

The next few days are comparatively quiet versus what you've become used to.

Naturally – there are still occasional attacks by gangs of mooks into various areas of the city, but it feels like even the aliens aren't putting forth an honest effort to actually defeat you. With everyone going through the motions, Mitsuru takes the time to advance her various projects. Even they are struggling to find purchase at the moment, or rather, find the illegal materials Mitsuru needs to finish building the various devices.

You float bringing Revy and Balalaika through to hook her up with some criminal networks, but she shoots it down in short order. Both of them would need to spend significant time and resources to form a connection like that, time which would be better spent doing things the 'hard way,' by brute forcing it until someone relented and took the money.

But you note it down for later. This isn't going to be the only anchor built, after all.

"Tired of working your fingers to the bone? It's time to enjoy a getaway from your daily life, without having to compromise with your schedule! The new dream-luxe hotel is now open on the corner of Fifth Station. Enjoy a luxurious evening away from your worries with our world beating service!"

Yet despite all of the things that need to be done – you find yourself splayed out on the couch watching bad TV like a vegetable.

"This slice of paradise doesn't need to break your bank. Our deeply immersive holiday experiences pack all of the fun, sights and sounds into a single place, without burdening you with troublesome airport travel or losing your head over booking!"

This damn ad has been dominating every commercial break for the past week. Where the hell did a local motel get the funding to saturate the airwaves like this? They must have some serious venture capital behind them to fund these expenses, there's always a bunch of cash sloshing around for stupid ideas like this.

"How the hell do you managed to look so bored with two dozen fawning girlfriends?" Mitsuru quips from the bench.

You fire back, "Why did you bother building all of these compressed space laboratories below ground when you still end up using the old garage for everything?"

"Soldering some circuit boards does not demand an expensive laboratory."

"Well, everyone is busy at the moment."

You pull out your 'special' phone and check the status indicators of your summoned girls (and Issei.) Pretty much everyone is occupied with something important at the moment. It's a sea of small red icons next to names and images that represent each person. Even if they were available – you're not in a date organizing mood at the moment.

"I think Barbara ended up telling some of her superhero friends about me."

"She did?" Mitsuru murmurs.

"I think Supergirl swung by and prodded holes in her story. She ended up letting the truth slip, and now she wants to meet me too."

"She'd be extremely powerful. It would be a large escalation from your other summons so far."

“Huh? Android 21 can crush a planet if she tries hard enough. You don’t get much crazier than what happens in Dragon Ball.”

Mitsuru tilts her head in mixed-agreement, “I suppose that’s true – but she isn’t invulnerable like Supergirl is. Kryptonite does not exist in this universe either.”

“Let’s just agree to disagree then. I really don’t know how strong they are in comparison to each other anyway.”

“Sure. We haven’t had a good power level debate in a long time.”

“Good? They’re annoying as hell. It’s only relevant now because we can actually summon these people for real.”

Mitsuru pauses, “As for the Kryptonite thing, I have reason to believe that our invasive friends from the other dimension may have ways of obtaining some should they need it. We can’t assume that they’ll sit back and allow us to tilt the odds so much in our favour.”

“What about the copycat? She could summon someone even *more* overpowered than Supergirl.”

“We need to get that gun out of her hands, and fast.”

“I’m not disagreeing on that. She freaks me out.”

“But she seems bound by a similar sense of ego to you. She only wants to summon characters she herself find attractive. Can you imagine her dragging Doomsday out of the DC universe and claiming that she wants him to be her husbando?”

“I’ve heard stranger things before, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be Doomsday. When you’ve got all of creation open to you – finding a character with a crazy stupid power is easy enough, something that can completely remove whatever advantage you gain from summoning a Supergirl or the like.”

Mitsuru’s face turns sour as she considers the full implications of her technology, and the potential chaos it can unleash when put into the wrong hands. Your ‘son’ from the future seemed pretty confident in saying that things would work out okay, but you don’t know how much faith you can put in those words now. Is the future fixed, or can it change depending on your choices?

You’re pretty terrified of what might happen if Donna decides to summon a genuinely evil bastard. A character like Dio won’t hesitate to cause mass destruction and huge numbers of casualties if it serves his interests. For now, she has stuck with more morally grey characters from DxD.

She’s right. You need to get that copied Sledgehammer out of their grubby hands as soon as possible. It does make you wonder though, why exactly does the commune need the Sledgehammer when they are already advanced enough to travel through space and dimensions on a large scale? Mitsuru is still struggling to complete one of her anchor points, which in turn will only permit registered individuals to temporarily move between worlds.

The amount of power and mass needed to move a spaceship, or whatever they use as a launching point, must be immense. They’re working to a far larger scope than anything you can cook up in your garage slash laboratory. With their technology and interdimensional breaching ability it would be so, so easy for them to conquer the Earth too. So why haven’t they?

Unless – that isn’t what they’re trying to do.

The plots cooked up by the enemy generals have been buffoonish at best, connected with a tenuous thread of targeting various feelings and institutions that people engage with every day. There's an alien element to the way they approach these plots.

They act as if each one is the single block in the tower that needs to be removed to cause the whole thing to come crashing down. Human society may be ended because of overpopulation or another abstract issue. Overpopulation is a problem, but not one that will occur over the course of a few days from a cloning gun.

Mitsuru's technology poses a real threat to them. That is the only conclusion you can reach. Why conquer Earth when they can slip between dimensions and find unsettled planets to exploit for resources? No, they're not looking for living room or slaves or raw materials. They're scared of Mitsuru and what she can do. She can end their monopoly on the interdimensional arms race.

Your phone vibrates. It's a message from Barbara.

"Hey big guy – sorry for not being on call for a while. I've been totally swamped with 'work,' if you catch my meaning."

You quickly tap out a reply, "I would say the same, but our interdimensional friends have been very quiet recently."

"I wouldn't relax. That means that they're planning to do something big."

"I'm not. It's starting to get to me."

"I just found some time to slip away from my business. Feel free to summon me whenever you like, and don't worry about the suit – Mitsuru already arranged a replacement for me in the garage."

At the same time, your phone pings with another message from Rias.

"Hello hubby! Our rating game went amazingly – we won! I'm in the mood for a celebration, and I can't think of anything better than me and the girls getting to spend time with you. Don't keep me waiting for too long..."

Why is it that all of your girlfriends finish work at the same time? With Barbara and Rias, you'll have to leave most of the occult research club out of it. You send a response to Rias explaining the issue, and she soon replies with a simple proposal.

"Akeno and Xenovia are willing to wait and let Koneko and Asia visit instead. That'll keep things orderly."

Rias must be cracking her 'harem leader' whip to get them in line. You haven't spoken with Koneko in a long while, so seeing her again and touching base on how her development is going sounds appealing. You take the Sledgehammer from the bench and slide their cards into the chamber. Four figures appear from beyond the veil and land in the garage.

"Hello everyone."

Rias is quick to jump into your arms and drag you down into a tongue-filled French kiss. The other girls watch in silent awe at her confidence. Koneko is already getting flustered from her behaviour. She doesn't even know the half of it yet.

"Hello hubby!"

Barbara clears her throat, "Nice to see you again." She isn't wearing her Batgirl costume, instead wearing a pair of jeans and a green sweater. Barbara is drop-dead gorgeous, with her long ginger hair and high-cheekbones. Letting her walk the streets might attract more attention than the Batgirl outfit.

"I'm surrounded by perverts," Koneko gripes with a red flush on her cheeks.

Rias sticks out of her tongue and teases her, "I'll try not to lavish hubby with too much attention while you're here, Koneko-chan."

Asia is next up to the plate. She steps up onto her tiptoes and plants a chaste kiss on your cheek, before retreating back and hiding between her arms like a turtle. Koneko rolls her eyes and tries to not let all of the public affection get to her.

"I heard your rating game went well. Did Koneko get to use her full power?"

Koneko cuts in before Rias can explain, "I did, no thanks to you."

Rias giggles, "That's her way of saying 'thank you,' that training area you built gave her the confidence to use her real abilities during the game, and you should have seen the faces of our opponents when they discovered who she really is. That was a lesson they won't forget in a hurry."

Barbara approaches, "This is the first time we've met. I'm Barbara."

"It's lovely to meet you. I'm Rias. These girls are members of my peerage, Koneko and Asia."

"Peerage?"

"It's a system utilised by devils in our universe. They pledge their loyalty to a 'King' in exchange for increased power. It's rather complex once you start discussing the details, but that should be enough for now."

"Devils?" Barbara says, again asking open questions about these girls from another world.

"You know, from the underworld," you offer unhelpfully.

"Okay, not the weirdest thing I've heard this month – but it's up there."

You laugh, "It's even weirder when you find out that they use technologically advanced chess pieces to turn people into devils."

Rias contests that claim, "They're not like a computer. Beelzebub is still among the living, and only he knows how they really work. I believe he constructed them from crystals."

"Oh, yeah. Sorry – I'm a little rusty on the details myself."

Koneko and Asia are sitting on the couch while the ads play. The insistent drone of that hotel ad fills the air once again and you feel another bit of your soul die as a result. This might turn you into a devil before Rias can ever give you one of those evil pieces in question. This is why you don't watch TV anymore. Life without advertisements is much more tolerable.

Rias frowns, "That man in the advertisement – he looks a lot like that fool we fought before."

"Really?"

You use your phone and look up the ad and watch it until the spokesperson appears. Now that Rias mentions it, he does look exactly like Faust. Some of his more alien features have been removed

including his off-coloured skin and yellow eyes, but it really is striking just how similar they are. Suddenly his promises of a wonderful holiday without leaving the confines of the hotel take on a more sinister tinge.

“Ugh, I bet this is one of his stupid plans.”

Barbara puts her hand on your shoulder, “Then that means we should go and check it out, just in case.”

Rias can’t help herself; “My, how daring of you! Inviting hubby to a hotel so soon...”

“Shush you.”

The prices for a room are alarmingly cheap. While that would normally make people think of it as a low rent motel trying to take them for a ride, an effective social media and review campaign has generated a lot of goodwill from the customers. Word of mouth can be a powerful thing. They claim that they went in miserable and stiff, leaving a few hours later feeling like a million bucks. The site’s pitch claims that all of your wildest dreams will come true using something they call the ‘fantasia system.’

In essence – it’s kind of like a spa day. You swing by with some clean clothes and forget about the outside world for the duration of your visit. How they manage to achieve such amazing results is what makes you suspicious. If they are connected with the aliens, then they may have technology that genuinely allows them to heal injuries or release stress.

But then the question becomes ‘what are they doing this for?’ Faust in particular doesn’t act out of the kindness of his heart. He’s a mean son of a bitch who tries to spread mass destruction through humanity’s common problems. There has to be a catch.

“Let’s visit incognito and see what this is all about. We can’t leave it to chance,” you propose.

To your frustration though, the largest room available is only for couples, or rather groups of two. Oddly enough there are also a lot of open rooms with single beds as well. You clearly don’t need to bring a partner to get the full experience out of it.

“Looks like we’ll have to split ourselves up into three groups.”

Barbara raises her hand, “Let me fly solo. I’m used to handling myself.”

“Okay. Koneko and Asia can take a room, and then Rias and me...”

Koneko sighs, “Do I have to?”

Asia reassures her, “I’m sure that it won’t be dangerous, Koneko. We’re only visiting to see what’s happening inside of the hotel.”

“You don’t have to come with us if you don’t want to,” you suggest.

Sensing that Rias is on board with your idea - Koneko shakes her head and changes her mind;

“Wherever the President goes, I go. So long as this isn’t an excuse to be a pervert.”

“We’re not going to be in the same room...”

You book three sets of tickets and pay out using your overstuffed bank account. They’re delivered in the form of QR codes that you can supposedly scan at the room’s door to gain entry. There are no staff at the reception to hand out keys. Cutting costs on staff wages? Perhaps Faust is subscribing to

the great human pastime of creating complex solutions for simple problems. The site only asks that you bring a clean set of clothes for overnight stays. You've only booked the rooms for a few hours.

"We shouldn't need to bring luggage with us. So let's head over there and see what's going on."

With Barbara, Rias, Koneko and Asia in toe – you depart from the garage and begin the short walk to the commercial area wherein the hotel makes its home.