**Chapter 70**

Next class with Oobleck, I lifted a hand, as I’d noticed something, something that could make life a *lot* easier for people, but they *weren’t doing it*, and while I was powerful, and intelligent, and deadly, I wasn’t *so* arrogant to believe that I’d solved the issue of Grimm attacks in my *first year at Beacon*.

“Yes, Mr. Arc?” the green-haired professor called, having reached his ‘does anyone have any questions’ part of his lesson.

“It’s not related to this,” I said, waving to the diagrams that displayed how food was gathered, processed, and packaged for better transportation to far-flung outposts. The pipeline for basic fruits and vegetables was pretty standard, but with the possibility of a town having to hunker down, cut off for *weeks* until a Huntsman team could arrive, people had long since learned to mix processed, long-term ingredients in with the fresh ones.

“Then does anyone have a question that is?” our teacher asked, only to be greeted with dead silence. “Then proceed, young man, with your query of questionable quality!”

“Okay, so, Grimm don’t like to group together without an Alpha to *bind* them together, with some exceptions, because there’s always exceptions, but why don’t people capture a type of Grimm that they *can* deal with, like an installation with good anti-air capabilities keeping an aviary full of Nevermores, so that they *only* pull in more Nevermores that they can handle easily, as opposed to Beowulfs at their doors, or Creeps trying to go under their walls?”

“Ah, you would not be the first to ask that very question!” the professor announced, which is what I had thought. “Would anyone *else* wish to answer Mr. Arc? Someone *other* than Ms. Poledina,” he added as the gynoid behind me jumped to her feet and started waving. No one else said anything, so Oobleck sighed, and gestured towards her.

“Frequency, Reach, and Mutation!” she announced, each reason said like it was the proper name of a concept instead of merely a descriptor.

“*Indeed!*” he nodded. “While Grimm do group together, keeping them in captivity changes them. In nature, it is the, well, *nature* of the Grimm to gather to a certain level, groups and packs fairly predictable, with extras branching off to form new groups, however that limit is removed for those kept captive, and where a new member might be added to the group every few *weeks* in the wild, enough Grimm to form an entirely new group will attempt to join the original one in a similar amount of time. This means that, while attacks are more predictable, they are more common, and more intense than would occur naturally!”

Nodding, I replied, “That *would* change things, but specialized defenses would be able to handle them better. I assume Reach means the, er, ‘pull’ range of a group with captive Grimm is far longer than the group normally?” The man nodded. “But, if you had a couple towns all pulling the same type, wouldn’t it cut down on that as they overlapped?”

“You would think so,” Oobleck informed me, “But *YOU WOULD BE WRONG!!!”* He screamed, before coughing into his hand. “Such pulling will, after a certain level, awaken Alphas even of different types, types that would include the captured Grimm in their normal cohort, and, with the Alphas awakened, you will bring down a tide down upon your head, a tide made of Grimm that you have *not* fine-tuned your defenses to handle.”

“Okay, so not worth it, but. . . Mutation?” I questioned.

Oobleck hesitated for a moment, which would’ve been closer to a full minute for the rest of us, before hedging, “This would likely be a topic better suited for Professor Port, or Professor Horton. If you find the topic interesting, I’d suggest the latter’s Grimm Studies course next year. The vastly, *vastly,* ***vastly*** simplified version is that rarer, more dangerous Grimm are often *offshoots* of more common Grimm, though how they come to be in the wild is unknown. However, in captivity, Grimm can shift and change, usually in ways that would allow them to escape, and wreak havoc on those that held them, and that is assuming the captivity is complete, for if there is another way in, the arriving Grimm *will* find it, free its kin, and strike with an intelligence and vindictiveness not in accordance with their behavior in the wild. Needless to say, many have tried, but *none* have succeeded in what you are proposing, Mr. Arc.”

“But,” Ruby asked, frowning, “If keeping Grimm is bad, what about all the ones in our basement?”

“The *What?*” the Abigail demanded behind us, Penny’s teammate surging to her feet.

“How. . .” Oobleck questioned, his gaze flicking to me for a moment from beneath his glasses. “Ah, I see. Those Grimm are being held for much the same reason the ones within *Atlas Academy* are, Ms. Smalt,” he stated, nodding to Abigail. “For research purposes, not in an ill-conceived attempt to control Grimm incursions. The relevant authorities of both nations are well aware of such practicises, and such research can only be carried out in a location with sufficient defenses, which coincidentally is the Huntsman Academies of each nation. Isolated research labs exist, I am certain, but, as students, you do not need to concern yourselves with them, and, as Huntsman and Huntresses I *strongly* suggest you think carefully before accepting a mission guarding one once you graduate, as history has shown it is a *when* and not an *if* that they are eventually destroyed by breaches, enemy forces, or Tides.”

“Enemy forces?” Yang questioned. “You mean bandits?”

The older man’s face was carefully neutral as he informed her, “Given that our four nations are presumably at peace, yes, they would claim to be bandits. And that,” he paused the bell ringing, “is the end of today’s class. Remember, your assignment on logistic networks is due next week. Have a good day everyone!”

And with that he zipped out the door, sending Quinn Niven, who was already halfway gone, spinning like a top.

<DR>

*“How are you okay with this!?”* Bake yelled several tables over during dinner, attracting stares. “*Aren’t you ashamed of yourselves!?”*

Pyrrha shot me a look that said, ‘You’re the leader, *you* go handle this’, though she did smile when I rolled my eyes and sighed, striding over, even as Yang, who was starting to stand, froze and sat back down.

Having spotted the fact that one of the Atlas teams was nothing *but* Faunus, I assumed there was something going on, but, to be honest, I was doing *so* many other things I’d not cared enough to find out. They had likely shown up originally in Canon, but not made it to the Finals, so I mentally dismissed them, and worried about things a bit closer to home.

Blake, however, *apparently,* had too much time on her hands.

On the bright side, the Atlas team was laughing at her, which wasn’t helping the catgirl’s disposition in the *slightest*, and there *was* an angry, mocking edge to the laughter. Well, a fight hadn’t started yet, at least. Walking up beside her, she glanced my way, stiffened, then relaxed in an odd kind of pattern that I didn’t quite understand, so instead I focused on the Atlesians.

“Hey, sorry about my teammate, she’s not the best when it comes to *not* starting international incidents,” I greeted them. “What’s the problem?”

Blake turned to me, demanding, “Do you *know* what they said to me?”

“Considering I *just* asked what the problem is, no, no I do not,” I replied, deadpan, which got a chuckle from the dark haired one, three of the four with canine-esque ears sticking from their heads. They came in grey, striped brown, and orange-red varieties, while the fourth had a cat’s nose and a mane of neatly trimmed blond hair that *screamed* ‘I’m a lion, but in the *military!’* All of them, actually, had a clean, trimmed appearance that made them seem like military officers, like Ciel from Penny’s team, as opposed to the *other* two on team SSPM, who wouldn’t’ve been too out of place in *Vale*. “So?” I asked the group.

The grey-haired one, smiling, though it didn’t reach his eyes, nodded towards my teammate. “That girl of yours has a mouth on her.”

“I’m *not* his ‘girl’!” Blake snapped, taking the bait without a second thought, something that the leader, the dark haired one, and the lion found funny, but redhead. . . he *clearly* didn’t like the catgirl, though he was keeping quiet.

“Eh, you’re my teammate, and I’m your leader, so *technically. . .*” I smiled, and Blake’s ire was turned my way. At my wink, she paused, then rolled her eyes and huffed, but without any real heat. “So, what’s the problem?”

“You know how they treat ou-, your kind in Atlas, right?” she checked, correcting herself, even though it wasn’t *her* that I had asked.

Lifting my eyebrows, I looked at the four Faunus, who watched me warily. “They have dragons in Atlas?”

There was a beat of silence, before the brown-haired one started chuckling again, this time without an edge to it, and Blake smacked my arm. “*Be serious!”* she hissed. “I mean Faunus!”

“Oh, yeah, you guys are treated like shit,” I told the girl directly, the red-haired one frowning for a moment, before smirking as he glanced at Blake, or more specifically, her *bow*, and then back to me. Turning to face them, I gave the group a measuring look. “To be an entire team of Faunus is Atlas, especially one that’s been sent to complete internationally, you guys must be tough as iron. Seniors, I hope?”

“Sophomores,” the lion practically purred. “Better watch your back, ‘Dragon’.”

I smiled, baring my teeth, “I’d rather burn *yours*.”

“Geralt,” the grey-haired one chided, “Play nice.” The lion shrugged. “I’m Derek Diam, Leader of team Dowager, spelled DOGG,” he introduced himself.

“That’s not what you said-” Blake started to interrupt, but he kept going.

“The sly one’s Bradley Ochre,” Derek informed me, the smirking redhead nodding, “Chuckles is Grizz Gole,” the striped one grinned, “and our resident catty asshole is Geralt Ebon,” the lion one shot their leader an annoyance glance, “but I’m sure *you* know what they can be like,” he finished, shooting a look towards my teammate.

“Nice to meet you,” I nodded, waving towards Yang and Pyrrha, making introductions in turn. “So, what set Ms. Belladonna off?”

The. . . hyena? Maybe Jackal? The brown-haired canine Faunus told me, “Our official name is ‘Dowager’, but that’s boring. You can call us the DOGG Soldiers! Geralt’s enough of a bitch to count!” he announced, ducking as the Lion Faunus threw a roll at his head, the grey-haired one catching it and taking a bite.

*Okay, I guess I could see why that might upset Blake,* I admitted, glancing at the girl who waved towards them as if to go ‘See!’ “And let me guess,” I sighed, “she took offense to that?”

“How can you *not?*” my teammate demanded.

“Because *they* don’t seem to care?” I offered, turning to look at their leader. “Right?”

The. . . wolf? Yeah, he seemed wolf-y. The wolf Faunus nodded, amused, “If we cared we’d call ourselves ‘Dowager’, like a bunch of old ladies.”

“So if they don’t care, why do *you?*” I questioned the ex-White Fang member.

“Because it’s *demeaning,*” she told me in a tone that, itself, was pretty demeaning, but, seeing the lack of support from me, or any of the others around us, it came out more as a whine than a true accusation. “With how Faunus are treated there, they’re just. . . just *laughing* about it!”

Watching team DOGG, there was a flash of anger covered in their easygoing displays, and I understood a little. “I don’t think *that’s* what they’re laughing about. Mind if we sit down?” I questioned, and, after a moment the leader nodded, once. I sat down next to him, practically dragging Blake along with me, the attention of the other nearby tables drifting off now that we were no longer *quite* making such a scene.

“If I had to guess, you’re. . . *owning* your status in Atlesian society. Am I close?” I asked Derek.

The leader gave me a measuring look, before offering a half-shrug. “We asked to be on a team together. Caused some problems, since that meant there weren’t as many of us to be the ‘token’ Faunus. But the General stepped in, and allowed it.”

“‘Token’ Faunus?” Blake echoed on my other side, already starting to get offended again.

“There’s always one,” the redhead quipped, “that way they ‘aren’t racist’.”

“Neon of FNKI, Abigail of SSPM, Sable from MDDN,” Grizz laughed. “You shoulda seen their faces when we suggested Fluffy get a nosejob to ‘pass’!” The lion growled, which just made the hyena boy laugh harder.

The leader shook his head at the byplay, “We work harder, play harder, fight harder, and *be* harder than the others. Be heroes,” he stated simply, casting an annoyed glance towards *my* teammate, “which is hard when there are so many *villains*.”

“Ironwood briefed you?” I questioned softly, tilting my head towards Blake, which cut her off before she could say something *else* that’d attract attention.

“Standard threat briefings are mandatory for Sophomores, and Fang cells like to travel,” he stated neutrally. “*You* know?”

I nodded, “So does Oz, er, Headmaster Ozpin,” I corrected, when I saw he was confused by the Wizard’s name. “Blake’s *only* a student now, and if a certain *Bull* shows up, me and mine will help you take him down.”

At my statement my teammate stiffened, but the other four relaxed, Derek lifting an eyebrow, “Then she wasn’t recruiting?”

“No, she’s just like that *all the time*,” I remarked, getting a laugh from the other man. “She *really* believes in the cause, but objects to the methods they’ve started using. She’s more of a placards and pamphlets kind of girl instead of a brutality and bloodshed one.”

“She’s *right here,*” Blake objected, and both I and the other team leader looked to her. “And, *Ozpin?*” she questioned, a little nervously.

“The Wizard knows more than you think, but he’s a believer in second chances,” I told her.

Derek added, “And your family is well known in certain circles, Ms. Belladonna.”

The Catgirl’s bow twitched, and her pupils shrunk a little, as she let out a small “oh”.

“You are using your *real name,*” I pointed out kindly, giving the Atlesian a significant look, “which should tell you about her standard modus operandi.”

“Killers like Taurus don’t hide their name either,” the Faunus stated, though he nodded, admitting, “but I get what you mean.”

With most of the tension defused, I did ask, knowing that I *wasn’t* going to get a straight answer from either Blake *or* Weiss, “What’s the Atlas White Fang like?” At his curious look I explained, “My teammates that might know are *her* or *Weiss Schnee*, and I’m pretty sure neither are going to give me a straight answer.”

“You’ve got an, well, one of *them,* and a Schnee on the same team?” the wolf Faunus questioned disbelievingly. “How are they still alive?”

“Weiss’ on the same team as my teammate’s sister, so the eight of us do a lot together,” I explained. “And Blake’s normally not *that* bad, while Weiss is just a little stuck up. Serious academic chops though. *Way* better at that sort of thing than I am.”

As one, team DOGG turned to look at Blake, who bristled a little. “What? He’s not wrong,” she snapped, looking at them challengingly.

The brown haired one started laughing, while the redhead smirked, remarking “I suppose she *has* quit.”

“What’s *that* supposed to mean?” the catgirl growled.

“It means no one of *your* old organization would be caught dead speaking well of a Schnee,” Derek noted.

“The SDC are *still* monstrous!” she asserted. “Weiss is merely. . . *tolerable*.”

“Wow, you must *really* like her. Even *I’m* not ‘. . . *tolerable’*,” I joked, mimicking her, and she glowered at me, smacking my shoulder again. “But yeah, Jacques can go eat a bag of dicks. Asshat *absolutely* deserves it, but the others are okay, from what I’ve heard.”

“Fair,” the wolfman sighed. “He had us reassigned from a guard mission because we’re Faunus. But we’re not doing this to make *him* happy, we’re doing this to support the General, and to show our friends in Mantle that the mines aren’t the only place we belong.”

Blake was clearly struggling with herself, but, haltingly, admitted, “That’s. . . admirable.”

Looking to me, Derek asked, “Is that better or worse than tolerable?”

Squinting at his hair, I replied, “Well, you’re a couple shades *darker*, so I’d say about even,” getting a few laughs from the other. “Well, good to meet you, I’ll see you around, and I look forward to kicking *all* your asses in the Vytal Tournament,” I told them, standing, Blake following suite.

The Faunus team lead grinned, “I think you’ll find these DOGGs will have their day. Hear that boys?”

The other three howled in response. Well, the lion Faunus *tried*, but it came off as a really aggressive meow, but it was the thought that counted.

Waving to them, Blake and I headed back to our table, but I was surprised by her dragging me off to the side, towards an empty spot away from others. Looking back to my team, Pyrrha was smiling indulgently, while Yang was glaring at her steak.

Sitting down, Blake sat next to me, and leaned in close. “Why did you do that?” she questioned quietly but intensely.

“Stop you from creating an international incident?” I asked right back.

“No. Yes. No,” she said, and I waited. “Why did you. . .” She mulled it over. “Why did you say that. About me.”

I frowned, “Not sure what you’re referring to but, in general? Because it’s true. Or was I wrong?”

“No, you weren’t. . .” she quickly replied, once more falling deep into thought. “Do you. . . do you think they’re right?”

“About trying to fix the system through leading by example and service?” I questioned, and she nodded, looking conflicted. “No.” At her confused frown, I explained, “It *could* work, but it assumes a *lot* of people know a lot of things are true that they might not ever hear, and what those four are doing *isn’t* twisted one way or another. If they succeed, it will be because others are using their actions in a way they like, but they could just as easily be used as a way to excuse the actions of bad actors because *those four* are shown as the perfect paragons of citizenship so if *others* don’t meet up to the *marketing* of how they’re portrayed, not how those four *actually* are, that would then be used to excuse rejecting *other* Faunus from positions they’re qualified for. Or it could go badly another way. The fact that Ironwood’s behind them helps but it’s not going to go as well as they hope, and if things go badly it *will* be used against other Faunus, something that they could be threatened with to go along with some seriously shady shit. Shit that might, in turn, be used to discredit other Faunus as a whole.”

I sighed, shaking my head, “There’s no good, perfect solution here, Blake, or if there is I can’t see it. But there are *absolutely* some options that are better than others here. There way isn’t the best, but it’s better than, well, *terrorism,* and peaceful protest works well if you’re trying a hearts and minds campaign, but then you’re playing a game of social pressure, not logistical disruption, and you *can’t* mix that with Taurus’ methods. You can convince people you’re right and they’re good for supporting you, *or* you can convince them that you’re dangerous and it’s worth it to just give you what you want so you’ll go away, but you can’t do *both.*”

Blake studied me, “You sound like being violent *can* work. Like sometimes it’s justified.”

“Because it *can,*” I offered, trying to figure out how to phrase it. Ghandi’s nonviolent resistance worked on the British Empire, because they were at their hearts good people, and they cared a great deal about what the *other* nations thought about them. Because of that, and some mistakes of their own, Ghandi’s efforts made them decide to give in.

But what most people didn’t talk about that was the fact that Ghandi wanted to try the exact same thing with *Hitler*.

He even wrote Mr. Tiny Mustache a letter trying to sway the leader of the third reich away from war, which, quite obviously *hadn’t worked.*

“Different situations call for different approaches. If you’re dealing with a society who cannot be swayed, who does not care about the opinions of those that *can* be, then soft power doesn’t work,” I slowly articulated. “If most of Atlas *truly* saw Faunus as their lessers, and cared not a *whit* of the opinion of the other countries-”

“Like they were *before* the Great War?” Blake demanded.

Slowly, I nodded. “Not that familiar with that time period, but that tracks. And then the Faunus had to fight a *war* to get Menagerie, which seems like it was the right thing to do. Then your *parents* started a hearts and minds campaign, making it a *social* issue instead of a military one, but social change is. . . *slow.* When it goes, like an avalanche, it can all go at once, but just like you need a lot of snowfall that seems to not be doing anything for a while before it’s triggered, it takes a *lot* of effort with little visible payoff before things change. And that’s *not* counting any kind of shadow war. I wouldn’t put it past Jacques to send some droids to go kill a peaceful White Fang cell, or frame them in a false flag operation.”

“Why do you keep calling him ‘Jacques’,” the catgirl demanded. “Do you know him?”

“I’ve never *been* to Atlas, but to me ‘Schnee’ is Weiss, and, besides, it’s disrespectful, or it would be seen that way by him, so fuck him,” I offered with a smile. “You’ve heard Weiss, or maybe you haven’t, but her home life was *shit*, and he was most of the reason why. But am I right about attacks on your old cells?”

“I. . . yes,” she admitted, leaning in even closer. “Or Bandits. Or corrupt guards. We found orders from the Schn-, from *Jacques* on a few of them. But when we tried to tell others what he’d done, no one believed us!”

Considering *that*, I let out a long breath. “Because he’d gotten to them, or gotten to enough people that *they* thought well of, or relied on, that they didn’t believe you, or even made a few examples, which, since he controls the media with his funds, didn’t get play, but were well known enough to show people the cost of supporting you, and. . . *okay*,” I nodded.

The catgirl frowned, echoing my, “Okay?”

I mentally chewed the problem over, coming to the conclusion that this was *not* my field of expertise.

But it *was* Pyrrha’s.

Well, kind of, and likely it was more Oz’s, and while I *wasn’t* a Faunus, enough idiots kept treating me badly because they couldn’t recognize the majesty of the Dragon in their midst that it would still benefit me, in the long run. I knew very little about the larger organization of the White Fang, the leader was a tiger-girl named after the bad guy from the Jungle Book, which was *not* a good sign, but the internet agreed Blake’s mom was cool at least.

Well, they agreed she was a *MILF,* but second to that was that she was a good person.

And it was only now that I realized I didn’t actually *know* that many Faunus, my data points essentially Blake, casual interaction with my classmates, *Amakuni* and no one else. So, step one, find out if there was any truth to the rumors about Faunus. Step two, if there *weren’t*, and they were essentially just involuntary micro-furries, then see what I could do to help the cause, only. . . *not* being an idiot about it, if at all possible.

And, with the support of a number of *Non-*Faunus, let alone *Weiss Schnee,* it’d be much easier to sell the ‘let’s all be people together’ narrative then the Faunus-only presented ‘Give us what you got’ message that came across through their peaceful protests, and that was *not* counting their ‘lets all wear the masks of the enemies of all living beings and hurt people’ bullshit the White Fang got up to *nowadays*.

“It won’t be the White Fang. Terrible name, by the way, your peaceful group should not be named after a weapon, natural or otherwise,” I mused, “And it won’t be until we graduate, because we’ll *need* the societal cache, special rights, and ability to *always* be armed that doing so will give us to make this work. . .”

“Make *what* work?” my teammate demanded.

I smiled at her. “Racial equity, of course.”