonde youth with them. "Great work there, Jaune. Excellent reflexes and you nailed that first one right in the nogging from nearly a hundred yards away." The mirth was obvious in the man's voice as he too reloaded his rifle, then pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit one.

The young man gave a slight shrug, refusing an offered smoke. "Honestly, it wasn't much. I was actually aiming for the chest. This gun's got one hell of a kick, it was almost too much for me to aim properly with my left hand. I'm more impressed with how you both knew exactly where to shoot. You barely had a split second to decide. First, against the two Beowulfs and then against the Ursa? That ain't luck, you Dragoons are good. Very good."

The other dragoon, an older man but still in his thirties with black hair that just started to gray along with blue eyes, gave a light chuckle as he accepted an offered smoke from his companion. He holstered his own reloaded rifle, "Flattery will get you everywhere laddie. When you've been in the profession as long as us, you realize that nothing is more important than teamwork and giving good calls. You don't need to shout them at your partner to deliver your intent. Rory and I have been partners for nearly six years. We could almost read each other's mind when it comes to rules of engagement."

The now named Rory grinned at his senior partner, his brown eyes full of mirth. "Aww you're gonna make me blush Duncan. Anita would be distraught if she knew her daddy had the hots for me."

Duncan sighed at his partner's antics, and took a long drag from his cigarette. "And I'm sure Lizzie would be saddened to learn her man decided to spontaneously swing for the home team. Would you propose to her already? You both aren't getting any younger, you know. It was cute to see you both dancing around each other's toes two years ago, but now it's just sad."

"Hey, we're just not ready yet, okay? I'm aiming for that early retirement, and we're saving up to buy that ranch that old Baha is selling."

Jaune smiled as the two Dragoons bantered along and patted Arthur's flank. The first time they did it, he worried that they would be too distracted to react to a threat. He need not have worried, as he later learned that they do this to purposely keep their spirits high and take the Grimm by surprise rather than the other way around.

He checked the time on his newly purchased wristwatch to find it was nearly noon. Jaune sighed in annoyance as he remembered why they were delayed so much.

They had arrived at the Barracks at eight in the morning as was agreed, only to discover that the garrison wasn't ready yet. The Guard Captain, in all his wisdom, had insisted on taking nearly half the men along with four mortars and two field cannons to clear out the quarry. Sara and Lieutenant Brocket tried to dissuade him from it as it would leave the town undermanned, but the Captain was adamant on the necessity of being over prepared rather than under prepared. While there was no denying that such firepower would be a great asset against a Grimm horde, it was a logistical nightmare to bring it to field.

The garrison only had two armored vehicles and they weren't designed to drag heavy artillery, so they had to repurpose some trucks to do the heavy workload. Those trucks couldn't go over twenty miles an hour in the rough terrain, which drastically slowed their progress. What should have been a two-hour journey along the winding paths to the tower, had now stretched to three hours and they were barely past the half-way point! To be fair, the mortars were simple to pack and stow in the trucks. The cannons, however, each needed to be dragged by those same trucks. This unfortunately left little room for the soldiers to ride, with half of them switching places between riders and walkers. The officers had their own horses.

At least the extra time allowed them to do some last-minute shopping. A trip to Meg's and Jaune got his watch and another to Odvin's had him buy extra FDRs just in case. Turns out the Dragoons live up to their name and utilize Fire Dust heavily in their armaments, as his companions had shown to excellent effect. He himself needed to figure out a more practical way to switch to FDR mid-fight instead of reloading after each round.

"Let's head back to the convoy, we have made sure that the road is clear for three miles now. The next group to relieve us should meet us halfway through." Duncan decided after a few more minutes of checking the surroundings for Grimm.

Jaune and Rory nodded to the senior Dragoon and turned their horses back along the road.

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They met with three other Dragoons along the way and quickly briefed them on their day before they continued to the convoy. Once they arrived, Jaune stifled a groan as he saw that one of the trucks dragging the cannons had one of its tires Hydroplaning. It had rained in this part of Vale overnight, and the dirt road was still muddy in some places despite the sun doing its best to dry it out.

He waved to his two companions as he quickly made his way to Fie sitting atop her horse, who gazed disinterestedly at the troops trying to dislodge the truck from the mud. She perked up once she saw him and immediately motioned her hands to him with an expectant gaze. Jaune sighed at the girl, before he produced an ice cream cone from his storage space, much to the younger girl's delight. He really needs to stop spoiling the girl so much, but he was glad she was at least in a better mood now compared to this morning. Besides, he couldn't deny that her suggestion of buying as much perishable food as possible to store in his **Storage Space** was practical. It didn't rot, and for some reason, none of the stuff stored in the space interacted or conflicted with each other. So long as they were less than one meter long, he could fit them in the space. Unfortunately, that meant he couldn't fit his sword in it.

"So..." Fie raised an eyebrow at his hesitant tone, and motioned for him to continue. Jaune cleared his throat, knowing that this would be an awkward topic for both of them, "I noticed your reaction when Sara was explaining to me about Grimm Bait." Fie stiffened for a second before continuing her meal.

"Do you want to talk about it, Fie? I have a hunch that this affects you personally, but know that I am here for you."

The young adventurer slouched her shoulders a bit, and that's the most vulnerable he had ever seen the girl. "I'm okay, Jaune. Later perhaps, but I'm okay." She returned to her snack, closing off the conversation.

She did not sound okay at all to him, but he respected her wishes.

"Is Sara with the rear guard again?" The girl nodded, too busy munching on her ice cream to reply verbally.

"Gun it!"

They both quickly turned at the shout and the subsequent roar of revving engines. The truck was finally dislodged and the whole convoy cheered.

"Excellent! Now everyone, back to your positions and get moving. Chop, chop. I want to get to that tower before lunchtime. And try not to get stuck again, would you?"

Captain Montgomery's annoyingly patronizing voice sounded out as he got out of his APC. The dullard had decided to ride inside one of the air-conditioned armored vehicles instead of roughing it out with his troops. That would have been fine, if he did not come out every time something happened to berate the men. Jaune could see plenty of resentment among the common soldiery who had to trudge on foot directed at him, especially as the captain had a sandwich in his hand and a cigar in his mouth, yet complained about missing lunch? Did he have a personal fridge in that car? Montgomery barely finished talking before moving back in, and Jaune swore he heard him calling for a drink and laughing with his sycophants.

Jaune looked around for the Lieutenant, at least he was a reliable fellow, and found him speaking to the troops. Probably keeping them in order as well as keeping morale up.

"At least the rest of the road is dry, from what I saw."

Fie looked at him as she finished her snack, "Yeah, maybe we really will make it to the tower before lunchtime."

They both stared at each other for a moment before laughing as they continued on their way.

It took them another hour before they finally arrived. They were able to see the tower for over an hour now and even communicated with the garrison there once they figured out the repairs were done. Now Jaune looked at the hundreds of feet tall tower and its makeshift fortifications.

“Finally! This just sucked,” Rory groaned out. He had joined him and Fie for the rest of the journey, and they hit it off well considering he was one of the youngest Dragoons. Fie didn’t like his smoking habits, however, but Rory was polite enough not to smoke near them again after her first complaint.

“Tell me about it. Is it normal for the Guard Captain to even attend missions like this?”

Rory glanced back at the APC where the Captain had the window open and shouting commands at Lieutenant Brocket and some of his sergeants. “Ever since he was assigned here nearly four years ago? Just twice, I think. This is the third time he ever bothered to join on an assignment. Usually, he is content doing administrative work.”

The Dragoon pointed with his chin at an assortment of troops on horseback walking near both APCs, “Those are the *good* Captain’s most loyal men. They have the best gear and training, and would do whatever shit he asks. The ones in the other APC are his best men, elites from Vale’s academy. Nothing on the Dragoons, obviously, but we Dragoons are all Celdic natives, so the stakes are much higher for us to be better than them. Those guys? Vale military men doing their service time. Tell me an easier place to serve your time than Celdic? None of the dangers of the other frontier lands, hot women, good food, nice weather, brilliant view of the mountains, relatively close to Vale, hot women, decent internet connection when the tower is working... you get the idea.”

The disdain was easy to make out in the Dragoon’s words, and Jaune frowned at that. It’s clear that things were not as simple as he hoped they would be. Turns out military politics are a thing. Hopefully, this wouldn’t affect their progress later on.

“Don’t let Lizzie hear you talk about Celdic’s hot women.”

Rory barked out a laugh, “Who else would I be talking about?”

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They did not have a lot of time before they would depart. From what he saw, there were forty men guarding the tower right now, in addition to the thirty that Montgomery brought with him. Then, there were the sixteen Dragoons including the Lieutenant. That left Celdic grossly undermanned, with only thirty of the garrison to protect it, most of whom were non-combatants. The other Dragoons have their own missions and patrols, so the mayor was forced to call up more militia but hardly anymore could be called upon. It was to his understanding that the Tower contingent would

escort the repair crew back while they continued on towards the Quarry, which was a few hours from here.

Sara waved him off to connect to the terminal at the base of the tower to contact his father. Fie had wandered off to scout the perimeter, though Jaune figured she was just giving him space, and he appreciated that. Unfortunately, his Scroll was an older model that did not allow video calls wirelessly, unlike Sara's and Fie's. It was his hope he would be able to upgrade it once he got to Vale, or maybe Beacon would have better models?

Once he was connected, Jaune dialed his Dad's number and waited... and waited... and waited. Until finally, an annoyed face appeared on the screen. With her lipstick and eyeshadow that matched her eyes' blue color, along with her shoulder-length blonde hair tied into two messy twin tails; one would mistake the girl on the screen for a punk, but the signs of grease and oil on her face and clothes told a different story.

"You have reached Lucas Lichter's personal number, he currently cannot take your call due to him puking his guts out. If this is a sales call, then we ain't interested in any of your products. If this is a Brother's Witness, we already paid our tithe so buzz off... also, why the hell would anyone make a video call without turning on their camera? Is anyone there? Is this a prank call? I swear if that's you Angel, Imma whoop your ass so hard your daddy is gonna feel it."

Jaune winced at his sister's rapid fire spiel and quickly turned on the terminal's camera. Why would it be turned off by default was anyone's guess, "Hey, Maya. It's me, Jaune."

The face on the screen blinked, "Jaune?! Is that really you? Where the hell are you? Ooohhh you are in so much trouble mister! Do you have any idea how pissed mom was when you disappeared the morning of our planned trip to Shion? Are you alright? Did you lose weight? Mom was so looking forward to that trip, ya know? Especially after gramps made her sit out last year. She ended up taking Dad for a three-day emergency vacation. Poor pops still has weak knees from it."

Jaune smiled genially at his sister. She was always a chatterbox, with a lot of energy and no filter on her mouth. Ever since Dad unlocked her and her twin's Aura last year, it had gotten worse. "Yeah, it's me. Good to see you too, sis."

"...Good to see you too, I guess." Maya bashfully replied, "Don't try to change the topic, mister. Explain!"

"Haha, well, to answer your questions, I'm in the Celdic Region on the eastern outskirts of the Emerald Forest. I'm fine, I guess, lost some weight going on a hike. Anyway, how's Dad? Why are

you answering his phone? Where's Bleue? You're always attached at the hip. Where are you anyway?" It looked like the insides of an airship if he had to guess.

"Dad took Bleue and I to Vacuo, and Bleue's using this chance to get flight experience. Got some urgent business with one of those old oil refineries over there. Dad was ecstatic about a breakthrough, or something, you won't get it. We had to detour all the way to Patch to avoid Vale. Unfortunately, in his hurry, Dad forgot to take his motion sickness medicine and is indisposed."

Jaune grimaced at that. He could totally understand Dad's woes. Of all the Arc family, only Jaune inherited his Dad's problem with motion sickness.

"So what's up, little bro? It's nice to get a status update on our cute little runaway, but what's the occasion? Don't ask us for a lift, you're exactly two hours too late." Maya had a cheeky grin on her face as she turned away to tinker with something he couldn't see.

"I got some very important information for Dad. Stuff that could potentially affect our family, including Dad's family, in an existential way." Jaune stated seriously, and Maya quickly turned back to the screen.

"That serious, huh? You were never one for overplaying stuff, Jauney. Alright, give me a minute. Let me get Dad, I'm sure his stomach can handle talking for a few minutes."

Jaune stared at the empty room from the screen as he waited for Maya to return. He occasionally spread his Aura Sense to make sure no one was eavesdropping, but the closest person near him was Fie, who had decided to climb the tower apparently to just chill and enjoy the view.

As he waited, he wondered how the twins were doing. Maya and Bleue were his closest friends in the family, mostly due to their very close age. Then again, they also fought the most amongst each other for the same reason. Both twins really got into the whole scientific life of Dad's, with Bleue preferring the practical and delicate aspects of it. Maya on the other hand, got Dad's mad scientist side. He shuddered as he thought of what monstrosity she's tinkering on lately.

Eventually, he heard noises coming from the terminal and saw Maya had returned, leading an older man towards a seat. Jaune smiled as his Dad appeared on the screen; his light-brown hair had started to gray on the sides, his normally jovial face was a bit gaunt and green from sickness, and his hazel eyes looked tired behind his glasses.

"Hey, Dad. You look like crap."

“...Cheeky little shit.” Jaune and Maya chuckled at that, Lucas just looked constipated. “You’re gonna fill me in on what you’re doing in Celdic later, but first what’s so important that you had to drag me away from the toilet?”

“Oh nothing much. Just stumbled onto perhaps the largest Dust deposit to be discovered since Sweet Spice in Vacuo. I had to fight off a Grimm Horde in the process, and managed to pilfer a few samples. Got them appraised at the Dust shop in Celdic, all of them are high quality and of different elemental variety. I have video evidence that I can send if you’d like, but I’m sure Uncle John would be *very* interested in this.”

Lucas and Maya had ludicrous faces as they listened to Jaune, and remained silent for a whole minute to process what he said.

“...Tell me everything!”

“You’re done speaking with your family?”

Jaune had barely left the terminal room before Fie dropped down from above. “Yeah, I–BWFFFFTTT,” He tried, oh he tried not to burst out laughing as he beheld her appearance, but he just couldn’t.

Fie’s hair had gotten extremely spiky and was standing up nearly a foot in the air. She did not look amused.

“W-what happened to your freaking hair? Is this your way of trying to reach my height? You’re a couple of inches too short though.”

“...yeah, yeah. Laugh it up. Make fun of the poor girl who got brutally assaulted.”

“By what? The tower waves?” Fie crossed her arms and looked sideways with a pout. “No, seriously? I noticed you climbing the tower, but you let the static get to you? At least you aren’t hurt, yeah?”

Jaune started patting the girl’s head as he tried to get her hair under control. He noticed that even her tail didn’t come out unscathed and pointed straight upwards.

“I’m okay. Hmm, Just wanted to enjoy the view. Mhm, I like heights.” Fie replied as she let the older boy fix her hair and enjoyed his ministrations. At least Sara wasn’t—

“Hey kids, we have a problem. Meet me in—Pfft, by the Maidens! What happened to your freaking hair?”

Fie sighed.

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“Now, what did we learn sweetie?”

“Do not climb communication towers without protection?”

“No, no. You already knew that. To always have someone record you when you are about to do something fun like that.”

The young girl attempted to glare at the older woman, but it really just came out as an adorable pout. The subsequent squeal from the older woman before she glomped her confirmed it.

“So what’s wrong, Sara?” They were on their way to the courtyard where Montgomery was arguing loudly with Brocket and another man he recognized as part of the repair crew.

“Did you check the news? We finally know why Beacon couldn’t send backup.”

That certainly caught Jaune and Fie’s attention. “What is it?”

Sara had a grim look on her face, “a Grimm invasion is underway. All of Beacon’s attention is set on the south-west right now.”

Both youngsters eyes widened in shock. “A Grimm...invasion? Not a swarm or horde, but an all out invasion? This hasn’t happened since—”

“Since the Faunus war, yeah. Regardless of why this is happening now, a state of emergency has been declared in Vale and its entire military has been mobilized. Beacon has recalled all of its hunters, mobilized the retired ones and even any of the available students have been asked to volunteer. It’s an all out war, all hands on deck sort of situation, and it’s been going on for a week now.”

There were many thoughts going through Jaune’s mind right now, a few of them concerning how bad of a timing this was. His grandfather had just taken most of the fleet to clear out the Narrow

Sea, and suddenly, an invasion the likes of which wasn't seen in decades happens? Maya's words about detouring away from Vale made a lot more sense now. Vale was probably a no-fly-zone.

"Guess we shouldn't expect that backup at all then."

They finally made it to the arguing trio and Jaune caught the tail end of the argument.

"—will not be dragged around this Brothers Forsaken land so that you could watch shit blow up, Montgomery! Our deal with you and the mayor was clear. You escort us to the tower. We fix the damn tower, and you escort us *back* to town and provide a train ride for me and my men back to Vale. Now you want to drag the men promised to us to some hellhole infested with Grimm? Just because you took your sweet time getting here and caused your own delays? Hell to the fucking no! My men and I are not moving from this spot till you provide us with an escort to Celdic and that's final."

Montgomery's face had gotten tomato red and his mouth flapped like a fish. It appeared he never got shouted down enough in his life. "Then good luck getting back to town on your own, you chicken-hearted, cow-handed dunder-headed cad!" He finally blustered out and waddled back to his car.

Sara groaned beside him. Jaune had a feeling that the Guard Captain had just discovered a way to make their lives more interesting. Joy.

I know I promised action this chapter, but it will have to be another time. This chapter introduces new OCs; from Jaune's family to his Dragoon friends. All of them are from my all creation.

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