

Your heart nearly leapt out of your throat when Mitsuru called you on the emergency line. It was a good thing that you were already on your way back from the jog, and the stay in the dingy hotel that Xenovia became obsessed with. In the end she had a lot of fun. Getting over her quick first time wasn't much effort. She had completely forgotten about it by the time you decided to call it a day and clean up. When you walk through the door and into the lab, Rias is already waiting with a pensive expression. Mitsuru, as usual, is busying herself with a new gadget.

"What's going on? Did they launch an attack?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes," Mitsuru explains. "One of their number, disguised as a human, has been planting monitoring devices on infrastructure around the city. If someone foolishly tries to remove them, they'll explode. Whatever it is they want the data for, it can't be good." She finally looks up from her work and comes face to face with the three of you. Mitsuru's eyes narrow, and she gives you the dirtiest of dirty looks; Her eyes flickering between you, Chun and Xenovia as if to imply something untoward.

You shrug, "What's with the look? Xenovia wanted to join in on the training."

"I highly doubt that description of events," Mitsuru states, "It's statistically more likely that you were completely unable to keep it in your pants."

She's right, but you don't want to admit to doing that in front of your friend. You decide that it'll be easier to plead ignorance and move on. Nothing good ever comes from worrying about other people's love lives all the time. You shake your head, "No, we went and did some exercise together. Jogging in the park, stretches, that kind of thing."

Xenovia nods; "Yes, and *then* we had sex."

Why did you know she was going to say that? Privacy is so, so hard to get when Xenovia is around. Rias just laughs it off with a smile, but Mitsuru is clearly more put off by the frank admission that you were having sex with Xenovia and Chun-Li an hour ago. Xenovia is so earnest and confident in saying it that she doesn't even realise she has done something wrong until you pull on her shoulder and give her a disappointed dad-face.

"Well, that's lovely," Mitsuru says, "Please refrain from informing me in the future, Xenovia."

Xenovia bows, "Apologies."

"Never mind that," you interject, "What are we gonna' do about these bombs?"

"I'm already printing copies of this for you downstairs. They should be here any second. Once they're both calibrated and tested, we'll need to split up, find them, and defuse them before a hapless bystander tries their luck and loses their fingers."

That's not a pretty image. These aliens are a real bunch of assholes. Mitsuru brings out her phone and forwards a map to everyone in the room. The marks are scattered through various business areas around the city. It would be a serious issue if they disabled their access to power and communications. But it'd be easier to do that than attach bombs to them – it's clear they're trying to gather information.

"I contacted the police and informed them of the situation to make sure nobody gets hurt. You may have to disguise yourself or sneak around the cordons."

That's going to be tricky. The last thing you want is to get identified by the authorities with an unregistered gun in hand. What will their reaction be if a total stranger walks up to one of those bombs? You should have summoned a girl that can turn invisible, but it's too late to fix that now. You can't even think of one on the spot like this. The extent of the changes to Mitsuru's lab is made apparent as a small gap on the table behind her opens and elevates a small metal tray into view.

"Ah, there it is!"

She retrieves the copies of her defusal device and lays them out on the table, conducting a series of short tests with a shoddily built electrical circuit to make sure that they work. Mitsuru must have hooked up an automated printing system to put these together. She doesn't even need to head downstairs into the basement backrooms to get them. Nice to see that she's putting that hard-earned toy money to practical use.

An idea springs up in your head, "Wait, couldn't we teleport to each explosive? Then we wouldn't need to worry about the police."

Rias shakes her head, "Teleporting to and from a location takes a huge amount of magical energy, I'm afraid. If I do any more than bringing us here and taking us back – I won't be able to defend myself effectively. Something we are taught to never do."

"Xenovia?"

She is also pessimistic, "I'm afraid I have not yet learned this particular skill. We will have to do this the hard way. Flying above the cordons using our wings should make this easier for us."

Rias agrees, "That's right. Leave some of those bombs to us."

"Well, I'd feel better if you stuck with Mitsuru," you say, "Maybe we should summon someone to come and help." You reach into your back pocket and withdraw your deck of cards. Akeno, Asia, Koneko, Venelana, Motoko, Chun-Li and Lala. There's one name and face that jumps out at you as the most experienced with this kind of thing.

*"MOTOKO KUSANAGI! SHATTERING!"*

Motoko appears in her trademark 2<sup>nd</sup> Gig purple jacket, leotard and white pants. You do wonder how many different outfits she has stashed away in her apartment. It doesn't take long for her to realise what's going on. She smirks and puts her hands on her hips, "Let me guess, you need me for something?"

You bow your head apologetically, "Sorry about the call on short notice."

Mitsuru walks over and shoves one of the devices into your hands; "The enemy has planted a series of monitoring devices slash bombs around the city. If we don't act quickly, someone is going to try and remove them and die in the explosion. And since you insist on me having an escort..."

Motoko's phone pings as the map is shared with hers over the private network. She accepts one of the defusal kits and checks the locations. Mitsuru pulls out her own phone and separates the bombs into four different coloured areas. One for you, one for Xenovia, one for Motoko, and one for her and Rias. Rias glances at Mitsuru with a sly smile. Have they been talking about something behind your back? Mitsuru's expression is unreadable. You don't know if she's pissed off or happy about your well-meaning concern.

Motoko studies the hastily-constructed defusing device with a frown. Maybe those stray green and red wires are making her doubt the capability of its build and features. Mitsuru doesn't have time to make it look pretty. It has to do the job and do it quickly. She refrains from complaining and studies her route. She'll have to ride in on the bike with you, Rias and Mitsuru can teleport, and Xenovia will fly over using her wings.

Mitsuru finishes off by placing a set of canvas bags onto the table, "Once you've disconnected the bombs and shorted them, put them in these bags. I'll need to study them later."

You laugh, "I don't think that the police will like us stealing explosives from under their noses."

She shrugs, "If they have a problem with it, they should disarm them before us."

'Finders keepers' is not something generally applied to an attempted terror bombing, but Mitsuru does work on a different level to everyone else. Everyone is resolute in doing their part to avert bystanders from getting hurt, so you grab your stuff and head over to the bike – while Xenovia, heads out of the front door.

"Stay safe!"

Mitsuru nods as Rias' magic circle drags them back underground. She's going to have a head start on dealing with this. Motoko takes one of the spare motorcycle helmets from beneath the table. You swing your leg over the top and identify yourself with the system, revving the engine back to life. The roar of this thing always sends a shiver down your spine. Mitsuru wasn't joking when she said she tuned this thing up. You can hear it coming from across the city.

Motoko climbs on behind you and wraps her arms around your stomach with some serious force. You're certain that she could keep hold of the bike just using her legs, but she's getting touchy-feely since you decided to make this relationship official. You have no doubt that she can handle this. Transforming into your suit, you hit the throttle and shoot out of the garage door and into the main yard. You navigate around some of the leftover junk and out onto the main road.

You already know where your first target is. The traffic is already being redirected away from the affected areas by the police, but you blow right through their roadblock and into the nearest business centre. There are dozens of police cars and vans parked around the area. They pay surprisingly little mind to the transformed man and his hanger-on blasting through their carefully arranged perimeter.

At least not until you get close to the target. Motoko leaps off of the bike and runs over before they can stop her. You don't have time to stop and see if the thing works, you keep on driving to the next. Your HUD displays the location of Motoko and all of the other bombs. That way you can co-ordinate who defuses what without having to say a word. The lack of an explosion tells you that the plan worked. Motoko's location begins moving quickly to the next. As a cyborg, she's too agile and strong for any of the policemen to catch her. Even if they do lay a hand on her, she'll make quick work of them using her CQC skills.

But when it comes time to do the next bomb on your own, there's still a bit of fear in your chest. Bless Mitsuru for all of the things she does, but you've seen some of her work fail before. No number of computer simulations can avoid that. Failing that, you hope that her and Lala's work on the armour is good enough to stand up to a close-range blast. The police haven't gotten to this one yet, going with a wider reaching containment and evacuation strategy. You leap off of your bike and run up to the electrical box.

The strange, spider-like device looks like something they'd use. You swallow your fear and slip Mitsuru's box over the top, touching the exposed metal to the wires that form the internal circuit. With a push of the button, a magnetic force tugs on the outer casing while an electrical charge begins to be pushed through. You pull the bomb away and breathe a deep sigh of relief as it doesn't detonate in your hands. Into the old canvas bag it goes. Hopefully Mitsuru can refine the concept using the leftover pieces.

The police finally catch on to the fact that someone is messing with their operation. A gang of four appear at the other end of the side street and demand that you stop. You ignore them and hop back onto the bike, taking off before they can do anything. You hope that the others are being careful – flying would be a very useful ability to have right now! Motoko has already dispensed of another. The dots on your map are disappearing at a rapid clip. But you know that it isn't going to be that easy. The invaders are watching their precious stream of data being disabled in real time. They'll send a drone or some soldiers to try and stop you.

Rias is going to have a lot on her plate.