# The Problem with Penny

Penny Polendina deserved better.

Penny Polendina is a character whose narrative arc ranks as one of the most dissatisfying and disappointing conclusions to her character, right up there with Adam Taurus and James Ironwood. I truly feel bad for both her and her fans, amongst whose numbers I include myself.

Penny Polendina, for me, represented the purity and beauty of one’s soul, someone who was emblematic of the joys of living and being alive. Simultaneously, she personified the existentialist uncertainty we all face, especially when we come into a world where we have no idea of who or what we are. She struggled with reconciling her origins with her dreams, feeling that she could never have nor be who she truly wanted to be. It was by default, inherently, unequivocally, and categorically something denied to her. No matter how much she wanted to be real, she just wasn’t.

Until she realized she was. And had been all along.

And then that was taken away from her.

Penny got to discover who she was, conquer her loneliness and make life-long friends that brought her fantastical dreams to actualization. She had an arc, one that actually mattered and was largely handled well.

But we should have known the other shoe was just waiting to drop. Right onto our faces when it was conveniently above the curb.

Penny had one of the most nuanced, meaningful storylines in all of RWBY. The questions poised about identity and agency and what defines a human, as well as the validation and vindication of finding out she was capable of making friends, and discovering she was as she saw herself. A real girl – these were important concepts to explore and examine and affirm within the world of Remnant.

All that was thrown out in the final episode of Volume 8, “The Final Word”, and I have to ask the question.

For what?

For what reason was Penny killed? For what purpose was her entire arc invalidated in less than 20 minutes? For what end was the relevance of Penny and her story line in effect redacted and retroactively stricken from the record?

More importantly, why?

Why was Penny brought back, if she was going to just be killed a volume later? Why waste all of Volume 7 and 8 focusing on and building up Penny, if you knew you were going to throw that out the window at the end of Volume 8? Why did you waste our time with Volume 7 and 8 if you just side-stepped what you *wanted* to do in the first place only to end up going right back there, with two entire volumes wasted just to accommodate what you could’ve easily done from the beginning, had you not resurrected Penny in a pathetic if successful attempt to employ pathos within your audience and get them to care about your bringing back a deceased character, in effect teasing the same for Pyrrha? Of course it was never explicitly said, but if Penny could be brought back from the dead, as final as her death appeared, then what’s stopping Pyrrha from doing the same, aside from narrative interference in the form of the writers? Yes, I know Penny would’ve had an easier time to be brought back since she’s a robot and her core was intact and Pietro could afford to sacrifice more of his aura and subsequently his health in order to bring back Penny, but something you need to realize is that literally anything can occur if the writer wishes it to be so. There is no conceivable reason why they can’t bring back Pyrrha, if they were willing to do so, ultimately rather pointlessly, for Penny.

The entirety of Volume 7 and 8’s rigamarole around Penny and her return and her jaunt as the Winter Maiden and then killing her off after she finally attained humanity, which, by the way, was never necessary to validate her as a person and is actually kind of gross and undercuts her arc in yet another manner if you think about it – why did we sit through that? Why did we watch her be brought back, if only to watch her die one year later, and waste our fucking time?

I feel like I’m just angry rambling at this point, this was supposed to be much more eloquent and now here I am, sounding like a raving lunatic foaming at the mouth, only part of which is true.

I’m going to follow the formula I set with the previous character analysis on Jaune arc (psst, go watch it if you haven’t already! Link is in description below), in which I scrutinize things in a chronological order.

So to get to the end of this mess, let’s go back to the beginning. All the way back. Volume 1, Chapter 15: The Stray. But first…

# Chapter 1: Who is Penny Polendina?

Penny Polendina is the world’s first synthezoid, a robot capable of generating its own aura. This is because her father and creator, Pietro Polendina, an Atlesian scientist, sacrificed some of his own life force to imbue it upon his daughter and creation – he ultimately did this twice. Penny was wholly unique in that there only was one of her kind in the entire world – herself.

She was a feat and marvel of technological innovation; a manufactured being capable of generating and utilizing aura in combat, as was her intended purpose as a purported “saviour of the world”, a role she would eventually fulfill as the Protector of Mantle (and subsequently Atlas).

Of course, we didn’t know this at first – when Penny was first introduced, she was (somewhat) innocuous in that she just appeared to be a normal girl, no different from our title cast of Ruby, Weiss, Blake, and Yang.

Sure, she was awkward and weird and there was something off about her – not quite malevolent enough to be unsettling, but enough to give you pause and make you wonder…what is UP with her? What’s her deal?

These questions would only compound in her subsequent appearance in the next episode, Volume 1, Chapter 16: Black and White. One second she’s asking Ruby if the others are her friends, and the next she’s obliterating the White Fang, taking down bullheads by herself, and elegantly dancing about a battlefield while commanding swords she summons out of the pack on her back like it’s rehearsal for choreography class. So not only is this girl weird, as Roman so aptly puts it – [SCENE of Roman saying These kids just keep getting weirder and weirder] she’s also insanely powerful. She put a stop to Roman Torchwick’s White Fang operation effectively by herself. Blake and Sun may have put up a good fight, but it was only when Penny stepped in that Roman was forced to retreat. Talk about a powerful showing! Combat ready indeed!

Penny was, at that point, one of the most powerful characters in the show based on feats.

# Chapter 2: Penny’s Secret

Next we see of her, she’s slipped away from her friends and is in a limo, being chastised as she’s driven away by an unseen driver (with a very nice voice, might I add), who reminds her that her time will come and she knows better than to run off.

We don’t see Penny again until one of my favourite episodes of the series, Volume 2, Chapter 4: Painting the Town. But before that, we need the context of Volume 2, Chapter 3: A Minor Hiccup. She saves Ruby’s life and asks Shop Keep if he’s alright, which I always found a neat little example of her empathy, instead of just treating him as a nonfactor with only Ruby being the important one. The fact that she took the time to check in on the man whose vehicle she just totaled has always struck me as a really nice and genuine thing to do. And that was Penny – genuine as can be.

What follows is one of the most wholesome, heart-breaking and heart-warming interactions in the entire show, and one that never fails to get me in my feels. It is the moment that made me a Nuts n Dolts shipper, and the Nuts n Dolts equivalent of Blake and Yang’s heartfelt scene in Volume 2, Chapter 6: Burning the Candle.

Here, Penny is clearly apprehensive and incredibly nervous about how to justify what she just did, and the abilities she has. She doesn’t think Ruby will understand. Consider how happy Penny was to make her first friends in Team RWBY, and how Ruby was the first person to ever call her a friend. Penny felt in this moment that she would lose that friendship, that Ruby would think she wasn’t worthy of friendship or wasn’t even a real person or that Penny was a liar for keeping so big a secret from her only friend.

Penny felt she had to hide who she was at all costs – a feeling I and many other people in the LGBTDBZ community recognize all too well and empathize with. Ruby wouldn’t understand who Penny was, she wouldn’t want to be her friend anymore, and Penny would lose the only close friend she had ever had.

Ruby is doing her best to convey to a blatantly distressed and panicking Penny that she can be trusted, and that she *wants* to help her friend, she just needs her to help her understand what is going on so she can be there for her.

In one of the most heartbreaking moments of the show, Penny beseeches Ruby to answer whether or not she’s her friend, and begs her to promise to be her friend. This scene breaks me every fucking time. It’s just so desperate, so raw, that it never fails to get me all up in my feels. I feel so hard for Penny here, so bad and just want to hug her and teach myself how to bake cookies and cake so I can make them for her. Protect Penny Polendina at all costs, is what I’m saying. I guess it’s a bit of a moot point now, given what the actual fuck happened in Volume 8’s finale, but we’ll get to that in due time.

Let’s note that a normal robot would never have had the mental capacity nor ability to feel emotions, such as apprehension and dread like Penny did. She was a real girl all along, complete with real feelings and fears.

Thankfully, Penny need not have worried. Ruby lives up to her hype as a person with a soul of gold, simple and pure, and instantly reassures Penny that she’s her friend and that she promises.

It is then that it is revealed that Penny seemed off for a reason – she’s not human, or rather, she’s a synthetic person. She’s a robot capable of generating and utilizing an aura. She believes this means she is not a real girl. Ruby is absolutely on the ball though and takes her hands before affirming that she *is* a real girl, that her internal components do not matter anymore than Ruby’s does, and Penny is suspicious about how well Ruby is taking this perception-shattering piece of information.

Ruby reaffirms that Penny isn’t anything like the soulless automatons that are the Atlesian Knights, she is different in that she has a heart and soul that Ruby can feel. This affirmation of her personhood results in an elated Penny being overcome with joy and hugging her best friend and the only person who knows her secret (barring obvious people like her father Pietro and Ironwood), thanking her for understanding and affirming she was the best friend anyone could have.

A short chat about Penny’s creation and her purpose as a protector for the world later, Penny hides Ruby in the trash and goes with the soldiers, who also know of her true nature. She also requests that Ruby not tell anyone about her secret, lest she be outed.

There’s a lot to unpack here, but here’s my main takeaway:

Penny’s coming out as a synthetic person is obviously a parallel to a person coming out as queer. The apprehension, the fear, the absolute certainty that they won’t understand you, that they will reject you, that you will have just killed that relationship by merit of being who you are…the parallels are apparent. Penny herself comes across as an allegory for being queer, whether that be lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or something else. The most popular reading is that Penny represents trans women, as both groups are real women who are told by society at large that they aren’t. Let’s make no bones about it, trans women are women and trans men are men. Point blank and period.

A lot of people see Penny as trans-coded. Coding, for those of you not in the know, is the implication or suggesting of something, for example an identity, without outright directly saying it or there not being an analogue comparable in whatever medium the story takes place.

An example is Garnet from Steven Universe. She has Black lips, an afro, and is very clearly meant to draw on Black features. But gems don’t have the concept of race, and there are no “black” gems. Ergo, Garnet is Black-coded. To us, in our world, with our understanding, we recognize her as being or at least alluding to Blackness, even though that concept does not exist for the gems.

An example is the Faunus. They are a stand-in for minority groups, particularly people of colour, although I suppose they can be read as queer-coded. Though Faunus aren’t flat-out said to be people of colour or part of the LGBTDBZ community, the White Fang is a direct parallel of the Civil Rights Movement (and subsequently Black Lives Matter), and the Faunus are oppressed for their physical features.

There’s even the concept of passing, as demonstrated with Ilia, passing being the idea of “blending in” with a group and being able to pass for one of them despite not being one of them, just like how certain light-skinned Black or mixed people can pass for white.

The Faunus are coded as POC, and even though there are obviously people of colour in the world of Remnant, we don’t know if they identify or what terminology they use. All issues related to race, such as racism, slavery, fighting for one’s rights and fighting against your oppressors, are seen through the lens of the Faunus and the White Fang, leading them to be coded as POC.

That is why a lot of people believe Penny is coded as trans, due to the aforementioned reasons regarding her coming out and desire to be perceived as a girl, which, again, she is.

She even asks Ruby to promise not to tell anyone, which would lead to her being outed if she did not consent to it.

Also, if you haven’t figured it out yet, Penny is an allusion to Pinocchio from the fairy tales. If you’ll remember, characters in RWBY have to allude to or draw from fairy tales, mythology, legends, and the like. Penny’s inspiration is Pinocchio, and I love that her quirk related to lying is that she hiccups in the way that Pinocchio’s nose grows when he lies.

Penny’s previous appearances had been so short, she didn’t really get much time to develop. The end of V2Ep3 and the beginning of V2Ep4 developed her massively, and answered a lot of the questions we had. She was fleshed out, pun intended, quite beautifully and Penny definitely became one of my favourite characters then.

We wouldn’t see her again until a brief cameo later in the Volume in V2Ep7, “Dance Dance Infiltration”, whose punny take on Dance Dance Revolution I love, for the record. In case anyone is recording this. I mean, technically I’m recording this as I speak right now, but I digress.

# Chapter 3: Penny Gets Smelted

I am so fucking evil for that title hahaha.

But yes, it’s true. Volume 3 isn’t too kind to Penny, at least in the latter half. Prior to that, we see she’s absolutely wrecking Team CDNL while Ciel Soleil and her epic design just watch on from the background, probably timing it, and more importantly, she has a fun little chat with Ruby. She’s come a long with with accepting who she is, and even jokes with Ruby about an incident with a magnet she was able to play off.

Interestingly, Penny reveals that she has wants and desires in that she wants and desires to stay at Beacon with her friends. Ruby tells her neither Ironwood nor her father would ever allow it, but Penny says she has a plan to convince them.

What was the plan?

This plot thread was dropped completely. I’m so frustrated I could laugh.

Of course, the laughs just about stopped and exchanged themselves for tears when what came next came to pass. The second Penny Polendina, Synthetic Human Extraordinaire was announced as going up against the Mistress of Magnetism herself, Pyrrha Nikos, I *knew* that Penny was gonna get slaughtered. Smelted, even. Hence the title of this chapter. Pretty apt it’s chapter 3, given this happens in Volume 3, huh? What a weird, not at all meticulously planned coinky-dink.

Penny, polite person that she is, greets Pyrrha, who doesn’t respond, which I always found kinda rude, but that’s probably the Canadian in me, and also, she had a lot on her mind, so I can’t really hold it against her.

They have a lovely fight and Penny looks like she has the upper hand at one point, but of course, known Robo-phobe Emerald had to fuck with Pyrrha’s head in order to obliterate Penny from existence. And so Penny v1.0 comes to a tragic end.

If you weren’t with us back when Volume 3 was airing, and you haven’t been spoiled by now, you must realize that everyone thought Penny was gone for good. Sure, we all might have held onto the hope that there was a backup copy of her or something, but by and large, we all believed her to be as permanently dead as Pyrrha was. And Pyrrha is *dead* dead, unless the writers decide she isn’t anymore.

In one volume, RWBY took away two of the kindest, politest, sweetest, and most sympathetic characters in the entire series. Oh, and also Roman Torchwick. How weird is it that the three dead characters were all red-heads, and they all died in the same volume? Someone on CRWBY had it out for gingers and I really believe they were taking out their rage on them by killing off every red-head except Nora in a single volume.

We never got to find out what Penny’s plan was to stay at Beacon. We never got to see her spend quality time with Team RWBY (aside from the end of Volume 1). We didn’t even get to meet her teammates aside from Ciel Soleil, whom we promptly never saw again (see what I did there?).

Like it or not, Penny Polendina was dead. For good. There’s no way she’s coming back.

# Chapter 4: Penny Gets Un-Smelted

Until she wasn’t.

Throughout Volumes 4 – 6, Penny was barely mentioned, despite having been an important character. She may as well have been a footnote, or Melanie and Miltia Malachite (whom, for the record, I do really like and wish would come back; or at least, see again during the Return to Vale arc for volumes 10 – 12, assuming they’re greenlit).

Imagine our surprise when we see a familiar green laser incinerating Grimm from the sky and an even more familiar silhouette pirouetting through the sky as graceful as ever.

Yes indeedy, the bitch in green and black was back.

And some people fucking *hated* it.

They had valid concerns, to be fair. It’s generally accepted that if you kill off a character for reasons related to emotional terrorism, you do not, under any circumstances, bring them back. It invalidates their original death and makes it seem pointless and ultimately meaningless. This is why Jiraiya was never brought back in Naruto. By the same token, that same unofficial understanding was broken when Kishimoto Edo Tensei’d the fuck out of pretty much the entire cast.

To be clear, I don’t mind when characters are brought back. I only mind in the case of Penny because of how they used her *after* she was brought back. But we’ll get to that a bit later on.

Penny was back, and it seemed she was here to stay.

But that’s fine, right? We wanted Penny back, didn’t we? This was a good thing, wasn’t it?

The undisputed sweetest girl alive was just that – alive! A cause for celebration, surely!

# Chapter 5: A Cause for Despair

Apparently, Penny was never meant to stay alive permanently, according to the finale of Volume 8. So that feels like to me, she was brought back for nothing. Let’s see what happened in between her resurrection and her permadeath:

Everyone had the most underwhelming reaction to Penny’s resurrection and return. When Penny originally died, though Ruby was too busy being distracted by Mercury to witness the death itself, she was able to see the aftermath and slumped to her knees, breaking down crying at the loss of her best friend.

But when she returns from the heavens, Ruby just looks at her confusedly. She doesn’t cry. She doesn’t demand to know what happened and how this is possible. She doesn’t doubt her eyesight. She just…immediately accepted it, as though returning from the dead was the most normal thing in the world. She didn’t even bother trying to rush to Penny to hug or embrace her, to touch her, to make sure she’s real. They just launch into the awkwardly and tonally-dissonant use of comedy in Penny hyper-tackling Ruby and Ruby’s subsequent aches.

You would think that if any scene were to be taken seriously, it should be Penny’s return. Death is a huge thing and they certainly played it for drama and pathos when she died. Why should her return from death be any different?

It just seems nonsensical to me that her return is met with such underwhelming lack of enthusiasm and treated almost like an every-day occurrence. Fans have been clamouring for her return, just like they have been for Pyrrha. After three volumes, half the entire series at that point, she’s finally brought back. This should have been a momentous occasion and yet…her return is not given the proper respect it’s due, and it was disappointing to see. All she got was this stupid exchange: “This sounds…strangely wholesome. Sounds like Penny to me.” I hate this exchange so much it drives me feral. Especially how Weiss awkwardly pauses so that Blake can finish her sentence. RWBY does this a lot and I hates it. Regardless, Penny’s return wasn’t taken seriously and I didn’t like that. This should have been a portent of things to come with respect to the handling of Penny’s arc.

After establishing that she’s Remnant’s equivalent of Jesus (note how she returned after 3 volumes, whereas Jesus returned after 3 days), Penny is shown to be in Ironwood’s good graces and is one of his top confidantes, along with Winter Schnee. She knows about the Maidens and the Relics because Ironwood told her. He needed his own Inner Circle the way the as-far-as-he-knew Dearly Departed Ozpin had his in Glynda Goodwitch, Qrow Branwen, and James Ironwood himself.

And so Penny was brought into the fold of the main conflict of the series – the relics and Salem’s existence. Now that she knew, she was certainly going to be a big player in this – there would have been no need to resurrect her or have her know the central conceit of the series if she was not to be relevant to the story going forward, or at least one would assume.

Penny is part of the festivities that come about when Teams RWBY and JNR are promoted and graduate to the status of official huntsmen, no longer students or in-training. She’s her usual happy preppy self and genuinely pleased that her friends are receiving their dues and fulfilling their dreams of becoming huntsmen and huntresses. Good old Penny. Her enthusiasm is wholesome and infectious.

Next Penny is seen chatting with Ruby in the supply truck as they drive through the tundra, and Penny reveals Ironwood decided she doesn’t have time for friends. When Ruby asks how she feels about this, Penny says she wishes she could do the things she needs to do and the things she wants to do, before questioning if that is normal. Ruby assures her it is.

The interesting thing here is Penny clearly displays autonomy. She’s moved out and about as she pleases, but this is perhaps the second time she’s displayed a desire to do something that she hasn’t been told to do. Penny usually does as she’s told and obeys orders, never really choosing for herself because she believes in duty and responsibility, whether that’s to her father or the general or to the people of Mantle and Atlas. Her desires get left by the wayside, in favour of her duty to everyone else, prioritizing others before herself. Penny is selfless, but also foolish in that she doesn’t take care of her own wants and needs as well.

The first time she’d displayed a personal desire was when she told Ruby she wanted to stay at Beacon. We never saw that come to pass, due to the Pulverization of Penny, courtesy of Pyrrha, also a notorious known if unintentional Robophobe.

# Chapter 6: Agency and Autonomy

Here in this scene from Volume 7, Chapter 5, “Sparks”, we get that conversation about agency between the Nuts n Dolts gang. Penny expresses a desire to do what she wants to do in addition to her duties, but what is it that she wants to do? She never elaborates, and though we came close, we never found out thanks to that fucking Volume 8 finale.

The point remains thus: Penny expresses human attributes like wants and desires and presumably even the figurative concept of dreams, as in a goal one wishes to achieve with all their heart. Another point for the “Penny is real” column. Robots don’t show agency. They do what they’re programmed to do. Penny goes beyond that, and reinforces the thematic importance of autonomy and identity.

She goes on to aid Clover in removing the Happy Huntresses as an obstacle, using her kindness and keen instincts to achieve her goal. Kindness and politeness win the day for once. You love to see it.

Ruby, Nora, and Ren join Penny and Marrow at Robyn’s political rally/pre-emptive win celebration bash, where good old Tyrian decides to fuck shit up for everyone and kill people in some of the most ugly and stiff, uninspired and non-fluid animation I’ve seen on this show.

Penny is framed for the rally massacre, even though it was only nine people who died – how many dead people does it take to qualify as a massacre? And more importantly, how many dead people does it take to get to the tootsie roll centre of a tootsie pop?

This story line had the potential to go somewhere very interesting, but of course it was an interesting concept, anathema to CRWBY, so they didn’t explore it much. It was very short-lived and naturally left me wanting more.

Next we see her, she’s offline and Pietro reveals that the reason Penny is the only one of her kind is due to the aforementioned reasons, specifically that it requires sacrificing parts of one’s aura in order to bestow it upon Penny. I wonder, since his aura was primarily damaged near his legs, if that’s what led to his disability and subsequent use of a wheelchair, or if it’s because of old age. We’re never really told an answer for that.

Penny is among the few who were privy to the council meeting in the Schnee’s dining room, and again issues of agency was brought up here. Jacques questions whether or not they were safe with her in the room, due to the doctored footage of her massacring innocents. Ironwood dismisses his insidious claim, retorting that Penny is completely under his control.

Penny herself looks to be ashamed and uncomfortable, partly because of the ongoing doubts about her involvement in the massacre, and Ironwood’s proclamation of control over Penny would naturally cause her to chafe against such a bold claim. She’s treated her as an object, a piece of property, something that can be owned or possessed. Her autonomy is denied here, and she’s reduced to a prop, whether Ironwood recognizes this or not.

Penny’s uncomfortable expressions make it clear that she wants to push back against that statement, but she is not one to go against her superiors, and it certainly wouldn’t have been the proper time nor place in the Schnee manner anyways, particularly with Jacques within earshot.

The narrative brings up the theme of autonomy through that entire scene, as well as in the subsequent Penny scene where she goes to check up on a disgruntled Winter, who excused herself from the meeting after her uncharacteristic and totally justified outburst (uncharacteristic in the sense that she is usually so cool, calm, and collected, not in the sense that it was bad writing for her).

Penny asks her if she’s okay, and Winter responds that she’ll be alright, she just let her emotions get the better of her. Penny inexplicably asks what she means, despite knowing full well what emotions are, having expressed them dozens of times herself, including this very instance when she conveys worry and compassion and empathy for her friend Winter. When Winter brusquely dismisses her question with a “You wouldn’t understand”, a dejected Penny replies “Oh…right…”.

She presumes that Winter means she won’t understand because she’s a robot who would fail to comprehend or compute the experience of emotions, but to her credit, Winter simply meant that this place holds meaning for her specifically, so she wouldn’t understand the context and history of her growing up in such a toxic and invalidating home, especially since Penny wouldn’t be able to relate given that she has a loving and kind father in Pietro.

Penny tries to validate Winter’s experiences with a comment of Winter having just spoken from her heart, but Winter isn’t having it and says that was precisely the issue. Given that Penny is such an emotional and open-hearted person, she ultimately recognized that Winter was right and that she didn’t understand due to this fundamental difference in perception – Winter thinks being emotional is a weakness, whereas Penny thinks it’s a strength.

# Chapter 7: \*Mariah Carey voice\* YOU got me feeling E-mo-tions!

Winter takes her emotions for granted because she’s human and experiences them all the time, and although Penny has clearly expressed emotions multiple times, her questioning of what Winter meant kind of leaves the impression that she doesn’t understand what emotions are? This harkens back to her asking Ruby if wanting to do what she wants and what she needs at the same time was normal, as Penny doesn’t understand norms or societal expectations. I suppose it could be argued that Penny is coded as autistic in addition to being coded as trans, so you love to see it.

Circling back to the point, Penny believes that emotions are a gift and Winter believes them to be something to be conquered and compartmentalized. There would be no seeing eye to eye on this one.

Penny is among the huntsmen and huntresses who go out to stop the Grimm invasion after the heating grid is turned off by Watts, and she and Ruby team up to kill a Goliath. Her cool as fuck Floating Array weapon got to do their laser thingy again and I really love it, have since Volume 1, Chapter 16: “Black and White”.

When everyone is recalled to Ironwood’s side, Penny is summoned to accompany Winter as she goes to claim the Winter Maiden’s power. It’s here where Penny really shines. For the first time, she stands up to her friends and speaks her mind. She doesn’t believe that Ironwood is right in sacrificing the lives of those in Mantle to save the lives of those in Atlas. She verbally clashes with Winter over this, standing her ground and sticking to her morals, insisting that Winter’s feelings *should* matter, and questioning whether or not the deaths of all those people even bothers Winter.

When Winter says it’s for the good of the greater rather than for the few, Penny scathingly replies “I do not see what is good about any of this.”

Petty Penny also throws Winter’s words back in her face when Winter says she hopes the transition of the Maiden’s power from Fria to herself doesn’t hurt her, quoting her line of “You said your personal feelings do not matter.” Winter ultimately acquiesces and concedes the point, acknowledging that Penny is correct and that acknowledging and wrestling with your feelings reassures you and forces you to recognize if you’re on the right path, and that this is what makes one human. Given that Penny has also experienced emotions, this would imply that despite her metallic, robotic, automatic, supersonic, hypnotic, funky fresh composition, beneath it all, she is human.

# Chapter 8: A Tangent

I’m going to go on a tangent here for a bit, so bear with me. I don’t think Penny should have been human. There was no need for it. She was perfectly fine being a robot, and the narrative had gone out of its way to insist and reassert the fact that Penny, regardless of her body or origin, was a real girl. This has a history that runs all the way back to Volume 2, Chapter 4: “Painting the Town.” Ruby noted that she could feel Penny’s heart and soul, and confirmed she is real. This was also implicitly confirmed by the fact that Penny has an aura at all, when it’s noted that you need a soul to have an aura (given that an aura is the outward protective manifestation of your soul) and that’s why the Grimm don’t have aura, because they’re soulless.

Given Penny has an aura, and therefore a soul, she was real from the jump. Not to mention that later in this very same volume, she acquires the Winter Maiden powers in the Volume 7 finale and we *know* that it has requirements in that only young women can become Maidens. Given that Penny became a Maiden, that confirms she’s a real girl, or she would not have been eligible for the Maiden powers at all.

I think that it was a mistake to turn her human, as it feels as though it invalidated all the narrative foundation and building blocks for Penny being confirmed as a real girl, and implies that Penny only became “real” after she became human. I’m not a fan of that implication, and thus even though it was interesting to see her as human, and of course presumably the ultimate end goal of her character arc, given that she parallels and alludes to Pinocchio, who also became a real human boy, it was a narrative folly to actually make her human.

But I digress.

# Chapter 9: Not A Tangent

Looping back around to my pre-tangent point, Penny’s arc of underscoring that she’s real despite her robotic body was reinforced when she confronts Cinder for orchestrating what occurred to her back during the Vytal Festival during the Beacon Arc in Volume 3, Chapter 9: “PvP.” (aka Penny vs Pyrrha. Or Pyrrha vs Penny. Who knows. Sidebar, I loved that title because it’s a play on their names, but also Player vs Player, a term found in video games, and I just think that was super duper clever and whoever suggested it deserves a raise and also to not be sent to the Shadow Realm.)

Penny is shown to show some manner of anger at what happened to her, since it was an exceptionally traumatic event. Cinder threatens to obliterate her completely this time if she doesn’t step aside, and asks what Penny thinks about that.

Penny says, “I think…it gives me personal feelings.”

I can only imagine Cinder going “What the actual fuck, what does that even mean, what does that have to do with anything, is that an allusion to something that happened earlier, is it an inside joke, literally what the fuck prompted that, what is this robo-bitch on about, am I on Candid Camera, what in the fuck.”

So they fight, they rabblerouse, they skirmish, and wouldn’t ya know it, Penny opts to save Winter instead of going after Cinder. She’s shown yet again to have agency, and that moment was the culmination in her arc regarding autonomy. She had options, she had a choice, and she made it. You love to see it!

She chose to jump in and talk to Fria. She chose to assist her when her time was near. She chose to become the Winter Maiden, even though she was pressured into a position that left her with little choices. Still, no one forced her to take up Fria’s hand. She opted to herself.

Just like she chose to flee with Team RWBY, instead of staying behind and assisting Ironwood. Penny has made plenty of choices of her own free will. Keep this in mind.

The narrative made a huge show of Penny becoming the Winter Maiden, with that glamour shot, the close-up shot of her eyes and the Maiden aura flare, and how this was a huge moment and massive plot twist that no one saw coming. This was an important development, a game-changing twist, a serious plot point. They’d been building up with dialogue all volume long about how it would be Winter who would become the Winter Maiden, but ultimately it was Penny who got it. Who saw that coming? I’m sure some people did. I didn’t, but I’m not exactly the most observant person if I’m being honest.

Due to Penny now being an essential plot point, given that she’s a Maiden and Maidens are important because Relics are important, she was cemented into the cast as an important player, like it or not. And she very much did not. Regardless, if ever there was any doubt before, there could be none now – Penny is 100% one of the most important characters in the show.

Volume 8 certainly seemed to think so.

# Chapter 10: \*sigh\* Volume 8.

Penny’s screen time was elevated, and she was absolutely a central player in the grand scheme of things. But change isn’t always good. Along with her Maiden Powers seemed to come a drastic change in personality and mentality.

Penny began to value herself less, and was more willing to sacrifice herself. For the first time, she seemed inexplicably suicidal. She was content to die, to throw herself in harm’s way, to offer herself up and let whatever happened happen. We see this multiple times throughout the volume, this drastic change in Penny’s outlook, and how she was more than willing to embrace death whenever an opportunity for it arose.

This was not like Penny. Penny who valued emotions and the lives of others. Penny who was grateful to exist and found joy in living and was always so happy and pleasant. This Penny was sour and dour, depressed and withdrawn, uncharacteristic and moody. I understand the Maiden Powers are a big thing and she feels pressured into accepting them, and the daunting responsibility of being a Maiden and thus tasked with and burdened by great power, great responsibility, blah blah blah, but she CHOSE to accept them.

If she hadn’t, Salem’s faction wouldn’t have been able to acquire them because no one knew where they would go (provided Penny or Winter hadn’t been the last person in Fria’s mind, which is a big caveat, I’m aware). This would have kept the powers out of play because no one would know where they’d have gone because they could have gone to someone completely random, and likely far, far away.

Penny CHOSE to undertake that responsibility, she CHOSE to take Fria’s hand and accept the Maiden Powers, she CHOSE to accept the fate of being a Maiden.

So why was she so upset about it?

I imagine it might have something to do with her having felt like a tool or something to be controlled and without autonomy as the Protector of Mantle, and then having that responsibility quadrupled tenfold with the responsibility of her Maidenhood, and thus even less able to exert autonomy because she had to think of the greater good as always. She wasn’t allowed to be her own person, to have choices only impact her, because her being a Maiden meant that she had to be extra careful and adhere to strict restrictions, certain parametres and factor in every possible permutation and outcome, with respect to how her actions would impact others and their safety.

Still, that’s no reason to suddenly become suicidal. It can be overwhelming, but she has her support system right there. She knows Ruby would never lead her astray. She knows she has good friends in Teams RWBY and JNPR 2.0. She knows she can trust her father Pietro and Maria Calavera. She wasn’t going this alone. She wasn’t by herself. She wasn’t without help.

So where did these suicidal ideations come from?

We see it first when she offers to give herself up to Salem in the hopes that Salem would leave and not destroy Atlas. This was nonsensical writing. Penny knows better. She knows that Salem is evil incarnate. She knows she is an immortal being who has threatened the world for millennia. She knows the Grimm answer to her. She knows how big a threat Salem is.

In what universe would Penny actually believe what she was proposing? In what world did Penny truly think Salem would receive the Maiden Powers in the form of Penny, and subsequently the corresponding relic, the Staff of Creation, and just hitch up her skirt and turn tail and go home? In what scenario did this make any lick of sense?

Spoiler: it didn’t. It doesn’t. It won’t.

Penny was proposing that she be sacrificed to the literal demonic she-bitch satan witch with great tits as though this was a smart plan that had any chance of working. She knows that meant death. So why was she so hellbent on considering it? Why was she so depressed? Especially when the visual narrative flip-flops back and forth between her being sullen and forlorn, and her being happy and cheery? Where’s the consistency? The continuity? She seems to change fundamental aspects of her personality from scene to scene.

The next time we see Penny, Ironwood is trying to guilt-trip her into returning to his side, and more of her self-doubt shows. Sad Penny is sad. You hate to see it. At Snow Shoe Shipping, she expresses to Ruby how she doesn’t like it when friends fight, and clarifies that she means with Winter and Ironwood, who were their friends prior to Team RWBY’s being attacked by the Ace-Ops.

Penny seems susceptible to Ironwood’s guilt-tripping, believing him when he said that any subsequent deaths would be because of Penny, and it’s up to Ruby “Gaslight This, Bitch” Rose to talk some sense into her bestie. Penny expresses how she wishes she wasn’t the Winter Maiden, and yet again this underscores Penny’s ability to have desires, yet again reinforcing the “Penny is real” theme.

# Chapter 11: PvP (Personhood vs Plot Device)

Names are integral to identities. It’s how you distinguish yourself, and identify one as a sentient, autonomous being. So when Penny rebukes May Marigold’s calling her Robo-girl with “And my name is *Penny*”, she’s yet again reinforcing and reasserting herself as a person. That was a nice scene to see. Especially when the next time May addresses her, she calls her by her name. Perfection.

That makes it all the more unfortunate when CRWBY shoots themselves in the foot with such a contradictory notion presented in this scene.

Penny being capable of allowing her father to remote interface into her and take literal control over her body is so invalidating towards the themes they’ve been pushing of her autonomy and personhood. People don’t get their body hijacked by their fathers. Or anyone really. I think it’s a really cool ability, but to me, it spits in the face of the persistently established “Penny is her own person” theme.

The only saving grace is that she shows apparent distaste for it and hesitates because she clearly does not like being controlled, even if it’s by her father.

They follow that up with Penny yet again being invalidated by her father and friends, who seem to make decisions for her about where she should go. She wants to help her friends, but her father and friends insist that she stay out of Salem’s reach, because apparently, before she is her own person, she’s the Winter Maiden and a glorified Relic-fetcher. What she wants doesn’t matter. It’s what the greater good wants. Even though Penny is the greatest good that they’re ever going to get.

Penny is clearly upset about this decision, but she doesn’t contest it for some reason. Why? Just a couple of episodes ago, she insisted on attending the mission to infiltrate Central Command, even dramatically and sillyingly showing off her Maiden aura flare eyes to reinforce her steadfastness and implacability with respect to that decision. But now she’s back to being meek and controllable Penny who does what everyone else wants despite her own interests, affirming this sentiment with a “I guess we all have to do some things we would rather not.” That makes it clear where she stands on the subject, and still, it’s not enough because Penny the individual takes a backseat to Penny the relic-fetcher.

This goes a long way in setting back the narrative thread of her being her own person, when she’s denied the agency and autonomy to make decisions on where she wants to go and what she wants to do. Not a fan of that at all.

Of course, now the Ace Ops had to chime in with some fun little gaslighting. Penny knows that she would never hurt anyone. Penny knows she’s not responsible for Salem’s actions or the consequences and casualties that result from them. Penny knows that Winter is safe *because* of her, not in spite of her. I seem to recall Penny literally choosing to prioritize Winter’s life over the Maiden Powers or fighting Cinder or protecting Fria. Penny saved Winter’s life, and here the Ace Ops are trying to guilt-trip and gaslight her into believing everything is her fault and Winter nearly died because of her, and that Penny stole the powers instead of being left with few options regarding taking the Maiden powers (but still options nonetheless), *despite* the fact that Penny knows better. And it’s working.

Penny is consistently reduced to the grandiose title of Relic-fetcher. Give the relic to Salem. Keep the relic away from Salem. Keep the relic away from Ironwood. Open the vault and give the relic to Ironwood. Her personhood matters not to these people, only that she can do a service for them.

Still, Penny shows that she has got plenty of bite in her four-on-one fight against the Ace Ops. This was a good fight, all things considered, and once Idiot, I mean, Harriet snatched one of Penny’s swords from Floating Array free, I knew some shit was about to go down. And down it did go.

This would be the beginning of a horrible, terrible, no good, very bad plot point that I can see why it might have had to happen, but that doesn’t mean I have to like it. The Penny gets hacked plot line.

# Chapter 12: Penny Gets Hacked

And this time, not in the literal sense, nor by her own wires!

Yet again ramming down the “Penny is a person” plot point is Penny once again trying to go help her friends, only for Pietro to shoot that idea down by right of fatherhood. Maria voices what the narrative really wants you to think: “Don’t you think Penny’s had enough of people telling her what to do?”

If that isn’t blatant development of the “Penny is a person” plot point, I don’t know what a plot point is.

Before she gets hacked, though, she gets to have a pretty fun fight with Cinder in Volume 8, Chapter 5: “Amity”. This was a rematch to their last one in the Volume 7 finale, Chapter 13: “The Enemy of Trust”.

Cinder raises the claim “You’re just a tool to be used!”, once again bringing Penny’s personhood and autonomy into question, but Penny retorts “You do *not* know what you’re talking about!”

But Cinder isn’t done here. Oh no. She knows that’s a sore spot for Penny, and she digs in deeper: “I serve no one! And you wouldn’t either, if you weren’t built that way!”

Penny splutters a retort, reaffirming that she makes the conscious choice to fight for people who care about her, and that no one forces her to or makes the decision for her.

Two knock-out laser blasts later, and Penny is once again trying to make choices of her own accord, y’know, the way an autonomous person would. Her father again tries to shut that down, out of concern for her safety and fear of losing her, and goes on a diatribe about how he doesn’t want to lose his daughter again (side bar, does anyone ever wonder why Penny is white? Like, Pietro made her from scratch, and he’s a black man. Why did he choose to make his daughter white instead of black like him? Obviously black fathers with white daughters exist, but you would think that a black man would opt to create a daughter in his likeness or image, of which Penny only has superficial qualities that resemble him (freckles and the pink bow). It’s almost like white is the default or something…hmm…must investigate later…), and how he wants to see her live her life, to which Penny gently replies that she’s trying.

Pietro recognizes that living her life means making her own choices, and finally consents to let Penny do as she pleases, including bolstering up Amity and boosting it up long enough to send out the message Ruby recorded.

Penny has a really beautiful scene here, and it just is so magnificently shot and I love it. Whoever did this part, kudos to you and a thousand blessings.

Finally comes the hacking. Watts replaces Penny’s chip with one of his own making, and because the swords sync to communicate with each other so Penny can direct them, the virus influences her too and begins to take over. Penny literally has to fight for her personhood (if you’ll notice, this entire video I’ve been emphasizing the term personhood as opposed to humanity – there’s a reason for that) against the virus that sees her only as a robot, a program or system to be overtaken and infected.

So that leads to this heartbreaking scene (assuming you have a heart, unlike me) of Penny fighting for her personhood, her identity, her *life*, and losing. Which of course goes a long way to try to undo what they’ve done about Penny’s autonomy, calling it into question, the narrative asking whether or not Penny is a person or just a tool, an operating system to be hacked. It directly undermines what groundwork they’ve laid before regarding her autonomy, and it’s completely baffling.

Next we see her, she’s conveniently fallen out of the sky right in front of the Schnee manor, where everyone else just so happens to be. Convenience coincidence is conveniently coincidental. She’s brought in, and Blake says something I truly, truly hate: “She lost consciousness…and she’s…leaking.”

What a fucking awful word to pick. I recognize that Penny isn’t human, but that was so incredibly dehumanizing. Objects leak. People bleed. Penny is bleeding. Those are her internal components, literal fluid from inside her. It’s her equivalent of blood. She’s bleeding. To say she’s leaking is to say she’s an object and it was so fucking rude and disrespectful and I hated everything about it. Whoever wrote that in the script, shame on you, shame on your cows, and fuck your tamagotchis in particular.

Klein says he doesn’t know what she is, but at least refers to her damage as a wound, the way one would call such in humans. He, a complete stranger, respects Penny’s personhood, unlike her friend Blake, apparently.

Penny viciously bullies a man with several personalities, and is blinking in and out of consciousness and autonomy, and in a moment of lucidity proclaims she doesn’t want to do it, it presumably being either her current freakout, or more likely, her being summoned and compelled to go to the Vault.

Nora, as the voice of the narrative, flips back to the “Penny is her own person” before it inevitably and immediately undermines that soon enough I’d bet, with her saying that no one can force her to do what she wants, and that it’s only a *part* of her that is compelled to, and to not forget about the rest, essentially paralleling Blake’s earlier advice to herself.

Of course, not too long after, the walking and talking “Penny isn’t a person, she’s a tool to be hacked” plot line rears its ugly head about and she bullies Klein some more, before revealing that she’s going to open the vault and then self-terminate. This is interrupted by the goodest boy on this show (fuck you, Zwei), the Hound.

The Hound takes Penny out after a brief struggle, and then she’s next seen trying to head for the Vault, only for her friends to try and stop her.

Penny struggles with her autonomy and is fighting the virus’ instructions, and everyone teams up to prevent her from heading to the vault and self-destructing.

# Chapter 13: Insert Snappy Title Here

Here’s where things go wrong.

Penny begs Ruby to kill her, so she can ensure the Maiden powers go to her. (They ultimately don’t even end up going to Ruby anyways, instead having Winter select Penny even though she promised the powers to Ruby).

Why is her first, immediate, instinctual answer to solving her problems suicide? Or murder, rather.

Why is she so gung-ho on dying instead of begging them to help her find a way to beat this virus?

Why does she advocate for her own death as though that will solve everything?

Remember how earlier she wanted to sacrifice herself to Salem, and now she wants to die? Where the fuck was this characterization coming from? Where was the happy-go-lucky Penny Polendina we knew and loved? The perky one we’ve seen this volume even? Why is she sporadically all doom and gloom and the biggest advocator of her own death? What kind of message is that sending? Especially if we take into account the themes associated with Penny. If we factor those in, how does it come across? “You’ll never be free, kill yourself”? Is that the message they want their audience to take away from this? Suicide is the answer? The only option?

Penny is the ONLY character to advocate for her own death in this entire show. It was an extremely dark moment, introducing the concept of suicide to the show. That’s a heavy subject. It’s a loaded topic. And Penny just says it, wishing for her own death. That’s extremely fucked up.

Let’s sprinkle in some “Penny is a person” again with Nora saying that Penny is more than a machine, and Ruby affirming that. But what does it matter if Penny’s a person, convenient as it may be when it suits the plot, if all she wants is death? What’s the point of validating her personhood if the outcome is just terminating one’s self? Sending one’s self to the recycling bin? Alt + F4-ing yourself out of existence? It’s a moot point if the end result is just her death. She ceases to be a person then, so what does her personhood matter if that’s the angle being pushed?

Once Penny has the virus under control, Ruby yet again tells Penny that she has a soul and that she’s not a machine.

But what’s so bad about being a machine? It’s who Penny is. She’s literally a machine. She’s not *only* a machine, but you can’t deny that Penny is also a robot. My question is, why is her robotitude so reprehensible to the cast? Why can’t they accept Penny for who she is, instead of who they believe her to be? There’s nothing wrong with Penny as is. She was perfectly content because she realized she was real. But these comments from her friends come across to me as microaggressions, every time they disparage robots in front of Penny. Penny is not only a machine, but she is still a machine. It just gives me “we’re not racist, we’re colourblind, colour doesn’t matter” vibes and I really don’t like it.

On the other hand, I suppose if we hearken back to the trans-coding, I suppose it could be seen as a positive thing, such as “you’re not your body, you’re who you are and how you feel”. That would be a positive message to send out to those with body dysmorphia because of how it pertains to their gender, but it still feels problematic to me for them to ignore what she is as though what she is, is inherently bad.

Fast forward to Team RWBY + Penny heading to the vault, and Penny opens it by virtue of her Maidenhood. Time freezes as she’s about to self-destruct, courtesy of Ambrosius and the virus respectively, and Ruby yet again affirms Penny is atypical and I believe it’s Blake that says her soul is who she is. And so Ambrosius executes their convoluted plan (which included a new Penny robot being made with the old Penny’s parts, taking the virus with them and leaving a soul left, which apparently required manifesting a new human body for Penny).

Penny has to witness her own death in the form of her old body, which was no doubt traumatic and extremely fucked up. But instead of having to process such a fucking sadistic thing to witness, she immediately goes on to hug Ruby in the most adorable scene in this entire fucking show:

[Show clip of Penny asking if hugs always make you feel this warm inside, Ruby saying yes, and then Penny saying “more!” and hugging the rest of Team RWBY.]

# Chapter 14: Puppet No More

So Penny is human now. I’ve already addressed how I feel about that, but to recap, I think it undermined her entire character arc regarding personhood and being a real girl, and implies that the only *real* way for Penny to be considered real was to become human. She was already a person despite that. She was already real despite her robot parts. Everyone had told her so. I think it was a mistake for CRWBY to write it so that Penny became human.

I understand the whole Pinocchio allusion, and perhaps it makes sense in that context to have her arc about being “a real girl” resolve with her becoming human like Pinocchio did, but A) they don’t have to follow the fairy tales they draw from to the letter (and they obviously don’t; Cinderella is evil here, so that’s probably a big clue); and B) it really feels like they undercut all their talk of her being real because in the end, she became human when she was perfectly fine being a robot. CRWBY didn’t have to humanify (yes, I know humanize is the word; I just like the sound of humanify) Penny as the end result of her character arc about personhood. It feels tactless.

If we were to continue our reading of Penny as trans-coded, this feels like it would be akin to Penny only being considered a real girl once she’s transitioned, as opposed to being a real girl no matter what her body was or how she presented. I don’t think that’s a positive message to be sending out, but maybe I don’t know what I’m talking about. Who can say? Not me, cause I don’t know!

I want to talk about how stupid it was that Penny, mere feet away from the gateway to Vacuo, didn’t go through it because she heard (I think) Blake cry out for Yang as the latter fell. There was no reason Penny should have been walking that slow. If we’re being realistic, she would have already gone through the barrier by the time that happened, so unless she was standing still while off-screen or suddenly became a turtle Faunus and walked super dee fucking duper slow, there was no way she should’ve been around to hear that cry.

But of course, CRWBY wanted Penny present, so present Penny was, regardless of how nonsensical.

Penny and Cinder fight, and Penny yet again throws herself in the line of danger, ready to sacrifice herself so readily, in order to sate Cinder’s lust for power. This is the third time she’s been so inclined to sacrifice herself in a suicidal way, and this is extremely uncharacteristic for Penny. This behaviour only started in Volume 8, and came out of left fucking field. You hate to see it. You really do.

So Penny, Jaune, and Weiss are fighting Cinder, and Cinder divides them and obfuscates their line of sight and hamper their vision. Penny, who had just moments ago been hovering in the air, inexplicably decides to lower herself to the ground, where the fire literally prevents her from seeing anything including her teammates or the enemy, and is in prime position to get pierced by Cinder.

# Chapter 15: Inquiring Minds Wanna Know

What, I ask you, the fuck.

Why on Remnant would Penny literally actively enter a position that hampers her vision instead of having common sense and floating up higher above the flames so she could see her enemy and know where her friends were? She did the stupidest thing she could do, and Penny is smarter than that.

This is 100% an instance of the writers having to shoe-horn something in in order to make their end goal work. They wanted Penny dead, because fuck gingers apparently, someone on CRWBY has a hate-boner for redheads, and instead of doing it organically or making it make sense, they had to literally make her stupider and make poor decisions in order to achieve the end result they wanted.

Was there literally no other way for Cinder to kill Penny? Or mortally wound, rather? Did you have to give Penny the idiot ball in order to make your idiot plot point work? Again, whoever wrote that scene in particular, fuck your tamagotchis. I hope they choke. The tamagotchis, in case that wasn’t clear.

I feel myself getting stupider every time I watch that scene. WHY would you lower your altitude and interrupt your line of sight instead of flying, the way she had been all fight, all episode, and not being a sitting fucking duck Faunus?

It was stupid. Stupid stupid stupid. I hated it. I hate it. I will always hate it.

Taylor McNee does a really good job of Penny’s piercing scream, though. I love her voice and I just wanted to say kudos to that.

Even stupider is what follows. Penny is mortally wounded by Cinder, and Jaune offers to heal her, and her response is no, there’s no time.

Bitch, what?

Come again?

How the FUCK do you know how long it takes Jaune to heal someone? You’ve literally never seen him do it. She pulled that out of her ass, making an assumption that it would take too long even though she had no basis for making that claim.

What’s even more infuriating is that she doesn’t deny he can heal her, that he can make sure she lives, she actively chooses death the way she has consistently been doing all volume. First with Salem. Then with Ruby. Now with Jaune. She has asked to be killed exactly twice, which is two times too many.

So not only is Penny the leader and person behind #KillPennyPolendina2k21 hash tag, she goes out of her way to deny herself the opportunity to live.

JUST a handful of episodes ago (okay, more like 9 episodes ago), she told her father that she was trying to live her life.

So that was a fucking lie.

Why is Penny so hell-bent on dying? Why does she vocally advocate for her own death multiple times? Why does this robo-bitch wanna die so fucking bad?

What’s even fucking WORSE is that she says this stupid fucking line:

“Let me choose this ONE thing.”

That line implies that she hasn’t been able to choose anything thus far.

She chose to take on the Maiden powers. She chose to disagree with Winter when it came to the topic of her life mattering. She chose to save Winter instead of prioritizing Fria. She chose to go with Team RWBY when she got the Maiden Powers, instead of staying with Ironwood. She chose to fight Cinder despite her father’s pleas. She chose to boost Amity up despite her father’s protests. She chose to fight for her friends who care about her. Penny has chosen lots of things of her own volition.

So that was a fucking lie.

Then she gets Jaune to kill her because Miles wanted to have that glamour shot and scene-stealing cry-sob-what-the-fuck-ever, and she thought of Winter as she died. I’m not going to get into how stupid it is to have your healer kill a teammate, I’ve already articulated my raving loon-like thoughts in my character analysis video essay on Jaune, called Jaune’s Arc. If you haven’t watched it, the link is below. Also check out my first video essay, the Butchering of Adam Taurus, because I rage way more in that one and I need the vindication.

Regardless, it turns out to be Winter who Penny thought of in her dying moments, so that promise to give Ruby the Maiden powers? Apparently, the writers forgot.

So that was a fucking lie.

Yet another character disparages machines right in front of Penny, who was a machine, and seriously, it feels like microaggressions every time they talk shit about machines like she isn’t one as well. There’s nothing wrong with machines! It’s always treated as such a derogatory term in this show, without considering the implications it has on a character who is literally also a machine. More than just a machine, yes, but a machine nonetheless. Stop demonizing machines for whatever reason. It’s just like the red-head thing. Someone on the CRWBY staff really fucking hates machines.

I did think it was cute that Penny echoed Winter’s words from last volume, correcting her when Winter said that Penny would be gone.

[I won’t be gone. I’ll be a part of you.]

I love little callbacks like that, and the role-reversal of it all. It’s just cute.

# Chapter 16: The Problem with Penny

The problem with Penny is this. Though the narrative touts her as a person, insisting she’s her own entity with autonomy and agency, the narrative also contradicts itself constantly by treating Penny like a plot device that exists solely to further the story. Penny the person doesn’t matter. We literally never get to see her accomplish her desires (think back to when she said she wanted to stay at Beacon in Volume 3, or when she said she wanted to be able to do both the things she wants and the things she needs in Volume 7), and almost everyone makes decisions for her.

Penny has made several choices herself, but more often than not, she’s following the orders or suggestions of someone else. Whether it’s Ironwood or her father Pietro or Ruby. Penny’s agency is called into question multiple times, and the narrative flip-flops on where it stands with her.

My biggest problem with Penny is that the story took a happy-go-lucky character, inexplicably made them depressed and suicidal in the latest volume, and decided to frame this weird quasi-suicide-murder thing as a good and smart choice instead of literally every other possible choice there was. It also goes out of its way to make stupid choices and excuses like Penny can’t be healed despite her having no idea how long it takes, and Penny choosing her death instead of fighting to stay alive and begging and pleading for her friends to help her experience life.

To take a character who got a brand new lease on life, who was free of the threat of enslavement and violating her bodily autonomy since she could no longer be hacked as a human, to make them consistently try and choose their own death instead of wanting to live like she had expressed earlier in the volume, and then to kill her off for the third and final time after you brought her back before just so you could kill her one volume later…that is disgusting. That is cruel. That is absolutely asinine.

Did I cry when Penny was killed? Yes. I cried for over a week. Her theme song “Friend” fucks me up to this day.

But was her death well-handled? Absolutely not. They made the solution to a suicidal character’s problems to be suicide. They framed suicide as a good thing for the sake of the plot, framed it as the right choice to make and shooting down any other possible suggestion, and then had the audacity to put up a trigger warning at the beginning of the episode regarding death and how distressing it may be for some viewers.

I’m all for trigger warnings. I think people should be able to consume media without fear of being hurt. But I also think that this was slapped on for the shock factor of Penny’s death. Where was this for Clover’s traumatic death, when you buried that gay, who was clearly queer-coded? Where was this warning for Pyrrha when she suffered a traumatic death as well? What about Jacques, when he was obliterated to smithereens?

This was performative. It doesn’t feel like they actually care. They would’ve been consistent with it if they really were looking out for people’s mental health. I guarantee you that they won’t bother doing it for other deaths, and it’ll go right back to the way it was.

Suicide is never the answer. Having a character advocate for her own death despite having options is never the answer. And treating her as property while giving lip service about how she’s her own person with the capacity to make choices is disingenuous at best and down right bastardly at worst.

Penny Polendina deserved better.

At least now they can’t butcher her anymore. She, Adam, and Ironwood are safe from further character assassination. Small favours.

I’m sure there’s more I’m missing, but I’m tired, gay, and homophobic. This video took way too long because I lost interest, but then I banged out a majority of the script in a couple of days. If this video seems choppy and the flow feels off, it’s because it probably is. C’est la fucking vie.

Next video is a toss-up between Ironwood or Cinder. I kind of want to do another video on a female character, since the last two were males, but we’ll see what we see.

Of course, that’s assuming I don’t pull a Danny Phantom and go ghost because I needed some recovery time.

Either way, thank you for watching and/or listening, and I hope your day is as fantastic as you are. Except you, CRWBY. You know what you’ve done.

I’m just kidding. Y’all have a good day too.

Ciao for now!