

It put you on edge, but somehow everyone managed to get away without being collared by the police. Every explosive monitoring device was recovered and stored safely in a blast-proof chamber that Lala had built in the laboratory. Mitsuru and Rias had tried to engineering a situation where they could summon Asia and cover up some injuries she had received, but both her and Rias were too honest with you to keep it under wraps. You understand that Mitsuru thought you wouldn't be able to come help in time, but you asked that she call you regardless next time just in case.

Aside from that, Mitsuru was so eager to begin reverse engineering the components taken from the bombs that you had to remind her to sleep every now and again. They're small and low-power, but the simple system used to transmit the data did include a CPU system unlike anything you can find on earth. These are computing units that surpass even the fastest of NASA supercomputers, capable of sorting and threading an immense load without breaking a sweat. Mitsuru quickly reached the conclusion that building the machining necessary to produce your own will take a lot more than just toy money. Rather – it will be completely impossible.

With many reserved for parts, the few that remained were for the sole purpose of cracking open and trying to figure out how they worked. Unfortunately, even the combined intelligence of Lala and Mitsuru wasn't enough to solve that particular puzzle. A week after the bombs were defused and they've made almost no progress. Even Lala thinks that they're far beyond the technology level of her own intergalactic empire, which really boggles the mind.

On the seventh day you open the door and walk in to find Mitsuru sprawled out flat on the floor with a despondent emptiness to her gaze. A clearer sign than any that she has been completely and utterly stumped by her current project. When things don't go Mitsuru's way, she tends to get like this and loses a lot of her motivation.

You look around the lab for the pink-haired terror, "Where's Lala?"

"I sent her home yesterday."

You sigh and hoist a selection of groceries up onto one of the empty tables. The CPU has been disassembled to some extent, but its slow and painful going lest she break something important.

"Any news on cracking this thing?"

"No."

"You have to have *something*."

Mitsuru rolls over and climbs back up onto her feet, listlessly poking through your shopping and picking out something to eat. "We understand the requirements for plugging one of these into our own systems. We'll need an immense cooling solution, lots of memory, and a power supply that I'll have to order custom, but it should be possible."

"Isn't that the big thing?"

"We were lucky that these bombs also included a miniature motherboard. Otherwise, none of that would be tenable. In terms of discoveries made by us that require any actual thinking, no – we have nothing. Having them will make simulations and calculations lightning fast, but understanding them would be even better."

"How fast we talking?"

Mitsuru calculates an estimate in her mind, "Presume you ask me to find you three girls who match our requirements. Polyamorous, willing to help, in love with a fictional version of you. Each one of those choices multiplies the amount of time needed to locate a suitable universe to pull them from, and there may be more factors depending on the person in question. The current system is *always* working. I have a hard-coded list of all of your favourite things, and it repeatedly scrubs the multiverse for ones that match. From input to pull, it takes around three months at max."

"Three months? That means you were working on this long before you told me about it."

"I wasn't sure it would work. Anyway, once I have a suitable universe it's stored for later reuse. Saves us time and computing power, and makes connecting with other girls easier. With this new CPU, we could hypothetically cut that time from three months to a few days."

"And they're throwing these things into explosives?"

"It's all about perspective. They must have CPUs even *more* powerful than this somewhere. This is disposable hardware to them."

That's a very terrifying thing to imagine. Just how advanced are these guys really? Mitsuru is already poking and prodding at her sample with a screwdriver. But you have a much better idea on how to take care of this, "I have an idea."

Mitsuru throws her tools down and sighs, "What are you thinking?"

"Lala's great, but a few more smart girls might be just the thing we need. The ORC has a lot of the combat duties covered already, so let's invest some of our stones into solving this mystery. How about Bulma and Android 21? Combine them with Lala and you'll have a world class scientific team."

Mitsuru considers your choices before nodding, "Sounds good."

"Really? I thought you'd have something to say about those picks."

She scoffs, "I'm humble enough to know when I'm out of my depth. A fresh pair of eyes can even help a genius like me. The only thing that matters is that they're intelligent enough to assist."

Humble, she says.

"But isn't Android 21 kind of murderous?" you posit.

Mitsuru laughs it off, "Oh, don't worry about that. I did a lot of digging to find a universe where she's both alive, and less vicious when in her other form. She'll still have her split personality, but it shouldn't pose a threat to anyone but our enemies." Those must be the multipliers she was talking about. More specific conditions that demand more work.

"That sounds like a lot of effort."

"Investment is everything. Spending time and money now will speed things up in the future. I had a feeling that you'd recruit some more smart girls to help me, so I went through the list and calibrated a set of them to match our needs. The differences are mostly minor. I know you like it when they stick to their *original* characters."

Mitsuru walks over to the pressing machine and double-checks that her hand-picked version of Android 21 is lined up and ready to go. The last thing you need is to accidentally summon the original version who wants to eat everyone. Perhaps a bevy of evil girls aren't entirely beyond your reach with these new revelations – you have always liked the baddies.

“So, Android 21 and Bulma it is.”

Mitsuru nods and presses the button. The machine whirs to life as more of the interdimensional matter is ground into a fine powder and embedded into the data structure of the card. A spurt of steam escapes from the unsecured edges. Hydraulic pumps force the lid back open, revealing a pair of brand-new cards for you to use. Though in this case, Mitsuru is one the benefitting the most from their assistance.

Mitsuru checks the meter on the monitor, “You have enough for seven more.”

Seven more cards. You still want to keep a few in reserve in case you need a specific power; but seven should be enough headroom to add a couple more without issue. You’ve been seriously considering hiring some help to look after the mansion. While using your huge pile of dirty merchandising money would suffice, you also want to take the opportunity to enhance your options. The combat maid is a staple – cleaning, cooking and even providing defence for the premises from would-be attackers. Mitsuru is probably not going to take such a charitable view on you hiring a maid though.

“You look like a nervous child about to ask his mother for a new video game,” Mitsuru comments dryly, “There’s nothing you can say that will surprise me. I already compiled the damned list of worlds we can pull people from. So out with it already!”

“Ugh. Belfast.”

“I see,” she replies. You feel a cold sweat starting to break out as she stares at you. A single key press switches the targeted universe, revealing that she had indeed prepared for such a request ahead of time. Without any further debate – she presses enter and forges the card. “Don’t abuse her work ethic, whatever you do.”

“I just want a little help around the house,” you say defensively. You are, in no way, shape or form, thinking about how absolutely massive her chest is or how cute she looks in her maid uniform. Those are entirely incidental to your decision.

“What’s with the sudden sense of shame!? We’re long past the point of worrying about that, idiot.”

True. Very true.

“Anything else we’re missing?” you ask, curious as to what Mitsuru is thinking.

“I may be smart, but someone who’s skilled at formulating a coordinated crisis response would be helpful. I don’t have any experience in that field – and this incident with the bombs only made that clearer.”

“Like a... superhero? What about Barbara Gordon?”

Mitsuru snaps her fingers, “Batgirl? That’s a great idea. Intelligence and planning will be no problem with her around.”

“Are we even allowed to do western characters?”

Mitsuru gives you a strange look, “I never said you couldn’t. I didn’t *region lock* the interdimensional summoning device, idiot. Go nuts – summon whatever superheroes you want.”

It’s just a change of tact from what you usually do, that’s all! What would your dedicated readers think if you suddenly started summoning a bunch of new, unprecedented characters? Mitsuru isn’t

even waiting for your confirmation. She's already entering the details and printing out her card. They'll just have to get used to it, you suppose. The new haul is complete. Bulma, Android 21, Batgirl and Belfast. You hold the spread of cards in your hands; now you just need to hope that they all decide to cooperate with you.

"Let's start with your new science team, shall we?"

"Go ahead."

You grab the Sledgehammer from the table rack and slide the cards into the chamber. Lala, Bulma, and Android 21. You feel a little on edge about introducing two new team members at once, but hopefully everything will go just as smooth as it did before with the others. They should be friendly enough.

"By the way, what Bulma is this? Are we talking pre-marriage?"

"She's older to preserve some of her scientific skills, but no, she never married Vegeta in this timeline. That has some knock-on consequences, but nothing too drastic." True to form, Bulma's card displays her in an older state – with short hair, makeup and a tight red dress. You agree with Mitsuru on some level. Pretty much Rias' entire family has been put out by her selective universe search, but on the other hand, they still exist even if you aren't summoning them. There are a seemingly infinite number of other universes where there are other widowed copies of Venelana.

It makes for a change of pace to have someone before their latest incarnation, at least.

"SHATTERING!"

Lala, Bulma and Android 21 appear before your eyes. Both Dragon Ball girls are really sexy, but you can ogle them later when everything is straightened out with them. Android 21 remains completely impassive with her arms crossed, but Bulma's reaction is much more emotive.

"Hey, I was in the middle of something there!" Bulma complains, though her simmering anger quickly dies out as her eyes land on you. You have never seen someone pull an about-face as quick as this, as she immediately ignores everything Mitsuru is saying and descends on you like a rabid tiger. She wraps herself around your left arm and flutters her eyes at you, "I'm sorry, I didn't realise that a handsome guy like you was waiting for me!"

"Oh, hi Mitsuru!" Lala smiles.

"Would you mind explaining where this is?" 21 demands.

Mitsuru is unflappable even in the face of such a powerful woman; "Wouldn't you know that already? I made sure that both of you were familiar with us before I summoned you."

21 remains sceptical, "You mean to say that this is real? It seems more likely that someone has created a simulation that features you, as you are nothing more than figments of one author's imagination."

Bulma laughs, "Keep talking! That means I can keep this guy for myself."

This is going to take some explaining.

