

What she'd found was the stock truck that had been delivering the cattle from the encampment to the city. Professor Peach showed them the photos she had taken. It stood out like a sore thumb. Every other vehicle in the city was rusted down and in varying states of disrepair while the truck was covered in mud and dust and shit, and not much else. It was parked by an old, dilapidated building which read Mountain Glenn Drainage on the side, missing a letter or two.

More photos showed the surrounding location; the large drainage channels that helped keep a city from flooding, and the massive pipes that went underground. Around the entrance to one of the pipes were a cluster of trucks, all operational, and other heavy machinery; drills, excavators, bulldozers, pushed off to the sides, abandoned now that their work was complete.

"Damn, Ms. P – seems like you found the way in," Coco grinned.

Peach smiled back. "That does appear to be the case."

It was already late afternoon, quickly approaching evening. It was decided to make camp for the night, and they would advance into the bowels of the city come morning. They scouted out some of the buildings that were close but not too close to the pipes, finding one that still had its roof intact to protect them should it decide to rain.

They started a small fire with anything they could get their hands on, scavenging from the surrounding areas. Darkness rapidly fell, and the temperature dropped with it.

Their dinner consisted of ration packs. A few of them had a stew mixture that was dried out, and only required hot water to bring to life. Yatsunashi had brought rice with him, more than enough for everyone, and Velvet, the sweet tooth that she was, had loaded her bag with candy.

Professor Peach arched her eyebrow in amusement as the rabbit faunus blushed, but rather than reprimand her, she pinched a chocolate bar for herself. They had themselves a little feast;

the stew was pretty bland but it was hot, and along with the rice, filled their stomachs nicely. The sweets were the real victory, though.

A little sugar in such a dreary, depressing place was just what the doctor ordered.

“We’ll take watch in rotations of two,” Professor Peach said after dinner, chewing on her chocolate bar. “Mr. Arc – Ms. Scarlatina, you will be first.”

Coco and Weiss would follow, then Blake and Yatsunami, and finishing with Nora and Fox. As everyone started rolling out their sleeping bags and getting situated, Jaune decided on a final patrol around the building. Velvet joined him, the pair making their way downstairs to the ground floor.

Navigating the deepening darkness posed its own problems, but having Velvet by his side made it much easier. To her, it might as well have been daylight.

“I bet you didn’t expect this to be your first official mission,” she said, a teasing note in her voice.

Jaune chuckled, letting her take the lead.

“No. A few missing cattle and maybe some bandits, that was about the extent of my expectations,” he sighed. “Though things never seem to be quite that simple with us.”

“On our first mission, we ended up being captured by a group of rogue Huntsman,” Velvet admitted, sounding embarrassed. “Sort of. They were dropouts, but not because they weren’t good enough. They got caught engaged in criminal activity during their third year at Beacon, drug dealing, armed robbery. Some nasty stuff. Before they could be arrested, though, they

managed to slip away. Our mission ended up coming a little too close to one of their money laundering operations, and they took us captive.”

“They must have been pretty strong.”

“Not really,” Velvet laughed lightly. “At least, not individually. They worked really well together as a team, though. The leader – her semblance allowed them all to form a type of link, as if they were one person. Share thoughts, see through each other's eyes – that sort of thing. It was really difficult to deal with.”

“How'd you guys escape?”

“Professor Goodwitch. When we missed our check in, she came looking for us. We're still not really sure how she found us, but she tore them to pieces on her own. It was... I'd never seen anything like it.”

There was a reason why Goodwitch was their Combat Instructor.

“They did everything perfectly. They surrounded her, and the timing on their attacks was faultless. But it didn't matter, she was too strong. After that, Coco was fuming about how easy it had been for us to get taken, so she really pushed us. She didn't want anything like that to happen again.”

“It must have been pretty scary.”

Velvet nodded, her long ears swaying.

“It was. For me, at least. I’m... well, I was a bit of a scaredy cat. I had to grow up a lot after that. I’m not all the way there, yet, though.”

“I guess all teams go through something,” Jaune mused.

“Sometimes things are just out of your control,” she said, and in the soft light on the moon, her eyes appeared to glow as she glanced his way. “But some things are. Those are the things you focus on.”

Jaune had the feeling that Velvet wanted to say more, but they walked on in silence. Once they finished their patrol, they returned to the upper floor and took up positions on either side, keeping watch out the windows. Everyone else had already gotten into their sleeping bags, though Professor Peach remained seated by the fire as it crackled away merrily.

A few hours passed until it was time for their shift change. The fire was out, but Peach remained seated where he’d left her, unmoving but very much still awake.

“Professor?” he asked quietly.

“What is it, Mr. Arc?”

“You aren’t going to sleep?”

“I will. I just happen to be a bit of a night owl,” she smiled wryly. “I find it difficult to fall asleep before a certain time. It’s just how I’ve always been.”

“Oh.”

“This mission has turned out much more serious than you thought it would be,” it was a statement, not a question, but he answered as if it were one.

“Yeah.”

“Sometimes these things happen. While we do our best at Beacon to sort and grade the requests that come our way, it is impossible to know all the variables. It is perhaps one of the leading causes of student death. You’ve dealt with this before, though, haven’t you?”

She was talking about their survival test.

“Our profession is a dangerous one, even at the best of times. What seems like a routine escort mission can turn deadly when an unknown Grimm passes through the region unexpectedly. Or a simple investigation becomes much more complicated when it is discovered that rather than some simple cattle rustlers, the ones poaching these animals are an international terrorist organization,” she turned his way, facing him directly, and Jaune was immediately captured by the intensity of her gaze. Even in the low light, he felt pinned. For someone that often carried herself with such an easy going air, it was much more potent. “You did well, calling it in. Many may have attempted to continue alone. Maybe for personal glory. Maybe because they simply didn’t wish to cry wolf. It doesn’t matter why, but it often ends in disaster. The mark of a good leader is making the correct call in the moment, and that is what you did.”

“I... thank you, Professor.”

Velvet was no doubt listening in. Even without her enhanced hearing, she'd have heard it, seeing as she was sitting only fifteen feet away. It made him feel a little embarrassed.

"You've got the makings of a fine Huntsman," she continued. "Keep progressing as you have been."

"I will, ma'am."

She nodded.

"I have a feeling we'll need all of our strength tomorrow, so I won't keep you up. Goodnight, Mr. Arc – Ms. Scarlatina, you may rest now."

Jaune woke Weiss up while Velvet woke Coco, and then they slipped into their sleeping bags. It wasn't long until he heard Professor Peach go to bed. Eyes growing heavy, Jaune sighed as he relaxed, and then the next thing he knew, sunlight was encroaching across his face.

Squinting, he rolled over, the scent and sound of sizzling bacon greeting him.

Wait, what?

Professor Peach was already awake, Nora and Fox sitting with her. Not only bacon – as Jaune sat up, he saw eggs.

Where...?

“Good morning,” Peach said, seeing him sit up. “Hungry?”

“Look, look – Professor Peach smuggled in eggs and bacon~!” Nora said happily. “No ration packs this morning!”

Professor Peach laughed, the sound charming. “Not exactly the sort of food you should bring on a mission, but I had a fair idea that we might need something like this before a big day.”

Blake was the next one to rise, and then Coco, Weiss, Velvet and Yatsunami. They all gathered around as Professor Peach began handing out breakfast, and if Jaune was being honest, it was some of the best bacon and eggs he’d ever had.

“Right,” Peach clapped as they finished eating and cleaned up their camp. “Ms. Scarlatina, Ms. Belladonna, Mr. Alistair, you three will be leading the way. I very much doubt there will be much light in those pipes, so you will be our eyes and ears. Everyone else, we’ll be following behind.”

The abandoned drainage channel was still deserted, the abandoned machinery and trucks still where they’d seen them last, so they quickly made their way down. Blake and Velvet listened carefully, their ears twitching, attempting to pick up any unnatural sound before they slowly made their way into the massive pipe. Fox followed close behind, with the rest of them bringing up the rear.

It was pitch black inside, darker than the darkest night, so they formed a chain. The pipe was wide enough for several people to stand abreast, so that is what they did, putting their trust in their teammates to not lead them astray.

With nothing but their breathing and the sound of their footsteps to keep them company, it felt like they walked for an age. It was impossible to tell how far they'd gone, or how long they'd walked for. Nothing existed but the endless abyss – and the smell. Dust, mold – and dung. This is where they'd brought the cattle.

Eventually, Blake spoke up.

"I hear something," she said quietly, but in the absolute silence, she might as well have shouted it. They all paused. "It sounds like... power tools."

"I hear it too," Velvet added softly. "Um – it sounds like they're cutting something."

There was still quite a walk until finally, there was light at the end of the tunnel. They moved towards it slowly, Blake, Velvet and Fox dashing ahead. They swept the area to make sure there were no White Fang around before waving for them to follow.

The light was natural, creeping in through the fissures far above where the streets had cracked open. Long shafts of light illuminated the area, and Jaune looked around in awe as they stepped out into a truly enormous cavern, so large that you could fit a city in it – which is what they'd done. This was the doomed final grasp of Mountain Glenn, when the city above had been overrun. They'd retreated down here for protection, and had built a small city to house the people, believing themselves to be safe underground.

The pipe opened up into a drainage ditch that continued onward, but a bridge had been erected to cross the gap. Even Jaune could hear the sound of power tools hard at work now, echoing throughout the massive chamber.

"Follow me, stay close," Professor Peach ordered, moving quickly. She dashed towards some of the abandoned buildings, staying low. They all followed in her wake. Once they were safely

hidden, she turned to Blake and Velvet. "Scout ahead, find out what those sounds are. Don't be seen, and return here quickly."

They both nodded and vanished, scaling up the side of one of the nearby buildings and leaping out of sight. The rest of them hunkered down, listening intently. If a fight broke out, they'd hear it, but they stayed at the ready.

It was a tense twenty minutes until they returned.

"They're repairing one of the trains," Blake said immediately, slipping inside through one of the windows. Velvet came through the door. "From the looks of it, it's almost complete."

"I went a little further, and they're working on the tracks, as well," Velvet added, frowning. "And I could hear drilling down one of the subway tunnels. They're clearing a path."

There was only one place those tunnels went.

They all shared a look, understanding the danger. Professor Peach had a severe expression, one that Jaune had never seen on her face before. It made her beautiful features cold, and the fury in her eyes was palpable.

"I see," she said quietly. Her anger carried into her voice, her usual warmth replaced by frost. "So – they seek to attack Vale."

"But why... I mean, they're already in Vale, they've been stealing all that Dust," Nora sounded confused. "What's the point of this?"

Professor Peach had already worked it out.

“These lines give the Grimm a direct path into the city,” she said, and Jaune felt as if someone had gripped his heart. He saw the shock ripple through their entire group. Even the calm Yatsunashi looked shaken at the very thought.

“No, they wouldn’t...” Blake said weakly.

Weiss placed a hand on her shoulder in comfort. “Blake.”

“I’m not defending them,” Blake said quickly, touching Weiss’ hand gratefully. “But... to use the Grimm in this way...”

It was unforgivable.

Grimm were the enemy of man and faunus kind. They were the enemy of *all*. To use them as a weapon, to set them loose inside a city the size of Vale...

It was abhorrent.

The loss of life would be...

Jaune didn't even want to imagine it.

"Did you two see anything else?" Peach asked, cutting through the tension.

"There were a lot of crates. Hundreds. Guarded closely, and stored far away from the work going on," Velvet revealed. "Could they be weapons?"

Professor Peach's mouth pulled into a taut line. "I think I know where all that stolen Dust has gone."

"Professor... this is *insane*," Coco said harshly. "I know the White Fang are bad news, but *this* is something else. You're talking about the sort of attack that could bring an entire kingdom down, just like..."

Just like Mountain Glenn.

Peach nodded. "As of now, it is still just speculation. An educated guess... so we shall have to find out the truth ourselves," she met their eyes, one by one. They straightened. "This mission could very well determine the fate of our home but we are in luck. The train is still incomplete, yes?"

Blake nodded. "Yes."

"And the tracks are still under repair?"

Velvet nodded. "They are."

"And from the sounds of it, they're still clearing the tunnel. We've come across them at the perfect time. They cannot launch an attack on Vale as they are, so we have time. How many people did you see?"

Velvet and Blake shared a look.

"Over a hundred, easily," Blake said, grimacing. "Maybe two."

That was a sizable force. That was what the cattle were for. To feed so many people was no easy task.

"A few of them moved like they were Huntsman trained," Velvet continued. "One in particular. He wore black and red, and appeared to be their leader."

Blake tensed. "What?"

Velvet blinked, surprised. "What? What is it?"

"Where did you see him?"

"Oh, um – he was overseeing the work done on the tracks."

Team CFVY shot Blake curious looks.

Jaune knew what had her so rattled.

“You think it’s Adam, don’t you?” he asked.

“Adam,” Professor Peach said sharply, looking his way. “You are speaking of Adam Taurus.”

Jaune nodded when Blake remained silent.

“And why, exactly, do you believe him to be the one that Velvet saw, Ms. Belladonna?”

Blake struggled to form words, so Weiss sighed and spoke up.

“We’ve encountered him before,” she said, only partly true. “I’m sure you know of what happened during the first semester?”

“Yes. The Headmaster shared with all the staff,” Professor Peach narrowed her eyes at Weiss. “That you were involved in stopping a major heist. He did not mention Adam Taurus. Hm.”

“I’ve heard the name,” Coco said, lowering her glasses. “He’s some big shot with the White Fang, right? Dangerous?”

Blake finally found her voice.

“More than you know.”

“Right, well – this changes nothing,” Professor Peach dismissed, drawing their attention back to her. “Our way forward is the same. Beacon is monitoring the situation closely, and are on standby,” reaching into her bag, she pulled out a small gun. No, not a gun – at least, not in the typical sense. It was a flare gun. “Our plan is simple. We gather information and then we return to the surface and alert our forces with this. Once it is seen, Huntsmen will be deployed to this location in a joint operation by Beacon and Atlas Academy under the direction of Headmaster Ozpin and General Ironwood.”

“So... we’re retreating?” Coco asked.

“Yes, Ms. Adel. There is no reason for us to engage if they aren’t in a position to launch the attack. Once we have our information, we await the Huntsmen from Beacon and Atlas, and then crush the White Fang with the might of both academies.”

It made sense.

Blake looked relieved, though her shoulders remained tense. Weiss whispered something to her, and it helped to ease her furrowed brow a little.

“It is important that we are not seen,” Peach stressed. “We identify the contents of those crates, conduct a head count of their forces, confirm the identity of the man in black and red, and then return to the surface.”

Simple.

At least, it should be.

Being sneaky wasn't exactly Jaune's forte. Neither was it Nora's.

"Again, we will split up to cover more ground. Be careful."

They spread out, some taking to the rooftops while the rest remained hidden amongst the buildings, using the alleyways and abandoned rooms to move. Jaune and Nora moved slowly, checking and double-checking their surroundings before continuing. If the city above had been eerie, this underground city was something else. Every building felt like a tombstone marking a grave.

"I'm sick of meat and beans," a voice came to them from around a bend, so sudden that Nora flinched. Jaune froze, lowering himself into a crouch, pulling Nora down with him.

"You and me both, buddy," another answered, sounding tired. "But food is food. At least it isn't just beans."

"Urgh – would it be so hard to get some more vegetables in our diet? Who the hell decided that beans were all we needed?" the first person shot back. "Canned corn, peas, anything!"

"Take it up with Adam," a third voice came, feminine.

“What? Are you crazy?” the first asked incredulously. “I don’t have a death wish.”

Three people walked by the mouth of the alley they were hidden in, and Jaune carefully moved them both behind an old dumpster. Dressed in the typical White Fang uniform, their masks glinted in the light.

“Then shut up,” the woman snapped harshly. “If I have to watch these damn beasts, let it be in silence.”

“Someone is moody today. You on your rag or what?” the second guy asked, and grunted when she elbowed him in the ribs.

“The next one will be harder, asshole. Just because I let you fuck me doesn’t mean you can speak to me that way.”

They vanished around the corner, and after listening for a minute, Jaune crept forward. Peering around the building, he blinked.

The surviving cattle that had been taken in the stock truck were gathered in a pen, though their number had been cut in half. Nearby, he saw an area that had been cleared, the concrete stained red with blood.

Right. This is where they butchered them.

Jaune pulled back.

“Lets keep moving,” he whispered. Nora nodded, and joined him in climbing through the window of the next building over.

The sound of their work on the train grew louder as the minutes ticked by until they saw it. Several cars long, it sat upon the repaired section of tracks, as if ready to go. Sparks rained down as steel was welded together, their attention focused on the lead car. While it was clearly unfinished, Jaune thought they weren't far away at all.

A hundred feet away or so, Jaune saw the stacked crates. The wood was unmarked, no hint of what was inside.

Jaune began counting. Dozens of people were working on the train, hauling over equipment, materials, drilling and bolting steel plates into place. Dozens more protected the crates, and even more moved about the area, keeping watch.

A hundred, easily – and that was just here. Further along the tracks, if there was a similar number...

That was when he spotted him.

Adam Taurus moved with a purposeful stride, tall and imposing. One hand rested on the hilt of his sword, ready to draw it at a moment's notice, the air around him noticeably tense. By his side walked a smaller figure; slender, feminine, long brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. Jaune couldn't hear what they were talking about, but Adam appeared... agitated.

Their ear pieces crackled to life.

“The crates are filled with Dust,” Professor Peach spoke quietly. “I have confirmed this. I see the man in question; do we have confirmation on his identity?”

“That’s him,” Jaune answered. “That’s Adam Taurus.”

“I see. Everyone fall back, we have enou—,” she cut herself off, and then the sound of gunfire filled the air. Everyone froze, the work on the train halting, and then her voice snapped, urgent. “Move!”

Everything happened in a matter of seconds.

Professor Peach appeared from her hiding spot, trailed by Blake and Weiss. The White Fang got over their shock and opened fire, their rifles roaring. Another group rained down bullets from above, cutting off their escape route, forcing them to change direction.

“Blake!”

A voice roared, filled with fury.

“We’ve been found,” Coco’s voice came, sharp. “Attempting to fall back—,” rapid gunfire carried over their coms, and throughout the cavern.

Jaune made a decision.

“Engaging,” he said, loud and clear so they could all hear. Then he was vaulting out the window, Nora on his heels, moving without question.

He focused, semblance blooming to life. Power flooded his body, and reaching out, he grasped Nora’s hand. He fed as much of his aura into her as possible in the time they had, and then with a lunge, the ground cracked as he launched himself forward.

White Fang shouted in alarm as he appeared, Crocea Mors singing from its sheath. Rifles swung around to aim at him but those closest were too late, his blade cutting them down. It tore through their armor, biting deep into their flesh, blood misting in the air as they screamed in pain.

They had no aura.

Nora bulldozed through them with wide sweeps of her weapon, bones crunching with every impact. The White Fang hesitated, unable to get a clear shot without hitting their own, and it allowed them to push further towards the train.

The hair on his neck stood on end, and he ducked.

A flash of red passed over his head, a long, slender blade whistling as it cut the air. Jaune grunted as a knee slammed into the side of his head, rocking him. Staggering, he fell and rolled with the momentum, regaining his feet moments before that red sword slashed at his neck. Crocea Mors met it with a clang.

“You’ve made a big mistake, human,” Adam Taurus said, their swords locked together.

Adam tried to push him, but Jaune was a wall and didn't budge. He saw Adam's jaw tighten moments before he disengaged, Nora's hammer almost taking off his head. He danced back nimbly.

Chaos erupted all around them.

Velvet and Fox appeared, engaging a large group of White Fang. Fox cut through them with his bladed gauntlets, moving like the wind. Velvet dispatched them with wide, cleaving strikes that were familiar – as was the weapon she carried. Though it was made from white light, there was no mistaking Crescent Rose, the curved blade tearing through those that got close.

"Eyes on me," Adam said, and then he blurred.

Jaune grit his teeth, deploying his shield moments before he struck. Adam's weapon rasped across the face of his shield, the sound sharp, cutting. Jaune pushed back, shoving Adam back before lashing out with a slash of his own. Adam shifted just enough for his sword to miss before countering, thrusting towards his exposed side.

Jaune twisted, the blade glancing off his chest plate before striking out with his knee. Adam caught it on his leg, lifting it in a block before hastily backtracking as Nora attempted to crush him, Magnhild crushing the concrete below their feet.

He was *fast*.

Not in the way Ruby was, or Harriet had been. Perhaps swift was the correct term, every movement flowing like water, no wasted energy. His blade flashed with every strike, so quick

that if you blinked, you'd lose your head. Nora was forced away, using the haft of her hammer to shield her body from his sudden assault. Jaune intercepted, coming to her aid.

Their swords met in a flurry, sparks flying as they exchanged a series of strikes. Adam spun and lashed out at his legs, attempting to sweep his feet. Jaune leapt, angling his shield to tank Adam's follow up strike but the force of the blow threw him back.

Right into the path of an axe.

Jaune grunted as the massive weapon slammed into his back, aura flaring in protection as he was thrown. He tumbled across the ground before kicking back up to his feet, only to swerve wildly as a hulking man with arms like tree trunks fell upon him. The axe head buried in the ground, cleaving through concrete like butter, and chambering a kick, Jaune booted him in the side.

The large man rocked, the air forced from his lungs but he maintained his grip on his weapon. Ripping it from the ground, he swung powerfully, a wide, brutal strike that Jaune leapt back to avoid.

Another flash of red, and Adam was upon Nora. She blocked the first strike, the second, before there was a gunshot. The sheath on his hip was a gun, the bullet taking Nora by surprise, her head jerking back as it slammed into her face. Stumbling, she was slashed across the chest, her cry piercing.

Jaune felt anger spike through him at the sound, and fear.

White Fang poured towards them from all directions, the roar of gunfire deafening. Jaune watched as Nora fell back, rolling, Adam advancing on her in a blur. The hulking man swung at Jaune's head, the axe whistling, forcing him to raise his shield.

There was a loud clang, the force rippling down his spine as he blocked the blow.

He needed to get to her.

Aura gathered, his body flooded with power. Golden light seeped from his skin, enveloping him completely. The anger and fear multiplied, but he wrestled it into submission, clamping down on it. Legs tensing, he threw back the hulking man's axe and leapt.

He crossed the distance in a blink.

Adam turned at the last moment but not fast enough. Jaune slammed into him with bone shaking force, Adam blasted back. His aura flashed red in protection, body hitting the ground and rolling before he came to a stop. Bullets pinged off his aura as he shielded Nora.

"We need to move," he told her. She nodded, grasping his shoulder.

Adam rose from his prone position, jaw tight as he sheathed his sword. And then a strange glow enveloped him, his hair and the red markings on his clothes lighting up, while the blacks deepened, an energy gathering. He lowered himself into a different stance, almost curled around the hilt of his blade.

"Watch out~!" Blake screamed from somewhere behind them.

For a moment, the very air seemed to hold its breath – and then Adam vanished, appearing in front of them in the time it took to register Blake's words. Jaune felt his heart stop, everything

moving in slow motion. Adam's sword slowly crept up out of its sheath, the blade roaring with power. Crimson light poured from the blade as it rose, almost blinding.

He couldn't avoid it.

Jaune's eyes widened, feeling the energy wash over him. His instincts screamed at him, warning him, but he wasn't fast enough, and Nora was behind him.

He had no other option.

He raised his shield, body tense, awaiting the impact but then something shifted, the very air warping. One moment the space between them was empty, Adam closing the distance, and then the next, Professor Peach was just *there*.

Her pretty sundress fluttered, her polearm wreathed in purple light. Before Adam's sword could clear its sheath, her weapon *pulsed*, cutting through the air with force. Gravity Dust, Jaune knew a moment later, when the head slammed into the ground and the entire area collapsed beneath a crushing force.

Adam cried out in shock as he was flattened, his attack stopped dead before it could finish, the ground shuddering. Jaune and Nora felt themselves being pressed down but not as violently, gasping as the air was forced from their lungs.

What was...?

Peach tore her weapon from the ground and spun, attempting to impale Adam with a vicious downward strike but the man recovered in the nick of time, rolling to the side. Another pulse of purple, Gravity Dust activated, and he was blasted away, thrown like a ragdoll.

“Are you okay?” Professor Peach asked, her voice clipped.

Jaune nodded. “Yes, we’re fine.”

“We’re good,” Nora added.

“I will take care of him,” she said. “Regroup with your team and eliminate the other threats.”

“Take care of me?” Adam stood from where he’d fallen, his voice sharp. “Hah. Your arrogance will be the death of you.”

“Sorry, sweetie – you just aren’t that good,” Professor Peach said, twirling her weapon effortlessly. The shaft and head continued to glow. “As a Professor of Beacon, it is my duty to teach. Lesson one: do not mess with my students.”

The pair came together in a furious clash, and Jaune took that moment to move.

“Come on,” he hauled Nora up. “Let’s go!”

“I don’t think so,” a rough voice stopped them. The hulking man with the axe approached, arms bulging. “You die here.”

He rushed them.

Jaune went left while Nora went right, his axe whistling between them. Jaune kicked out, striking the man's knee with force, his leg buckling. Magnhild swung around from behind and slammed into his broad back, Nora pulling the trigger. The force threw him away, aura shuddering as he was launched into one of the nearby buildings.

"That guy was annoying, thanks," Jaune said.

Blake and Weiss were engaged in a battle with two other White Fang. One of them was the girl with the brown ponytail, her weapon snapping through the air with rending cracks. Some sort of whip, the length cracking with Lightning Dust, distorting the air whenever it snapped taut. Blake dodged and countered, her clones running distraction but the brown haired faunus destroyed them in a sweeping arc, her movements agile, swift.

"Ilia, what are you doing here?" Blake shouted, grimacing as she was hit by some of the bullets raining down from the building tops. Her aura flashed.

Did Blake know this girl?

But whoever it was remained silent, attacking with conviction, dashing in and twirling, her weapon snapping out towards Blake's face. Blake ducked, her weapon shifting into its firearm state and opening fire. Three bullets punched into the girl's chest before she could react, staggering before she deflected the others, cartwheeling away.

Several feet away, Weiss was engaged with a slim woman who wielded a weapon very similar to her own, a slender blade that flashed as the pair thrust and parried rapidly, the steel singing as it clashed together. A long, scaled tail whipped out, attempting to trip the heiress but Weiss countered by summoning a glyph, using it as a launchpad to vault over her opponent, twirling and slashing at her back.

“You help Weiss, I’ve got Blake,” Jaune said, rushing forward. He raised his shield to protect his face, bullets slamming into the surface. “Go!”

“Got it!” Nora replied, flipping her weapon over and mounting it like it was a scooter before pulling the trigger. The recoil sent her flying towards the tailed woman. “Dynamic entry~!” she shouted, colliding with her.

The girl with the pony tail noticed Jaune at the last moment, jerking away as his sword lashed out. It chipped the corner of her mask, a thin line cut across the face before she countered with a kick, her shin slamming into Jaune’s stomach. His semblance tanked the blow, the girl grunting as it blasted her leg back, and then he was on her like a storm, a flurry of strikes forcing her back.

She was slippery, managing to weave around his attacks and counter with her weapon. It shortened and became rigid, the segments locking together to form a makeshift blade, slashing at his face. He parried her attack and felt a shock run through his arm as Lightning Dust flared.

That was troublesome.

The more he blocked and parried her sword, the more numb his hand and arm became. Jaune fainted before swerving, kicking out with a boot. It connected, taking the girl in the hip. She cried out in pain as she stumbled, and then Blake appeared, a whirl of black and white. She scored two hits across her chest, brutal slashes, before the girl managed to create distance.

“Ilia, stop, please,” Blake implored, but again, she was fired upon from above. Jaune shielded her, his eyes narrow.

“Velvet, can you hear me?” he asked, activating his ear piece.

She responded at once.

“What do you need?”

“Those men on the roof tops. Can you handle them?”

“I’ve got it.”

From the corner of his eye, he saw the white glare of her weapon as she vaulted up the side of the building. Crescent Rose twirled in her grip, and she moved *exactly* like Ruby, launching herself into the air and arching her back. It was so uncanny, a perfect mirror of Team RPRY’s leader, and then she was upon them, their shouts heralding the end of their suppressing fire.

There were still so many more enemies, though.

Adam and Professor Peach were still locked in a furious exchange, the area around them shuddering from the force of their blows. He moved so quickly that after images were left in his wake, each sword stroke flowing into the next. Peach met him with force, her weapon pulsing as it shifted erratically, blocking each slash and countering. Further beyond, he saw Coco unloading with her weapon, rotary machine-gun roaring endlessly, cutting people down by the dozens. Yatsunami was clashing with the man with the axe, strength against strength. Fox weaved in and out, cutting people down with deft cuts, always on the move.

But more just kept coming.

“Ilia, please,” Blake tried again.

“You know this girl?”

Blake nodded, expression tight. “I do. She’s a friend.”

That got a reaction.

“Friend?” the woman – Ilia – said with derision. “*Friend?* What friend abandons another? You are nothing more than a traitor.”

“Ilia, look at what you’re doing here?” Blake shouted, gesturing around. “Is this really what you want? The White Fang that we believed in? You’re going to kill *thousands!* The Ilia I know would never agree with this!”

Jaune saw her hand tense around the hilt of her weapon.

“And the Blake I know would have never turned her back on us,” Ilia replied coldly. Her blade lengthened, returning to its whip form. It crackled, arcs of electricity sparking across its surface. “But she did.”

Jaune went left while Blake went right, Ilia’s whip snapping between them. Jaune dashed in but had to retreat as her weapon coiled and lashed out in his direction, ducking beneath it as it soared towards his head. Blake picked that moment to close the distance, her foot slamming into her chest. Ilia grunted as the air was forced from her lungs, flying back, and Blake followed.

Jaune was about to join her when suddenly, the ground shook.

Not just the ground. The entire cavern rumbled, the fissures above widening as the ceiling threatened to collapse. Rock fell, thunderous as it struck the ground and cracked, and everyone paused as the rumbling continued, growing more violent.

Jaune struggled to stay upright, widening his stance.

There was no way. An earthquake? Now?

But that wasn't what it was. It was worse.

A horrible sound filled the air, stone crumbling in a deafening series of cracks that made the hair on his neck stand on end. It was followed by another sound, more terrible, the atmosphere filled with *fear*.

It sounded like the wail of a thousand voices at once. A wail of sorrow. A wail of agony.

Several of the buildings shifted, *pushed*. Concrete cracked and gave way, the buildings tilting until they collapsed, coming down in a hail of stone. Velvet leapt from the top, aura flaring as she hit the ground hard.

"Move!" Jaune screamed, and they did. Blake, Weiss, Ilia, and the rapier wielder that Weiss had been fighting, they all leapt away as moments later, the ground shook beneath the force of several tons of concrete falling.

And then from the shadows, an enormous creature appeared, as if plucked out of their worst nightmare.