**Chapter Eighty-Three**

Raye wasn’t sure when the world had gone nuts.

His first year at Beacon had been fairly hard, he’d thought. He and his team had come together during their initiation, the four of them working hard to take down an Ursa, which had *seemed* like a great accomplishment at the time, like they’d really done something difficult*.* They’d learned more, and they’d come to dread the weekly field trips, but had worked hard, meeting their quota of Grimm each time, up to a dozen, and felt good about it.

Staring at the *hundreds* of Grimm coming their way, in their sector alone, suddenly that didn’t feel like such an accomplishment.

On the bright side, from the looks on the faces of the teams on the level below, the ones that *his* team were covering, he wasn’t alone in feeling that.

When the Grimm had first started pouring out of the ruins, he’d started to panic, the sheer *number* of enemies so large that it *had* to be a Tide, something that a Huntsman might only see half a dozen of in their *entire career*, and wasn’t something they were supposed to face until their *graduation exam.*

Then one of the freshies had started firing, and Raye had thought they were panicking, *not that he blamed them,* until he realized how *regular* the shots were, and then narrowed his eyes. Using his Semblance, *Zoom*, the masses of Grimm coming at them shifted into sharp focus, and he saw that *every* shot was a kill. Now, *he* was a sniper, his *Sunlit Spear* turning into a scope-less rifle, though one a bit smaller than the small currently firing girl’s. He’d trained with it, a lot, and could make those kinds of shots himself, but he could *only* make those kinds of shots *because* of his Semblance, while he’d heard the kid in question had some kind of movement-based power.

The lizard Faunus, the one that people said was the Headmaster’s *apprentice* had been giving out orders, which the visiting sophomore team from Mistral had followed, and, while the *other* freshie teams had on the right-hand wall looked nervous, starting to firing wildly, the teams on the left wall acted like they were on the range, plinking away regularly, and not like there was a freaking *Tide* bearing down on them, numbering well over a *thousand!*

“Should we start shooting too?” Mysti asked, beside him, the seal Faunus holding her pistols tightly, as nervous as *he* was, but keeping her head in the game.

“You heard Goodwitch, only when the Grimm get *over* the wall,” he reminded her, himself, and the other two on his team, not sure how the four of *them* were supposed to handle *that.* Mysti could split her focus with her Semblance, firing both machine pistols independently, and Mell could direct how the explosions from her rocket launcher moved, and Coop could make sure his bullets passed harmlessly through ‘friendlies’, but against *all of that?*

More of the freshman started opening up fire, slowing the Tide, dozens, then *hundreds* of Grimm, dying in hails of gunfire, explosions, and *ice* of all things, but even then it wasn’t enough. Looking to his left, to the next sector over, he saw that Professor Tim had taken to the field, the *three* Sophomore teams stationed on the second level all firing already, in addition to the several teams on the lower wall, Grimm trying to climb up, while the fire-covered Huntsman tore through the masses of black flesh, a long blazing whip made of pure fire scything through them, while a flaming sword was in his other hand, the man using it to cut through an Ursa in an instant.

Looking to the right, he heard Coco’s Gianduja roaring, the fire-Dust minigun unloading on the horde, standing on top of the wall at the bottom of the V where the two sides met, and firing almost indiscriminately. The three Sophomore teams on the upper level there were shooting as well, and they were *all* slowing down the Grimm, but the Tide was *still* pushing forward, until an orange haired girl from Atlas moved to jump *down* in front of the machine-gunning fashionista, standing on the *ground* instead of the wall, a dozen floating swords spinning to clear an area, while the rest of Atlasians team fired down around her, opening the area more, but *those* three stayed up *on* the wall. The Atlesian ginger directed the swords forward into a ring pointed at the enemy, which spun, glowing, until a *giant laser poured out*, easily four feet across, and it whipped across the sector, clearing it *entirely*.

*. . . what.*

“Raye, they’re here,” Coop prompted, and he turned his attention back onto *their* sector, the Grimm *finally* reaching the wall, which was bad, but at least it gave him something to do.

Then the lizard did *something* with the white-haired girl, combing her ice with bright green flames, which hit the Grimm, but stuck *into* them, not seeming to do much.

Until the Dustcaster shot down a single fireball.

Then *their* entire sector *exploded*.

***. . . what.***

Just like the girl from Atlas, the battlefield was wiped clean, but while *she’d* taken out a four-foot section of the entire sector in front of her, leaving the tops and bottoms of the dead Grimm to fall to the ground, the *Lizard’s* attack *emptied the* *entire area*, the only black on the battlefield the scorched ground, before he jumped up on the parapet, said something, popping out *wings* of all things, then fell backwards off it, twisting and flying for the still charging Grimm, because, you know, waiting for the horde of monsters to come to *him* wasn’t enough!

“Huh,” Mell commented dully, as Raye’s entire team stared, the entire left wall, except for the archer in blue and the Schnee girl jumping down after him as well, “That’s. . . a thing.”

“You think we should go help?” Coop questioned, *clearly* not wanting to, but the freshies were being *downright suicidal*, and it was only the fact that the Sophomore team from Mistral was *right there with them* that kept Raye from giving the order.

Watching as the lizard flew, more of his rainbow fire was breathed out onto his wings, and Raye shook his head. “You heard Ms. Goodwitch. We stay here,” he stated, the small girl with the red cloak having switched her sniper rifle into a scythe, which she twisted and horizontally ‘stood on’, before- *oh.*

She pulled the trigger, and must’ve loaded *Gravity Dust* rounds into it, because the tiny girl was *blasted* forward, like a caped missile, shooting past the lizard in seconds. The girl with the grenade launcher had turned *her* weapon into a great long-handled hammer, which she *also* leapt up on, flipping it upside-down to stand on its head, holding the handle like she was gripping a ship’s mast, and clicked a hidden trigger. A series of pink explosions, likely from the weapon’s internal reservoir of grenades, blasted from the back like bursts of rocket-propulsion, accelerating the girl until she passed the Faunus on the other side, waving jauntily to him as she did so.

Scythe-y hit first, putting herself into a nauseating looking spin, the blade of her weapon like an enormous buzz-saw, but a Beowulf leapt up at her from below, even as an Ursa Major opened large arms the advanced bear Grimm’s white chest plates set to protect it from her attack for the single moment she’d be stalled before she was pulled down.

However, *right* before the wolf’s claws would’ve caught her leg, the girl’s body burst into a flurry of red petals that flew *around* the Beowulf’s grasping fingers, past the Ursa’s snapping jaws, turning *back* into the girl right behind it, *still* spinning just as fast as she’d been before, taking the black bear monster’s head as she shot forward into the mass of unprepared Grimm, cutting a deep swathe before turning into petals once more, arching up into the air, reforming to shoot herself into *another* group, spinning up into a buzz-saw once more.

At a different point in the wave of Grimm, the orange haired hammer wielder put something in her mouth as she closed in on the Tide, and an advanced Boarbatusk came bouncing outwards. The bone-backed pig Grimm had pulled tight into a wheel of white spikes that launched itself at the girl, as a Minos came charging behind it, head down, to pulverize the girl when she dodged the boar, showing the kinds of tactics that made Tide’s *so much more* *dangerous* than just being a mass of Grimm.

Raye watched, getting nervous, as the orange-hair girl got closer and closer, cutting her dodge dangerously close, *stupidly* close given how, unlike her, the Borbatusk *couldn’t* change direction mid-air, but surely she was going to dodg-

She *didn’t.*

Instead, at the last minute, she whipped her hammer around, slamming it up into the arcing Grimm, matching the run-away truck’s worth of momentum with her own, stopping the pig’s rotation in an instant and launching it up, and the creature rag dolled, *dead*. But *its* force was transferred into *her* as well, and the hammer-wielder was launched downwards, right onto the head of a surprised-looking Beowulf, which exploded into black mist as it came apart from the force of her landing.

The Minos was still charging, but there was a flash of lightning within the dark cloud of Grimm-smoke, only it was. . . *pink.*

Blasting out of the dark vapor, faster than she’d moved before, the hammer wielder charged the Minos head on, trailing pink electricity. The Grimm that’d take Raye’s *entire team* a solid minute to eliminate brought its head down, horns pointed forward to gore the cocky girl, as she blasted forward, but surely the girl at least had the good sense not to jump for its *heavily armored head*, moving to the sid-

*No,* she moved *directly* in front of the creature, landing just for a moment to jump up *at* the Grimm’s armored skull, its toughest, *most defended point*, hammer rising in a blast of pink as arcs of the same colored energy covered the girl, but it wouldn’t be enou-

*Crack!*

Even from here, he could hear the impact, though it was faint under the cacophony of battle, as the girl slammed her hammer right into the Grimm’s. The massive skull was snapped upwards, arms that’d been reaching out to grab the girl if she dodged going slack, and the eight-foot-tall beast-

*“Did she knock it off its feet!?”* Mell demanded, the greatclub-wielding girl having tried something similar when *they’d* first fought a Minos, at the end of last year, only for the bull-headed Faunus to barely be pushed back.

“And broke its neck, it looks like,” Coop added as the Minos started to smoke the way that only *dead* Grimm did. “What’s her Semblance? Some kind of strength enhancement?”

“*Must be,”* Mell grumbled, like she was personally offended by the younger girl’s performance.

Speaking of performance, the lizard Faunus had almost reached the closing line of the Grimm Tide, and blew out *more* rainbow flame, like the myths of dragons of old, but instead of moving like normal fire would, it reached forward, building, then started spinning, like a giant *drill*. It slammed into the Grimm, bringing the Beowulfs up short, the creatures weirdly trying to both jump away from and claw *into* the attack at the same time, before the Faunus hit the stalled ‘drill’ from behind, causing it to *explode* outwards, covering the attacking creatures as, faintly, Raye could swear he heard the Grimm *scream.*

All three freshmen continued to cut their way through the Grimm, moving so fast that the Tide couldn’t close in on them, a full *third* of the front trying to curl up after them, but most of the Grimm were still charging forward.

And the rest of the three teams moved to meet them.

The blonde girl leapt up from her run, shoving gauntlets behind her, which both detonated in blooms of combustion Dust flames, yellow-orange instead of deep red, blasting herself forward like the hammer-girl had. Instead of hitting the biggest thing she could see head-on, though, she instead fired herself right over the heads of the Beowulfs, twisting mid-air, to punch one’s mask so hard it shattered as it died, using the recoil from her hit to twist and hit another, then a third, then a *fourth*, pinballing across the battlefield.

She wasn’t doing as much damage as the others, but she was dragging *attention* to herself, and, when they started to close, she launched herself into the air. The punchy girl unleashed a flurry of blows in the direction of the Grimm that were climbing over each other to get to her, striking nothing but air, but the combustion Dust rounds were firing off explosive payloads instead of propelling her away. They hit and created a rippling set of explosions, pulverizing the packed-together horde, as the girl used the *slight* recoil to give herself a moment to load a new set of shells into her gauntlets, turn, and then blast away to another group of Grimm.

Elsewhere, the dark-haired girl was doing something a *little* similar, having jumped up and ran along the heads and shoulders of various Grimm, slashing down with twin blades at any weak point in range. For a moment, Raye’s grip on his rifle tightened, and he prepared to fire as an Ursa unexpectedly caught the girl in one claw, and he sighted on it to free her, but a dark shape blurred, and a kusarigama buried itself in the creature’s eye.

Tracking the ribbon-like rope attached to the curved blade, the dark-haired girl in the now-*dead* Ursa’s claw faded out of existence, and he spotted the brunette instead at the end of the line, holding onto the weapon. *Some kind of fate-changing Semblance?* Raye thought, having *heard* about ones that could cause things to happen differently then they *just had*, but they were both *extraordinarily* rare and *tremendously* costly in Aura to use.

He would’ve dismissed it before, but seeing the *insane* amount of pain these freshies were laying down?

He’d believe it.

Watching the girl, though, as she ripped her weapon free, then leapt up into the air again, he saw as she suddenly changed direction, flying outward over another group of Grimm, but he *also* saw another version of her hang in the air for a moment, before fading as the ‘her’ that’d been caught by the Ursa had.

*Oh, a distraction Semblance,* he thought, those a *lot* more common, though the fact that the girl was using it to *move around* was something he hadn’t seen before.

And the dark-haired girl was *moving,* twirling her blade by its ribbon so fast it blurred, even to his sight, the flashes of light indicating she was making the gun component of her weapon fire to make it move *even faster*, doing *just* as much damage as the red-cloaked girl, though the distraction-using girl had twist to hit the larger Grimm carefully, while the smaller freshie just *tore through them too.*

Trying to track the others, there was a glimpse of grey that was out of place amongst the black, white, and red of the Grimm, and some of the creatures started to fall, the guy who *used* to be wearing green now completely colorless as he darted throughout the Tide which. . . couldn’t see him?

*No,* Raye thought, they *could,* but they weren’t coordinating like they should, and only the ones that could *physically* see him started to react, but by then the boy had moved on, hamstringing Beowulfs, Ursas, and more. He almost never *killed* them, but as they struggled and flailed, they slowed down the Tide more than the dead falling to the ground left by his teammates did.

And then there was Pyrrha Nikos, the only member of either freshman team that Raye knew the name of, who dived into the Tide easily, weaving through the rush of Grimm, living up to her title as the ‘Invincible Girl’. He watched as the professional fighter reached to her backpack, which was new, and there was a flash of silver and black, before all the Grimm around the girl just. . . *died,* cut in half in an instant.

A pair of Ursa Majors, surrounded by Beowulfs charged her, and Nikos leapt to the side, stowing her shield on her back over her pack, twisting mid-air to dodge a rolling Boarbatusk, until the Grimm Bears were directly behind each other, than brought up her free hand, which held a small silver knife, an Ice Dust crystal embedded in its center.

Levelling the almost comically small blade at the charging Grimm, Raye thought he’d see the girl Dustcast, but instead the weapon turned pitch black and vanished.

*Along with* ***everything*** *in a thirty-foot line in front of her.*

The Grimm at the edges of the ‘blast’ were frozen solid, half shredded, but the space in front of the woman was torn up frost-covered ground, and past thirty feet, for another forty or so, Grimm were falling over, dead, ripped to pieces, only a Minos still standing, its armor cracked and filled with tiny steel fragments, Raye’s *Zoom* Semblance pushed as hard as he could just to make *that* detail out.

He'd *never* heard of her doing *anything* like *that* in the Mistral tournaments, and he was sure that he would’ve if she had*.*

Not that the Mistral group was slacking either, the guy in full armor and with the greatsword was trailing blackness, something about him unsettling Raye the same way he’d felt the first time he’d seen an Alpha Grimm. With a roar that reached the defenders, the man swung, hitting the front line of charging Beowulfs, a ripple of force visible from how it blew about the dark smoke the others had started to leave behind, sending the wolf-monsters flying, cut in half, and clearing the area even as said smoke started to pour *into* the man, who seemed somehow to loom *over* Raye despite being several hundred feet away, and below the sophomore huntsman.

His teammates were right behind the dark-blue clad knight, the katana-girl disappearing into a long crackle of neon yellow lightning that struck out, deep into the Grimm that started to fill the gap the knight had created, before bouncing back, ending on the larger man’s other side, the enemies she’d passed through coming apart, sliced into chunks.

The Tide pressed in on them, and the knight jumped forward, coming down with a slash that cratered the ground, killing Beowulfs and lifting an Ursa up, which was struck by a distant arrow, burning with Fire Dust, and exploded, as the shirtless man with the other two jogged forward, firing shotgun blasts into the few Grimm still moving around.

From behind him an advanced Beowulf leapt forward, but the unarmed man just turned, casually shifting his weapon to a gladius, and accepted the bone-clad creature’s stabbing claws to the chest with a smile. The seven-foot-tall wolf monster was stopped cold, and paused, confused, the shirtless man not even having been moved back an inch, as he laughed, casually brought up his sword, and killed the distracted Grimm, burying his weapon in its chest, where a normal creature’s heart would be, and ripping it free.

It dropped, and the knight turned his head, causing the shirtless man to laugh and nod, as Grimm approached them from all directions, and the two went back to back, swinging outwards, the Knight doing a majority of the damage.

An Ursa Major came charging in, and reared up, only for a bolt of neon-yellow lightning to hit it and bounce off, landing next to the other two, turning into the katana-woman, the huge Grimm bear’s head coming apart, and her teammates included her in their formation without hesitation.

Between the three teams, almost *all* of the incoming Tide for their sector was tied up, only the occasional enemy coming through, and easily handled. For several *minutes* they fought, killing *hundreds* of Grimm, until, with a feeling of **Dread**, Raye saw two *huge* shapes come out of the ruins, one of them breaking apart the archway it muscled through, as they started to charge, not only the Fort, but *Raye’s Sector.*

Toggling his scroll to the command frequency, Raye reported, trying not shake, *“T-Two Alphas Spotted! Both Minos! Requesting Backup!”*

He’d seen one at the end of his Freshman year, but that was a single Alpha, a Beowulf, *much* smaller than the *thirty-foot tall minotaurs* that were charging them, and it’d been held down by three of their teachers. Not *two* of the beasts*,* *charging,* with *no staff to be found.*

Assistant-headmistress’ Goodwitch’s response didn’t help, either, as she reported, “*Understood. Follow directions. Assistance will be given as soon as possible.”*

“What does she mean, ‘*As soon as possible?’”* Mell echoed, frowning.

Pointing a pistol to the left, Mysti noted, “Looks like they’re busy.”

Following her aim, the rest of Raye’s team looked, only to see that the burning form of Professor Tim had grown, the man now looking like a forty-foot-tall demon of flame, deep red wings opened wide as he struggled to hold back an Ursa larger than *any* he’d ever seen before, the size of the airbus they’d taken here, possible bigger. The spikes on its back looked like sword blades long enough to chop a bullhead in half, claws entirely encased in serrated bone, chest a solid mass of amor, the protrusions from its mask, which looked a little like ears on a *normal* Ursa, now appeared to be a pointed crown.

And then he realized what he was looking at.

“There’s *three* Alphas?” Raye demanded, as the call went out, all of their Scrolls chiming loudly as the order to *retreat* to the next level up on the fortifications came down the line.

*“Four,”* Mysti corrected, pointing her *other* pistol, showing that the sector to their right was trying to fight an Alpha *Beowulf,* bigger than the one he’d seen before, the creature deadly fast, as opposed to the slow might of the Alpha Ursa, the orange haired girl with the floating swords dancing *just* out of its reach, jerked this way and that at the last minute, like she was being dragged, Coco and her team working with the Atlesian, but they were *barely* handling it.

The freshman and sophomores of their sections looked up at Raye’s team, clearly confused, unable to get a good look at what a *shitfest* this entire *crazy* mission was, only able to watch the three teams out there fight ,and pick off the occasional straggler, so the sniper stood, waving them all back, looking downrange, to get ready to lay down covering fire for the three teams in the thick of it to retreat under and. . .

*They weren’t coming back.*