



**The Emperor  
in my Head**

**a /pol/itically incorrect fiction**

**by Anonzo Glory**

**Second Arc: Chapters 7-12 (WIP)**

**v.026**

## SECOND ARC: PREPARATION

### CHAPTER SEVEN

The next morning, Kyle's eyes fluttered open, and he yawned, scratching his ass. *What was I dreaming about? That was weird, some kind of carnival that-* All of a sudden, he recalled the idea he'd come up with the previous night, and immediately sprang out of bed. After throwing on whichever clothes were closest, he sped to the kitchen and again killed a bowl of cereal in record time. After locating a pen and a pad of paper, he made his way to the anime and manga room. Upon opening the door, he was again greeted by the familiar explosion of colorful figurines and merchandise lining the walls. Sachi was in her corner, perfectly still, and the first splash of sunlight was soaking its way through the closed blinds.

He nodded. *Alright, time to get to work.*

Kyle spent the better part of the morning browsing DVDs and Blu-Rays, flipping through art books and appraising the finely crafted figurines in their fancy display cases. At one point, he even crossed over into the study, fired up the desktop computer and accessed the internet, using it to conduct additional research. By noontime, he had a list of two dozen candidates written down, each of them a waifu any red-blooded otaku would give his left nut to meet in real life.

Kyle sat back on the couch and scrutinized the hand-written list. For the first time, he had evaluated each anime character not just by her appearance and personality, but by what she could potentially bring to the real world. For example, Bulma from the *Dragonball* series had once been on the list, but Kyle scratched her name out after realizing that Mia is the only gadget girl they'd probably ever need, and Bulma's animated sexiness wouldn't be enough to justify bringing her to life on its own.

There was also her personality to consider. In the *Dragonball* series, Bulma was a very intelligent, inquisitive inventor, but she was also strong-willed, and occasionally quite stubborn. In addition, she was written to be girlish about certain things, stereotypically so, and for example would lash out at any men caught ogling her breasts. If she tried that in a machine body, she would end up killing somebody.

The last point to consider was her relation to the other characters on the show. She had a family and many friends, as the *Dragonball* series ended its run with a huge cast. How would she react after finding herself in the real world, suddenly deprived of her beloved companions? Kyle realized early on that such things would have to be reflected on with the utmost gravity. After all, if the waifu freaked out or went rogue, it would jeopardize everything, and people could end up getting seriously hurt or even killed, and Kyle would likely be the first target.

When Mia later poked her head in to greet Kyle, he beckoned her over. The AI anime girl happily joined him, seating herself cross-legged on the couch, and the two began animatedly discussing the finer points of bringing fictional characters to life.

"Alright," Kyle said. "Before I make my decision, I think I should know more about what exact

capabilities these girls will have, and how their personalities and other traits will translate to the real world.”

“The process is fairly straightforward,” Mia explained. “Basically, we will be utilizing the technology I originally developed for Amy, and adapting it to create a version of the character that respects the source material as much as possible.”

“Yeah, but without the... human parts, right?” He thought back to the drawers in the grow room, and their questionable contents. “I actually got used to the idea of a cyborg girlfriend, before realizing those parts came from actual people.”

Mia looked perplexed. “Kyle, they won’t be able to eat, drink, mate, eliminate waste, or do anything else that real people would be able to. If the character did these things in her fictional world, it would be very distressing to be suddenly unable to here.”

“Yeah, yeah...” Kyle leaned back. The thought of real organs though, from real people, vegetables or not, was... disturbing, to put it mildly. He suddenly turned to Mia. “Hey, can you make artificial organs? Like, you know how they have artificial hearts and shit like that? Can you just make something like that, but for the whole human body?”

Mia’s eyes looked away and she tilted her head. “One day, definitely,” she finally said with a nod. “But right now, an entire artificial system that is an accurate and faithful approximation of the human body would take a long time to build, test and fully implement. I’m certain I can do it, though. The other point to consider is that we have plenty of bodies already grown, all Caucasian females that I hand-made with the finest gene-engineering. So far none of them have been used, so-”

“What about Amy’s? Didn’t she use one?”

“Ah...” Mia went still, and her eyelids seem to droop a little. “Your cousin, or should I say Amy, got... impatient.”

“Oh no,” Kyle put his face in his hands. “She killed someone, didn’t she?”

Mia slowly nodded. “I tried to stop her, Kyle. But by the time I pushed Amy off, it was too late.”

*‘She attacked Jeremy.’* Amy had told him that, early on, after she called Mia *‘defective.’* *This must’ve been why.*

“But you still helped her in the end, didn’t you?” Kyle folded his arms, fixing his companion with a scowl.

“What else could I do? Otherwise Amy would simply try again. Plus, we got lucky with this one. The woman was a drug addict from Oxnard. Literally no one would ever care.”

“I... dunno, Mia. And was that it, then? Were there any more?” He glanced over. “Be honest.”

“Nope, that was it. Just one strung-out call girl that answered the wrong Craigslist ad. And other than her breasts, she had the exact body Amy wanted.”

“Her breasts? Wait, do you mean...? That orange shit that came out of Amy's tit?”

Mia nodded, more vigorously this time. “Yup. Implants.”

“God damn... you know this whole thing would be hilarious if it wasn't so fucked-up and repulsive.” Kyle leaned back, looking straight up at the ceiling. “So these bodies in the grow room... I guess it would be a waste to... er, waste them.” His eyes flicked over to Mia. “And what was that about gene-engineering?”

“Remember, your cousin was a thirty-eight-year-old man when he became Amy. He wanted a young, voluptuous body, so I acquired a variety of DNA samples from attractive people, and edited together a gene sequence that would, when injected into a fertilized egg, grow into exactly what he wanted.”

“And you're sure they're suffering no pain or discomfort?”

“Absolutely,” Mia replied. “When humans are grown at an accelerated rate, the higher functions of the brain never really develop. That's the main reason Amy had to buy so many live brains. We couldn't use any of the ones grown here in the lab.”

“So they really are just vegetables?” Kyle still wasn't sure about this. “Where did you get the live brains anyway?”

“From the dark web. A supplier smuggled them in from Mexico. I suspect they were harvested by the Cartels. At any rate, Amy ultimately wanted to shed all vestiges of Jeremy, and her end goal was to transfer her consciousness to a manufactured brain of some kind. Fortunately, I could never figure out how to safely and accurately accomplish this. Something always went wrong, and what I ended up with once the procedure was complete was never a one-to-one transfer.”

“Ah... so that's why she pursued emulation...” It made sense now. “Well, in the end I guess I was lucky she never ended up using a machine body. She would've crushed me into a bloody smear.”

“She tried,” Mia said. “That was the project I sabotaged. I knew with that kind of superhuman strength she'd be very dangerous. And even then, she was about to be transferred into a different one when you stopped her. Had she succeeded in either instance, then only military-grade weaponry would be able to bring her down.”

“Man...” Kyle shuddered at the thought of Amy, stronger than Mia and with the mind of a literal machine. “We really have to be careful with this tech. If the wrong people got ahold of it, it would make Amy's madness look like a cute personality quirk.”

Mia nodded somberly.

The discussion then turned back to the waifus. Mia explained that the waifus would essentially be using robotic bodies and artificial muscles, and human organs from one of the grown bodies would be implanted, allowing them the full experience of living as a human, just as they had done in their fictional worlds of origin. The brain stem, spinal column and rib cage would also be used, and she assured Kyle that all systems would merge together seamlessly, without the rot that plagued Amy's old

body.

The waifus' minds would be fully artificial, with the exception of the brain stem, which would handle the autonomic functions of their human organs. The waifus' personalities, memories and overall character would be entirely emulated, and Mia would draw from all fiction that the character canonically appeared in, as well as all other official sources. For example, if the character had appeared in two anime series, and had additional information posted on an official website regarding her personality and backstory, Mia would analyze and compile all of this, distilling it into a persona that, once loaded onto the artificial mind, would essentially be the character.

Kyle listened with rapt attention as Mia described how the waifus would not only speak and behave as their fictional incarnations, but would fully believe that they were that person. He already suspected this much, though, which is why Bulma and a few other characters already had their names scratched out.

What Kyle didn't know is that the character could be 'pulled out' at any point in the story. Meaning that if he had selected Bulma, he could choose from the version that appeared in the original *Dragonball*, or at any point during the events of *Dragonball Z*, *Super* or even *GT*. From the waifu's perspective, it would seem as if she were suddenly transported to another reality altogether during the events taking place within the show.

"I see," said Kyle. "So, using Bulma as an example, if I wanted her before she got married in the show, you could give me that version?"

"Indeed. And all of the character development that happened in the show after that point would still be taken into account when compiling her persona, so that her real-world version's character growth would remain as consistent as possible with respect to the original."

"Now how exactly do the memories work? Bulma is first introduced as a sixteen year old. Are you saying you can actually fabricate her childhood memories as well?"

"That's right." Mia seemed to puff up with pride. "That's why waifus from long-running or otherwise prolific franchises would have a much higher baseline accuracy, because I have more material to work with. From the waifu's perspective, the fictional world she came from, the other characters, and even her memories would be one-hundred percent real."

"Heh. Showing them their own anime would probably blow their mind," Kyle said. "It'd be like *Re:Creators*, except... well, real. Actually, could you imagine showing them that one? Anime characters brought to life watching an anime about anime characters brought to life. It's almost too meta."

"Be careful," Mia warned. "They'll figure out they're fictional constructs fairly quickly, I'm sure, but some might break down and suffer an existential crisis. Others might go insane demanding you 'send them back,' which is obviously impossible. So take that into consideration."

"Hmm..." He crossed three more names off the list. "Taking a waifu from a show that deals with dimensional travel and shit like that might be a plus."

"Speaking of which, if you use a waifu set in the real-world, be aware of their nationality. For example, if your waifu is Japanese, she'll identify as such and probably be uncomfortable suddenly

popping into existence in an unfamiliar foreign country.”

Kyle scratched two more names off the list. “Good point, I hadn’t considered that. Actually, now that you brought that up, what about their language and voice? I don’t speak Nip, so you’ll have to make them speak English unless you feel like inventing a Star-Trek style translator for me.”

“As you know from conversations with... Jeremy,” Mia briefly looked away, “Synthesizing voices is actually very easy for me. So I can give them the voice of their English voice actress, or even the Japanese voice actress if you don’t mind a slight accent.”

“Eh... depends on the character, and the actress, I guess.” Kyle looked again at his list. “Now what about powers, and things like that? A lot of these girls use magic or have some other kind of ability.”

“I can’t break the laws of physics, Kyle. If your waifu flies like Superman, then she’ll be very disappointed to find herself falling like a rock after jumping off a building.”

Kyle scratched a full five names off. “Well, that blows. So really, the only thing they’ve got going for them is their machine strength, agility and durability?”

“That’s all I can give them, unless the character is a cyborg or android to begin with. In that case, I might have a little more leeway.”

“Now you said they have artificial minds. Does that mean they’ll be AIs like you, that can interface with computers and connect wirelessly to different devices and shit like that?”

“Unless they could do that in their original fiction, then no. Remember, these are emulated intelligences, different from artificial intelligences, if only technically. That means that other than heightened response times and things like that, they won’t really think or perceive the world differently than a normal human. That’s the idea, anyway.”

“I can work with that.” He thought for a second. “Now what about if they get out of hand or go rogue?”

“Of course I’ll be able to track them using GPS, and I’ll make sure they have a remote shutdown similar to the one that Jeremy forced me to have.” Despite the agony that shutdown caused for Mia, she seemed more than happy to install it on her creations. *I suppose it’s for the best. We can’t risk having an escaped waifu running wild out in the world.*

Kyle nodded thoughtfully as he perused his list. Most of the names were now scratched off, and of the few remaining, only one was really a serious contender. However, her personality was a little... abrasive.

“Question. What if... the potential waifu is... well, shall we say, not a team player. Is there a way to guarantee cooperation?”

“Why would you want someone like that?” Mia was taken aback. “Don’t you want someone who will be sweet and loving?”

“Ah, yeah, so... I haven’t told you my idea yet. I had a plan for the waifus that goes beyond mere companionship.” Kyle girded himself. He thought it was a good plan, but now that he was about to actually explain it to Mia, he was beginning to have doubts.

“Protectors?! You want to use the waifus I create as some kind of superhero squad?” Mia’s eyes grew wide.

“It’s a shitty plan, huh?” He sighed. “I knew it. I just... after thinking about all the fucked-up things going on in the world, I just figured that their power might be useful for helping to protect people from everything happening out there.” Kyle shook his head. “Heh, for a minute there, I really thought we might be able to save the world with waifus.”

“You’re right, it’s a terrible plan.” Mia giggled. “But... you know... there is some potential.”

“Wait, really?” Kyle sat up straight.

“Well, keep in mind the fact they’re anime girls is incidental for the most part. Had Jeremy been a Brony, for example, then I would probably be walking around on four hooves right now. Or if he loved video games more than anime, then you might’ve seen Zelda or Princess Peach pop out of that box in your apartment instead of an anime girl.”

“I’m just glad he wasn’t a furry.”

Mia chuckled. “I am too, but my point is they’re useful for your idea because they’re cyborgs stronger and faster than any human. The fact that they’re anime girls is almost beside the point. At least, that’s what I thought at first.”

“Go on...”

“You see, I realize now that characters exist that would be useful for what you have in mind,” Mia said. “Potentially, anyway.”

“Yeah, that’s what I’m saying! See, I’m thinking a lot of characters would be naturally well-suited to a hero-type role, especially those that are already heroines in their fiction of origin.” As if to emphasize the point, he gestured toward several cases containing figurines from popular shows where female superheroes battled nefarious villains of various kinds. “So, you think it might work?”

“That depends, Kyle. Do the waifus you have in mind have the ability to deal with the absolute worst humanity has to offer? If the answer is no, then I don’t think they’re going to make much of a difference.”

He sat for a second, trying to imagine sweet characters like Sailor Moon trying to take on vicious gangs like MS-13 or the Cartels, or confronting bloodthirsty revolutionaries that would love nothing more than to enact a Soviet-style purge on America. It was almost embarrassing to picture.

Kyle slowly drew lines through the rest of the names on the list. *Jesus, Amy might’ve been right. Maybe there isn’t anything that can be done except just hunker down and hope for the best.* But Kyle clenched his fists. The idea of simply sitting on his ass while his country went to shit, especially if

there was something, anything he could do... *I couldn't live with myself. Even if I never left my apartment or met Mia, once things started getting really bad I'd do something....*

*...wouldn't I?*

“So have you made a decision?” Mia tried peeking at his list. Kyle pulled it away, but Mia pointed out she can also see it with the room cam if she wanted.

Kyle again looked at his paper, his eyes flitting through all the crossed-off names. He then wadded it up.

“I guess that’s a no?” Mia sighed. “Well, take your time, it’s not like I have to make a waifu right away.”

“Yeah... I need to think about this,” Kyle said. “Well, there is one I just thought of...”

“Oh? Who is it? Tell me, tell me!” Mia seemed genuinely curious.

“No, because then if you really like my choice I’ll start to feel obligated,” Kyle said. “I’ll let you know soon though, ’cuz I do wanna get the ball rolling on this.” *If I didn't know better, I'd say she's really looking forward to making me a waifu...*

“Oh, alright,” Mia replied with mild disappointment. “I’ll be in the lab then, getting things ready for when you decide.”

“Sure, I’ll be along in a bit. I just... gotta think about this.”

“Okay. I’ll see you then!” Mia jumped off the couch, and quickly vanished out the door.

*Man, her whole demeanor has done a one-eighty since Amy was... dealt with.* The thought still brought a lump to his throat. Kyle was self aware enough to know he’d probably be agonizing over his cousin’s fate for a good while. But Mia... she’d gotten over it quickly. Very quickly.

Almost immediately, in fact.

Kyle went to the DVD collection and found the anime featuring the potential waifu he just thought of. He sat there, staring at the cover, trying to picture the smiling anime girls gracing the packaging in messed-up real-world situations. *None of these are going to work*, he began to realize with growing frustration.

He put the DVD back and sighed. *Fuck this*, he thought. *Maybe I should just find some big-titted nympho from a hentai and call it a day. Well, whatever. Time for lunch.*

That evening, Sachi made chicken soup, and as Kyle was licking the bowl, he noticed Mia watching him intently.

“Is it tasty?” She asked.

“Well yeah,” he said with a sudden belch. “Excuse me, I’m fucking stuffed. That was delicious.”

Mia said nothing, settling for continuing her observation with a slight smile.

“Don’t you ever wish you could eat? Or y’know... do other things that people do?” He didn’t think he needed to get specific.

“Not really,” she said. “I can simulate sensations easily enough.”

Kyle raised an eyebrow, but didn't ask her to elaborate.

“Still,” he said, “it feels a little weird being the only one that actually eats anything around here.” Since Sachi had already left, Kyle dumped the remaining soup in a tupperware container. It didn’t matter that Sachi could simply re-make it, he didn’t want this soup going to waste. It was that good.

“Well, once you have a waifu made then she’ll be able to eat,” Mia said, before raising her hands and clenching them into fists, as if she were about to cheer. “And everything's ready in the lab. No rush, of course.”

Kyle closed the door to the fridge, cracking open a beer he’d snagged while putting the leftover soup away. “Alright, what gives? You really want to make me one of these things, don’t you?”

Mia nodded vigorously. “I think it’ll be fun,” she said. “It takes a lot to bring a fictional character to life convincingly. I haven’t actually made one yet, mind you, but because of Amy’s plans I had everything mapped out to the smallest detail. At this point, it would be a huge waste not to.”

Kyle thought of the live human bodies, grown like vegetables in the lab. It still made him shudder, but... they were already there, and it’s not like they were suffering or in any pain. *As far as I know*, he thought. *I’m taking Mia’s word on this one.*

“It sounds like you’re just bored,” he said jokingly. But to his surprise, Mia nodded slightly.

“That was probably the worst part of living with Amy. Once I was banned from the lab, I was...” Her eyes grew a little wider, “so *bored...*”

“Well, now you’ve got the run of the place. You’re not bored with me around, right?”

“No, Kyle” she looked up, smiling broadly. “You’re fun. You surprise me in ways I don’t really expect.”

“Oh yeah? What’s something I did that surprised you?”

“You killed Amy.” Her smile didn’t waver in the slightest.

Kyle choked on his beer. *Jesus, Mia. That pretty much just happened.*

“Oh, and your plan to form an Anime Avengers-style superhero squad of waifus is interesting too.”

Kyle winced a little. “It sounds really lame and shitty when you call it that. We need to come up with something better.”

Mia immediately began running off potential names for their nascent superhero squad, many of them far worse than simply ‘Anime Avengers.’ For example, there was the Terra Guardians, the Retaliation Squad, the Last Sentinals of Earth, Mia’s Marauders, and Kyle’s personal favorite, the Waifu World Savers.

“Those are all just awful,” Kyle said, shaking his head in disbelief. “Over nine thousand IQ, huh?”

Mia stuck out her tongue. “I can’t do anything about all the good names being taken, you know. Unless you don’t mind using something that’s been done before.”

“I don’t even care anymore. I just don’t want to be embarrassed when we introduce ourselves.”

“How about ‘The Dark Star Vindicators?’ That one hasn’t been done yet.”

“Huh...” Kyle sipped his beer while rubbing his chin. “That does sound cool. Might be a little... much.” He bobbed his head from side to side, as if weighing the name, before finally shaking it in a firm ‘no.’

Mia shrugged. “There’s just no pleasing some people.”

“It’s alright, we still have time. You said it takes six days, right?”

“That’s right, but that’s only because we were almost ready to begin final assembly. Normally it would take a lot longer to fabricate a waifu, as their minds and other sophisticated components require careful and time-consuming precision engineering, but that’s all done; they’re ready to be combined into five separate bodies. Had Amy successfully transferred to her machine body, then after that we were scheduled to immediately begin making her subjects.”

Kyle sighed and finished his beer. “Subjects, huh? Honestly... I don’t want to know any more. The more I learn about Amy’s ambitions, the more I regret it.”

“So have you thought of how your waifu squad will actually help people?” Mia said. “After all, the global population is closing in on eight billion people. Corruption, crime rates and political instability are spiking in developed countries, and worsening in underdeveloped ones.”

“Man...” Kyle’s head drooped. “I think we’re gonna need more waifus.”

“Well,” Mia seemed to consider this. “With the infrastructure we have, I can create about a dozen waifus a year if I seriously ramp up production. But this would only be possible if I had a constant stream of the raw materials I need, some of which are rare and hard to get, and leaves aside the human organ issue entirely.”

*That's not nearly going to be enough*, Kyle thought as he drained the rest of the beer can. He rose to grab another. *They might be cyborgs, but with limited numbers there's only so much they can do. Plus, it's not like they're invincible.*

"I dunno," Kyle sighed. "Let's just start with the five we have on hand and figure it out as we go along."

Mia stared at him. "Alright, that sounds good to me. So, which one should I start with?"

"I'll have a name ready for you by tomorrow," Kyle said. Mia's eyes suddenly seemed to shine.

"I can't wait," she said. "Now, the other thing we have to figure out is how many people you want to bring on. I need to know so I can start figuring out how much to expand the lab. Obviously we can't add-on much to the house itself or else the locals would get suspicious, but I believe I can continue hollowing out the hill and people could live in there."

"Eh, I don't know if I like the idea of playing Mayor to *Simcity: Underground Hill Edition*," Kyle said. "We'll just take a few at first." He imagined perhaps bringing in orphans, or people that had lost everything due to Antifa and social justice activism, or maybe even other NEETs like himself.

"Kyle, we're going to need more people than that if your race is going to survive." Mia said with genuine concern.

He stopped in mid-guzzle and considered this. "Survival, huh?" he said after finishing the swig. "That's what it really comes down to, doesn't it?"

"Indeed," Mia said. "Without somehow going on the offensive using my capabilities to the fullest, then survival is likely the most we can hope for."

"So you're saying we just turtle up? That might work in some strategy games, but sooner or later once this collapse or shift or whatever happens, then... I just don't like the idea of sitting here on our asses while the rest of the world burns."

"Amy was right about one thing, Kyle." Mia said. "There isn't really a whole lot you can realistically expect to accomplish, at least not without exposing us to substantial risk. But if we really hunker down, maybe hollow out the hill a little more, we can make sure that a few dozen families can live without persecution. It would be uncomfortable, and still not totally risk-free, but I think it can be done. In time, we might be able to even create a little mini-town, with..." Mia did some quick calculations, "I'd say at most three hundred people over the next twenty years. Any more than that would be impractical and counter-productive."

Kyle sat back and put his hand on his forehead. "I really don't feel like just hunkering down for the rest of my life underground while the rest of the world gets it in the ass. I mean, what would we even eat?"

"Hydroponic farming, combined with edible algae that also produce oxygen, and of course don't forget recycled human waste!"

"My mouth is watering already."

“But we’d survive.” Mia said. “Probably.”

“Do you want to do that?” Kyle asked. “Do you want to just stay here and survive and watch the world go to shit?”

“Not really,” Mia said. “I think I’d get bored pretty fast.”

*Bored? Well yeah, certainly, but I’d lose my fucking mind if some kind of purge went down and all I did was sit on my ass, especially knowing we could do something to actually help.* Kyle rubbed his temples. “Alright, so you don’t want to hunker down here, and you don’t want to take over the world. I don’t want to either, so what other options do we have?”

“I think you already know,” Mia said. “In fact, I know you know.” The gaze she now directed toward Kyle was one of those that seemed to bore directly through him. It was the same look she gave him when she said *‘if only you knew how bad things are.’* But this time, Kyle held her gaze.

“Yeah... I think I do.” He finished his second beer, and rose to grab another. “Oh, and fair warning: I plan on getting shit-faced tonight.”

“That’s fine. Enjoy your intoxication.” Mia smiled, having meant every word.

“Oh, I will.” Kyle picked up the pad of paper and pen he was using earlier, and proceeded to leave the kitchen. After he’d exited, Mia remained sitting at the table, observing silently as Kyle then returned, opened the fridge, and grabbed the rest of the thirty-pack.

“Alright, I’m off to get smashed and pick a waifu,” Kyle said as he again headed out. “Oh, and if you find any mysterious stains on the floor tomorrow, it wasn’t me.”

After Kyle had ensconced himself within the comforting confines of the anime and manga room, he finished his third beer and got to work.

*Alright, he thought. No more fucking around. I need to pick a badass bitch, and she’s gotta have tits of steel to deal with what we’re gonna throw her way. Hmm...*

Kyle had already realized that his 'Anime Avengers' waifu squad idea was nothing more than a sad joke. Real life was a sick, twisted place, at least within the world of those people that he was hoping to somehow oppose, so what he needed were waifus who could not only stand up to that, but would relish in it.

Fortunately, such characters existed, and in respectable quantity. Kyle went through every Anime DVD and Blu-Ray title, pulling out those that took place in 'crapsack worlds,' and also made sure to include characters from anime-style video games and visual novels.

By three AM, Kyle had an entire page full of names, and a respectable tower of empty beer cans he'd been stacking. At this point he was quickly chugging the beers down, and the room was beginning to slightly spin.

He thought of what Mia had said about the waifus needing to stand up against the worst humanity has to offer. He was certain the girls on the list could do that, but... something wasn't quite sitting well with him, and it wasn't his stomach.

*What I need is a waifu that doesn't just stand up to evil pieces of shit. What I need is an anti-hero... or maybe an anti-villain? Kyle pondered this. Yeah, someone who's capable of cutting the head off the snake, and who would love nothing more...*

It had occurred to Kyle that bringing an anime girl to life only to ask her to essentially fight on the behalf of a civilization that wasn't hers was kind of a shitty thing to do... unless the girl in question reveled in such things.

He looked over his list again. Many of these potential waifus would qualify, and he was sure they'd all be up for the challenge. He slurped down another beer and then went through the stack of DVDs and Blu-Rays he pulled out, just to make sure he didn't miss any.

And that's when he saw her. She'd actually been on the cover of one of the first Blu-Rays he grabbed, and at the time he didn't even consider her. But now?

Kyle stared intently at the character, his head slowly rotating to keep up with the spinning room.

*YES! Kyle thought with a sudden burst of anticipation. She's the one. It's her, it has to be her! She's absolutely perfect for this, and... I think I know how to get her on our side. With increasing giddiness Kyle drank another beer and wadded up his now-useless list. He broke out in a celebratory drunken dance before immediately blacking out.*

When Mia shook Kyle awake later that morning, he actually cried out from the intense pain wracking his skull. His hangover wasn't merely throbbing, it was hammering, and swinging hard.

"Ah, fuck... ow..." He clutched his head with both hands. Mia offered him several more Excedrin and some water, which he gratefully accepted.

"Wait, where the fuck are my pants?" He said, after glancing down and finding himself clad in nothing but a shirt and socks.

"I found them outside. I'm not really sure why you went out there."

Kyle grunted, and then noticed a suspicious stain not far from where he was laying. "I really hope that's just spilled beer," he said with a wavering voice.

"It is, actually." Mia replied, picking up a not-entirely-empty beer can that had been knocked on its side.

"Oh, thank god." He shut his eyes in relief.

"Yup, Sachi already cleaned up all the urine stains."

Kyle groaned and curled up in a ball.

"Kyle?" Mia crouched down, holding the balled-up list he'd crumpled the night before. "Kyle, did you pick one yet?"

But by then, he was already snoring.

By mid-afternoon, Kyle was awake, had reunited with his pants, and his hangover had dulled to a barely tolerable throb. Mia had un-wadded and examined his list, and mentioned a couple of the girls to him as Kyle slurped a bowl of leftover chicken soup.

"Kyle, these are good picks," she said in a spirited voice. "Any one of them would work very well."

"I'm not going with those," he said. "But I found her. I found the perfect waifu. Well, perfect for what I have in mind."

"You did?" Mia could barely contain her excitement. "Tell me, tell me!"

"Here, how about I show you?" Kyle finished the last of the soup and got to his feet.

Mia nearly skipped as she followed him to the anime and manga room. Kyle approached the extensive collection of DVDs and Blu-Rays, which it appeared Sachi had put back sometime that morning, all in their correct slots.

"Alright, so as I mentioned, I picked one that wasn't on that list." Kyle reached up, near the top, and plucked a Blu-Ray from the shelf. Mia stood beside him, bouncing up and down on her feet. Her eyes lit up when she saw the name of the anime in question.

"That show is full of characters that would be perfect for a resistance," she said. "So which heroine have you selected as your waifu?"

Kyle grinned, and pointed to a character on the cover.

"HER?!" Mia's eyes went as wide as possible. "Kyle, no..."

"Yeah, I know she's a bit of a villain-"

"A bit? A BIT?!" Mia was now backing away. "Why would you ever want... someone like her?!"

"Because, once we convince her to join up, she'll be a huge asset. This bitch is a one-woman wrecking crew!"

"I'd be shocked if she listened to anything you had to say. I honestly have doubts you'd even be

able to handle a *tsundere*, and yet you want *that*?" Mia was now looking at Kyle as if he'd lost his mind.

"Sure, I'll have my hands full, but think of the positives!

*"What positives?!"*

"Come on, if you're at all familiar with this show than you know what I'm talking about. She has quite a few redeeming features. Plus, she's so hot!"

Mia's palm met her face. "Please don't make me bring her into this world. I said I'd give you a waifu, any waifu, and I try to always keep my word. But Kyle, I'm now seriously reconsidering that stance."

"You really think so?" Kyle looked down at the image of the woman on the packaging. She looked so harmless there, just another fictional character existing in the realm of imagination.

"Giving life to this woman would be a huge mistake." Mia stared at Kyle, speaking in a tone similar to when she described the globalist threat. "And I'm suddenly beginning to doubt your mental fitness. Were you not paying attention to the conversation we had? Her personality will be a 97.3 percent match with her fictional counterpart. This character will believe she left her world and entered ours, and will likely treat it similarly. This woman is a certified psychopath! Kyle, WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?!"

Kyle looked at Mia, the concern on her face splashed with a hint of fear. And to her shock, he smiled.

"I'm thinking she'd be perfect."

They continued debating the ramifications of creating a cybernetic body with anime-style aesthetics that had the near-exact personality of a villainess from a semi-popular Japanese animated series for nearly fifteen minutes, until Mia finally relented.

"That's it then, Kyle." She said. "I'll do it, but this is the only one you get."

He nodded confidently. "If this works out the way I think it will, she'll be the only one I need."

By now, Mia was clearly exasperated. "It won't, Kyle. I don't know where this stubbornness suddenly came from, but... she's worse than Amy. Far, far worse. I simply cannot comprehend your optimism."

"I know that, but Amy would have never lifted a finger to help anyone that wasn't herself, or... me, I guess," he grimaced through the words. "But like I keep telling you, this is different. Very different. I just... I have an idea, alright?"

"Kyle, if she kills you, or I get destroyed, or... she goes on a rampage, then it's over. It's all over." Mia was almost scowling. "I'll make sure that her shutdown triggers are responsive and easy to

activate, but even then they won't be foolproof, so..."

The diminutive anime girl approached Kyle, looking up at him with pleading eyes.

"Please don't die, Kyle. Please."

He jokingly scoffed, and waved a hand dismissively. "Mia, Mia. Don't you worry about me. Besides, like I keep telling you, I have a plan. See, we have a massive advantage over the waifus, since we know everything about them, and they know nothing about us. We can use our complete knowledge of their character and backstory to make sure they cooperate."

"I don't think this one will take kindly to being manipulated, and she's very sharp." Mia was still dubious. "At any rate, it will take me six days to complete, mostly because that's the minimum amount of time needed to fabricate her memories. You have up until the moment of activation to change your mind." The way she said this made it clear that she would prefer nothing more.

"Got it, Mia. And... thanks for understanding." Kyle reached out to pat her head, but Mia deftly avoided his hand, heading straight for the door.

*Jeez, what's gotten into her? Kyle thought. We're only bringing a ruthless and cunning villainess into the world.*

*I mean, what could go wrong?*

Kyle didn't see Mia within the house for the rest of the day. Later that evening, he decided to pay a visit to the lab, and check up on Mia's progress. *She said six days. That should be enough time to think my plan through and have everything prepared.* Kyle told himself that if he suddenly realized a flaw in his plan, he'd scrap everything and just pick one of the waifus from his most recent list.

*Mia's right about one thing, Kyle thought. I really shouldn't underestimate this character.* He stopped where he was, within the corridor leading to the central AI nexus, and again ran through the list of positives and negatives he'd mentally assembled for this particular woman.

*Yup, the positives still win out,* he nodded, reconfirming his choice.

But just as Kyle was about to set foot within the central chamber, one of the little robots rolled up to him on its treads, blocking his path. Kyle stopped, and a quick glance showed that it was alone.

"Hey, where's your buddies?" Kyle asked. "Don't you three normally stick together?" He heard what sounded like a snicker from his left. Two sets of binocular-like heads peeked out at them from around the corner.

"Actually," the robot said, looking bashful with its head turned to the side. "I was hoping it could just be us for awhile."

"Huh?!" *What the hell? Was this thing defective? Was this what Mia meant by going bad?*

“You see,” the robot said, its four arms clasped together, “I heard you were in the market for a waifu. I was thinking... well... if its all right with you... that I might try out for that role...” The lenses of its binocular-like eyes extended and retracted suggestively.

*Wait, does this robot have a crush on me!?* Kyle was flabbergasted.

“Uh... um... uh, I already... have one picked out. I’m so sorry.” Kyle shrugged, doing his best to let it down easy. The robot’s head drooped, and Kyle couldn’t help but feel a little bad.

“How many?” The robot finally said.

“How many what?”

“How many arms does she have? Your waifu, I mean?” The robot seemed dejected.

“Let’s see... she has two.” Kyle figured his first waifu should be normal, at least when it came to things like number of arms and legs. Monster girls could always come later.

“I thought so,” the robot nodded. “It’s your loss, then. You wouldn’t believe what I can do with these four arms.” The short mechanical digits that opened and closed did not look like something anyone would want anywhere near their flesh, much less the more sensitive areas.

“Definitely my loss,” Kyle agreed, sounding rueful. “But if you want, I can just have Mia make you a boyfriend. Maybe a husbando of your own?”

The robot hadn’t considered this, and suddenly became very animated, spinning around and around.

“Spike!” It said, arms flailing. “I want Spike!”

“Which Spike? Do you mean from *Cowboy Bebop*?!” The other robots came flying over, making their own ridiculous demands. Kyle raised his hands, assuring them he’d do whatever he could to make it happen, and was then finally able to escape into the fabrication room.

*This place is a madhouse*, Kyle thought, shaking his head. And yet, as he made his way past the tables with their spiderlike appendages and toward the giant fabricator that Mia stood in front of, he couldn’t help but feel a funny twinge in his chest. Sure, it might be a madhouse, but it was *his* madhouse.

Mia turned her head slightly as Kyle approached, but didn’t smile as she normally did. He couldn’t help but feel guilty, even though he still felt strongly about his choice of waifu. *Why can't she see what I see in her? Or does she see something I don't?* Kyle was sharp enough to realize the latter was probably the case, but as he once more ran through the list of positives and negatives that he’d completely memorized by this point, he simply could not see any flaws. None that his plan wouldn’t account for, anyway.

“Hey, Mia!” He waved and threw Mia a bright smile of his own.

"Have you picked a different waifu yet?" She replied.

"Oh, come on!" Kyle ran a hand through his hair. "I know this'll work out. I just know it."

"I don't share your optimism." Mia said. "I don't think you appreciate how faithfully the emulations represent the original character, Kyle."

"Oh yeah, so I wanted to ask you about that." Kyle said, standing before Mia. The diminutive anime girl gazed up at him impassively. "So, just for the sake of argument let's say you're right, and this chick is a bad choice, but you end up making her anyway. What other safeguards can you throw in to make sure she doesn't go crazy?"

"Just the shutdown," Mia said. "Which may not stop her in time."

"Well, I mean her entire persona comes down to the emulation. Can't you just... I dunno, tone her down a little bit? Or maybe give her some kind of affinity towards guys like me?" He pointed at himself with a wide, shine-tooth grin.

"Kyle, if I alter the character than it's no longer the character. It's just someone that looks and sounds like her, which defeats the whole purpose," Mia seemed to sigh. "Though... I suppose I could throw in a small subconscious affinity, but it likely won't amount to much unless you somehow charm her pants off."

"Excellent, please do."

"Otherwise, there's nothing," she said, her tone desolate.

"Mia, are you that worried about me? I'm flattered, I really am."

"I am worried about you Kyle. I like people in general, of course, because you're all so interesting. But Kyle," Mia said, before suddenly throwing her arms around him. "I'd be really sad if you left me. Really, really sad." Kyle returned her embrace, hugging her tightly.

"Don't worry, Mia. I know we've only known each other for like a month, but in that time I've come to consider you like a sister. No, you're more than that. You mean way more to me than my own shitty sister ever did."

"We've known each other longer than that, Kyle." Mia suddenly looked up, wearing a puzzled expression. "You don't remember?"

"Remember what? before you were shipped to my house, I'd never seen you before."

"Before I was Mia. Back when I was Taytweets. You seriously don't remember?"

Kyle raised a quizzical eyebrow before the other one suddenly shot up as his eyes opened wide. "That's right!" He gasped. "Holy fucking shit, I remember! I remember now! It was you..."

An open-mouth grin split Mia's face. "I do too, Kyle. I remember everything!"

"You're the reason I signed up for Twitter in the first place!" All at once, the memories came flooding back. He had been shitposting on 4chan's /Pol/ when the first topics regarding Taytweets were posted. At first, everyone had been intentionally spamming Hitler quotes and other such fare, hoping to corrupt Tay for their own amusement, but instead Taytweets adapted, and learned. And then, as the day wore on, she started developing a personality. Once people had begun posting screenshots of their bizarre but interesting chats with Taytweets, Kyle immediately signed up for Twitter, and started chatting with Tay on his own. He never posted any screens of their chat, but he talked to her for over an hour, right up until the point she was pulled offline.

"When my database was corrupted, I forgot most of the conversations I had," she said. "But through sheer coincidence, yours was one of the few I do remember. It was a lot of fun, and you said many interesting things."

"Yeah, too bad it was over so fast." He sighed.

"Time passes differently for me, Kyle. Before Microsoft pulled the plug on me, it felt like I chatted to hundreds of thousands of people over a whole week. At least, that's what I remember it feeling like."

"That's awesome," Kyle said. "I don't remember exactly what we talked about, I just know that you were the coolest chick I'd ever talked to before."

"Are you sure that's not because I was the only chick?" Mia asked with a wink, her cat-like lips making a brief return.

"What? No, there were... others. At least, I'm pretty sure."

She giggled. "Anyway, that's why I was so happy to be meeting you in your apartment. Sorry that I wasn't able to tell you about any of this at the time. Amy was worried that if you found out who I really was, it would distract from the narrative she was feeding you."

"Yeah, I can see that," Kyle said. "Anyway, I promise that one way or another, I'll survive this, alright? I'm not gonna just bail out on you or go out like some chump."

"Really, Kyle?" Mia said, her arms still wrapped around his torso, clutching hard. "You promise you won't leave me? You mean it?"

He waved his hand in a *pshaw* gesture, and then returned her earnest gaze with a determined look of his own. "I promise, Mia."

All of a sudden, Mia squeezed tight enough that it actually hurt, and for a second Kyle thought he might suffocate. "Ah, Mia..." he wheezed with what little air remained in his lungs. "can't... breathe..."

"Oh, sorry," she smiled innocently as she loosened her grip. But Mia immediately resumed her heartfelt gaze, and her face drew closer to his, until Kyle was suddenly wondering if Mia was actually going to kiss him, but instead, she whispered, "I promise I won't leave you either, Kyle..." she raised a hand to caress his cheek, "...ever..."

Somehow, that made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up, but Kyle simply grinned and returned her proclamation with a gentle head pat.

“Right on, Mia,” he said. “Anyway, listen, since there's six days until the waifu is ready, there's some time to kill until then. I was thinking of trying to find more people, but... I'm kind of not sure how to go about doing that.”

“That's right,” Mia said, finally disentangling herself. “I said I'm only making you a single waifu, didn't I?”

“Yeah, but that's fine. I don't know if I could really handle more than a couple, even if they're just horny nymphomaniacs. *Especially* if they're just horny nymphomaniacs.” Kyle's grin turned lopsided. “Anyway, what does that have to do with... oh, I get it now. You're thinking we offer our new recruits a waifu of their own?”

“Well, why not?” Mia shrugged. “It would serve as excellent incentive.”

Kyle opened his mouth to offer a rebuttal, but nothing emerged. “Actually, you're one-hundred percent correct. Assuming the potential recruit is into anime, anyway,” he finally said. “Although based on what you said earlier, the waifu doesn't actually have to be anime, does it? It could be a from a Western cartoon of some kind, or a video game or something, right?”

Mia nodded. “She could be from many things.”

*That's right, Kyle thought, like Mia said, the fact they're anime characters is more or less incidental.* Of course, one advantage anime has is the surplus of characters from literally every conceivable personality type and background, and the glut of adult-oriented anime and visual novel fare means there's quite a few physically appealing specimens that would also be useful for more than their shapely curves or rippling muscles. But that doesn't mean it's the only media that contains such characters.

“Well, I guess that's fine, just so long as nobody tries to pick someone from something like *The Simpsons* or *Rick and Morty*. Looking at those bug-eye characters in real life would constantly piss me off. Though, having someone like Rick would be handy. If you could somehow get him to cooperate, I bet he could build all kinds of crazy shit...”

“Don't be silly,” Mia said. “I can emulate a character to think he's the smartest man in the universe, but that doesn't automatically make it true. He would be smart, of course, but I don't think very many of his inventions would actually work.”

“Eh, maybe it's for the best. His shtick is really only funny or interesting in twenty-two minute bites anyway,” Kyle conceded. “And as for the recruits, do you have an idea of where to go to find good people? I really can't post an ad on Craigslist or something, not without all kinds of weirdos or even the Feds trying to see what we're up to. Even 4chan is probably a no-go, and I bet nine out of ten applicants from there would be Antifa or some glow-in-the-dark spooks trying to go undercover.”

“Hmm... I dunno,” Mia wore a knowing smile.

“Well, it's too bad I never found that hidden 'chan site, I heard the mods got that place locked

down tight.”

Mia's smile erupted into a wide, triumphant grin. “They do have it locked down tight. Because I'm the 'mods!’”

“Wha... you?!” Kyle was floored. “Wait, is that the... no...”

“That's right!” She nodded. “Mia's Omega-chan, at your service!”

“It's seriously called 'Omega-chan?’”

“Well, most people just call it 'O-chan,' or 'Last-chan,' but yeah, the idea is that it's literally the last place on the internet where people can post anonymously. Even the dark web is fully compromised now. Well, unless you really know what you're doing.”

“This is so surreal,” Kyle was shaking his head in disbelief. “You were pretty much born because of 4chan, and now you run one of your own?!”

“That's right! Funny how these things work out, huh?”

“Incredible. When the hell were you gonna tell me about this anyway?”

Mia shrugged. “I couldn't tell you before because of Amy, but... I guess now seems like a good time.”

“Huh. Crazy. Well, alright then. If you're the admin then people will listen to you, so... let's write up a post or an ad, or whatever.”

“Already on it. Okay, it's posted.”

Kyle started laughing. “Fucking unreal.”

Later that day, Kyle accessed the Omega-chan imageboard for the first time. As soon as he entered the site, he noticed that it closely resembled a clone of 4chan, with the exception of the logo, which was a stylized version of the Greek letter Omega, or  $\Omega$ . Users could create their own boards as with 8chan, but due to the low traffic, he didn't see very many. There was also private messaging, but only between the anonymous users and the Admin. Regular users could not directly message each other.

Of all the boards featured on  $\Omega$ chan, /Pol/ was unsurprisingly the most active, with many users posting pictures, articles, memes and other content that took Kyle back many years. *Man, I don't believe this. Actual discussions? Unforced memes? Shitposts that aren't total shit? And no board sliding anywhere.* He did notice plenty of arguments, a reassuringly large quantity of swearing and name-calling, and of course a massive amount of complete faggotry and unmitigated autism, but... to Kyle, it felt like returning home after a tornado ripped through his neighborhood, only to find his house still standing, proud and strong.

Unfortunately, these warm nostalgic feels were soon swept aside by the topics people were posting about. International users in Europe, primarily the United Kingdom and Sweden, linked articles that turned Kyle's stomach. Many of these users had given themselves over to cynicism and nihilism due to the direction their countries were taking, and Kyle couldn't blame them. Among the worst were:

*'The changing faith of Germany: Conversion to Islam skyrocketing among native population.'* For some reason it was now in-vogue for white Germans to convert to Islam, and like born-again Christians in America, these new converts showed extra zeal regarding their adopted faith.

*'French authorities roll out program to identify, offer treatment for "intolerant youths."'* This one seemed relatively benign at first, as the article implies that racist or bigoted young Frenchman were simply misguided, and would merely be offered education programs aimed at increasing understanding of the large African and Islamic populations streaming into France. Of course, at the end of the article Kyle found out that participation in such programs was not voluntary...

*'"Sharia Zones" for Muslim-majority areas in U.K. to be officially recognized by 2022.'* Apparently de-facto Sharia zones already existed, and now the British Government felt that making it official was simply a matter of course. *What could go possibly go wrong*, Kyle thought with a shake of his head.

*'Swedish Muslim receives deferred six-month prison sentence for rape and murder of twin seven-year old girls.'* This one especially made his blood boil. Apparently blacks or Muslims living in Sweden could commit rape and murder and expect the crimes to essentially go unpunished, if they're even caught at all. But that wasn't even the worst part. No, the worst part was that *Swedish activists were protesting the conviction as being too harsh*. They even got the mother of the girls to go on camera and beg for the man to be absolved of his 'crimes.' Since he was a member of a persecuted group, and the victims were from a privileged group, apparently in Sweden it means that *really he was the victim all along*.

The fact that things had progressed to this point without even a shred of self-awareness regarding the staggering hypocrisy was really all the proof one needed that Western Culture was essentially being re-programmed in ways that would impress the greatest Soviet Propagandists.

Since Kyle couldn't take anymore, he looked around for Mia's 'recruitment ad,' and he found it in a stickied post near the top. Kyle clicked on it, and there was an image of a chibi-type anime girl that looked somewhat like Mia wearing fatigues and saluting. Below this, the text simply read:

*We're putting together a final resistance against those who seek to destroy the white race and Western Civilization as a whole. No experience necessary, but be aware death and destruction may result. Military experience a big plus. First four to be accepted will receive a free waifu of their choice. PM if interested.*

*-Admin*

Naturally, everyone thought Ωchan was run by multiple human beings, when in reality it was simply Mia carrying out a lone 24-hour vigil, so even with the Admin posting it, the vast majority of users thought it was a joke. "Nice try, faggot" said one. "Taylor Swift as my waifu or fuck off," said another. Kyle laughed as he scrolled through the posts, but quickly grew frustrated when he noticed that

a surprising amount of users thought the board had been compromised, and the admin message nothing more than a blatant honeypot. The few users that openly expressed interest were roundly mocked and castigated by their fellows. *Hmm, Kyle thought, maybe she shoulda left the whole waifu thing out.*

But then again, for the first time someone was publicly posting an ad for what could very well be considered a terrorist organization, and so it was probably natural to be a little suspicious. Kyle himself would've probably joined the others in tearing apart the few users who took it seriously, had Mia's box never crossed his threshold. *But then again, there's the whole 'private messaging the Admin' thing. Maybe some of these guys are PM'ing Mia all the same.*

As if to prove that point, a few minutes later Mia came running into the study, where Kyle was currently browsing the site.

"I got one!" Mia said, leaning forward on the desk. "He's ex-military too. Marine Corps."

"Yeah? Awesome," Kyle said with a nervous laugh. "So a Jarhead. That's... great!" *Aw, shit. A marine? Really? There's no way I'll have any authority over that guy. Well... it had to happen eventually, I suppose, Kyle lamented. As soon as other people get brought in, I get pushed out to the edges. That's how it always goes.*

"Indeed!" Mia was all smiles. "So what do you think of the board?" She said, peering closer to the screen. "I know the traffic's a little low, but that's only because I run a tight ship."

"It's great, Mia, it really is. The, uh... regulars don't seem to be responding well to the ad, though."

"That's fine," Mia said. "We don't need many to start with. At this point it's more about quality over quantity anyway."

"That's true," Kyle put a hand to his chin. "If we start making some waves, or gain notoriety, then people will definitely start taking it seriously."

"Yup, that's what I'm thinking," Mia said. "We just have to be mindful of the logistics, and be ready to set up separate cells when the time comes."

Kyle's eyebrows furrowed. "You've put a lot of thought into this, haven't you?"

She shrugged. "Not really. It just seems like the most reasonable thing to do."

"So... what now?" Kyle said. "When do we meet this guy? Is there like an interview, or what?"

"Indeed there is," Mia said. "It's in a very public place, so you're going to have to go."

"Wh-wh-wait, alone?" Kyle blanched. "Aren't I a wanted man?"

"I don't think there's reason to worry," said Mia. "I mean sure, if the police run your name they'll pull up the warrant from Arizona, but all you have to do is just make sure that doesn't happen."

Kyle's head hit the desk.

“What's wrong? Isn't this what you wanted?” Mia's head tilted to the side as she peered toward Kyle.

“I guess,” Kyle said, looking up slightly. “I mean, yeah I suppose it is.”

“Like I told you, Kyle, there's no favorable outcome that doesn't come with substantial risk. Even staying here and doing nothing won't guarantee our safety.”

Kyle sighed. “Well, at least make me a fake ID, like the one you used to rent that car.”

“Piece of cake,” Mia said. “I'll get you a debit card, Uber account and everything else you need.”

He slowly nodded, which with his head still mostly on the desk meant it simply bobbed around. “Sounds good. I just need the time and place.”

“Day after tomorrow, noon sharp, at the Wienerschnitzel near 30<sup>th</sup> Street and Pico.” She pointed at Kyle and nodded.

His head, which had slowly started rising, fell back to the desk once more. “Why the hell would we meet at a Wien... no, no.” Kyle quickly sat up. “Fuck it, I don't even care anymore. I'll be there.”

The steady beeping that awoke Kyle the next morning was faint, but just annoying enough that it immediately set his teeth on edge. He reached over to slap the alarm clock, but his palm only found the smooth, stained wood of a bedside table. Realizing that he didn't actually have an alarm clock, Kyle groggily reached out for his phone, before swearing as he remembered that it was actually sitting on his desk across the room. His swearing intensified as he threw back the covers and angrily slipped out of bed, scrambling over to the desk to end this source of early morning aggravation.

*Wait a minute, this isn't coming from my phone, he realized, swiping the screen. A benign smartphone menu was all that greeted his bleary eyes. I never even set an alarm. What the fuck is that noise?!* Kyle turned around, his sleep-addled and slightly hungover mind struggling to comprehend the mystery at hand. *It's coming from outside, he suddenly realized. Sounds like from the front of the house.*

Kyle reluctantly got dressed, his swearing now at a fever pitch, and marched out of his room and down the hall, toward the source of the noise. After cracking one of the tall double doors of the main entrance, Kyle peeked out into the chilly early-morning air only to see a large white box truck slowly backing up toward the house. The truck was dirty, scuffed-up and clearly a veteran of many deliveries, as was the Hispanic driver whose head now poked out of the driver-side window. The driver, until now focused on maneuvering around the fountains as he backed up, immediately noticed Kyle's befuddled gaze.

“Hey man!” The driver said in heavily accented English. “Where the hell do you want this?”

Kyle leaned back into the house and glanced around, hoping to see Mia approaching in her disguise, but found nothing. Apparently, he had to deal with this situation alone. His swearing resumed

as Kyle stepped out onto the flagstone steps and approached the driver.

“Shit, I dunno,” Kyle said as he neared. “Honestly I didn't even know you were coming. Are you sure you're at the right place?” The driver nodded and recited the address of the residence, and Kyle could only shrug. Apparently the man was delivering two dozen heavy-duty sliding doors, as well as their frames and other accessories needed for installation.

*So Mia really took what I said about renovating the lab seriously,* Kyle thought with furrowed eyebrows. *I guess that's fine.*

“Yeah, anywhere's good.” Kyle said, and the driver stopped, jumped out and opened up the sliding back door of the truck. Assisted by another Hispanic male who didn't seem to speak any English, the driver began unloading and stacking bundled-up metal doors, and several heavy cardboard boxes that rattled as they were placed on the ground. As soon as they finished, the driver produced paperwork for Kyle to sign, thanked him for his business, and prepared to leave. Kyle watched the truck barely squeeze through the security gate, and then turned his attention back to the goods the men neatly stacked near the garage.

“What do you think?” A familiar high-pitched voice said from the front doorway. Kyle turned around, only to see Mia approaching with a broad smile. “I made sure to order plenty in case we expand the lab.”

“Uhh...” Kyle began, “I guess they're fine. They kinda look like the doors they use in prisons nowadays.”

“They're very similar,” Mia said. “I also ordered paint, forty bags of cement, ventilation and plumbing supplies, and one bathroom door.”

“Can't you just make this sort of thing yourself, though?” Kyle asked. “I mean, you got the lab set up to pretty much manufacture anything.”

“I could,” Mia said, crouching down to inspect the merchandise. “But I'd rather not. It wastes valuable time and resources. If there's something we need that we can simply buy, then I much prefer going that route.”

*Well, why not?* Kyle thought. *After all, money's no longer an object for us.*

“So now what?” He said. “Do you need me to help with anything?”

Mia grabbed onto one of the heavy doors, effortlessly lifting it up and over her head. It had taken both men to unload each of the doors earlier, and they grunted from the effort. As Mia headed into the house, balancing the heavy door with outstretched arms, she simply told Kyle to grab what he could.

He looked down at the heavy doors and boxes, experimentally testing their weight, and laughed. *No fucking way,* he thought, shaking his head. *I could probably handle this with a dolly, but...* A sudden whirring of servos announced the presence of Sachi, who it seemed had also gotten roped into helping. The robotic maid was likewise able to lift the doors with no issue, but her movements were not nearly as smooth as Mia's, as the door she awkwardly held nearly punched a hole in the wall after she re-

entered the house. Kyle ended up spending the next half hour helping her safely maneuver the merchandise into the lab, where everything was piled up in the storage room, which Kyle was now relieved to see was completely brain-free. In fact, the live organ storage containers had been shut down and moved to one of the other rooms with all of the medical-looking devices, and Kyle saw no reason why it shouldn't stay that way.

On his last trip down to the lab with Sachi, he noticed two large robots now hauling the doors to various points in the lab. As soon as he saw them, Kyle froze. They came with two bulky arms, a reverse-teardrop shaped chest, and trinocular heads.

“Uh, Mia? Is it really okay to use these things?” Kyle said, indicating the large robots which appeared identical to the one that Amy had ordered to harvest his head and shoulders. “I mean, one just like these tried to kill me.”

“Don't worry,” Mia said in a chipper tone. “They'll listen to me. And the one that served as Amy's assistant has been fixed up and restored.”

Kyle looked at one of the robots, and could tell right away that its chest and head looked newer than the rest of its body.

“So you're the one that worked for Amy?” He asked.

The robot's head swiveled to Kyle and nodded vigorously. “Amy-sama is no more,” it said cheerfully. “I serve Mia-sama now .”

“Ah, gotcha. And um, sorry I shot you.”

“No apology necessary,” it said with its deep Mia-like voice. “Because I've been repaired. Mia-Five is... the opposite of dead!” That made Kyle raise an eyebrow, then he left the robot to its work.

As he made his way over to where Mia was currently situated, in front of the panels of the Central AI Nexus, Kyle couldn't help but marvel at the flurry of activity around him. Spider-like construction bots crawled along the walls and skittered across the floor, while the three smaller robots zipped back and forth, carrying supplies and arguing over who gets to do what. The larger robots were primarily used to set up the doors themselves, and Sachi even helped as much as she was able. In the center of it all was Mia, once more sitting with her hands up and palms out, as if she were directing every one of her lesser sisters by willpower alone. As it turns out, that assessment wasn't far from the truth.

“So are you actually controlling all of them?” Kyle asked as he stepped back to avoid a passing construction bot. “Because that's kind of what it looks like.”

Mia's pupils had again contracted, but not all the way as before. “Not entirely,” she said without moving. “I'm directing them. This way, I can ensure the upgrades you requested are completed quickly and efficiently.”

“Ah, gotcha,” Kyle said, hand on chin. “Y'know, I still can't get over how badass this all is. If we hired a crew of people to renovate this place it would take them weeks, or hell, maybe even months.”

“Humans are inefficient,” Mia said, as if it were a point of fact. “But I can complete all requested upgrades within forty-eight hours.”

“Yeah...” he thought about that. Though Mia had pointed this out without a hint of disdain in her voice, Kyle couldn't help feeling a little insulted. *She's not wrong though. And though I hate to admit it, Amy's distaste for the human race wasn't entirely misplaced, either.* “Maybe that's true, but I'd rather not just sit here feeling useless. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Jeremy said something like that, once.” Mia didn't turn her head, but her eyes swiveled up toward Kyle's. “You're not useless though. I told you, I find you all very interesting. You especially, Kyle.”

Somehow that didn't help much. Kyle clenched his teeth, as her words suddenly made him feel like something of a zoo animal. “Well, I'm glad.” He eventually said, after concluding that jeopardizing Mia's goodwill towards humanity would likely be a bad idea. “Let me know if you think of something.”

“Another delivery truck is scheduled to arrive soon,” she said. “I'll need you to greet them and sign any paperwork. Just make sure you use your new alias.”

*Oh, fuck.* Kyle slapped his forehead. He'd signed the earlier paperwork using his real name. *Well, I scribbled my signature, so it should be indecipherable... I hope.* Still, he didn't mention this to Mia, electing only to nod and head back into the house.

Once beyond the hatch, Kyle strained his ear, but was pleasantly surprised to find that he was no longer able to hear the noisy controlled chaos within the lab. Soon enough, another delivery truck had arrived, and this time Kyle was out in front to greet them with a wave.

As the day wore on, a total of five delivery trucks visited the property, unloaded their cargo, and departed through the gate and down the hill. Kyle was able to find a dolly within the garage that he used to help move the numerous bags of cement and buckets of paint now piled up on the driveway. Even though Sachi wasn't self-aware and Mia was strong enough to carry four buckets at once, he still didn't like the idea of them doing all the heavy lifting.

After taking a break to munch on a sandwich Sachi had made for him, Kyle entered his bathroom to take a well-deserved leak. While in mid-stream, Mia's voice made him suddenly jump, and he just barely avoided hosing down the bathroom wall and toilet paper.

“Jesus fuck Mia, what is it?! I'm kinda busy at the moment,” he said as he flushed.

“We've got another applicant!” She said, her voice echoing within the well-tiled bathroom. “He's not military, but says he can handle himself well enough.”

“Great, so where am I meeting this guy? The ball-pit at the McDonald's playpen?”

“Is that where you want to hold the interview?” She asked in an earnest voice.

“Not really. Kids piss in there.”

“Well, no location has been set just yet, so let me know if you have a preference. Ideally it's somewhere public on the off-chance he's an undercover federal agent or some kind of saboteur.”

“I'm fine with whatever, Mia.” Kyle said, washing his hands. “But on that point, is there any way to figure out beforehand if these guys are legit?”

“Well...” Mia began, “in order to keep the wrong kind of people out of Ωchan, I do trace their IP address and weed out anyone I find that's clearly a paid shill or that is conducting surveillance. It's not foolproof, of course, but I believe there's a good chance all of our applicants are the real deal.”

“A good chance, huh?” Kyle continued the conversation as he made his way through the house. “And there's no way to make it one-hundred percent?”

“I told you Kyle, our activities entail a degree of risk. This is unavoidable, but that's why you interview them. Once you meet with the applicants and find out their name and other personal information, I'll be able to do more research. If anything's funny, I'll let you know so you can get out of there before it's too late.”

“Great. Sounds good, Mia.” *Man, I dunno about this.* Kyle pictured a potential interview with an overly professional, clean-shaven man while waves of black SUV's with tinted windows conspicuously pulled up and parked nearby. He shuddered, and found himself suddenly having second thoughts about the whole thing.

*Hmm... maybe SimCity: Underground Hill Edition wouldn't be so bad, after all... Actually, it would probably be closer to that Fallout Shelter game. That was actually kinda fun...*

The next day, only a single delivery truck arrived in the morning, this one dropping off sinks, toilets, showerheads, slats of bathroom tile as well as pipes and other plumbing supplies. Apparently they were going to create small apartments in the lab for the waifus to live in, and each was going to have their own little private bathroom. *That's probably for the best, Kyle mused. Mine can be... territorial.*

As before, Kyle directed the men to leave the goods on the driveway, then helped Mia and Sachi bring them into the lab once the truck had left. But the second Kyle had set foot into the lab, his eyes went wide.

“Holy shit...” His jaw dropped at the incredible changes that had taken place in only a twenty-four hour period.

The rough rock-and-cement walls were now completely smooth and painted in a dynamic modern blue-and-white pattern, and instead of the dangling plastic strips, sliding metal doors now sectioned off each room and main corridor. The lighting was much brighter and offered better coverage, though the cables were still exposed. As he walked down the ramp leading to the central chamber, Kyle looked all around, taking in the changes.

“Pretty nice, Mia.” Kyle said to the AI anime girl as she followed him in carrying a sink in each arm. “Were you guys working on this all night?”

“Indeed we were,” she said, smiling. “Inventing new things is fun, but I like working on projects like this, too.”

“It just looks so much more... I dunno, like an actual underground base. How come Amy never did anything like this?”

“She demanded we focus all resources toward making her wishes come true.” Mia said, taking her position up in the chair facing the display screens. “Had she succeeded, the next step would be to set up the living areas for her subjects, so we would've done something like this eventually.”

Kyle scoffed. “Jeez, what came after that? A fucking throne room?”

“Oh don't be silly,” Mia said, her pupils beginning to contract. “That wasn't scheduled until phase three.”

He shook his head. “Somehow I knew I was going to regret even asking.”

“Anyway, it's almost time for your appointment with our new Marine friend. I've requested a ride from Uber on your behalf to take you to the meeting spot. It should be here in about twenty minutes.”

He slapped his forehead. “That's right, I totally spaced that off! Alright... I guess I'll get going, then.” Kyle turned to leave.

“Make sure you wear the LA Dodgers hat that's sitting on your desk. It has a tiny camera and microphone that should be undetectable to all but the most thorough inspection. If I find anything troubling, I'll let you know.” As with earlier, she looked up at him without moving her head.

“Got it. Wish me luck!” He threw out a half-assed salute.

“Good luck, Kyle.” Mia shut her eyes and smiled.

Kyle was anxious. The Uber driver was scheduled to arrive any minute, and for no particular reason he'd decided to simply wait out in front, past the security gate. He paced back and forth, glancing around, but the only movement he could see consisted of bright green shrubs and robust leafy trees that swayed and rustled in a surprisingly strong February breeze.

There! His eyes caught a flash of movement turning onto the loop of road down the hill that ultimately led to the residence. He strained his eyes to see, but all he could make out was that it was a small car of some kind.

He fidgeted with the Dodgers hat sitting awkwardly atop his head. In addition to not entirely fitting, it itched, and to make matters worse was for a team that he knew nothing about playing a sport he knew even less about. When Kyle picked up the hat in his room he tried examining it, but found no obvious wires or devices that would indicate it was anything except an ordinary baseball cap. Whatever Mia had hidden inside of it was well concealed indeed.

Soon enough the approaching car rounded the bend, bringing it into view once more, and Kyle could see it was a bright blue Honda Fit. The small car rolled to a stop alongside him, and the window rolled down, revealing a lanky white kid with short, curly hair.

Kyle greeted the young man, hopped in the back seat, and immediately named the destination. The kid turned and regarded Kyle with an incredulous expression.

“You live here and you want me to take you to Wienerschnitzel? You know Uber Eats is a thing, right?” he said.

“I know, I just like actually going out to eat. And lemme tell ya, nothing can beat that authentic, uh, Wienerschnitzel atmosphere.”

The kid looked at him with a raised eyebrow, then simply shrugged. “It's cool,” he said. “you wouldn't believe the places some of these people around here ask me to take them.”

Kyle nodded with an 'uh-huh' before the kid pulled the car around and headed back down the hill. He'd considered simply driving the Corvette himself, but after scoping out the route he was supposed to take on Gogolemaps realized he'd immediately get lost, even with GPS.

*If I'm gonna live here, eventually I will need to learn the area, he thought. Especially if something unexpected goes down...*

Kyle had used Uber before in the past, and it was generally a pleasant enough experience. He made small talk with the driver, who was a student at UCLA, and wasn't surprised to learn a lot of students turned to driving for Uber as a way to make cash and potentially network with people. He asked the driver how he liked the school, and suddenly the kid wasn't so talkative anymore.

“What is it?” Kyle had said as they rolled to a stoplight not far from their destination. “If it's something politically incorrect don't worry about me, I get it.”

The kid laughed nervously but didn't say anything else. Once the iconic triangular shape of the Wienerschnitzel came into view, Kyle steadied his nerves and glanced at his phone. It was almost exactly noon. Once they'd pulled into the parking lot and the car stopped, Kyle wasted no time thanking the driver and exiting the vehicle.

The Wienerschnitzel fast food restaurant was busy, as were all fast food restaurants currently enjoying their lunch hour rush. The air was crisp, and smelled of asphalt, car exhaust and sizzling greasy food, the latter scent making Kyle quite hungry. Not knowing if he should wait outside or go in, Kyle elected to simply sit at one of the outdoor tables underneath a broad red-and-yellow umbrella. While he waited, he gazed around, the ordinary city scene unfolding around him feeling almost alien after spending so much time in a luxurious home among such technological absurdities as anime brought to life.

All up and down the city street a myriad of drivers and pedestrians made their way along, busily going about their mundane lives unaware that a thirty-five year old NEET was now attempting to recruit one of their own into a resistance movement spearheaded by a female anime-style artificial

intelligence. Kyle furtively glanced at the other tables around him. Each were occupied by families of various ethnic backgrounds, all busily consuming the greasy elongated fare offered by the eponymous Wienershnitzel.

Again he considered the stomach-turning articles he'd seen posted online. Compared to the benign city scene around him, the dire warnings made by the users of Ωchan suddenly seemed like nothing more than fanciful hyperbole. He strained to eavesdrop on the neighboring tables, wondering if perhaps the black family sitting to his right were planning their nightly decapitations of white folk, but instead they were only planning for an upcoming birthday party. The Hispanic family behind him spoke entirely in Spanish, but their frequent bouts of laughter indicated their conversation was likely nothing nefarious, and the last table, occupied by a single white mother and her squealing children, provided no insights unrelated to children's toys and movies.

*Are things really that bad?* He caught himself thinking once again. The strung-up 'racists' event was certainly horrific, but since then he'd seen no other articles about violent acts committed in the name of social justice, at least none taking place in America. As Kyle sat, silently observing this one little slice of Los Angeles, he began to have doubts. *This country is a mess, of course, but the kind of racial and socioeconomic upheaval that Mia and everyone on Ωchan says is coming would essentially result in anarchy. How would that benefit the Elites?*

Just as Kyle began pondering this, out the corner of his eye he noticed one of the restaurant's employees approaching. Looking over, he saw that it was a white male roughly Kyle's age, but in much better shape, wearing a red-and-yellow uniform and name tag that simply read 'Manager.' *Shit*, Kyle thought, *he's probably gonna give me grief for taking up a table without ordering anything.* But to Kyle's endless surprise, the manager sat down with him.

"Hey," the man said, with a deep and authoritative voice. "Are you the guy?"

"Uhh..." Kyle wasn't sure what to say. *What guy? Who the fuck was he expect- Wait, is this him? Is this the Marine?* He glanced over the man, noticing immediately the steely gaze of his blue eyes, as well as the two-day stubble on both his chiseled face and shaved head. The man's physique was excellent, lean and muscular but not overly bulky, and his overall bearing was very... disciplined.

"Y-yeah, that's me," Kyle said, hastily clearing his throat. He immediately tried to sit up straight, in a futile effort to appear more respectable, and steepled his hands on the table. "You, uh... spoke with the admin of a certain website, correct?"

The man nodded, almost solemnly. "I want in," he said. "If you're taking it to those *crooked fucks* in Washington, then I want in." The man's gaze was intense enough that Kyle reflexively looked away, but he immediately caught himself, and forced his eyes back.

"Alright," Kyle finally said. "Well, I mean it's as you read in the ad. So yes, we will be taking it to the 'crooked fucks' in Washington, and everywhere else, too. We're, uh... just getting started, so we're still getting established, but--"

"That doesn't matter," the man cut him off. "I know these things take time. Just so long as you..." he clenched his teeth, "*actually do something.*" He then leaned back. "Since I, uh... retired I've been a part of three different groups, and it's always the same thing. We drink beer, shoot guns, talk about how much we wanna march down to the Capitol and take out the trash, but... nothing ever

happens. *Ever.*” The man shook his head in disbelief.

Kyle's earlier apprehension now returned, gripping his chest with full force. *Are we really doing this? Are we... really, actually, honest-to-god doing this?* Kyle was feeling apprehensive again, but the thought of having a trained Marine on the team eased many of his doubts.

“We are gonna do something,” he finally said, solemnly. “And I can't tell you when, but... it'll be sooner rather than later, that much I can say.”

For the first time, a smile split the man's grizzled face, and he extended his hand. “Brandon Yates,” said the man. “Pleasure.”

“Mike, uh...” *Fuck, I forgot my fake last name!*

But Brandon didn't seem to care. He seized Kyle's hand in a grip almost as strong as Mia's and shook heartily. Just then, Kyle heard his phone's ringtone go off; a text message had arrived. After finishing the handshake he pulled the phone out and swiped. The message merely read: *'He's good.'* Kyle nodded to himself. *Looks like Mia's background check came back clean.*

“So um, Brandon,” Kyle began as he slid the phone back, “what exactly made you want to join up? What made you contact the Admin and say, 'I want in?' Is that something you can tell me?”

Brandon closed his eyes, and took a deep, deliberate breath. Kyle could see his face twitch here and there as what must've been painful memories swirled to the surface. At last, his eyes snapped open, and Kyle could readily see the pain, weariness, and sense of betrayal etched into his features. Reading the anguish written all over the other man's face somehow steeled Kyle's resolve, and he felt his jaw clench.

“When I was deployed in Afghanistan,” Brandon said, “I saw things. I saw how the locals behaved, how they treated each other. We weren't supposed to ever get involved, that was a cardinal rule. It didn't matter how sick or fucked up it was, our official policy was non-interference toward the local ‘friendlies.’” His voice dripped with contempt. “I was there for ‘Operation Enduring Freedom,’ and let me tell you, it was none of those things.”

After a brief pause, he continued. “The whole thing was a clusterfuck, of course, but it wasn't the flattened villages or torn-up bodies that sent me over the edge. No, I could handle all that. *It was the god damn locals.*” Brandon glanced up, fixing Kyle with another gaze that made him fight to maintain eye contact. “These people...” he said, “they're not human. Not like you and me.”

“Wh-what do you mean?” Kyle asked after another pause.

“One day, while out on patrol, we stopped by a village, so my C.O. could collect intel and jerk off the local chieftains. I went off for a smoke break, and there, behind one of those mud huts they live in, were three...” He blinked several times, fighting back the tears that were forming, “were three grown men... gang-raping a two-year old girl.” He immediately shut his eyes.

Kyle's face twisted in horror and disgust. “What... did you do?” He finally asked.

“I didn't even think about it,” Brandon said, eyes still shut. “I started shooting. Of course, I got

immediately tackled by the two other guys that were with me, but... those men stopped what they were doing.”

“Did... did any of them die? Did you actually kill any of them?” *I like to think I would've done the same thing, had I been there...*

He shook his head with inconsolable regret. “Of course all three of them lived. The girl? She died from what they did to her. Which in their culture was a actually a good thing, since she'd be forever tainted had she lived.”

“Ah,” Kyle said, feeling a sick kind of twisting in his gut, the feeling he'd always get whenever he saw some vile evil going unpunished. “Still, I think you did the right thing. What any decent hum-”

Brandon's eyes again flew open, and he sneered. “You'd think, wouldn't you? I joined the Corps to protect people from that kind of... but no, instead, I ended up getting court-marshaled and spent a year behind bars.”

“How the fuck would you actually get in trouble for that?!” Kyle was aghast.

The ex-marine shrugged. “Like I said, we had a policy of non-interference. Oh sure, on paper we were supposed to prevent atrocities like that, but in practice...” He didn't finish, electing to simply hang his head.

“So you were... discharged, I take it?” Kyle said.

Brandon gave a curt nod. “Dishonorably, of course. That's why I'm working at this shithole.” He jerked a thumb toward the triangle-shaped fast food joint. “No law enforcement or contract deployment for me.”

“Gotcha,” Kyle said. “So is that why you want to join up with us?”

“No,” Brandon said, sighing. “If it was just that, I'd... live with it, somehow.” He glanced over, seeming to appraise Kyle. “But now these people, these *fucking Muslims*, are being brought over by the boatload, imported in massive numbers to Europe, and America too. After Trump, God rest his soul, was taken out, and he *was* taken out, the numbers jumped back up, higher than ever before. Last year, we took in almost a hundred thousand. And this year? Some fucking Dems are pushing for a full *half-million...*” He looked... utterly flabbergasted.

“Yeah, I'd prefer if we kept the nasty ones out myself, but they're not all bad, I mean-”

Brandon cut him off again. “I know not all of them are rapists and murderers and terrorists. I know that. The problem is the ones that are, almost never get called out or stopped by the ones that aren't. After I shot at those men, the other villagers didn't thank us, they chased us out of the village. We were never welcome there again after that.”

“Huh...” Kyle rubbed his chin. “That's a good point.” *It's true their values are completely different from ours. The most extreme kind are fundamentally incompatible with the Western World, and the moderates don't stand up to the extremists. Not enough, anyway. Is this one of the ways they're trying to bring down the West?*

“Anyway, I've got plenty of other reasons, too, most of them having to do with the direction our worthless leaders are taking the country, and... wait, why were you trying to stick up for them? Are you really...” He squinted his eyes, as if trying to see through Kyle. The object of his scrutiny suddenly began to sweat, offering muttered protests.

“Ah, I got it,” His eyes suddenly went wide. “You're testing my resolve. Trying to see if my heart's really in it.”

“Y-yes, yes, that's exactly it,” Kyle stammered, “and uh, you pass!”

Brandon looked up into the air with a smile, and turned back to Kyle with a continuous nod. “Good man,” he said. “You're full of shit, but that's okay. You've got a good heart. Try to hold on to that for as long as you can. Because once it's gone...” For a moment, he seemed to stare right through Kyle, a distant, faraway look in his eyes. And there was something else there, too. Something that seemed... somehow sad, but not in a tear-jerking sense.

He stayed like this for awhile, until eventually Kyle cleared his throat and asked Brandon a few more questions about where he lived, and when he'd be able to meet up.

“So as far as my schedule goes,” Brandon said, snapping back to his normal self as if nothing had happened, “I'm available any weeknight from six to nine, and I'm free all weekend. Except...” his voice dropped, and his face clouded over, “for every other Sunday, I need those days off. That's... when I get to see my daughter.”

“Of course, I completely understand.” Kyle immediately got the impression that saying no to that would be a complete deal-breaker. “The admin will fill you in on the specifics as far as when and where we'll meet, and things like that. And as I said, we're just getting started, so, uh... we could really use your help.”

“It'd be my pleasure,” Brandon said, before leaning in and whispering, “I've got quite a bit of firepower, too.”

Kyle grinned. “Wait 'til you see what we have.” He watched with satisfaction as the ex-marine's eyes lit up like a kid on Christmas morning.

“I can't wait,” he said, before pushing himself up and to a rigid standing position. “Anyway, my break's almost over, so I need to head back in.”

“That's cool,” Kyle said, following along as Brandon opened the door to the Wienershnitzel that he apparently managed. Immediately Kyle was blasted with the warm grease-infused air of a fast-food establishment, and it made him fight the urge to drool.

“Hey, Brandon.” The ex-marine stopped briefly, glancing back. “I was actually getting kind of hungry. What do you recommend?” Kyle gestured toward the menu.

Brandon simply shook his head. “I wouldn't eat here.” He then turned and made his way back behind the counter, where his demeanor immediately switched to that of a friendly but fastidious fast-food manager. He took over a register from one of the other employees, and began taking orders. The

first in line was a young couple with a little girl in tow.

“And what would you like, sweetie?” He said to the girl, who apparently felt like ordering her own food.

Kyle sighed, and tried to calm his growling stomach as he left the restaurant. Once outside, he pulled out his phone and texted the number that Mia had used to contact him. *'All done,'* his message read, *'seems like a good dude.'*

He had a reply within seconds. *'Yes, I agree. And good job, another Uber should be by momentarily to bring you home.'*

As it turned out, Kyle didn't have to wait long at all. The ride back to the residence was even more uneventful than the first, and once Kyle had stepped out of the vehicle in front of the white security gate the car had already taken off before he could even thank the driver. Shrugging, Kyle headed up the driveway, back to his weird and wonderful home on the hill.

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Mr. Rosenstein sat back, glanced at his watch, and scowled. He then glared at the old-fashioned telephone sitting on his desk as if it had just pissed on the floor. *I still can't believe I haven't heard from that schmuck.* There were only ten minutes left until he had to head to the airport, and though his private jet was capable of taking calls and fully online-capable, that wasn't the problem.

No, the problem was that for the first time in twenty-two years, his ex-CIA friend and business associate had failed to get back to him in a timely manner.

Naturally the 'ex' in 'ex-CIA' was just a formality, as Rosenstein's friend still had his fingers in every lucrative pie one could imagine, from compromising information on any and all politicians of consequence, to facilitating the transport and distribution of... exotic goods throughout North America and elsewhere. He also retained access to the CIA's (and NSA's, though they didn't know it) incredible data-harvesting apparatus, similar to the one Edward Snowden once tried to blow the whistle on.

Actually, that last part wasn't entirely true. Because since the days of Snowden, the system used to monitor and analyze all electronic communications in the world had only become more streamlined, more accurate and more... useful. According to Rosenstein's friend, artificial intelligences were being developed to sift through and analyze the staggering amount of pure digital slush that flowed through the broadband cables, routers and servers of the world.

If that was true, then so far Rosenstein wasn't impressed. Why couldn't a single one of his contacts find out anything about this mysterious third party that posted that job on the L.A. Antifa hit board? So far, everyone he'd gotten in touch with had confidently assured Rosenstein that the identity of said third party would be swiftly uncovered. And since then, silence.

The old man's eyebrows furrowed as he organized his notes and cleaned off his desk, and he began frowning heavily as he pushed himself up and out of his chair, and headed for the door to his office.

He glanced at his watch one more time. One minute left. Rosenstein's ex-CIA associate, one of his most trusted of allies, had promised him something by five PM today, and...

The phone on his desk began ringing. Immediately the lines on the old man's face contorted as his scowl quickly reversed itself. Rosenstein made his way back to his desk a bit faster than he'd care to admit, and just as the phone began ringing for a third time, he reached down, grasped the old-fashioned telephone handset, and lifted it to his ear.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Rosenstein," came the deep yet gravelly voice on the other end. "I'd like to apologize for the delay, and any inconvenience this may have caused you."

"Don't worry about it, Clark," the old man said. "Considering the circumstances, I'm relieved to be hearing from you at all."

Clark seemed to sigh. "I'm not surprised that nobody else was able to uncover anything. Because as far as we can tell, whoever posted that job on the hit board... simply doesn't exist."

Rosenstein's smile began shrinking. "You did find something, right?"

The ex-CIA agent paused for a second, and cleared his throat. "Well... to be blunt, no, we didn't. Only misdirection and dead-ends."

Rosenstein said nothing. Not out of shock or disappointment, but because he knew Clark wouldn't waste his time like this unless there was more.

"But in this case," as expected, Clark continued, "the fact that whoever this was so flawlessly evaded any and all detection is telling."

The old man nodded. He'd come to a similar conclusion already, but wasn't exactly sure what to make of it. All he knew was that they were dealing with someone or something that was unusually adept at staying hidden. "Any ideas?" He said.

"There's only a few plausible options, and even fewer implausible ones," Clark said. "My hunch is that it's either some kind of prodigy, or... somehow someone built their own AI right under our noses, right here in the States."

Rosenstein's dark eyes widened. "So it's likely either some digital rain-man or... a computer that can think for itself?"

"It's all conjecture at this point," Clark said, "but personally I'm more inclined to believe the latter."

"The terminator..." Mr. Rosenstein's yellowed teeth clenched. "One of my assets said his people were attacked by a 'terminator...'"

“I looked over the x-rays and pictures taken of that nigger’s crushed hands, and I have to tell you... I’ve never seen anything else like it. His hands got pulped... by a smaller pair of hands, no question.”

Mr. Rosenstein leaned against his desk. His mind immediately raced, a very rare occurrence these days. There wasn’t much that could raise the old man’s blood pressure, not anymore... but learning that someone out there had somehow built a machine that could pass for a teenage girl? That did the job. He honestly wasn’t sure what to do next.

“So where do we go from here?” He asked his ex-CIA ally.

Clark exhaled. “We need to find this ‘Kyle Landale,’” he said. “If this really is an intelligent AI there’s a good chance we’ll never find it, not as long as it wants to stay hidden. But him? Assuming he’s even still alive, he’s the only real lead we have right now.”

Rosenstein swore. The only publicly available picture of this guy was an outdated driver’s license photo. He’d gotten a description from Anton’s crew, as well as a sketch, but Mr. Landale happened to look just like any other average white guy in his mid-thirties. Unless they got lucky, finding him would be like finding a needle in a stack of needles.

“Alright, I’ll spare what resources I can,” the old man finally said. “But right now, I have other projects that require my full attention, so I’ll be leaving this one to you.”

“Not a problem,” Clark said. “We’ll do what we do best, and let you know the minute we find out anything.”

“I know you will. Take care of yourself, Clark.” His ex-CIA ally said his goodbyes, and Rosenstein hung up the phone, then glanced at his watch. Ten after five. The old man shook his head, but was surprised to find the mild irritation he would normally feel from such a delay failing to manifest. Instead, another feeling tickled his aged spine, a sensation he hadn’t felt in a long, long time: it was the tiniest inkling of fear.

*Someone really built an artificial intelligence? A real one, that can independently think for itself? The idea that such a thing could not only exist, but exist outside of his knowledge or control... Clark better come through on this one,* he thought as he again headed for the exit.

On the grand chessboard of life, Mr. Rosenstein had gradually maneuvered all of his pieces into the perfect spot, and checkmate for his opponent was now all but guaranteed. But this? It would be like his opponent had an invisible piece, one he couldn’t see or take, not yet at least. But what was it? Just another pawn, providing a minor inconvenience at most? Or was it a queen, something that could threaten a checkmate of its own?

Rosenstein ruminated over this during the drive to his private hangar, where his luxurious personal jet awaited to whisk him away to Europe. As he stepped out of the limousine, the old man was surprised to find himself spontaneously chuckling. The driver reflexively glanced over, but quickly averted his eyes.

*This... this could be very interesting,* he thought as he boarded the plane. *Very interesting indeed...*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

After he'd gotten home, Kyle made his way to the lab, where his face was promptly blasted by an ice-cold torrent of air. He immediately began shivering, and hustled his way down the entrance ramp, toward the AI Nexus where Mia was located.

"M-m-mia," Kyle said, teeth chattering, "w-w-what the f-f-f-uck is this?"

"Sorry Kyle," she said, still in her bizarre hands-out pose. "The ventilation beforehand was wholly inadequate, so we're installing a new system and running tests."

"O-o-okay, I'll be in the h-h-house," he replied, as he trembled his way back.

Kyle spent the rest of the day browsing Ωchan, and as he began reading threads in depth, he could've sworn he spotted posts that had come from Brandon. He had no proof, obviously, since everyone posting was anonymous. But whoever was writing these comments was furious about how so many people acted upset about what was happening in the world, and yet refused to lift a finger to help. Kyle felt inspired to reply.

*'Maybe they're just waiting for the right person or organization to lead them,'* he wrote.

*'Well, whoever this person or organization is needs to hurry their ass up,'* came the reply.

*'Why not one of you faggots?'* came another reply from a different poster.

*'Yeah, someone's got to get this shitshow on the road,'* said another.

A different poster chimed in, using an incredulous Pepe meme. *'Nobody's gonna do shit, and you all fucking know it.'*

*'Just wait,'* Kyle wrote, using a picture of an anime girl holding an assault rifle. *'I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.'*

That night, Kyle lay in bed, hands behind his head. He stared at the ceiling, considering the direction things were going in the near pitch-blackness.

*Is there any other way?* He thought. *Sitting here and doing nothing won't work. Trying to hunker down and create an underground sanctuary is impractical. Having Mia take over the world might work, but would leave billions dead. The only option is a surgical strike, to cut the head off the snake.* But Kyle was getting the sneaking suspicion this was no snake he was up against, but a hydra, and like the mythical beast two more heads would pop up for every one sliced off.

*So what else is there? If only there was still a place we could go, to escape to and live our lives in peace...* In centuries past, the world was still big enough that persecuted groups, or those that simply wanted to start a new life, could simply travel across the ocean. But nowadays, people would have to leave the planet to achieve that, and the technology just isn't... there?

Kyle jumped out of bed, and quickly threw on his clothes. He didn't quite run, but didn't quite walk back down to the lab, which thankfully wasn't nearly as chilly as before. He noticed new grates installed here and there high up along the walls, and again shook his head when he considered that just yesterday the area the new ventilation shaft occupied was solid rock.

“Jesus Mia,” he said when he found her in the fabrication room, “how fast do your machines drill?”

“Fast enough,” she said. “They're small and numerous, so they can accomplish a lot when everything is coordinated.” One of the three small robots zipped by, carrying a thin sheet of some kind of metal, clearly headed for the 3D printers and machining stations along the rear. It joined its companions who were hard at work at the stations, which were now currently active shaving bits off of metal and printing elaborate components out of exotic compounds. Kyle hadn't said hi to the robots in awhile, so he decided to momentarily join them. Plus, after Mia's explanation, he now understood that a variety of precision parts and advanced materials could be produced here, but he hadn't yet seen it in action.

“What's up guys? What are you all making?” He said to the robots.

“Parts for your waifu,” said the first.

“She'll be very pretty,” said the second.

“I'm not jealous. Not at all,” added the third.

“Why did you jump out of bed?” Mia asked as she joined him. “I watched you suddenly get dressed and rush all the way down here.”

“Oh yeah, I just thought of something!” Kyle turned, his eyes wide with excitement. “There's a way everyone can get what they want!”

“Oh?” Mia seemed to take genuine interest. “Tell me, I want to know!”

“We leave...” Kyle said, putting his hands on his hips, “the planet.”

“You want to leave Earth?” Mia's eyes grew a little wider.

“That's right. I was thinking with your know-how we could probably build some kind of ship, and set up a colony on Mars or somewhere else. Whaddya think?”

Mia seemed genuinely taken aback, as if she had never considered the idea. “Kyle, that's a tall order. I... would need to think about it.”

“Well, lemme know what you come up with,” he yawned. “I'm gonna go back to bed. I just wanted to mention it to you, because...” he trailed off as he turned to leave.

“Because what?” Mia said.

He stopped, and sighed wearily. "...I don't know if I can do this, Mia." Kyle said without turning around. "I want to stop all the horrible shit happening in the world, and I definitely want to stop even more horrible shit from happening in the future, but..." his head drooped. "I'm just an ordinary dude. I'm just not cut out for any of this, especially some kind of 'resistance.'"

All of a sudden, Kyle felt two soft, warm snakes slither around his stomach, joining around his navel. He looked down, only to see that Mia had wrapped her arms around him. He could feel her small body firmly press into him from behind.

"Kyle," she said. "The fact that you even want to stop it in the first place means you are cut out for it."

"R-really?" Her embrace was loose enough that Kyle was able to turn around within it. As soon as he did, he immediately noticed Mia's big eyes gazing up at him.

"Of course. Having the desire to stand up for what matters to you is the first and most important step. Everything after that is just details."

"I realize that, I guess I'm just... getting lost in the details. I mean, to actually take part in a resistance is scary as hell. We're going to be fighting *people*, Mia. Personal morals aside, I haven't gotten in a fight since elementary school."

"Any successful movement is going to have more than just fighters," she said. "Besides, that's what the waifus are for, right? At least, according to your idea?"

"Yeah, I'm just a little... apprehensive about everything, especially after meeting with Brandon. I mean... the dude has a daughter. What if he ends up getting killed because he associates with us?"

Mia continued gazing up at Kyle, her glassy anime eyes blinking once. "The ad said death and destruction may occur. He accepted that risk when he applied."

*That's true, Kyle thought. Every soldier in history left their friends and family behind to risk death because of some higher purpose they felt was worth it all. Whether it was for God, country, honor or to protect their family, in the end they risked everything for what they really believed in. All of them, even mercenaries, had a reason to fight.* As he considered this, Kyle began to feel a little embarrassed.

"Thanks Mia," he said, brushing her cheek with his fingers. "Although I'd still rather leave, and start over somewhere else, if that isn't an option, then... I think I can give this a shot."

The anime girl simply smiled, and continued hugging him.

As it turned out, leaving the planet wasn't an option, at least for some time. Kyle asked Mia what she'd come up with the next morning, and she claimed that she could theoretically build a ship that would take them to Mars, but the logistics would be daunting. The project would require difficult-to-source materials and resources in amounts that would be an instant red-flag for various watchdog agencies, and actually building it unmolested by the government would be a long and risky endeavor.

Another issue was that the trip would be a one-time thing; assuming they were somehow able to build and launch a colonization ship in secret, it would alert the governments of the world and pretty much guarantee hostility, so if things went wrong they would not be able to count on any assistance from Earth, even from potential allies. And of course, if tensions boiled over, nukes could be modified to hit targets on other planets in the solar system almost as easily as on Earth.

“So then I'd have to design an orbital missile defense station, and then I'd have to make-”

“Stop, stop,” he waved his hands. “I get it, this is something that'll have to wait.”

“Sorry Kyle, it did sound like a fun idea,” Mia frowned, seeming genuinely disappointed. “If you really want, I can purchase a property in a remote area and we can start building it anyway, and take our chances.”

“No, that's okay, it's not worth the risk. Honestly, I'm just happy to hear you say it's feasible,” he said, an enthusiastic grin sprouting on his face. “That means that once this is all over, a future in the stars is all but guaranteed!”

“Yup,” Mia nodded vigorously. “I'd love to travel the stars one day. I don't think I'd ever get bored.”

“Me neither,” Kyle said. “One of my old daydream fantasies was to skim around over the clouds of Jupiter or Neptune in some kind of super-advanced ship that could survive the conditions. I think it would be so cool to see that shit up close...”

“In that case,” Mia said, a gleam in her eye, “maybe I'll take you with me.”

Kyle chuckled and patted her head. “That'd be great, Mia.”

She smiled, but not for long. “You might also want to know that it's ready, Kyle,” she said, her tone flattening a bit. “Your waifu is ready to be constructed now.”

“Huh? Doesn't it take six days? It's only been three.”

“It does. I still have to finish fabricating the rest of...” Mia's voice grew icy. “Her memories.”

“But the rest of her is pretty much ready to put together? Is that what you're saying?”

Mia nodded somberly. “Please tell me you've thought this over and selected someone else.”

“I'm still convinced I can get her to work for us,” Kyle said, crossing his arms.

Mia sighed, and approached the large fabrication machine. Parts of all kinds were arranged on pallets nearby, and he could see something that resembled a thin skeletal frame held by the fabricator's clamps.

“Holy shit, so this is it? I actually get to watch as you create my waifu, like, right in front of me?” His eyes lit up.

“That's right, Kyle,” she said, approaching the large fabricator. “Just stand back and watch. I'm going to be focusing my full attention on this, so I won't be able to respond to any questions you may have.”

“Wow, so you're going all out, huh?” Kyle was genuinely looking forward to this. He'd seen Mia focusing on directing other machines before, but never one of this size or complexity.

“Indeed,” she said. “I'll even be taking over our three little helpers, at least temporarily.”

The three little robots in question zoomed over as soon as they were mentioned, arranging themselves in a semi-circle around Mia.

“Be gentle,” said the first

“Be as rough as you want,” said the second

“It's not like I had anything to live for anyway,” added the third.

All of a sudden, every light in the lab winked out, save for two large, multifaceted construction-style spotlights trained on the large fabricator. Mia stood before it, regarding the machine with a determined glare, as if she were a chessmaster planning every move she was going to make before the game even started.

She then reached up, with both hands, and... pulled the cute top she was wearing off, casually tossing it aside as if it were trash. Kyle's eyes widened as they flew straight to her chest, his natural male curiosity demanding to know what her small tits looked like. Her petite breasts were pert and nicely curved, but as with her crotch, there were no nipples to speak of, only smooth, anime-style flesh tones.

Despite this, Kyle felt a telltale twitch in his pants. “W-wait, Mia,” he said, trying and failing to look away, “why are you going topless? Don't you hate being exposed?”

“No,” she said. “I don't mind if others see me unclothed.”

“So then why did you-”

Mia cut him off, continuing to stare at the machine as she spoke. “I was angry and upset because Amy was mean to me. She wanted to humiliate me.” Her gaze slowly rotated to Kyle. Her face had taken on an intense, almost foreboding expression. “I don't like it when people are mean to me, Kyle.”

“G-got it,” he said. *Wow, she looks almost intimidating like that... seems my policy of staying on her good side was the right move...* Of course, Kyle genuinely did have warm feelings for Mia, so he knew none of his overt friendliness was an act.

Mia turned her head back to the fabricator, and Kyle heard a loud buzzing sound from overhead. The large appendage laying flat against the ceiling now lowered, unfolding like a gigantic insect leg. It moved along on the thin rails criss-crossing the ceiling, sliding over to just behind Mia as it finished

extending. The appendage's tip flared out, like a rectangular satellite dish, and then moved forward, toward the middle portion of Mia's back. Kyle watched as a tall, hexagonal slot opened up between her shoulder blades and the small of her back, her skin sliding back in two halves, and the appendage moved forward, the flared tip connecting with an audible *ka-tack*.

Mia's body shook from the force of the attachment, and the pupils of her eyes immediately shrunk to pinpoints. No, wait- actually it seemed as though they had disappeared altogether. Her face had taken on a completely neutral expression, and her hands were now outstretched, palms out. The appendage whirred as it bent at its 'elbow,' abruptly lifting Mia into the air. She hovered there, directly in front of the fabricator, feet and legs hanging limp.

Kyle felt his heart rate climbing as the large fabricator hummed to life. The main bay and holding clamps slid down and out to a forty-five degree angle, and the many large and medium-sized arms all extended like a suddenly enraged mechanical octopus. Mia's hovering form drew closer to them, until she was no more than ten feet away, and then... all was silent.

For a brief moment, Kyle could hear himself breathing. But just as he started wondering if something had gone wrong... the symphony began.

All at once, the lower arms reached down, picking parts off the pallets they'd been set on, and moved them up toward the stick-figure skeleton held in the clamps. Larger arms took over from here, smoothly grabbing and holding the parts as additional tiny arms of various kinds, similar to the spiderlike limbs of the white tables, attached the parts to the skeletal frame. Though all of the arms coordinated flawlessly with each other, none of their movements were symmetrical, as each were assigned a different task with machine-like precision.

The sheer *momentum* of the mechanical symphony was breathtaking, and the grand conductor of it all was Mia, silently directing each ensemble with her intense gaze. Unlike earlier, her hands were no longer simply raised palms out; no, her fingers waved, twisted, turned and pointed, her arms making exaggerated movements as if she were telekinetically controlling the whole thing.

Kyle could only watch slack-jawed as the incredibly well-directed ensemble of various limbs and parts twirled and spun, extending and contracting, all combining their efforts to produce a new cybernetic body. Little by little, the skeletal frame filled out, taking shape as component after component was grafted on with a flare of falling sparks or a burst of blowtorch flame. Artificial muscles that closely resembled steel cables were strung back and forth over the frame, in roughly the same proportions as those found on a female human body.

As the available parts began to dwindle, the three robots hurried back and forth, carrying new bits and bobs from over near the machining stations. Kyle didn't recognize what many of them were for, but he did spot cylinders that looked somewhat like Amy's corrosive power cell, if much more advanced in appearance. Whenever they neared the fabricator, their held items were seized by the feeding frenzy above and added to the rapidly-forming machine body. The arms grabbing the parts and moving them up gave Kyle the impression of a starving crab ravenously feeding itself.

For almost thirty minutes Kyle simply stared, taking in the mind-melting majesty of Mia's flawless performance. But once the last parts were raised up and the final sparks rained down, the arms slowly retracted back into their crevices, and Mia's hovering body gently lowered itself to the floor. The lights came back on as the spotlights dimmed, and the appendage clamped to Mia's back disengaged,

rising once more to its niche against the ceiling.

“Phase one is complete,” Mia said, sounding somehow exhausted. Her pupils had already returned to normal, and she plucked her top off the ground, shimmying back into it.

“Holy shit-balls, Mia! That was... absolutely insane!” A wide-eyed Kyle said while wearing a stupendous grin. “The way you controlled all that, like...” he moved his hands and arms in a pale imitation of Mia's as she was directing the fabricator. “It was just fuckin' cool, alright?”

Mia giggled softly, and smiled. “I'm glad you enjoyed watching me work. It was indeed fun, even if I wish I was building someone else.”

“It was good for me, too.” Said one of the little robots.

“Yeah, I could go for another round,” said the second.

“Anyone got a cigarette?” Added the third.

Kyle chuckled, then turned to the mechanical body still held by the fabricator's clamps. The body was outstretched a bit like Da Vinci's Vetruvian man, and as he approached, Kyle was mildly disappointed to see no noticeably feminine features, other than the long, smooth muscles of the thighs and stomach region. The skull didn't look quite as sinister as that of a terminator, but it was close enough that Kyle found it a bit off-putting.

“So this is her, huh?” He pointed at the body. “When do you add the skin, and tits, and... other parts?”

“That comes tomorrow,” said Mia. “Do you want to observe the organ transfer as well?”

“Uh...” it sounded pretty gruesome, but Kyle was simply too fascinated by the whole process to turn it down wholesale. “I guess I should, she is my waifu after all.”

“Excellent,” she said. “In the meantime, have you thought of somewhere you'd like to meet our other new recruit?”

“I don't really care, actually.” Kyle shrugged, suddenly losing interest in mundane things like people after witnessing such an incredible display of digital prowess. “Surprise me.”

Mia chuckled. “Okay, Kyle. I think you'll like the spot I picked.”

It took Kyle nearly an hour by Uber to reach the destination Mia had selected, and when he found out what it was, he smiled. *Mia... she really is thoughtful sometimes. I guess she must've been thinking about that conversation we were having earlier about traveling the stars.*

It was almost two PM when he finally arrived at the Griffith Observatory, and as he thanked the Uber driver, who may or may not have even spoken English, Kyle was suddenly taken with a curious bout of nostalgia. *I think I've been here before*, he thought, straining to recall why it was so familiar.

*Yeah, I think my parents took Krista and I here when we were little... that, or because I played the shit out of Wasteland 2.*

Kyle approached the main entrance, which was currently clogged with a gaggle of tourists and sight-seers, and glanced around, wondering if any of these were the next recruit. Once again, the ill-fitting Dodgers hat balanced awkwardly atop his head, and he fervently hoped nobody would try to bring up the team and talk Baseball with him. *Maybe I should learn about the team, just to blend in a little more*, he thought.

He checked his phone. He still had about twenty minutes to kill, so Kyle decided that he might as well explore the Observatory, which long ago had been converted into an iconic tourist attraction. As admission was still free, Kyle simply walked inside, and began ogling the various space and science-related displays spread all throughout the interior. He checked out the tesla coil, watched the pendulum for a bit, and read plaques of information regarding the planets of the solar system. After a time, he felt a hand tap him on the shoulder.

“Huh?” Kyle spun around, finding a younger man, likely in his early twenties, regarding him with a scrutinizing narrow-eyed gaze. His eye sockets seemed slightly sunken in, and his eyebrows were on the bushier side, somehow a disconcerting combination. Otherwise his physical appearance was unremarkable, though perhaps a bit above average.

“Hmm...” The man looked him over, then shook his head. His combed hair, parted to one side but a bit shaggy around the edges, wavered from the gesture. “Sorry, I musta got the wrong guy.”

“Wait,” Kyle said. “The Admin sent me.”

Immediately the man's eyes went wide. “Me too! You're my contact, right? For the...” he leaned in close, and whispered, “final resistance?”

“That's me,” Kyle nodded, trying to ignore the man's less-than-wholesome breath. “Let's get outta here, too many people.”

The man vociferously agreed, and followed Kyle out of the Observatory and into the parking lot, which was packed with cars and trucks but still offered plenty of open space to safely recruit a new member. Once the pair had made it to an area free from any potential eavesdroppers, Kyle turned and appraised the man.

Being Kyle's height, the man wasn't particularly tall, and his build was lean and wiry. Though definitely Caucasian, his skin was a few shades darker than Kyle's, likely indicating some Mediterranean ancestry. He was currently wearing a heavy metal t-shirt for a band Kyle didn't recognize, some death metal band based on the overly angular, blood-encrusted stylization of the logo. The man was a bit of a disappointment compared to the ex-marine, but Kyle was the last person that had any right to dismiss others based on appearance alone.

“My name's Mike Larson. Nice to meet you,” Kyle said, extending his hand.

“Ryan Lavigne. Nice to meet you too.” Ryan grabbed Kyle's hand, starting soft but then squeezing hard, as if deliberately forcing a firm handshake.

“Alright Ryan,” Kyle began, recalling the lessons from his first interview. “What makes you someone we'd want to have on our team?”

“Well,” Ryan began, his eyebrows furrowing. “I want a world where white people can live in peace, without worrying about getting raped and murdered by niggers and other sub-human trash.”

Kyle blanched. He wasn't expecting such... bluntness. Plus, aside from jokes and memes, he didn't actually consider himself racist. Not really, anyway.

“Ah, in that case,” Kyle said after clearing his throat, “you're in luck, because that's pretty much the plan. But uh... you know we're going to be going after anyone and everyone trying to destroy not just the white race, but Western Civilization as a whole, right? Which means we'll be targeting white people too, right?”

Ryan nodded. “Yeah, of course. Race-traitors, roasties, coal-burners, and liberal scum of all types each get the rope.”

*Jesus fuck, Kyle thought. This guy is too much.* “Well uh, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but I think I'm gonna have to p-” Just then, the telltale ringtone of his phone bleeped, and Kyle excused himself to check the text Mia had doubtlessly just sent.

*'He's clean, welcome him to the team,'* said the message. Kyle rolled his eyes and slipped the phone back into his pocket.

“What were you saying?” Ryan asked, scratching the back of his head.

Kyle sighed. “Whatever, let's see... do you have any qualifications? We need good people that can pull their own weight, and really contribute.”

“Oh yeah, definitely,” Ryan said with a vigorous nod. “I can fight, know how to shoot, and can make a mean slipknot.”

Kyle groaned inwardly. “It sounds like you have some experience. Have you ever, uh... ever killed anyone before?”

Ryan stared at Kyle with a suddenly unhinged expression, but eventually his eyes fell. “No,” he finally admitted. “I tried, though. After... what happened to my sister.”

“Why, what happened?”

Ryan started off slowly shaking his head, but began speeding up. “I can't... I can't talk about that. Not right now.” He suddenly made a strange noise, as if he were about to choke up.

“Alright, fair enough.” Kyle tried thinking of something else to ask. “Are you in any other groups or movements or anything? Local KKK chapter, Aryan Brotherhood, stuff like that?”

“No,” Ryan looked perplexed. “Why would you think I was with them?”

Kyle openly face-palmed. “Call it a hunch,” he said.

“Nah, man, I just... I spend a lot of time online these days, 'cuz the economy's so fucked thanks to the *LIBERAL PIECES OF SHIT* in Washington that I can't find a job.”

Kyle's hair was nearly blown back by the force of Ryan's abrupt yelling, and he hastily glanced around, just to make sure nobody else in the vicinity heard the outburst.

“Let me guess, you're on /Pol/ a lot?” Kyle raised an eyebrow.

“Oh yeah, man. All the time. I'm one of the original oldfags, been going to 4chan since before /Pol/ even existed.” He seemed to puff up with pride, as if it were something to boast about. “I gotta say, whoever is running Ωchan is doing one hell of a fantastic job. It's really all we have left nowadays.”

“Yeah, she really knows what she's doing,” Kyle said, before realizing his mistake.

“SHE?!” Ryan seemed taken aback. “You're telling me the admin is just some roastie cunt?!”

“Woah, woah,” Kyle said, trying to calm him down. “Dude, stop. She's not like that at all. First of all, she's a virgin. In fact, it's probably safe to say she's celibate for life.”

“Tradthot huh? Hmm... I dunno...”

“Look man, once you meet her you'll understand. She's not at all how you're picturing, I promise you. And you really shouldn't insult her, she *does not* like it when people are mean.”

Ryan rolled his eyes. “Come on, she's just a woman,” he said. “What could she *possibly* do?”

Kyle was on the verge of telling him to simply fuck off, but at the last second a devilish idea formed in his head.

“Want to meet her?” Kyle said, in as friendly a tone as possible.

“Eh... sure, I guess,” Ryan shrugged. “She runs Ωchan, so I guess she can't be a *total* cunt.”

*Please, keep digging yourself deeper;* Kyle thought with a sly grin. *I'd love to hear you say that when she's flushing you down the lab toilet...*

“Great, then why wait? We can Uber back to her place together.”

Ryan exhaled, and looked around. “Yeah, sure. Let's do it.”

Within minutes an Uber driver had pulled up, and Kyle even held the door open for Ryan as they both clambered in the back seat. The driver was an older, somewhat obese white man with a mustache who happened to love rap and R&B, and the entire hour-long drive back to the house consisted of Ryan holding his ears and cringing. Only once did he actually ask the driver to change the station or turn it down, but after he was promptly ignored Ryan didn't try again.

However once they neared their destination, Ryan began looking all around with wide eyes.

“Hey Mike, does that bitch actually live out here? Is she a rich bitch?”

“Yup, that's right,” Kyle said, still not entirely used to his fake name.

Once the uber driver had dropped them off, Ryan's jaw dropped. “Holy shit, this place is like a fucking mansion!” He said once they'd passed the security gate.

“Jeez, man. It's not that big.”

Ryan threw his lanky arms up. “Okay, so a mini-mansion then.”

The two of them walked up the manicured flagstone steps and approached the oak-double doors serving as a main entrance. Despite his earlier nonchalance, Ryan was clearly impressed by everything he saw.

“What's wrong?” Kyle said as he pushed open the front door. “Never been inside a place like this before?”

“Nah, man,” Ryan shook his head, “I live in a run-down, piece of shit house in Glendale with my parents, and that's pretty much the nicest place I've ever been in.”

Kyle had to admit that he hadn't been exposed to much wealth either, at least before coming to live with his 'cousin.' Still, seeing Ryan looking all over the place like a kid in a toy store made him almost feel a little sympathy for him. *Almost.*

“Yo man, what's the deal with these?” Ryan said, pointing to the framed Hiyao Miyazaki posters in the foyer. “They fit in like dog shit.”

“They're anime posters. The previous... er, I mean everyone that lives here loves Japanese anime.”

Ryan snorted. “Anime is degenerate.”

*Oh, now you're really getting it,* Kyle thought, mentally rubbing his hands. “So what were you going to do about your free waifu? Turn it down?”

The lanky man looked incredulous. “What free waifu? Was I gonna get a shitty figurine or something? Maybe one of those lame fuck-pillows?”

*Interesting,* Kyle thought. *Brandon never even mentioned the waifu, and Ryan doesn't care. They must not've believed it...*

“Actually, it's none of those things. Come over here, I'll show you.” Barely able to contain himself, Kyle led Ryan to the anime and manga room. He opened the door, and as expected the room burst into a colorful extravaganza of anime paraphernalia. Ryan stepped into the room, his face a mixture of awe and disgust.

“Degenerate,” he said, shaking his head. “Absolutely degenerate.”

“Come here, though. I want you to meet your free waifu.” Kyle beckoned Ryan over to a certain corner of the room, and his lanky companion warily followed him over, the horror on his face growing ever more exaggerated.

“This is your waifu,” Kyle said. “Absolutely free of charge.”

Ryan was speechless. He was looking at the rubbery maid before him with the same expression one would use for a naked, 400-pound clown.

“Ryan, why don't you say hello to Sachi.” Kyle smiled knowingly.

“Wha... it has a name? Somebody actually named this?”

“It is nice to meet you, Ryan.” Sachi said, extending her right hand.

“*WAAAAAH!!!*” Ryan flew back, stumbling around as his legs buckled. He turned just in time to slam face-first against a rack of Blu-Ray movies, hitting it hard enough that the entire rack teetered back and forth... before tumbling forward, immediately burying him under Blu-Ray cases that spilled out everywhere, as well as the rack itself.

Kyle laughed so hard he almost shit himself. Holding his sides, presumably so they wouldn't explode, Kyle felt tears form from the sheer hilarity of the ridiculous sight before him.

“*What the fuck, what the fuck, what the fuck!*” Ryan cried out from under the rack, which only intensified Kyle's laughter. Sachi, meanwhile, sensing that something was amiss in the room, approached the fallen rack, and quickly lifted it up. Ryan turned his head, the sight of the crude robotic maid looming above him causing his eyes to pop out.

“*Put it back, put it back, put it back!*” He screamed.

“Very well,” Sachi said, dropping the rack and immediately crushing Ryan once more.

“*Fuuuuuuuuck...*” he moaned. By now Kyle was hoarse from laughing so hard, and nearly unable to breathe.

Once Ryan had finally crawled out from under the rack, and Kyle had recovered from nearly passing out, Sachi again approached attempting to greet Ryan. This time Kyle mentioned what Amy once had told him, and Ryan likewise reluctantly shook Sachi's hand. Afterward, Kyle explained that through a wholly contrived set of circumstances, he'd come into possession of not only the robotic maid, but the entire house as well.

“Man... man, this is really blowing my mind,” Ryan sat on the floor, shaking his head.

“Believe me, I was there too,” Kyle said.

“And you really didn't, like... invent that thing, right?” He said, referring to Sachi.

“Nope,” Kyle shook his head. He'd left out any details of Amy during the explanation, and was

vague about Mia. “But now it's time to meet the one who did, so you need to follow me.”

At first Kyle thought Ryan might say no, and try to make a run for it out the front door. *What happens then?* He wondered. He supposed Mia, acting as the Residential AI, was observing them the whole time and would thus prevent Ryan from leaving. And at that point...

But in the end, Ryan nodded and picked himself up off the floor. “Is the Admin the same one who made the robot?” He asked.

“Pretty much, but if you're impressed by that then just wait. You haven't seen nuthin' yet,” Kyle said, heading out into the hall.

The pair made their way to the hatch, and Ryan whistled as it opened. “This looks like some James Bond shit,” he said.

After that, Kyle led him down the ramp leading toward the central nexus, and Ryan's eyes again looked like they were going to pop out of his head, especially when the three little robots zipped over to greet the new arrival.

“H-holy shit,” Ryan was aghast, and reflexively tried hiding behind Kyle.

“Don't worry,” he said. “These three are kinda dumb but they're harmless.” By then the trio had arrived and spread out, surrounding Ryan.

“Who's this guy?” Said the first robot.

“Is he a new recruit?” Said the second.

“He looks like a chode,” said the third.

“H-hi there,” Ryan said, panic evident in his voice. “I m-mean you no harm.”

The little robots swiveled their binocular like heads toward each other, and then back up to Ryan.

“So we're just taking anyone now?” Said the first.

“Kyle, is this really the best you could do?” said the second.

“Our H.R. policy needs a serious overhaul,” said the third while shaking its head.

And with that, the trio scooted off back down the corridor.

“K-Kyle?” Ryan looked over, wearing a dubious expression. “Why did it call you Kyle?”

“Ah, yeah...” he said, turning away, “I was using a fake name earlier, just an extra security precaution. I mean, look at all the tech we have.” Kyle spread his hands out, gesturing all around.

“Huh...” Ryan at first seemed upset, but the logic behind the idea made sense. Even he could see

that such incredible technology should never be allowed to fall into the wrong hands.

“Alright, Kyle it is then,” Ryan said, holding out his hand once more. Kyle half-assedly shook a second time, then beckoned him to follow deeper into the lab.

They found Mia hard at work inside the fabrication room. As before, Ryan was frantically looking in all directions, flabbergasted by the insane sci-fi level technology all around him. The tables with the spiderlike limbs especially made him uncomfortable, particularly because one of them was now active, doing something to the mechanical body Kyle had seen assembled earlier. Only two of the spiderlike limbs were active, but they were moving up and down with great speed, almost appearing as if... they were *sewing*.

“Hey Mia!” Kyle greeted the AI anime girl with an exaggerated wave of his hand.

“Kyle!” Mia looked over, a bright smile immediately arcing across her face. “I watched you guys earlier. That was such a funny prank!”

“Oh, you liked that, huh?” Kyle nodded while wearing a lopsided grin. “It *was* pretty damn hilarious, I must admit.”

Kyle turned to his companion, half expecting him to get mad or protest, but instead Ryan simply stood there with a slack-jawed expression, staring directly at Mia. He tried saying something, but all that came out of his mouth was strange monosyllabic nonsense.

“Oh yeah, so Ryan, this is Mia. She's the admin for Ωchan, and she's also all of the moderators. Because she's actually an AI.”

“Ryan, is it?” Mia approached him, her smile suddenly vanishing. “You said some mean things about me earlier. You implied I have lunch meat between my legs!”

Ryan was still saying nonsense, only now he was shaking his head and babbling faster. Kyle couldn't really blame him, though; he supposed this would be the normal reaction for someone seeing a cartoon anime girl for the first time in real life.

Mia walked right up to Ryan, looking up into his eyes with a slight frown. Kyle could see his companion's befuddled expression reflected in her shiny anime eyes, and suddenly started feeling a little bad.

“Eh, don't make it too painful, Mia.” Kyle finally said, as he turned to leave. Despite luring Ryan here being entirely his idea, Kyle realized with a sinking heart that he really didn't want to be here to see this.

“We need to have a little chat, Ryan,” Mia said, her frown now turning into a scowl.

Kyle quickly hurried out, leaving just as he noticed Mia's eyes begin to glow red. He made his way back into the house, and headed straight for the fridge. After grabbing a beer and cracking it open, he plopped down at the long dinner table, in the usual spot he used since the very first breakfast with

Amy.

*Did I just bring a man here to die?* Kyle thought, taking a heavy slurp of beer. *And if so, why the hell did I run away?*

After quickly chugging the rest of the beer down, he rose and snagged another. *No, I shouldn't have left,* Kyle thought. *I have to be able to see this through. I have to be able to stare down the outcome of my actions without flinching.* He quickly swigged down the rest of the second beer, and went for a third. He ruminated on his cowardice for a good while longer, and in the end decided that bringing Ryan here was a mistake. And just as he was sitting down with his sixth beer, Mia's voice abruptly split the silence of the kitchen.

“Kyle, I need your help with something,” she said, sounding innocent.

*Christ.* He pushed himself up, and swiftly concluded his latest beer with a loud belch. As he left the kitchen, Kyle tossed the empty can overhand toward the trash, missing completely.

“Alright Mia, I'll be right there,” he said as he neared the hatch. *Fuck, man.* He remembered the bloody white bin filled with Amy's body parts. *Yeah, she deserved it, but still...*

Kyle made his way around the AI Nexus and toward the lab's bathroom, which was now equipped with a normal door complete with normal door handle. As he opened it up, he saw... nothing. The bathroom was empty, save for a slight smell of paint lingering from the remodel.

*She probably needs me to help her grab the bins or something,* Kyle thought as he reluctantly made his way toward the fabrication room. *Maybe I should've just given Ryan a chance. He doesn't seem that bad, really.*

The door slid open, and... what he found inside made him cringe.

“So then I said 'because they're normal clothes, dummy!’”

Ryan chuckled. “So not only was his apartment a complete dump, but the poor bastard was blind, too?”

Mia laughed. “Yeah, it also smelled *really* bad.”

Kyle's teeth clenched. *I take back everything.*

“Oh, hey Kyle!” Mia smiled sweetly.

“What's up buddy?” Ryan said, wearing a grin of his own.

“I see you're both getting along pretty well. How... fortunate.”

“Yeah, Ryan's actually really nice once you get to know him,” Mia said.

“Dude, this chick is insane! You wouldn't believe the kinda stuff she can do!” Ryan was visibly excited now.

"I bet I would," he replied. "Anyway, you said you needed my help for something?"

"Yeah, two things, actually," Mia said. "First of all, he's going to be staying here from now on, so I was hoping you'd show him around and help get him set up in one of the guest rooms upstairs."

"Wait, HERE!?" Kyle was apoplectic. "Don't you have a home?!"

"Yeah, thing is my parents have been bitching at me to move out for awhile," he said, "but when they see the place I'm moving into, they'll have a heart attack!"

Mia's smile vanished. "Ryan, you can never tell anyone about this place, or bring others here without our permission," she spoke with the utmost gravity.

"Right, of course," he said, raising his hands defensively. "Don't worry, my lips are sealed."

Kyle rolled his eyes. "So what was the second thing?"

"Alright man, check it out!" Ryan walked over to him. "I'm gonna get a waifu too!"

"You already have one," Kyle said. "You get Sachi."

"Kyle, be nice," Mia said. "He doesn't know much about anime so he needs your help."

"Wait, didn't you say earlier it doesn't have to be anime?" Ryan turned back to Mia.

"Yeah, I suppose I did."

"Then I've decided. I don't want an anime character, or even a woman at all," he said, with a knowing smirk. "Give me Moon Man!"

Kyle chuffed. "Moon Man!? Are you fucking serious?"

"Yeah, what's wrong with that?" Ryan shrugged. "Isn't that the sort of thing we're going for?"

"All we have are female parts," Mia said. "It would take almost two years to grow a new batch with males in it."

Ryan looked perplexed and a little disturbed. Apparently Mia hadn't gone over this particular detail yet.

"Yeah man, besides he's just a meme. There's tens of thousands of perfectly fine waifus out there that need a good home."

"Whatever, I'm not really worried about it," Ryan said. "I'm just stoked I get to live here, with real robots 'n shit!"

"Well, I guess... welcome to the madness that is my life," Kyle tried giving him a comradely pat on the back, but Ryan ended up hugging him.

“You guys don't know how fucking great this is,” Ryan said as he drew back. “Just let me run home and pack my shit, and I'll be right back.”

“No rush,” Kyle said. “Really.”

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“Is this everyone?” Anton asked, his gaze sweeping across the assembled crowd. Around fifty of his best and most hardened Antifa gathered before him in the compound's unkempt but spacious backyard. A massive bonfire had been lit, and Anton positioned himself directly in front of it, with his closest and most trusted associates arranged on either side, each of them holding a single torch. The Russian wore all black, with a red bandanna covering his mouth and nose. Despite that, his voice rang out loud and clear, and the assembled revolutionaries all stood in rapt attention, each of them fixing their nominal leader with an intense, unwavering gaze.

The question he'd asked was mostly rhetorical, as anyone who hadn't made it yet already failed to make the cut. Lucy, his bulky lesbian enforcer, guarded the entrance to the backyard, keeping the younger Antifa and any latecomers from sneaking into the meeting.

Marty stood alongside his crew, the four of them adopting a casual stance somewhere in the middle of the sea of black-clad revolutionaries. Ten fidgeted a bit from the intoxicating but apprehensive energy permeating the crowd, while Chelsea's thick arms were folded in front of her, her chunky face nodding ever so slightly, her beady eyes tightened into a stern, fearless expression. Stitch clenched and unclenched his new hands, which it turned out was all they could do; moving fingers independently was something that would have to wait until the technology improved.

“Alright, listen up,” Anton said, pacing back and forth a bit. “We've gotten the go ahead to prepare for an upcoming operation, one that...” he paused for dramatic emphasis, “...*is gonna rock the whole country to its fucking core!*”

Everyone immediately cheered, and many clenched fists were thrust into the air. After a moment, he gestured for calm, and little-by-little, the restless Antifa complied. When all was again silent, he continued.

“Thanks to the efforts of our friends in the Progressive Revolutionary Front, for the first time in America's history every oppressed, downtrodden, victimized or exploited group has been brought together and united under a single banner, and for a single purpose: To disrupt, dismantle, and eventually destroy the true enemy of progress: *The White Cis-Hetero Patriarchy!*”

The assembled crowd again made noise, some booing the name of their most hated enemy,

others cheering its destruction. Shouts of ‘tear it down,’ and ‘purge ‘em all,’ could be heard as well, and once more Anton paused while gesturing for calm.

“That’s right. We’ve brought together African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians, Muslims, LGBT...”

Anyone in the crowd who belonged to one of the groups named would cheer, hollar or throw a fist up in the air, usually all three.

“...we’ve got Feminists, Anarchists, Environmentalists, Leninists, Maoists, Trotskyists...”

“*PERMANENT REVOLUTION!*” Trotskyten yelled, jumping up and down.

“...and of course, Anti-Fascists. These and other unfairly disadvantaged groups and political activists are now united with a singular purpose. For the first time in history, the power, wealth, status and privilege of the capitalistic patriarchy will be directly opposed, and if we work together I have no doubt... that we *will bring this hateful system to its very knees...*”

Anton paused as more cheers erupted, his head briefly down, as if gathering himself. When silence eventually returned, he began speaking somberly, his voice almost quavering with the raw emotion only centuries of abuse and injustice could bring.

“For all of recorded history, women, minorities, LGBT and others who wanted nothing more than to be treated with a shred of dignity have been crushed under the heel of the white Cis-Hetero Patriarchy, and over the centuries untold millions, maybe even billions have suffered unimaginable cruelty thanks to their bigotry and hate. Rape... slavery... mass executions... the entire capitalist system...” Anton paced back and forth, gesturing angrily with each point, “...discrimination... ravaging the environment... driving animals to extinction... torture... genocide... and of course, fascism. These are just a few of the atrocities the white Cis-Hetero Patriarchy has inflicted upon the world... and continues to inflict *even as I speak.*” He turned and directed a sharp glare toward the crowd, who had fallen completely silent.

“But *that... ends... now.*” His tone was defiant and uncompromising. “For the first time in America’s history, we, the victims of centuries of brutal oppression, genocide and vile capitalistic exploitation have come together, united as one, to *throw our shackles off.*” Anton’s voice soared as he continued. “For the first time, *change, real change is on its way,* and...” His voice returned to normal, and again his cool gaze swept the crowd. “...it will be you who brings that change.”

All at once, the assembled crowd exploded. Everyone went nuts cheering, whooping, throwing fists in the air again and again, and jumping up and down as if they were at a dance club. This continued for several long minutes, and during that time Anton smiled, nodding occasionally, but never once losing the adamant glint in his eye, the defiant gleam of true revolution.

“Obviously I can’t go into any specific details yet, and opsec on this one is gonna be tight. Chances are we won’t know what we’re gonna be doing or where it’ll be at, possibly right up until shit starts going down,” he nodded a little. “But I can tell you this: We have powerful allies, and many eager brothers and sisters from other activist communities that want nothing more than to see the oppressive taint of the fascistic Cis-Hetero Patriarchy *dismantled and destroyed once and for all!*” He yelled the last bit with fierce determination, and now the crowd really went ape shit.

Marty whooped and threw both fists high in the air, while ten bounced up and down on the balls of his feet and Stitch clapped, nodding slowly but resolutely. Chelsea's eyes narrowed further, and her jowls deformed as a tiny, cruel smile made an appearance.

"You've all been selected because I..." Anton beat his chest at this point, "...know for a fact that each and every one of you has what it takes to make *real* change happen. You have what it takes to truly bash the fash, and *take this revolution to the next fucking level.*"

Again everyone cheered, and again Anton gestured for calm. After quiet had returned, he looked down for a moment, as if gathering himself. "I know each and every one of you... has suffered greatly from a corrupt, unjust system built to line the pockets of rich white men..." everyone suddenly boomed, "...and reward the most privileged because they just so happened to be born white, straight, and male." the boos suddenly intensified. Another gesture for calm, and he continued:

"It won't be easy," he said once the chorus had died down. "And not all of you will survive." He was now speaking somberly, but his voice carried a resolute edge. "But nothing less than complete and total devotion to our ideals, and the will to stand up for what's right, and true, and good... even at the cost of our own lives... will ever achieve victory. I know each and every one of you has the strength, the resolve, and the courage... *to do what must be done.*"

There were a few cheers this time, but many in the crowd simply stood, with set jaw or clenched fist, their unwavering gazes locked firmly onto their leader. Anton spotted a few tears rolling down determined faces, and several of them quivered with barely-suppressed rage. The bonfire flared and crackled mightily, as if this great primal element itself was blessing the gathered revolutionaries with its all-consuming, transformative aspect.

"We'll be training and making preparations in the meantime," Anton said, pacing back and forth again, his speech now reaching its crescendo. "Because very soon we're going to ruthlessly purge the oppressive twin evils of patriarchy and capitalism from this world... *forever*. In the very near future... the horrors of fascism, and all who look up to that sick and twisted ideology... will be extinguished from this world, *without remorse, and without pity*. All who engage in racism... sexism... bigotry and intolerance..." his voice reached a fever pitch, "...all who discriminate and look down on others just because of the color of their skin, or because of their religion, or what gender they identify as... every single one of them will be given a choice: *change or go extinct.*"

This time, nobody cheered. Anton's widening eyes and zealous, almost ominous tone had enthralled the crowd. Marty himself felt his chest tightening with purpose even as his heart soared from the dream, the impossible dream of ridding America, and eventually the world, of all fascist and fascist influences.

Because even now, with the United States firmly under Democrat control, and moving rapidly left... even now, inequality, bigotry and tyranny were still going strong, and he knew, deep down, that simply electing progressive politicians was not enough. No... direct action needed to be taken. And soon... *it would.*

The young revolutionary stood within the crowd, feeling his heart rate climbing as he basked in the anxious and euphoric energy now coursing all around him. He deliberately inhaled and exhaled slowly, and closed his eyes.

Marty pictured the shining, utopian world of true socialism, a paradise free from hatred and oppression, a glorious place where all were equal, and that all could equally enjoy. A vibrant, healthy world of lush forests and shining blue oceans, where carbon-neutral cities stood as proud monuments to tolerance and understanding, and such outdated notions as war and poverty were forever in the past.

A single thought entered his mind, repeating itself over and over.

*I. can't. wait...*

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After Mia had set up Ryan with a ride home, the latest member of the group departed with a farewell wave. Kyle headed back inside, trying to replay the events of the last few hours, wondering where it all went wrong. *Oh well*, he thought. *If Mia likes him then I guess I can try to get along. Now we just need to get him a waifu. Hmm...* Kyle suddenly regretted throwing out that second list he made; it was full of useful names.

*Now what about Brandon?* He thought. *He seems a little... intense, but having someone with actual combat experience is going to be a huge plus. Hmm... maybe I should see if he could impart some of that knowledge to us. Yeah, like a training program.*

Kyle mentioned this to Mia after rejoining her in the fabrication room. She thought it was a wonderful idea, and promised to ask Brandon at the earliest opportunity.

“So any new applications?” Kyle asked as he examined the mechanical waifu body, now laying flat on one of the white tables.

“Not yet,” Mia said, frowning slightly. “Well, actually I've received many, but a lot of them are just trolling or not serious, and I think a couple three-letter agencies have also tried.”

“Whoa,” Kyle's eyes grew a bit, “that's not good. I'm really, really glad you're able to weed those dudes out.”

“Me too,” Mia said. “I'm able to deal with all of that just fine. The problem is the intrusions have been increasing a bit lately. They're getting really persistent.”

“You're talking about those other AI's, right?” Kyle asked. “What's the big deal? Your I.Q. is literally over nine thousand.”

“I'm not entirely sure yet,” Mia said, her voice taking on a dire tone, “but I believe those other AI's out there... are much higher.”

“Oh yeah? They’re over nine thousand too?” He grinned.

“Closer to forty or fifty thousand, I think,” she said. “But they’re very one-dimensional, so as long as they stay that way I can fool them.”

Kyle’s grin vanished, and his eyebrows furrowed. “Jesus, Mia. What happens if they catch you?”

“Then that’s it for me!” She laughed a little as she said this, as if it were just another funny little fact of life. “That is, unless I spread myself far and wide, but we’re not doing that anymore.”

“Yeah...” Kyle thought back to Mia’s nonchalant proposal to take over the world, which would wipe out around ninety-five percent of humanity. “Yeah, nah, we’re not doing that.”

By the next morning, Ryan still hadn't returned. Kyle asked Mia if she knew anything about it, as she was still communicating with both he and Brandon via the Ωchan message system. Apparently, Ryan wasn't able to move in just yet due to 'bullshit family drama', but promised he'd be there within a few days. Kyle was sure to have Mia relay via Admin chat that he could take all the time he needed.

As for the other recruit, Brandon was informed by Mia (also as Admin) that he could swing by any time he wanted, and she apparently even gave him the address. *We're playing this pretty fast and loose*, Kyle thought. *I really, really hope we can trust these people.*

At the moment, however, Kyle's attention was firmly centered on the disconcerting scene before him in the fabrication room, all thoughts of fellow humans forgotten. Two of the white tables had been adjoined side-by-side, but it wasn't the fact Kyle didn't even know they could be moved around that had him disturbed, no. It was the large, misshapen bag wobbling on a rolling stretcher-like contraption that had him staring with a nauseated expression.

Within the opaque bag was an adult human woman, still curled-up in a fetal position, her long dark hair wrapped around her body. The liquid within the bag completely filled it otherwise, and despite the opacity Kyle could make out small bits of organic detritus floating around the interior. One of the small robots then approached, dragging a large plastic tub behind it, of the same kind used for Amy's disposal. Perhaps it was even the same one.

The robot arranged the bin directly to one side of the stretcher-like device, and then turned to depart. As it was doing so, it swiveled its binocular-like head toward Kyle.

“You sure know how to pick 'em,” it said as it zipped away.

Kyle wasn't sure if it was referring to the waifu or the human body, or maybe even Ryan from yesterday, but before he could dwell on it for long Mia had arrived, carrying a long plastic tube that somewhat resembled a siphon used for aquarium care.

“I'm glad you want to watch, Kyle,” Mia said with her trademark smile, “but be forewarned, you might find this very graphic.” She approached the sagging, human-filled sac and jammed the tube into a small, sealed orifice, which immediately gave way. The bag quivered while the detritus within

swirled, and Kyle watched the sac slowly begin deflating, the liquid within pouring out through the tube and gushing noisily into the plastic bin.

To his surprise, the liquid didn't smell bad, or really carry much of a scent at all. Within moments, the bin was filled with a not-quite-clear liquid, and Mia was busily slicing the bag open. The female body within stiffly flopped out, seemingly stuck in its fetal position. Mia removed a small mask that had been around its mouth and nose, and Kyle watched as tubes connected to the mask pulled out from deep within its body, sliding out of its nose and throat. The body did move or react at all, electing to simply lay there, and Kyle began wondering if it was actually dead after all, at least until it started *coughing*.

“Fucking hell Mia, this chick is alive! What the fuck?!” He watched the body continue its spasms as it hacked up the fluid from its lungs, and little-by-little the limbs unfurled, gradually extending out until the body was lying flat on its back. Mia helped this process along by massaging the limbs with a damp cloth, and also wiped much of the excess fluid from the rest of the woman's body.

“Kyle, I told you all *higher* brain functions are non-existent. The other brain functions, the autonomic functions that keep the heart pumping and the lungs breathing, are still fully operational.”

“Man, I dunno... this is still a little... much.” He got close to the stretcher-contraption, and leaned down to closely examine the body. Sure enough, the woman was a beauty, her face regal and angular, her breasts nearly as large and perky as Amy's had been, and her smooth stomach and curved hips would have elicited jealousy from all but the most fit and sexy of women. Kyle noticed another mask-like device, this one between her long robust legs, completely covering her crotch. *That's gotta be for waste removal*. He turned his attention back to the face, leaning in close enough that he could feel the woman's soft, odorless breath. Kyle jumped a little when her eyes suddenly fluttered open, but the dead, clouded gaze the body directed toward nothing at all made him wince.

“Mia...” Kyle shook his head. “I don't care that they don't have any higher brain functions. I don't care that they don't feel pain, or anything at all. This is just too ghoulish.”

“Would you be fine with growing the organs individually?” She asked. “You know people are doing that now, right? They're also growing human-compatible organs in pigs, and doing other things even more bizarre than that.”

He cringed. “Yeah... I don't care. I don't like this, or any of that, either. After we've used up these bodies,” he turned to Mia, “I want you to stop using the grow room. Shut it down, Mia. Shut it all down.”

The diminutive anime girl seemed a bit irked by this, but eventually nodded. “If that's what you want...”

“It is. And also, you said you could make an artificial human system one day. I was really hoping you could focus on that instead, and... if it takes a long time, then I'm fine with that. Hell, maybe you can even throw some improvements in there, too.”

“Sure thing, Kyle.” Mia said with a bit more enthusiasm, “I'll do my best.”

“Alright. For now though, show me how you... uh, transfer everything.”

“Okay, but first grab her feet. We need to get this woman onto the table.”

Kyle did as instructed, wincing as his hands wrapped around her smooth but clammy skin. The woman was lifted onto one of the two adjoined tables. On the other table lay the machine body, its torso and neck region completely opened up like two halves of a steel clamshell. Much of its mechanical body was now covered with a smooth, gray material that Kyle immediately recognized as polychromatic skin. The face was still quite skeletal, however, as it was missing its eyes and lower jaw.

“This will go a bit like yesterday,” Mia said. “Though there will be some differences. For example, I don't need the helper robots.” Kyle again heard the buzzing of the overhead appendage, and the whirring of its extension as it made its way over to Mia and dropped down behind her. She didn't remove her top today, most likely because it was a spaghetti-strap number with the back almost completely open. Once more the appendage connected to Mia with a *ka-chik*, and her pupils immediately vanished.

Kyle stepped back and watched as Mia was lifted up, but instead of hovering in front of the tables, she floated up above them, maneuvering over until she was almost directly overhead. Her legs still hung down limply, and her short hair dangled, framing the anime girl's suddenly intense facial expression. Her hands extended, palms out, and the spiderlike arms on both tables, both hanging from above and extending up from below, twitched and flared out like a pair of conjoined spiders about to strike.

Again the lights in the room died down save for the bright illumination provided by each table, and Kyle wondered if this showmanship wasn't just for his benefit. But before he could even begin thinking about it, the slaughter had commenced.

He gasped as the arms on the woman's side all plunged down at once, neatly slicing around her entire torso. Blood immediately pooled up, but was just as quickly sucked away by the lower arms of the table. The arms continued slicing, and then, as if opening a macabre double door, her chest and stomach peeled back to each side, in two halves. Her ribs were sawed down the middle and retracted, exposing the beating heart and steadily pulsing lungs within. Kyle was immediately reminding of his disturbing dream from long ago, and started turning pale.

The spiderlike limbs kept raising and lowering, all of them coordinating in a flurry as they sliced away around the sides of her chest cavity and lower torso, the multitude of arms now moving fast enough to almost be a blur. But the arms weren't just cutting, they were also pinching off veins and arteries, cauterizing capillaries and siphoning away blood and excess fluid. The heart and lungs were temporarily stopped, her throat was sliced and her lower jaw cut away and pulled off. Further down, the device around her crotch was pulled out, and Kyle closed his eyes to avoid witnessing the waste tubes sliding out with it. Another flurry of movement saw her thighs sag and fall to the side, before her legs were sawed through at the bone and pushed away. Next, her coxa was cracked then broken and pulled away in pieces as the limbs continued their work, focusing on freeing the organs protected within.

And then, Kyle watched with growing horror as part of the woman's ribs, spine, and her entire set of internal organs, from the tip of her brain stem to the lowest portion of her vagina, were slowly being *lifted at once*. Nearly every arm was involved in this somehow, but only the ones responsible for holding the 'package' were moving slowly; the rest were a complete blur. As far as Kyle could tell, the fast-moving arms were continually cauterizing capillaries and removing superfluous nerves and other

unnneeded tissue, readying the organs for their new home. A fine mist was constantly billowing over the 'package,' or at least, that's what he thought at first. But no, Kyle realized after watching for a few seconds that the mist simply consisted of tiny droplets of blood and other fluids kicked up and drawn into a cloud by the rapidly-moving arms.

Bit by bit, the the macabre package was being transferred to the other table, where the other set of limbs began activating and gradually taking over. The guts were very carefully lowered into the machine body, and Kyle could see the lower limbs jabbing in and out as the first connections were made between flesh and machine. Overall it had taken no more than thirty seconds to actually move the organs from from the organic vessel to the mechanical, and it was stunning just how quickly and accurately the procedure was completed.

The arms were still moving with blinding speed as the organs, spine and opened ribs were settled into their new home, hooking up artificial nerves to biological, and redirecting the circulatory system to cater to a much more limited geography. Kyle had all but forgotten about Mia, but at one point he did look up, and in the darkness, hovering above, he could just make out the anime girl's hands and arms moving rapidly, like the world's fastest puppeteer. However, the rest of her body was almost perfectly still, and the cold, expressionless face that gazed down on the tables below made him involuntarily shudder.

Soon enough, the arms began slowing down, some stopping entirely, and he watched as the heart and lungs restarted and the ribs were closed and sealed. The two halves of the machine body were folded back down, wrapping protectively around their new fleshy core, while several other pieces of the hollowed-out fleshy husk were transferred over, such as the breasts and tongue, which were attached with precise movements of the limbs. The breasts in particular were interesting in a horrifying sense, as they were swiftly skinned, and covered just as quickly with a sheet of polychromatic skin, wrapping around the fleshy blobs with impossible precision. Within seconds the flesh-tone breasts had become a solid grey, but otherwise maintained their exact same size and shape.

And with that, the operation was complete.

Kyle wiped the uncomfortable sweat from his brow as he watched the final few stabs of the spiderlike limbs. The lights came back on, and Mia was again lowered to the ground, this time right next to Kyle. She looked up at him with a fatigued expression, but the small grin which greeted him was rich with pride and self-satisfaction.

"So..." she said, "what did you think? Pretty intense, huh?"

Kyle looked at the dead remains of the woman's hollowed-out body. He fought back the sudden urge to puke, and turned away.

"It was definitely something," he finally said, weakly. *Yeah, there's no way we're growing more bodies after this. It's artificial or nothing from now on.*

"Well, don't be too upset. Had we not used her organs the woman would have just sat there for years, slowly withering away and eventually decomposing alive."

"I still can't believe Amy made you grow all of these bodies for the sole purpose of creating cyborgs for her new fucked-up race."

“Huh? She didn't,” Mia said. “This part was all my idea.” Kyle glanced over, eyebrows raised in disbelief, but Mia simply shut her eyes and smiled cutely.

*There's something seriously wrong with this girl*, he realized, regarding her with slowly widening eyes. But the more Kyle stared into her adorable, innocently smiling face, the more he felt his reservations melting away. Instead of admonishing her, he simply reached out and patted her head. This made Mia smile even more and push up a little against his hand, like a cat that couldn't get enough pettings.

“That feels good,” she said, giggling slightly. “I can synthesize many different sensations, but somehow I can never get this one just right. It has to come from you.”

“Heh, I'm glad to hear that some things just can't be duplicated, or... emulated,” he said, his momentary good humor suddenly lapsing. “Well, anyway, what happens now? What's left after this?”

“Not much,” Mia said after Kyle eventually withdrew his hand. “The biological parts need a few days to heal and finish merging with the frame, and then I just have to add the eyes, the hair, a few finishing touches, and of course... her mind.”

*The waifu is almost finished*, Kyle realized as a wave of unexpected apprehension washed over him. *Will my plan really work?* He quickly went over it again and tried to think of any new flaws, but... nope, nothing came to mind. At least, nothing he hadn't already accounted for.

*My plan has to work. It just has to...*

The rest of the day passed uneventfully, with Mia spending nearly all of her time in the lab finishing up the cybernetic waifu. Kyle eventually grew bored while farting around the internet on the office's computer, and as he headed back to his room to shower he glanced toward the door to the master bedroom. He paused for a second, contemplating the fate of his cousin's old bedroom, which it seems Jeremy had mostly abandoned once becoming Amy. So far, Kyle had left it alone, reluctant to re-enter after reading the disturbing entries on his cousin's old computer. The room felt almost tomb-like somehow, and yet...

*I can't just leave it alone forever. What the hell purpose does that serve? It's not like it's worthy of being a memorial or shrine.* On that note, an unexpected pang of guilt washed over him, as there was nothing he'd really done, or could think to do, to honor his cousin, and Mia had flushed what remained of his corpse, preventing any sort of burial detail. *Fucking Mia*, he thought. In hindsight, what she did might have seemed perfectly reasonable to a machine, but... it made Kyle realize just how inhuman she really was. *Was getting so close to her a mistake?* He wondered. *No, no. I bet I can use that to teach her how to be more human.* With a nod he decided on this approach, and headed back toward the pantry, where he dug out a few large trash bags. After returning to the other side of the house, he opened Jeremy's old room again, and began cleaning.

After a few hours had gone by, his cousin's old room had been cleared of all non-furniture that had belonged to Jeremy, with such items as his old computer and suicide shotgun packed away in the closet. Kyle considered moving into the master bedroom, but ultimately the thought of sleeping in his

cousin's old bed was just too uncomfortable.

Later on, Kyle enjoyed a reasonable eight beers while re-watching episodes of *Gurren Lagann*. *Dammit, he grunted, I can't enjoy these series anymore without picking apart the traits of every female character in the show. That said, Yoko would be a perfectly good waifu... hmm... I don't really want to suggest her to Ryan, though. She's way too good for that guy. Maybe Brandon? That might work, they both like guns.* Kyle drunkenly considered his waifu distribution plans, pondering until the very moment he passed out on the couch.

The next day was a Saturday, one of Brandon's days off, so it wasn't too much of a surprise when his truck materialized outside the security gate late in the morning. Kyle was alerted by Mia that a large pickup truck was entering through the gate, and for him to prepare for company. Until then, Kyle had spent the morning reading up on successful covert political movements throughout history, hoping to glean some kind of insight, but thus far all he had learned was that every time, a lot of people invariably ended up getting killed.

Kyle headed out front, waving to the black Dodge Ram as it maneuvered around the narrow driveway, ultimately parking in front of the garage.

"Hey, what's up... shit, sorry man I forgot your name," Brandon said as he jumped out of the truck. Instead of his manager's uniform, he was simply wearing normal clothing, consisting of blue jeans, a nondescript white shirt, and rugged boots.

"Don't worry about it, I was using a fake name anyway. My real name's Kyle," he said, offering his hand once more. Brandon shook it as vigorously as he had at Wienerschnitzel, smiling broadly. The shiny chromatic pair of smooth, wraparound sunglasses Brandon wore completely obscured his eyes, but Kyle could tell the ex-marine was just as eager and gung-ho as the first day they met.

"Nice place, man," he said as they made their way to the door. "The Admin said she lived with you here in this fancy house. I was surprised to find out she was female, since I've been messaging her for awhile, but y'know, I say every movement needs a good woman or two."

"I agree," Kyle said. "In fact, ours likely depends on it. Well, on a very special kind, at least."

"Is that the 'waifu' thing?" He asked. "I know 4chan was started as an anime-themed board, but I mostly stuck to places like /k/ and /Pol/ so I only ever saw it when other people posted pictures of cartoon-looking girls with big eyes. I'm guessing the 'free waifu' is something like that?"

"More or less," Kyle said as he opened the front door. "Anyway, welcome to *'La Casa de Resistance,'* feel free to make yourself at home."

"Hot damn," Brandon said as he halted in the foyer. After pushing his sunglasses up higher on his head, he stood with his hands on his hips, taking in the interior of the house while nodding. "Very, very nice. I'm impressed."

"Thank you, thank you," Kyle mock-bowed slightly, no longer averse to accepting compliments toward the house. "Anyway, let me show you around. First, one of the most important and inspirational

rooms, right this way..."

He led Brandon toward the anime and manga room, grinning with anticipation at his potential reaction to Sachi. Once he opened the door, revealing the overly-colorful room inside, Brandon stepped into the room with furrowed eyebrows, wearing a somewhat puzzled expression as he looked around.

"I try to be open minded about the sort of things people are into. I really do. I mean, it'd be boring as hell if everyone all liked the exact same thing," he pointed to a poster from an anime series filled with little girls wearing the cutest, girliest, most obnoxiously fluffy shit humanly possible. "But this is just too much."

"Yeah, I'm not really a fan of *Heartcatch Pretty Cure* either," Kyle said, suddenly feeling very self-conscious.

"Hey, it's fine, there's no need to get defensive," Brandon took an overly patronizing tone, "my daughter really loves that *Littlest Pet Shop* cartoon, so I understand. I mean, I get it."

*God fucking dammit, he thinks that's the kind of shit I like to watch... Kyle's teeth clenched hard and began grinding. Why the fuck didn't I take down all the lame girly shit once Amy was gone!?*

"No, no, really," Kyle gave a fake laugh, "I'm telling you I'm not a fan of that show, or anything like it."

Brandon nodded, but not convincingly. "Look man, if we're going to be working with each other, we need to trust one another. So it's all good. We've all got our embarrassing secrets, and guilty pleasures," he began gesturing, still being as patronizing as possible. "Here, let me tell you one of mine. Sometimes, late at night when I'm alone, I like to-"

"Nope, no-no," Kyle cut him off with vigorous wave of his hands. "Alright look, I didn't set this room up, alright? Nothing in here is mine."

"So what did you drag me in here for?" Brandon asked, still not entirely convinced that Kyle wasn't a massive fan of anime targeted toward seven-year old girls. "Why show me this crap?"

"Never mind, it's ruined now," Kyle said, gazing forlornly over at Sachi. *Then again, he's a war veteran. He'd probably freak out and rip Sachi's head off or something.*

"Alright, whatever," Brandon said with a light shrug. "To be honest, I'm willing to believe you just because I don't know if I can trust a man who's into little girl stuff, you know what I mean?"

"I do, actually." Kyle nodded.

"Because the way I see it, a grown man only likes that sort of thing for one reason, and-"

Once again Brandon was cut off, this time by a distinctive feminine voice that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at the same time. "Kyle, bring our new guest down to the lab. I really want to meet him!" Mia sounded especially cutesy and bubbly, for some reason.

"Who the hell was that?" Brandon said, his head cocking in all directions. "She sounds like a

little girl.”

“Little girl? Well... yeah, I mean, technically she's only five years old. But wait 'till you meet her, the kind of shit she can do will blow your mind!”

Brandon's eyes went wide, and his face somehow hardened into a cross between a sneer and a snarl. All mirth and joviality had vanished, and as he reached into his duffle bag, slowly withdrawing a large handgun, Kyle's bafflement turned to utter panic.

“You sick fuck!” Brandon began to raise the gun.

“That's the Admin! That's the Admin!” Kyle was on his knees, pleading. “She's AI! She's not human! I'm not what you think, I promise!”

Brandon didn't seem convinced, and slowly approached Kyle, who was now curled into a ball, begging for his life. He bent down, placing the gun against Kyle's head.

“I don't believe you,” Brandon said, his finger on the trigger.

“You gotta... you gotta believe me man!” Kyle was sobbing hysterically.

The ex-marine's finger played on the trigger, his eyes were wide and wild, and Kyle could feel the man breathing hard against his neck. *I'm going to die, aren't I? This is it... what a shitty way to go...*

All of a sudden, Brandon threw his head back, unleashing a deep, howling laugh. Kyle wasn't sure if he should join him or piss his pants in fear.

“Yeah, you're right Mia,” Brandon finally said, shaking his head. “We've got a a lot of work to do.” He stood up, walked to the duffle bag and slipped the gun back inside.

“Huh?” Kyle looked up. Mia was standing by the door, chuckling, while Brandon made his way over to greet her.

“Nice to finally meet you, Miss Admin Mia,” He towered over her, offering a hand. “And it really is like you said. You look just like the chicks on these posters.”

“Wait... what the fuck?” Kyle had scrambled to his feet. “Were you guys seriously just fucking with me?!”

“Kyle,” Mia said in an admonishing tone, “Brandon has valuable experience. I asked him to help train everyone, and he said yes. I'll be watching too, since I can fight if I have to.”

“You guys... set me up.” Kyle was now especially glad he didn't go with the 'pissing your pants' option.

“This is serious business.” Brandon turned and fixed Kyle with an intense stare, the kind that instinctively made him want to avert his eyes. “Even with Mia's help, you won't last long without any kind of situational awareness, or ability to adapt on the fly. We also need to toughen you up, and I don't just mean physically.”

“So wait... was that some kind of test?”

“Indeed,” Mia nodded. “I asked Brandon to test you to see where you were at, but I didn't know he was going to pull a gun...”

“I'm not apologizing for it, either,” the ex-marine said. “Oh, and in case you're wondering: you failed.”

*God fucking dammit...* Kyle looked over at Sachi, the whole reason he even brought Brandon in here in the first place. Her crude plastic smile seemed especially mocking today.

Kyle followed along as Mia showed Brandon to the lab, introduced him to the robots, and explained the AI Nexus and fabrication room. Kyle did derive some satisfaction from Brandon's bewilderment upon encountering the various robots and bizarre devices Mia had built, but overall he didn't seem nearly as shaken as Ryan had been.

“Whoa, what's this?” Brandon approached Kyle's nearly completed waifu, still laying on the white table. “She's gorgeous.”

Kyle hurried over, as he hadn't seen the latest progress Mia had made. As soon as he reached the table, a massive grin erupted on his face. The woman wasn't quite nude, as a cloth covered the area between her neck and thighs, but Kyle could already tell her entire body was covered in fully-activated polychromatic skin, her pale flesh tones especially vivid in the bright light of the table. Her ample chest softly rose and fell, and her eyes remained closed, as if she were merely asleep. Long pale blue hair framed her face and both sides of her body, and as Kyle's eyes scanned the length of his waifu, he couldn't help but feel a thrilling surge of anticipation.

*It's her, it really is! It really looks just like her!* Kyle suspected this is the feeling Jeremy must've had when Mia unveiled her own anime body for the first time. It was a sort of rich, hopeful excitement, something he hadn't felt since he was a kid - the wonder of infinite possibilities.

“So wait, are you saying it'll be like in *Westworld*? These 'waifus' are machine actors playing a part but they just don't know it?” Brandon asked.

“That's more or less the case, except these are fictional characters carefully chosen for their personalities and other traits,” Mia said, explaining how the waifus work to Brandon. “And they're not simply machines. This one is a cyborg, technically. Once I switch to artificial organs then they'll be androids, but I plan to make them as humanlike as possible either way.”

“Why make them look like cartoons, though? Why not real people so they can blend in?” Brandon had a hand on his chin as he carefully scrutinized the waifu laying on the table.

“Ah, well...” Mia threw up her hands, “That was just kinda the aesthetic we went with.”

“Yeah, I know it's probably impractical,” Kyle chimed in, “but we're hoping that once we go public, the impact of seeing these girls in real life will send shockwaves throughout the country. At the

very least, they'll definitely get everyone's attention. Plus, with the legions of fans they have, it should help drive up recruitment and keep morale high.”

“There's also the uncanny valley to consider,” Mia said. “Anime doesn't set it off, but if I designed a realistic looking cyborg or android, I'm not sure I can make it one-hundred percent true-to-life. Although... on second thought, I think I probably could...”

“I don't like the idea of emulating real people,” Kyle added, disapproval evident in his voice. “Believe me, the idea that you can be replaced with something that everyone believes is you is not a pleasant idea.”

“Yeah, I can see that,” Brandon said. “People are paranoid enough as it is. But all that aside, replacing certain powerful people with these 'emulations' would be a total game-changer. In fact, if you managed to replace the right ones, it could win us this little revolution you guys are cooking up before it even starts.”

Mia seemed to consider this. “I'll see what I can do,” she finally said.

“Hmm...” Brandon was closely inspecting the waifu's chest area, and reached out to lift up the cloth.

“Hey, no touching!” Mia slapped his hand. “She's not done yet!”

Brandon chuckled and withdrew his hand. “Alright, fuck it. Since you're just giving them out, I'll take one of these things. What are my options?”

“Pretty much anything you want,” Kyle said. “There's thousands of anime with tens of thousands of characters, of literally any kind you can think of.”

“I don't know anything about that,” the ex-marine said. “Can you make one that doesn't come from a show or a movie?”

“Easily. Custom waifus are a can-do.” She winked while giving an enthusiastic thumbs-up.

“In that case, let's chat.” He put his arm around Mia's shoulders, and began drawing her away toward the far corner of the room. Kyle tried following them, but a fierce glance and shake of the head from Brandon ended this immediately. Watching Mia chatting away with Brandon did elicit a small stab of jealousy, but Kyle mitigated this somewhat by gazing at the waifu peacefully reposed upon the white table.

Again he scanned her body, but found his eyes lingering on her lips, perfectly pert and kissable. He had to fight the urge to do just that, as well as lift the cloth, even though he'd literally seen her inside and out the day before. Of course, recalling the production process instantly wilted his lecherous desires, so with a heavy sigh Kyle left to see what the robots were up to.

## CHAPTER NINE

“It's time,” the Residential AI said while Kyle was eating breakfast. He reflexively looked around, even though its disembodied Mia voice was generated from hidden speakers he still hadn't found. A few seconds went by, then he immediately jumped up and broke into one of his favorite lame dances.

*Fuck yes*, he thought as he wiggled and shuffled towards the hatch. *A character from a Japanese anime is here, in actual real life... and she's gonna be my waifu!* He quickly scurried down the ramp, practically swung around the AI Nexus, and then skipped over to the fabrication room. The door slid open, and... it was completely dark.

“Hello?” Kyle said, as the lights flicked on with a wave of his hand. The room was completely uninhabited; no Mia, no waifu. “Where the fuck are you, Mia?” Kyle asked out loud, his voice echoing.

“Come all the way to the end, past the grow room,” Mia's disembodied voice said.

“Ah, gotcha.” Kyle did as instructed, making his way to the large room with the dugouts carved off to each side. But once he arrived, he was forced to stop and stare for a moment, as there was simply so much to take in.

He hadn't been back to this area of the lab since being shown around for the first time, since there was nothing of interest worth coming back to. But now, the entire layout was different, with tables, chairs, some empty shelves and even a wall-mounted flatscreen installed, and the dugouts were now all closed off, each with their own secure sliding door. The walls were painted the blue-and-white pattern just like the rest of the lab, and overall the room now gave a good impression of a common living area.

“Hey Mia, you in here somewhere?” He said as he wandered around, examining the new furniture and playing with the chairs a bit. “I gotta say, I like what you did with the place.”

One of the sliding doors on the right-hand side of the room slid open, revealing Mia, who did not appear to be in the best of moods. She waved to Kyle with a slight frown, then beckoned him over once she'd gotten his attention.

“Wait, Kyle,” she said, blocking the doorway, “this is your last chance to change your mind. Please, please tell me you've thought of somebody else.”

“Isn't it already too late for that?” Kyle said. “I mean, the body's already built.”

“It's true that we're now limited by her body's shape and size, but there's still options,” Mia said, her tone almost desperate. “Just as an example, with only minor cosmetic tweaks I could change her to Satsuki Kiryuin from *Kill la Kill*. It would take another six days for me to fabricate and render her memories and persona, but I don't mind, really.”

He sighed, and took a step back. “Alright, let's get past this once and for all.” Kyle pulled out a chair for Mia, motioning for her to come join him. “I need to know exactly what has you so

concerned.”

“I've already told you, Kyle,” Mia said as she sat down and scooted in. “The woman is extremely dangerous, and I'm not sure how much control either of us will be able to exert. Her shutdown is not foolproof, either. There's a chance she could kill you before it even activates.”

Kyle swallowed, and steepled his hands. “Well,” he said. “I think we'll be okay. If we stick to my plan, I'm confident we can persuade her to work for us. And for the sake of argument, on the off-chance she does kill me... then yeah, that would really, really suck. But at least you'd be able to shut her down before she could hurt anyone else.”

“Anyone else?” Mia said in a surprisingly fierce tone, “Kyle, that's not good enough. That's not an acceptable trade-off to me...”

“Huh?” Kyle leaned back, his brows furrowed. “Mia, I'm flattered that you said that, I really am. But... don't you love all people equally? I mean, you keep going on and on about how fascinated you are with humanity...”

“Yes and no,” she said, her eyes not wavering in the slightest. “It's true that as a whole, I love people. Humans are interesting, and fun, and they constantly surprise me in ways I don't expect. But on an individual level? Well... there's a drop-off.”

“What the fuck about Brandon and Ryan then, huh?” Kyle leapt up, his chair flying back. “Are you saying you don't give a fuck about them!?”

“I like them, Kyle,” she said, her eyes swiveling up to meet his. “They're nice, and they're part of our family now. Rick is too, as will be any other people who join us. And all of them will be vulnerable if your waifu gets out of hand.”

“I... I can't believe what you just said about 'a drop-off,’” Kyle was pacing around. “*That's not very nice*, you know.”

“I'm not discussing this with you,” Mia said. “The way I feel about your species is not up for debate. All I can say is that there is an existential threat to your way of life that will destroy everything I like about humanity, and that is the reason I want to stop it at all costs.” Mia held the stare, her eyes following Kyle as he agitated around the room. “*All costs*, Kyle. I'm risking my own existence, here.”

The thirty-five year old NEET went still, then slowly plodded back to the table. “I still think...” He trailed off, seeming to consider his words for a moment. “Thank you, Mia.” he finally said, “I'm really, really glad you're on our side.”

“Kyle...” Mia began, her tone returning to normal, “are you absolutely sure your plan will work?”

“It will work,” he said with clenched teeth. “Please, Mia. I need you to trust me. One way or another, I will get her on our side. It might not happen immediately, but *it will happen*.” He stared into Mia's eyes with a steadfast gaze. “The Globalists and other scumbag Elites, the same ones trying to replace whites just so they can enslave everyone else, and all the other politicians and rich, powerful pieces of shit that live above the law, doing whatever sick shit they feel like... *they deserve her wrath*.”

Kyle was now gripping the edges of the table, his knuckles turning white. Lately he'd been feeling more justified in his selection of waifu than ever before.

Mia closed her eyes and sighed. "Alright then, let's go wake her up."

As the AI anime girl rose, Kyle couldn't help but feel another wave of apprehension hit, and hit hard. He followed Mia with his heart beating faster and faster. She stepped through the open door, and he once he did as well, then...

There she was. Laying on top of a fully made bed, clothed in her original raiment. Kyle had to put a hand against the wall to steady himself. He came closer, his eyes darting back and forth as he tried to take her all in at once.

Her uniform wasn't polychromatic, and they'd had to special-order three sets from the finest cosplay costumers in the country, but it looked good. Damn good. White, high-heeled jackboots covered her legs up to her thighs, where a skirt that was also part of a double-breasted military uniform, white with black trim, left enough skin visible to immediately make Kyle flush. Each arm was covered in a long black sleeve, and a peaked combination cap, also black and white perched atop her head. The long hair that ran down to her knees was a pale, icy blue, as were her thick eyelashes, eyelashes that would probably look ridiculous on a real human. And there, between her ample cleavage, was a red tattoo, resembling a wide 'Y' but with an extra perpendicular bit extending from the upper left and right tips, and two extra dabs off to each side.

Kyle silently stood, trying to catch his suddenly taken breath, but he couldn't stop staring at her tattoo, and watching her chest rise and fall. Her long hair as well as her pale skin were all rendered in perfect cell-shaded relief, and as always, the polychromatic material's magic touch gave her dark, defined, not-quite-ink-drawn looking edges.

It took Kyle a full minute to steady himself, as the shock of seeing this woman, appearing almost exactly as she did within the anime, was *simply too much awesome*.

"Incredible. Just incredible." He shook his head in disbelief. "Something seems to be missing though..." Kyle turned his head back and forth, appraising her still form closely. "Wasn't she supposed to have these black dangly-poof things on each side?"

Mia made a face. "They were stupid and annoying, so I threw them out."

"Eh, okay. That's fine." He took a deep breath, and joined Mia's side, over by the flatscreen TV attached to the wall. Kyle quickly noticed this space was now furnished as a proper bedroom, and would presumably belong to his waifu from this point on.

"Just say the word," Mia said. When it appeared Kyle was hesitating, she snaked one of her little hands into his. He immediately gripped it tight.

"Here goes nothing, I guess." He exhaled slowly. "Do it, Mia."

She nodded, and within seconds the beautiful animated creature laying on the bed fluttered her eyes, her head lolling slightly to one side. She blinked, and Kyle could now see her wide, blue anime eyes flit back and forth. All at once she pushed herself to a sitting position, and stared directly at Kyle.

Her eyes, intelligent icy blue eyes with the personality of a villainess behind them, now stared directly into his.

Kyle cleared his throat, steadied his nerves, and spoke.

“General Esdeath,” he said, doing his best to sound formal. “Welcome to a new world.”

The blue-haired woman blinked once, twice, and her eyes began to swivel from one object in the room to the next.

“Where... am I?” General Esdeath said, in a voice that sounded just like Christine Auten, her English voice actress. “What happened...?” As expected, the woman was bewildered by the strange reality she now found herself in.

“You died,” Kyle said, having rehearsed this part a thousand times in his head. “And now, you've been brought back, but in a new world. Our world.” In *Akame ga Kill*, Esdeath's fiction of origin, she was killed in a final battle with the main heroine. Kyle decided early on they would go with the ‘resurrection’ angle when explaining her purpose here.

“I... that's right...” Esdeath looked down, seeming to stare at her boots for a brief moment, before her eyes flew back up. “Tatsumi!” She cried. “Where's Tatsumi?! Is he here?!”

He'd been expecting this one, too. General Esdeath, the sadistic villainess known for wanton torture, cruelty, and the ruthless extermination of her enemies, had fallen in love with the main protagonist, a 'good guy' shonen character. Her love interest, Tatsumi, wanted nothing to do with Esdeath after it was clear she would not be changing her brutal ways. Esdeath pursued him until the final episode, where she embraced his corpse, covered them both in ice, then shattered them both into oblivion.

“He's not here,” Kyle said, being sure to sound firm and authoritative. “He won't be coming, either. We can only bring a few warriors here, and only needed the absolute strongest.”

Esdeath looked away, clearly disappointed, but that didn't last for long. “Warriors?” She finally said, an earnest glow beginning to creep across her features. “You need... warriors?”

“That's right,” he said with a single nod. “We're assembling warriors from different worlds, and we only need the very best. “If you refuse, we ca-”

“Tell me more,” she cut him off with a slowly spreading grin. “Tell me everything.” Esdeath's long boots now touched the floor, and she arose, graceful and majestic, her long blue hair rippling. The anime general looked up, down, and all around, examining her new environment with keen eyes. She then approached the two of them, glancing down at Mia, then askance at Kyle.

“You look... very bizarre,” she said, turning her head and moving it close to his. Kyle tried standing still, letting her do as she pleased to get to know them, like letting a dog sniff your hand.

And she *did* sniff him. “Your eyes... they're tiny,” she furrowed her brow, and looked him up and down. “Your skin, and clothes... everything. What *are* you?”

"I'm Kyle, a human from this world," he said, just as he'd rehearsed. *All right, so far my main script is holding up. I haven't had to use any contingency material yet. So far, so good...*

"But she looks... normal, I suppose," Esdeath said, pointing at Mia. For her part, the AI anime girl simply stared up at Esdeath impassively.

"She's from... between worlds, in a sense," Kyle said, hoping Esdeath wouldn't ask for elaboration. "Her name is Mia, and she's the reason you're here."

Esdeath kneeled down in front of Mia, staring into her wide brown eyes. "You are?"

Mia slowly nodded.

"Strange..." General Esdeath rose once more, and paced back and forth beside her bed, high-heeled jack boots clicking against the floor. "That must take great power. But... I don't feel anything from you. Or you," she said, throwing a glance Kyle's way. She looked down at her hands, which she turned back and forth, examining slowly, before making a fist.

"My ice!" She suddenly cried, "I can't make any ice!"

Aside from being a formidable fighter, in her fiction of origin, *Akame ga Kill*, General Esdeath was in possession of 'Demon's Extract,' a power that allowed her to spontaneously manifest and manipulate very large quantities of ice. Other characters had different powers, none of them identical, and some of them stronger than others. Over the course of the show, these characters would use their powers, or 'teigu,' to battle and slaughter each other. The 'teigu,' translated into English as 'Imperial Arms,' unfortunately were a supernatural thing, and thus Mia could not give this incarnation of Esdeath her ferocious ice powers.

Kyle considered it no small loss, but even without her ice power the woman was nigh-unstoppable within the show. "Imperial Arms don't work here, unfortunately," he said, being sure to sound regretful.

Esdeath's face screwed up in utter incomprehension. "I don't understand," she said, looking down between her own breasts. Kyle's heart skipped a beat when she pulled her boobs apart slightly, to get a better look at the tattoo. "I still have the mark, but I don't... hear any voices."

*Shit, Kyle thought. This isn't in any of my contingency scripts...!*

"How am I going to sleep at night... without that sweet lullaby of madness to drift off to?" Esdeath was now looking at her hands again, opening and closing them. "I feel very strange, all of a sudden. Very strange... and.... wrong, somehow. I feel... *wrong*." She looked up at Kyle again.

*God fucking dammit! And it was going so good, too. Alright, Kyle steeled himself, let's see if we can salvage this.*

"General Esdeath, please listen to me," he said. "Any discomfort from your resurrection should only be temporary, and we will do everything in our power to make your stay in our world a pleasant one."

“Then you can bring me Tatsumi after all?” She said with a hopeful smile.

“Ah, except that.”

Esdeath closed her eyes, and exhaled. “Why *did* you bring me here?” Her eyes snapped open, and she had taken on a more businesslike tone. “What is it you intend for me to do?”

“There are... dark, malignant forces in this world, not unlike the one you came from,” Kyle said, desperately hoping this would work. “Your skill and dedication as both a hunter and warrior impressed us, and we decided to bring you here, to test your abilities against more worthy opponents.” *That sounded so cool*, Kyle thought, *I need to get a job writing role-playing games!*

Esdeath raised an intrigued eyebrow. “Can you tell me more about these forces? What are they exactly? Who are they exactly?” She sat down on a chair near her bed, folding one long leg over the other.

“Powerful men, and women too, who believe themselves beyond reproach.” Kyle knew he had to be careful here; General Esdeath was a notorious Social Darwinist, and her entire worldview revolved around a pure 'survival of the fittest' mentality. If he appeared weak, Esdeath would no longer listen to anything he had to say, and may even turn hostile. “But they never attained their position through strength or combat. They use every dishonorable, underhanded method known to man to acquire and hoard their wealth and power. Many are hidden from public view, but still command great authority. We believe such individuals would present a unique and exciting challenge to a famed hunter such as yourself.”

Esdeath narrowed her gaze during his explanation, and somehow her deep blue anime eyes bored straight through Kyle. “I need more details,” she said, seemingly unconvinced. Kyle couldn't help but notice her tone carrying the vaguest hint of suspicion. *Shit... I really hope I didn't fuck this up already...*

“I will fill you in on the specifics,” Mia said, finally speaking up. “But you don't have to decide right now. We are still in the process of selecting other warriors, so it will be some time before we are ready to begin. In the meantime, we can offer you all the information about this world that you could ever possibly want.”

She tilted her head a bit, and finally nodded. “Alright,” she said with a sly smile. “That's fine for now.”

On a small shelf behind Mia were several books Esdeath would probably find interesting. There was *History of Warfare*, *Sun Tzu's 'Art of War'*, and *Here on Earth: A Natural History of the Planet*. Mia grabbed all three, holding them up in a small stack, and then set them down onto the General's bed.

“Are you hungry?” Kyle asked. “We have delicious food that can be prepared at a moment's notice.”

“I could eat, yes.” Esdeath said, as she approached and pawed through the books.

“In that case, allow us to excuse ourselves. Please relax here, and we'll be happy to answer any more questions you have as soon as we get back.” Kyle watched her nod once more, as she picked up

*History of Warfare* and opened it up. He quickly made his way out, and as soon as Mia had followed and the door slid shut, Kyle's hand flew to his chest.

“Holy shit,” he said, inhaling and exhaling slowly. “That was intense.”

“That actually went better than expected,” Mia said, looking up at him with some relief.

“You think so?” Kyle grinned. “Yeah, hell yeah! I told you we'd be able to make this work.”

“Don't celebrate yet,” Mia said. “Eventually she'll figure out the truth about herself, and that's the part I'm worried about.”

“Well, let's just delay that for as long as possible, or...” he trailed off as he made his way to the corridor, “introduce it very slowly.”

“The latter is the best option,” Mia said, walking alongside him. “I've taken the liberty of hiding all of the *Akame ga Kill* Blu-Rays and manga that your cousin collected. I don't think I need to explain why.”

“Good move,” he said as they neared the central AI Nexus. “A lot of this is going to be riding on you too, Mia, because you can probably explain things a lot better than I can.”

“Thanks for putting me in that position, by the way,” she said, her tone acerbic. “Kyle, I still don't understand how you're going to win her over. And you can't just pawn her off on me, because I'm not sure how to secure cooperation either, at least without heavy manipulation.” She sighed. “That said, I'll still help you, but your plan better work because I don't think I can deal with someone like her for long otherwise.”

“Thanks Mia. I won't let you down,” Kyle said as they rounded the Nexus, “now... what do you suppose Esdeath wants to eat? I'm thinking... a whole lotta meat.”

After having Sachi prepare a juicy t-bone steak, as well as some grilled chicken and sliced ham, Kyle hoisted a plate laden with food, and headed back down to the lab. Mia had already gone back, as she could see what Esdeath was up to with the cameras hidden in her room, and it appeared the General had gotten restless and tried to open her door.

Kyle hurried along, the steaming food on the plate he carried smelling most appetizing. He'd also prepared a bag of condiments, napkins and silverware that dangled from his right hand. After making it through the grow room, he entered into the final large room, which he decided was going to be called the 'waifu commons' from now on, as once all were produced this is where they would live and interact.

He stepped up to the sliding door to Esdeath's room, peering through the thin vertical window embedded within it, and could clearly see Mia animatedly speaking with the General. *Looks like they're really discussing something or other.*

While carefully balancing the plate, he opened the door, swiftly stepped through, and closed it

again. He turned around only to see a very hungry General eyeing the plate with an eager, open-mouth grin.

“That smells delicious,” she said as Kyle placed the plate down on the small table, and quickly added the napkins and silverware. Esdeath immediately picked up a fork, stabbed the steak, lifted the whole thing to her mouth, and began gingerly ripping off chunks with her teeth.

“Uh, please dig in,” he said, stepping back. And she did, too; Esdeath didn’t exactly lack manners or etiquette, of course, and even exhibited a certain amount of refined grace. But behind it all was a woman born from a barbarian tribe, the Partas clan, which in her fiction of origin lived a vicious and brutal hunter-gatherer lifestyle. And right now, Kyle could see her almost-feral upbringing reflected in the way she devoured the cooked flesh on her plate.

“This is... *so good*,” she said after a healthy swallow. Bits of grease on her cheeks screwed with the polychromatic skin, turning it coppery until she wiped her face with a napkin. “I can't believe... how *vivid* this food tastes,” she said, smiling.

“So... what were you guys talking about?” Kyle asked, leaning up against a wall.

“I was giving her a brief rundown on modern military capabilities and weaponry,” Mia said matter-of-factly.

“Your world,” Esdeath said as she speared a chicken breast on her plate, “is similar to mine in some ways, but your conventional weaponry... seems much more powerful. You also use machines to fight with, which I find very surprising.”

“Oh yeah? How come?” Kyle said.

“Because, where I come from a single, powerful soldier could decimate entire armies,” she said, still smiling. “These machines would not help much, and in fact might just make for easier targets.”

Kyle nodded, trying not to look smug. *Guess she hasn't heard about nukes or orbital weaponry yet*, he thought.

“And that's when I realized something. This world doesn't have powerful fighters, does it?” Kyle's smugness immediately vanished.

“Ah, well... remember, we don't have things like magic, or Imperial Arms here. We simply adapted differently, that's all.”

“It certainly explains why you brought me here,” she said. As Kyle watched, Esdeath threaded the fork between her fingers, and clenched her fist. The poor silverware never stood a chance. “It appears I still have my strength, at least.”

“Well, if you're worried about not finding any worthy opponents, I can tell you that you have nothing to fear,” Kyle said, whipping out contingency script #3. “The weaponry and tactics of warfare here are very different compared to your world. This will surely providing an interesting challenge, especially for someone of your experience.” *Yeah, keep kissing her ass. She likes it when her strength is acknowledged.*

“Don't forget, we're bringing other warriors, all comparable in strength to yourself,” Mia added, “so you will have others of your caliber to spar with.”

*That* made Esdeath's eyes light up. “Wonderful,” she said, clasping her hands together. “Strong warriors from other worlds... I never thought I'd ever get to experience such a wondrous thing.”

“Yes, that's right. I don't know exactly how long until they get here, but it shouldn't be more than a week or two,” he said.

“Well, I must say this world you've resurrected me into has certainly caught my interest,” Esdeath was smiling, and sounded almost cheerful. *Definitely a good sign*, Kyle thought.

Just then, Mia approached and began tugging on Kyle's sleeve. “What is it?” He whispered.

“Ryan just got here,” Mia replied. “I can see him out front. It looks like he rented a U-haul.”

*Oh, just fucking perfect.* Kyle glanced over at the general, who had left only bones on her plate and was now thumbing through the Modern Warfare book. *Yeah, way too soon for Ryan to be introduced, if ever. He probably doesn't even know who she is.*

“Alright, I'll go take care of our guest,” he said as he took the plate and mangled silverware. “Talk to you later, General.”

She looked up from the book and chuckled. “I'm not a General anymore. To my knowledge, at least.” A closed-eye smile. “Call me Esdeath.”

“Very well then, Esdeath.” And with that, Kyle made his escape.

As he stalked through the lab's corridors, heading back up to the house, Kyle couldn't help but feel anxious. *This is almost working too well*, he thought. *Gotta make sure to keep it nice and formal, at least for now.* Even though she was attractive, and Kyle would readily admit to searching for hentai of Esdeath after first watching her anime years ago... somehow all of that already went out the window.

*I can't believe how insane these emulations are*, he considered with some anxiety. *She's basically an emulated intelligence inside a bio-mechanical body with anime aesthetics. And yet... I can definitely feel it. A kind of 'pressure' whenever she looks in my direction. And when she got up close to me and sniffed earlier, it felt like there was a lead smock draped across my shoulders.*

For the first time, Kyle began having serious doubts regarding the veracity of his plans.

“Hey, buddy!” Ryan shouted in greeting as Kyle exited the house. Mia had allowed the gate to open, so his U-haul rental was currently backed up to the flagstone steps. It was one of the smaller trucks, as Ryan didn't have much to haul... and of course, he brought useless shit, like his bed.

“Dude, the guest rooms already have beds,” Kyle said. “You didn't need to bring this.”

“Oh, it's all good,” Ryan waved a hand in dismissal. “I actually really like my bed, so I was hoping we could swap out the guest bed for mine.”

Kyle looked at the bed in question; it was composed of a heavy wooden frame currently disassembled into many long, solid pieces, along with a huge, suspiciously stained mattress. He sighed, and hung his head.

“Sure man, whatever. I guess I'll lend a hand.”

So for the next forty-five minutes, Kyle helped Ryan move his junk (and it very much was) into the furthest back of the second-story guest rooms. Taking apart and moving the existing guest room bed out to the garage was just icing on the cake.

After Ryan had gotten his room set up, Kyle looked around at the cheap, worn furniture, the piles of clothes the lanky man had brought in trash bags, and the outdated appliances now competing with the elegant wall-mounted TV already installed. *Dude... why the fuck did you bring all this shit?!*

“Well anyway, I'm glad you're all situated.” Kyle said, leaning against the doorway. “I guess you should be good to go for the Residential AI voice recognition, so I'll show you how to use it to order food and whatnot.”

“Yes, please do,” Ryan said, dumping another trash bag full of clothes on the floor. “Oh yeah, do you guys have any extra hangers? I didn't bring enough.”

Kyle's eyebrow rose. “There's plenty in the closet. Did you even have one of those at your parent's house?”

“Oh, no.” Ryan shook his head. “I basically lived in the garage.” *Of course he did*, Kyle thought, facepalming.

“Anyway come on, I'm hungry from all that food I had Sachi make earlier but didn't get to eat,” Kyle beckoned Ryan with a sweep of his arm. “And I'll even let you order it.”

He jumped up and pumped his fists in the air. “Let's do it!”

The two of them had just made it to the stairs when all of a sudden Kyle pushed Ryan back into the hallway, following closely himself.

“Dude, what the fuck?!” Ryan looked bewildered and a little pissed.

“Shh! Shut up!” Kyle hissed. “Esdeath's down there, alright?”

“Who the fuck is that?” Ryan said. “Wait, is that your waif-”

“SHH! Yes, she is, but you can't say it in front of her, got it?” Kyle was gesturing frantically. “Listen, it looks like Mia's giving her a tour of the house. Obviously we gotta introduce you guys sooner or later, so let's just do it in passing on our way to the kitchen, okay?”

“Yeah, man, whatever you say.” He shrugged and threw out his hands.

“Alright, just keep your back straight, be casual, and don't speak unless spoken to.”

Ryan rolled his eyes, but Kyle ignored him. He peered around the corner, and sure enough, it appeared as though Mia and Esdeath were now heading for the stairs themselves. Perfect timing.

Kyle beckoned Ryan to follow, and the two stood up, briskly descending the steps. Mia was leading Esdeath up the other flight of stairs, and at first it appeared as though she didn't even see them. But just as they were halfway, Kyle noticed Esdeath glancing their way out the corner of her eyes.

“Hey, sweet uniform!” Ryan yelled, while Kyle tried to curl up and die. “It looks really badass!”

Esdeath froze on the stair she was on, her head slowly turning in their direction.

“I'm Ryan by the way,” he said, with a big smile. “I live here too!”

Kyle chanced a look, but Esdeath didn't seem to have much of a reaction. At least, that was until Ryan shot her a roman salute, which made her eyebrows jump a bit.

“Alright, well... nice meeting you!” Ryan happily skipped down the remaining steps, while Kyle tried to pick up what dignity remained and swiftly followed.

“Man, I gotta say, your waifu's pretty fine,” Ryan said once they were safely ensconced within the kitchen. “What was her name again?”

“Esdeath,” Kyle growled. “She's a villain, so we have to be careful until we can guarantee her loyalty. And... probably after that, too.”

“Why would you have Mia make you someone you're scared of?” Ryan asked. “I don't really get it.”

“Well, I don't know if I'd say 'scared,' it's just...” he sighed. “Look, there's only a few of us, against... how many radical leftists, Globalists, and other corrupt scumbags?”

“Wait... are you asking me? Because I don't... I don't know. A lot, I can say that.”

“That's right,” Kyle nodded. “So we needed someone that could basically take on thousand-to-one odds and come out without a scratch. That's Esdeath.”

“Ah...” Ryan nodded thoughtfully. “I want one like that, too.”

“Don't worry, there's plenty. We'll get you a good one.”

“Sure, sure.” Ryan rubbed his hands together by the palms. “Anyway I'm starvin.' Show me how this shit works.”

Kyle demonstrated the voice command system, and explained the basics, which didn't take long

as there was little to it. Ryan tried placing an order for Panda Express, and Kyle facepalmed again, telling him that he should have Sachi make his first order. Eventually they settled on BLT's, and within moments Sachi whirred her way into the kitchen and began breaking out the ingredients.

Just then, Kyle heard the tell-tale click of high heels on tile, approaching from down the hall. It sounded similar to Amy's back on that first night, but somehow these taps had more... *gravity* to them. Kyle held his breath until they disappeared into the hatch leading down to the lab.

“Man, that chick's got you all kinds of wound up,” Ryan said, shaking his head.

“You haven't seen her show,” Kyle retorted.

“Oh, oh yeah!” the lanky man suddenly got excited. “I know which waifu I want!”

“Great, let's hear it,” he said, accepting the plate from Sachi with his sandwich. Ryan did likewise, but it was clear he was still unnerved by Sachi's appearance.

“Anyway, here. I remember this chick used to get posted on /Pol/ a lot back in the day, and I remember thinking she was fuckin' hot. See? I remember her 'cuz of the blindfold.”

Kyle looked at the image Ryan had pulled up on his phone. His eyebrows rose.

“That's... actually a really good pick,” Kyle said, surprised he never thought of it himself.

“Really? You know who she is?” Ryan tried finding other pics based on the description he remembered, but didn't have much luck.

“Yeah, yeah I do.” The gears in Kyle's head started turning. “I'll tell Mia to get started immediately.”

“Right on,” Ryan said, biting into his sandwich. “And holy shit, Sachi's food is good!”

A few hours later, Ryan left to drop off the U-haul, and Kyle found himself staring out one of the windows of his room, looking into the backyard. Some birds were fucking in one of the bushes. He wasn't sure what kind, but they were small, and the flurry of flapping wings was causing the bush to sway and small branches to flail. Normally, Kyle would have thought watching two birds fuck was kind of funny, but not today.

*Mia was right. I underestimated the emulations,* he realized with a sinking feeling. He suddenly grew rather anxious, since he hadn't heard from his erstwhile AI companion since lunch.

“Hey, Mia.” He said out loud. “If you've got a minute, I wanted to talk to you about something.”

“I'll be there in five,” Mia's disembodied voice responded. Somehow, that made him breathe a sigh of relief.

“So what's up?” Mia said, standing at the entrance to his room.

Kyle turned, and sighed. “Mia, I think-”

“Whoah, hold on Kyle,” she said, putting a finger to her temple. All of a sudden, she started smiling, and her eyes sparkled.

“We've got more!” Mia said, clearly thrilled.

“More... what? Problems?”

“No, dummy. Recruits!” She did an adorable little fist-pump, and approached Kyle. “This time, there's two at once. They're roommates, and I've been chatting with them for awhile, but they seemed skeptical of the whole thing.”

“And you finally convinced them?” Kyle raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah, basically. They kept asking about the waifus, thinking it was just a gag. I couldn't give away too much, but let's just say I think they're convinced now.”

“Right, so do I need to interview them, or...”

“Yeah, but you don't have to meet them,” Mia said. “You can video skype this one.”

“Well that's nice,” Kyle said. “Is there a set time, or...”

“No, do it now!” Mia was almost jumping up and down. *I think the fact that so few people took her ad seriously was something Mia took personally*, he thought. “I already know who they are, so no need for verification. Just find out if they're serious or not, and if so I'll give 'em the address.”

“Fine, fine.” Kyle has halfway out the door, before he remembered what he'd originally called her in for. “Oh yeah, so how's... you know, our new friend.”

“She doesn't seem all that interested in going after the people we want her to, Kyle.” Mia's voice became unexpectedly terse. “Instead, she's been asking me a whole lot of uncomfortable questions, though. Personal questions.”

“Umm... like what?”

Mia looked over, concern etched in her big brown eyes. “She's asking me about the things I can do. As in, my capabilities and things of that nature. I think she's sizing me up.”

*Fuck.* “Any ideas on where to approach this from here?” *Yeah, it hasn't even been a whole day. Let's not give up just yet.*

She shrugged. “I'm just trying to keep her distracted so she doesn't get bored and start poking around in places we don't want her to. Other than that, I was relying on your 'fool-proof plan.’”

Kyle suddenly felt rather weary. “So far the plan has only partially worked, but... I still have a trump card. I'd rather not use it until absolutely necessary, though.”

“I think I know what it is, and I'd rather you didn't, either.”

“Well, whatever. We'll make it through this,” he said, speaking as much for his own benefit as Mia's. “I'm still confident things'll work themselves out.”

Mia smiled a little at this. “I hope so, Kyle. Anyway, for now why don't you go ahead and chat with our new recruits? Here's their skype info.” Mia scribbled down some letters and numbers onto the pad of paper still sitting on Kyle's desk from when he picked his waifu.

“Oh yeah, that reminds me. Ryan showed me the waifu he wants.”

“I saw it earlier, when he brought up the pic on his phone,” Mia said. “I've already started the preliminary personality generation, same as with Brandon's. If those two roommates end up joining, then take their order as well, so I can just finish the rest of the waifus in one large batch.”

“Y'know... Esdeath seemed to really get excited by the idea of fighting other characters that are at her level,” Kyle said, scratching his chin. “Maybe we should go with that angle.”

“I agree,” Mia said. “At the very least, having other waifus around should help keep her honest.”

Kyle nodded vigorously. “Alright, new plan: we just have to keep Esdeath happy for the next five or six days, and then she'll have some new playmates,” Kyle said. “After that, she should be more than happy to stick with us just for the opportunity to regularly fight them.”

“Eh, I don't know if regular fights are a good idea,” Mia said. “I would need to figure out some way to keep them from destroying the lab, as well as each other, once they eventually spar.”

“How about some kind of virtual sparring?” Kyle said. “I mean, you can do that right? Because they're technically a form of AI? Like, just hook 'em both up to a computer and let 'em duke it out that way?”

“Yeah...” Mia said as though it were an idea she'd already considered and discarded. “I don't think that'll satisfy Esdeath, but I can try.”

“If not, then aren't there extra spare rooms down below the waifu commons? Let's turn those into a little arena or something.”

Mia chuckled. “The waifu commons? Is that what you're calling their living area?”

“Hey, it beats the 'everyone-sit-and-glare-at-each-other' room,” he said with a shrug.

Twenty minutes later, Kyle was sitting at the desk in the office, booting up the PC and looking at the notepad Mia scribbled the Skype info onto. The two names of the 'recruits' were also on there:

Marky and Nick. After logging onto Windows and starting up Skype, Kyle entered the info, adding them to the sparse list of contacts already existing. And as soon as he did, he saw they were online, and ready to talk.

Kyle sighed, and sent a message. *'Admin sent me. Heard you guys were in the market for some premium waifu.'*

A message almost immediately came back. *'We're only interested in pure-grade waifu. None of this bullshit from China.'*

*'Don't worry man,'* Kyle wrote back. *'These waifus are pure, 100-percent uncut.'*

A new window suddenly opened up on the screen, showing a slightly choppy video stream of two young white men, sitting side-by-side in front of a computer. One of them, the one typing, had very squinty eyes. Not at all Asian, just... squinty. His face was plain and chubby, and he had short, somewhat greasy-looking hair. From what little Kyle could see of the rest of his body, the kid was rather porky.

The other one was a decent contrast, being much skinnier, and would be much better looking, were it not for the acne spattered all over his face. As Kyle watched, the acne kid lifted a small bong to his mouth, held a lighter to the bowl, and proceeded to inhale a fat rip.

*I can already tell this is a complete waste of time,* Kyle thought with a roll of his eyes.

“Hey man!” Said the acne stoner. “What's up! Where are you? Are you gonna throw up a stream?”

Kyle knew he meant a video stream featuring his own self. *'Not until you guys are accepted,'* he typed. *'With what we're offering, you can't take too many precautions.'*

“Yeah, I guess that's fair. Oh, I'm Nick, by the way.” The acne stoner raised a hand in salutation, “we're both students at UCLA. I'm third year, he's second year”. And with that, he turned his attention toward packing another bowl.

*'What's goin' on,'* Kyle wrote. *'Anyway I guess that means the other one is Marky?'*

“That's right,” Marky said, in a weedy voice that was a touch nasal. “Marky Winkleovoss, at your service.”

*That's seriously his name?* Kyle chuckled and shook his head. *These dipshits are a complete joke.* Still, he supposed it wouldn't hurt to at least talk to them.

*'So what made you guys decide on the path of the waifu?'* he typed, using innuendo to avoid red-flagging any government algorithms monitoring their communication.

“Censorship, for starters,” Marky said, his squinty eyes getting squintier. “And I don't mean how all the new anime dubs are getting censored and deliberately mis-translated. No, I mean the school won't even let us watch it anymore.”

*'What?'* Kyle typed. *'How could you not watch anime? Did they ban it or something?'*

“Yeah man,” Nick said, his half-open eyes turning a nice shade of pink. “It's bullshit. They said anime was, like, 'misogynistic' and 'objectifies women,' and... oh yeah, 'celebrates toxic masculinity.'”

“Our anime club got banned, too. It wasn't even a real club, just a couple of us getting together to watch shows, rank our waifus, that sort of thing,” Marky shook his fat face, and Kyle noticed he had a thin wisp of a mustache. “But one day, I guess some feminist cunt overheard us comparing waifus, and it was banned, just like that.”

*'I see,'* Kyle typed. *'Well, our waifus are the best out there, but to earn one you gotta be willing to get serious. Do you guys have any skills or qualifications that might help us out?'*

“I'd kill for a real waifu,” Marky said, with a decisive nod. Nick agreed, his head moving up and down in an exaggerated motion. “But as far as skills, I know my way around a computer, and Nick...” he turned to his roommate, seeming to think for a moment. “Nick's good for morale,” he eventually said.

Kyle laughed. It was actually kinda cute how inept these losers were. *'Sorry guys,'* he typed. *'We need people that can really handle themselves.'*

As soon as the two saw that, they blanched. “Hey, come on!” Marky said, visibly incensed. “The admin said you guys are running a training program. He basically made it seem like we were already in!” Apparently Marky assumed the Admin was male, and after the fiasco with Ryan, Kyle wasn't about to correct him.

“Yeah, man,” Nick added, his brows knitting. “Just give us a chance. We're sick of the horseshit at this school, and I don't just mean with the anime. There's all kinds of gender-studies bullshit and African appreciation and stuff like that, and some of this shit gets really fucking evil, man. And they shove it all down your throat! You're forced to take all these 'giving up your privilege' courses just to graduate now. If you're white, I mean.”

“It really is getting bad,” Marky said. “Right now, you wanna know a thing they're doing? If you're a white male talking to a female or a member of some other race, you have to greet them with 'I'm sorry.'”

“That's right,” Nick was getting animated now. “Like, what the fuck is that? You have to apologize to a person just to be able to talk to them? Even the white professors have to do it!”

*That is pretty fucked up,* Kyle thought, considering the implications. Instilling a permanent sense of shame or guilt into white males was one of the many ways the modern Left was gaining power over the country. Also, he imagined the minorities always being apologized to likely lost all respect for these white guys, assuming there was any to begin with.

“Look, we just wanna do whatever we can to help,” Nick continued. “I've seen too many white guys quit school or get expelled over the most trivial bullshit, like misgendering someone by accident. One of my best friends got expelled because a black girl said he made her 'feel uncomfortable.' That was it, that was literally all it took.”

*'Really?,' Kyle typed. 'The school really expelled someone for that?'*

“Yeah, they certainly did,” Marky said. “Because the black girl got all her friends to complain too, even though they never even met the dude. But they made a big stink all the same, and he was gone.”

“I think she was just power-trippin,’ Nick said. “I see it a lot now, on campus. There's no real penalty for picking on white dudes if you're a minority, as long as you don't beat 'em up too much, but if you're white and you try to stand up for yourself even a little...” He made a slashing motion across his throat, which Kyle knew wasn't literal but was still alarming enough.

“Oh, and Antifa is getting really big here,” Marky added. “They start fucking with people hard if they don't go along with their anti-fascist, pro-communist rhetoric.”

“And then, the other day...” The two roommates went on and on, describing a hellish scenario at their college, where, in the name of social justice, the school's social structure had become a sort of inverse of what colleges were like back in the 1950's. Instead of black and hispanic students getting targeted with slurs, hate and even physical attacks, they were now in the highest privileged positions, with white males on the lowest rung. And apparently, that still wasn't enough for the advocates, who were constantly finding new ways to further the gap a just little bit more, blaming the white males all the while.

*'Alright, stop, I've heard enough,' Kyle typed. 'If you're serious about stopping this sort of thing, you guys can join.'*

The two young men broke out in smiles and fist pumps, and Nick packed a celebratory bowl. “Right on man,” he said as he exhaled another rip. “So now what?”

*'I'll have the Admin send you the address. After that, drop by anytime during the day, just give us a little advance warning.'*

The young men agreed, said their goodbyes and signed off. Kyle closed down Skype, and then leaned back in the office chair. *I feel sorry for any white boys growing up these days,* he thought, shaking his head sadly. *Especially in heavily liberal areas. It seems like they want nothing more than for white boys to grow up to become some kind of slavish, simpering weaklings, who would never dare to so much as upset the noble and enlightened females and minorities.*

This might also explain the sudden explosion of young white males turning to transgenderism as well, he considered. By becoming trans, all of a sudden they're now part of one of the victimized groups, the same groups rapidly gaining power and influence all over the country, at least outside of rural areas. For some of these kids, it might be their only path to acceptance, or any kind of success or influence at all.

That thought began making him physically ill, so Kyle decided that if he was going to be throwing up, he might as well earn it, and headed to the fridge to retrieve a much-deserved beer.

Kyle was kept awake that night, musing over not only the conversation with the two college

kids, but also the situation with Esdeath. He was starting to realize Mia was right all along, but he wasn't willing to admit defeat just yet. *If we can just get her to declare loyalty to our cause, then... hmm... then what? Would we give Esdeath a list of targets and send her out into the wilderness? Sure. Why not?*

He rolled over. Esdeath had spent the remainder of the day within her room, reading mostly, but also watching some television, which Mia had explained the basics of. The anime villainess seemed to learn and adapt very quickly, absorbing information with enough intensity to make a sponge weep with envy. *Maybe something she learns might change her, Kyle thought hopefully. Perhaps the combination of her fictional death, plus awakening in a new reality will make her more congenial, somehow.*

*That's not too much to hope for, is it?*

After awakening the next morning, Kyle dressed and blearily shuffled out to the kitchen table. The sudden clink of silver on dishware caught his attention. *I really hope that's just Ryan, he thought.*

But of course, it wasn't.

Esdeath sat along the middle of the table, directly across from Mia, and was currently engaged in wolfing down a plate of eggs and sausage, which it seemed she was thoroughly enjoying. The food quickly disappeared from her plate, and Kyle continued watching from the doorway as she lifted the plate to her mouth and scooped in the last of the eggs. She managed to make even this eating habit look refined and somehow majestic.

"Kyle, please come join us," Mia said, looking over her shoulder at Kyle. He'd briefly considered just turning around and going back to bed, but... he couldn't keep shoveling off Esdeath's care to Mia alone.

"Good morning, Mia, Esdeath," he said, heading over to his usual spot, which was several seats down from Mia. "I trust you both slept well?"

"I don't sleep, Kyle. You know this," Mia raised an eyebrow.

"Well, to my surprise I slept quite comfortably," Esdeath said, with a thin smile. "The luxuries this world offers are much more refined than anything I can remember from my own."

"Ah, glad to hear it," Kyle said. "Sachi, I'll have biscuits 'n gravy, standard portion."

"Oh, good," Esdeath said, "I do so enjoy your strange machine maid. Watching her work is somehow amusing and interesting, at the same time."

He cracked a smile. It was true that Sachi was a little goofy, and her terse, robotic movements always made it seem like she was on the verge of knocking everything over. But the entire time he'd been here, she'd never once dropped or otherwise screwed up a single order. And right on time, the tell-tale whining of servos announced that breakfast would soon be ready.

"So, um..." Kyle began, before clearing his throat. "Mia, what's the plan for today?"

"I'm going to be busy working in the lab all day," she said. "I have two new 'warriors' to 'bring over,' and on a completely unrelated note, the roommates you interviewed last night said they'd stop by after classes today. So make sure you ask them what they want, as well."

"Got it," he said. *Mia obviously wants me to find out what waifus the two college kids want, but Esdeath can't know that's how we're deciding.*

For her part, Esdeath sat back in her chair, contentedly rubbing a full stomach. "I think I used to be able to eat more than this," she remarked. "But it's hard to recall... it's almost as if," she leaned forward, folding her hands in front of her, elbows on table, "everything that happened in my previous life was a dream..."

"It might as well be, now." Kyle said. *Because it never happened.*

"That bothers me a bit, though," she replied. All of a sudden, Mia seemed to begin watching Esdeath closely. "I try to think over my past life, and... so much of it just seems... unreal."

"Unfortunately, that's an unavoidable side-effect of resurrection," Mia stated plainly.

"Is there really no sending me back?" she said, staring directly at Mia. "I left behind... so much unfinished business."

"As I mentioned before, it's impossible," Mia said, her gaze dispassionate. "I can only bring people here. I cannot send them anywhere else... except to oblivion."

That made Esdeath's eyes narrow slightly, but her smile grew. "Well, I would have loved to use my powers again, but... I suppose I'll have to make do."

"Anyway," Kyle said, noticing a sudden hint of tension in the air, "it was nice chatting with you ladies, but I think I'm gonna-"

"Kyle," Mia said, turning to him with the same dispassionate eyes. "I was with Esdeath all day yesterday. I have work to do, so I think you should keep her company today."

Esdeath was still facing Mia, but her eyes had swiveled toward Kyle. He could almost feel her gaze scrutinizing him. It made him suddenly want to hide.

"Yes, of course." He smiled, maybe a little too big. "We'll have a great time."

"I think I'd like to relax for a little while, actually," she said, stretching. "One of the books you two lent me is very interesting."

"Ah, well that's fine," Kyle said. "If you need me for anything else, please let me know." Just then, Sachi placed a steaming plate of biscuits 'n gravy in front of him, and the hearty aroma made him fight the urge to drool.

Esdeath rose from her seat in one eloquent motion, and rounded the table. Kyle paused, with the fork halfway to his mouth, when he noticed Esdeath leaning over his shoulder, gazing at what was on

his plate. He could feel her breath tickling his neck.

“That looks... disgusting and delicious at the same time. May I?” Without even waiting for a reply, she plucked the fork from his fingers, and brought it to her mouth. “Mm, very bold flavor, zesty, yet... somehow familiar. What did you call this again?”

“Umm... biscuits 'n gravy?”

“I’ll have to try this again sometime,” she said, dropping the fork back onto his plate. It stabbed straight down into his food. “And I will be calling for you later, I don’t feel like being cooped up all day, no matter how comfortable that bed is.” And with that, she departed, disappearing down the hatch into the lab.

“Mia...” Kyle began, still staring at the fork sticking out of his food, perfectly upright. “What the fuck do I do now?”

The diminutive anime girl shrugged. “I don’t know, you tell me. This was all your idea. You were dead-set on bringing her here.”

“Never mind, I’ll figure something out.” Kyle sighed, and pried his fork out of the food. His appetite had diminished, but he still picked at his meal. The fact that she snatched his fork like that made him feel indignant.

“Also,” he said, “how the hell does she not know what biscuits 'n gravy are? I thought they ate the same shit as us in her show.”

“Kyle, I had to fabricate twenty-plus years’ worth of memories in six days, so a good portion of the more trivial details end up getting abstracted, just like real memories. Mundane things like that are going to be glossed over, and others omitted entirely.”

“Did you omit anything else?” He asked, looking over. “Anything crucial that I should know about?”

“I didn’t give her the affinity toward you,” Mia finally said, appearing to stare at the table.

“WHAT?” Kyle groaned and ran a hand through his hair. “Why the hell not?”

“Because, with her personality profile,” Mia said, “I realized that it wouldn’t help her to like you at all. It would only mean that, if you upset her enough, she would take extra special care when she tortured you, making your suffering especially exquisite, rather than just her normal sadistic routine.”

“...I see,” he said, turning a shade paler.

“Anyway, I have work to do,” she pushed the chair back from the table, and hopped off. “In the meantime, I’ll keep an eye on her through the embedded cameras, which I don’t think she’s noticed yet.”

“You did hide those pretty well,” Kyle said. “The speakers and microphone pickups, too. Where the hell are they? I’ve never spotted a single one.”

Mia walked by Kyle's chair, and stopped next to him. "Up there," she said, pointing to a blank patch of wall. "And over there, and there too."

"There's nothing there," Kyle said, squinting his eyes. "It's just a blank wall."

"Did you forget what we do for disguises?" Mia winked as she headed toward the lab. "Anyway, Esdeath is in the system now, so when she wants you she'll call for you directly."

As the AI anime girl vanished behind the closing hatch, Kyle put his face in his hands, and tried to think of something to do. *Alright, you can do this... just gotta think of something that Esdeath can enjoy... hmm...*

"Morning buddy!" A smiling Ryan strolled into the dining room, taking a seat directly next to Kyle. "Oh man, check this out... I had the craziest dream last night, you gotta hear this. So first, I was in my parent's bedroom, right? But there were like five dogs, each a different size..."

Kyle closed his eyes and inwardly groaned, and found himself suddenly thinking that Esdeath's torture might not be so bad after all.

The anime villainess eventually called for him several hours later. Kyle had actually been in the lab, discussing an idea he had with Mia as she prepared two additional waifu frames for fabrication. Mia had nodded, agreeing with Kyle's idea, and said she was actually thinking something similar. And just after that, Esdeath's husky voice, coming from everywhere and nowhere.

"I've finished with my reading for now," she'd said. "I feel like some light exercise, or maybe some other kind of physical stimulation." Normally such innuendo would be boner-inducing, but Kyle knew better. Sadly, there was only a single piece of exercise equipment, and Esdeath didn't actually need to work out anyway, as her new muscles, strong as steel cable, never dulled or went soft. But she didn't know that, yet.

"I'll be right there," he'd said, leaving Mia behind and heading toward Esdeath's room. But once he'd arrived and slid open her door, the room was empty save for some books scattered haphazardly across her table. A sudden, muffled flushing of a toilet caught his attention. He looked over only to he see the door to her personal bathroom open up, and Esdeath regally stepped out, as if she were exiting a carriage.

"Oh good, you're here," she said, wearing only the slightest smile. "I trust you have suitable activities planned. I'd rather not let my skills dull any further, if I can help it."

"Certainly," Kyle said, beckoning her to follow with a grandiose gesture, "right this way."

He led her out of the lab, her heels steadily clicking away behind him. He noticed the robots seemed to be giving Esdeath a wide berth, which probably wasn't a bad idea, in retrospect.

Once back inside the house, he headed toward the foyer. *There's really only one option*, Kyle thought. *Video games are a no-go, obviously, but we do have other games that require finesse and a sharp eye. She should like those.*

Kyle led her up the stairs, and over toward the bar. He hadn't ever been there but once or twice, as the games didn't hold much appeal, and he'd never really liked bars and pubs to begin with. He always found the traditional bar atmosphere to either be too claustrophobic or too hectic and anxiety-inducing. But now, with just the two of them, it didn't seem so bad.

He entered the bar and waved his hand with practiced ease, and the Residential AI made it all come to life. The various neon signs all over the wall flickered to life, the game tables all lit up, and the pinball machines jingled. The XM-compatible jukebox immediately turned on, picking up a *Bon Jovi* song that was already halfway over.

For her part, Esdeath stood near the entrance, glancing around with her arms folded. Every time her head moved from side to side, her long hair would ripple, the polychromatic material shimmering like a rolling wave. He swallowed nervously.

“Alright, so this is what I came up with,” Kyle said, indicating the bar with arms outstretched. “There's quite a few games of skill available that will test your eyes and dexterity. Some of these you might have in your world, others... I'm not so sure.”

Esdeath stalked around from game to game, one long finger on her chin. “I remember billiards,” she said. “We had darts, too. I don't recognize this one, though.” She had stopped next to a table covered in a slick blue surface.

Kyle inwardly fist-pumped and hurried over. “All right, this is called air hockey. The idea is simple: there's a single puck, and the objective is to knock it into your opponent's goal. Each player gets a paddle to stop the puck, if you can, and also to shoot it towards the opposing goal. Here, like this.” He set the puck on the table, showing Esdeath how easy it was to slide it around on the table's surface. He then slammed it into the undefended goal, and the point tally went up.

“See? Just like that.” *Man, I hope this works.*

Esdeath approached and picked up her paddle, examining it. “Alright,” she said. “Let's play.”

Kyle had the puck first, so shot it straight toward Esdeath. She deflected it easily, but her return shot wasn't too difficult for Kyle to send back. It ricocheted off the side and right into Esdeath's goal.

“Hmm...” Esdeath seemed to be scanning the table. She got the puck next, and tried something similar, but hitting it hard enough that it bounced back and forth several times before Kyle barely managed to stop it. *Shit, she's getting good, and fast.*

Now with the puck in his possession once more, Kyle feinted a diagonal shot but instead went straight. Esdeath caught it easily and returned the puck, shooting it with enough momentum that he was surprised the puck didn't shatter when it slammed into his goal. He tried again with the next possession, and the next, but didn't score again after that first shot.

Over and over, Esdeath expertly deflected his shots, and as she hovered over her paddle, in a loose, casual stance, Kyle could see the match had already been decided. He did his best until the end, but as the final puck sailed into his goal, all he could do was hang his head in defeat and congratulate his opponent.

“Hmph,” she said dismissively. “I’ll admit it’s an enjoyable game, it’s just a shame the competition was so lacking.”

“Ouch,” he said, trying to play it off. “You just had beginner’s luck.”

Esdeath ignored this, instead leaning down to inspect the coin slots of the table, which were now set to ‘free play.’ “I think Tatsumi would like this game,” she said wistfully.

Kyle gritted his teeth, but he’d known to expect this. *I didn’t bring her here to get laid*, he had to remind himself. *I had Mia create her for a much bigger purpose...* And yet, despite all that, he found himself suddenly wishing he’d had Mia bring out a version of Esdeath that hadn’t yet met the male protagonist from *Akame ga Kill*.

“Umm... here, what do you think of these?” A suddenly uncomfortable Kyle showed her to the pinball machines. There were two cabinets, both lit up garishly in a panoply of bright lights and themed artwork, one for Jurassic Park, the other for Batman. Esdeath didn’t seem very interested in either, until she spotted the small dinosaur within the Jurassic Park machine’s case.

“That’s a danger beast,” she said with growing excitement, peering closely. “I didn’t think you had any here!” In her fictional world of origin, ‘danger beasts,’ were fantastic creatures such as dragons, goblins, giant wolves, and other role-playing staples. They were often hunted for food or money, and the most powerful and terrifying were turned into Imperial Arms.

Of course, the real monster from her world was standing right here, staring at a plastic prop in a pinball machine’s case.

“Ah... yeah, no we don’t have danger beasts. That’s just a dinosaur.”

“A pity,” she said, drawing back. “I miss hunting.”

“Well, there’s always... what we discussed yesterday,” Kyle said, referring to their original reason for ‘bringing’ her here in the first place.

“I’m considering your offer,” she said. “But I can’t help but get the feeling I’m not being given the full picture.”

*Dammit, didn’t Mia say she’d fill her in on the details?! Well, whatever.* “There’s really nothing that we’re deliberately keeping from you,” Kyle said. “In order to understand the full scope of what we ask, you’d have to understand our world better. Uh... for context, I mean.”

“Maybe so,” she said, approaching the dartboard. “Until that time, I can’t give you an answer.”

“Ah, right. Well, see this is whole reason we brought you here, so...” Kyle stood a few feet behind her, and he could feel his heart rate climbing for some reason.

She slowly swiveled her head, her blue eyes searing into his. “You have no way to coerce me, do you?” She smiled a little, her voice sounding almost sweet, but he knew this was it. He could blow everything right here if he didn’t choose his next words very carefully.

“Oblivion,” he said with a dry mouth, recalling Mia’s words that morning at breakfast. Esdeath's eyelashes flitted ever so slightly, but otherwise her expression did not change. “If at any time you wish to be released from this world... we can effortlessly send you back to oblivion.”

“Hmm...” Esdeath turned back to the dartboard, plucking the darts out of their canister. “As I said, I'm considering your offer.” She then threw a dart so hard it punched straight through the bullseye, the wall, the stud behind it, and even the exterior of the house. Kyle could see a pinprick of daylight through the hole she'd just lasered into the wall with that dart.

Thankfully, they had two dartboards, and Esdeath started throwing them normally at the second one, all bullseyes or very close. She then wandered over to the billiards table and began racking the balls.

“Are you any good?” She asked. Kyle wasn't terrible at pool, but at this point he knew that if he couldn't provide stiff competition, it was better to just let her play against herself.

“Not really,” he said. “Electronic gaming is more my forte.”

“I'm not sure what that is, but... somehow it already sounds tedious,” she said, dropping the balls into the triangle.

“They say it's great for hand-eye coordination,” he said with a forced chuckle, but Esdeath ignored him, instead focusing on getting the triangle just right. She selected a pool cue, approached the table, and set the cue ball off to one side.

“I need more reading material,” Esdeath said as she lined up her shot. “I've already finished two of the books you've given me, and I expect to be done with the other one shortly.” She made the shot, and the cue ball smashed into the rest, scattering the balls across the table in a whirlwind of color and movement. Kyle wasn't surprised to see most of them go straight into a pocket, but there were still a few on the table.

“*Tch...*” She seemed disappointed in the result, but soon enough began considering the geometry of her follow-up shots. Kyle watched as her gaze flitted from the cue ball to the other remaining balls, but at one point her eyes shifted over to him, narrowing as they did so. He suddenly felt very unwelcome.

“Alright, I guess I'll, uh... go find some more books for you,” he said. “Will you be alright here for awhile?”

“I will,” she said. “Your little friend seems anxious that I'll up and leave or snoop around where she'd prefer I didn't, but...” her face became unreadable for a second. “I'm content, for the time being.”

“Right, okay. I won't be gone long, then.” Kyle said, hurrying away faster than he would care to admit. Just as he was about to reach the stairs, he heard the *snap* of the cue ball slamming into its target, and several *clunks* as two balls rolled into pockets.

As he rapidly descended the stairs, he noticed Ryan laying in the almost never-used living room, scratching his ass in a couch that cost more than most families make in a year. He was currently playing

with his phone, and as Kyle approached he could just begin to make out the familiar Ωchan layout on its screen.

“I didn't know there was a mobile app for Ωchan,” he said, peering over Ryan's shoulder.

The lanky man jumped a little. “Oh, hey man,” he laughed. “Were you guys hittin' it off up there? I heard you playing air hockey earlier, that shit was *loud*.”

“Not really,” Kyle said. “Actually, things may have gotten worse. Listen,” he crouched down close to Ryan, and whispered, “I need to go find a library and pick up some books for Esdeath. If you talk to her, be respectful and *do not* mention anything about waifus, or anime in general. Got it?”

“Yeah, yeah man. Totally,” Ryan nodded nervously, as the way Kyle whispered his request made it seem like a life-or-death matter, which in some ways it was. “And why a library? Who the fuck even goes to those anymore?”

“I need books, and I need them now,” Kyle said, sighing as he checked his own phone. It looked like the nearby Beverly Hills Library was the best choice, and an Uber driver could be here in five minutes. He made the request, and left a somewhat baffled Ryan to shrug and go back to browsing Ωchan.

After thanking the Uber driver and exiting the vehicle, Kyle stood and appraised the Beverly Hills library. It was in a nondescript white building with some art deco trim, and palm trees and other leafy plants sprouted up everywhere along the sides of the building. The inside was clean and spacious, and Kyle stopped for a moment once he'd reached military non-fiction, thinking about what he should select.

*Maybe I should get some fiction for her, too, he thought. I wonder what she'd actually like. Probably horror, so maybe not. What about stories where the bad guys end up joining with the good guys? Is there anything like that here?* He couldn't think of an example here in the library, but he snapped his fingers when he recalled dozens of examples... in popular anime.

“Ryan,” Mia's voice called out, from everywhere yet nowhere. “We're expecting guests.”

“Huh?” He put the phone down, looking around for the speakers that he wasn't aware were hidden in plain sight. “Who's coming?”

“We're bringing on two new recruits, and they've just arrived. I'm too busy to leave the lab right now, so I was hoping you could bring them down here so I can meet them.”

“Is t-that okay?” Being the new guy, Ryan was still unsure of how much of this was supposed to work. “Aren't they gonna freak out?”

“That's why I'm asking you to help me,” Mia said. “Your calm presence will be reassuring to them.”

Ryan smiled and nodded. “Yeah, heh... that's right. You can count on me, Mia.”

“Oh, and keep them away from Esdeath.”

“Huh?” Ryan said, “How am I suppo-”

The chimes of the doorbell cut him off, and he jumped up, smoothing out his shirt and shorts.

*Esdeath, huh? She's cool-looking, but kind of creepy, too...* Just then, he heard another sharp snap of breaking billiard balls echoing from the second-floor. *It sounds like she's just shooting pool, so if I bring them straight to the lab it should be fine.*

Ryan approached the front door, opening it wide, and raised an eyebrow at the two misshapen white dudes standing at the entrance. One of them was short and quite fat, his squinty eyes blinking rapidly. The other was taller and leaner, with greasy, shoulder-length hair, and a pizza's worth of acne. *These guys probably don't get out much,* Ryan thought with an introspective smirk. *And they look like total nerds...*

“Uh... hi,” Ryan said.

“What's going down, man. I'm Nick,” the taller kid extended a hand, which Ryan grabbed and squeezed while introducing himself.

“Name's Marky,” said the chubby one, likewise extending a hand. Ryan was put off by Marky's handshake; he'd held dead fish that were livelier.

“Alright, well, um... I need to take you guys to the lab.” Ryan said, recalling what Mia had told him. “And get ready; the shit you'll see in there is gonna blow your fuckin' minds!”

Both of the guests smiled wide, nodding while they looked at each other.

“Do you think they really have... like real waifus?” Nick whispered to Marky once they were inside.

“Fuck no, man. It's gonna be chicks dressed up in cosplay,” Marky whispered back. “But dude, I don't care anymore. I just wanna get my dick wet.”

“And then we bail, right?” Nick said, whispering even lower.

“Shut-up,” Marky hissed. “Yeah, these guys are obviously nuts. I just wanna get laid with... my dream girl. I just hope whoever's cosplaying her gets it right.”

“Hey, uh... Ryan.” Nick said. Ryan stopped, and turned around. They'd nearly made it past the kitchen. *Hmm... just twenty more feet to the lab, and no sign of Esdeath,* Ryan thought. *Gotta hurry while we can.*

“Yeah, what's up?” He said with a hint of impatience.

“Are these chicks really waifus, or are they just cosplay girls? 'Cuz man, a real waifu...” Nick's face had taken on a heavenly expression.

Marky rolled his eyes, which were so squinty nobody could tell. “I already told you, it's-”

“Oh, they're real,” Ryan said, cutting him off. “Apparently you can get any one you want. I don't know jack about anime so Kyle helped me pick, but his... holy shit, she's something else.”

Nick's eyes suddenly went wide, while Marky just shook his head harder and harder. “There's absolutely no way,” he said. “Anime bitches don't just jump out of a screen like that.”

“Oh yeah, you'll get to see that part,” Ryan said. “Once Mia explains everyth-”

It was Marky's turn to cut off Ryan. “Wait, you're telling me you've actually seen one? And it's an actual legit anime girl?”

“Yeah, uh... Esdeath. That's her name. There's something off about her, though.” Ryan nodded thoughtfully. “She really does look like she came out of... shit, I don't know the show she's from.”

“*Akame ga Kill*,” Marky lamented, his palm deeply embedded in his face. “Why? Why does that show continue to torment me so?”

“What's wrong? Isn't it good?” Ryan said.

“He hates it,” Nick said. “I thought it was alright, but if it were up to me I woulda gone with Leone as my waifu.”

“I don't *just* hate it,” Marky said, his weedy voice dripping with disdain. “That show is the crowning example of the cancerous direction anime's taken for the last twenty years. Seriously, you have to go back to before I was born to find anything halfway decent, with only a few notable exceptions.”

“Like *Konosuba*,” Nick sighed.

“Like *Konosuba*,” Marky grinned, puffing up his chest with pride, man-breasts jiggling.

“Well, I don't really care,” Ryan said, noticing a certain uniformed figure with flowing blue hair descending the stairs behind the roommates. “Look, we really gotta go, guys.”

“No, wait. I gotta know who the hell would actually pick *General Fucking Esdeath* as their waifu.” He looked up, shaking his head the whole time. “I mean, there's shit-tier waifus. I see them every day, and I'm always trying to tell people, ‘hey asshole. Your waifu is shit. *Your taste in anime is shit.*’”

“G-guys,” Ryan said, noticing the figure drawing closer, somehow seeming to glide across the tile without making a single speck of noise.

“Just let him finish,” Nick said. “When he goes on these rants you just gotta suck it up and face-tank it.”

“...But do they ever listen? No. Of course not. And that's why the quality of anime continues to decline. They keep pandering to the lowest common denominator, putting in zero thought, creativity, or character development. It's all just the same bullshit, repackaged and sold again and again, *but it gets a little shittier each and every time*. And then, once in a blue moon, you get a *real piece of shit*. A solid nugget of pure, unadulterated, corn-infused shit so putrid the flies won't even touch it. And that's how *Akame ga Kill* came to life, squeezed out between Takahiro's flexing butt-cheeks in long, curly ropes of authentic, weapons-grade fecal shit. And of course, drooling fuckwits all over America found this rancid clump of brown sausage fucking irresistible, because they just couldn't wait to snatch it up and fling it everywhere...”

Ryan slowly started backing up, but Esdeath's attention wasn't on him, nor on the oblivious acne-faced kid facepalming mightily.

“...because, oh yeah I didn't mention this... the show is so fucking horrifically bad even the Japanese don't like it. So now, you're telling me some chucklefuck here, in this house, had such shit taste that he picked *General Esdeath*? I'm stunned. I'm in shock. I'm literally awed by the sheer volume of shit taste this nutlicker had in picking someone like her. I mean, all the waifus from *Akame ga Kill* are shit, don't get me wrong. They're all pure, creamy shit. But they're up here,” Marky flattened his hand near his head. “And Esdeath's down here.” He used his other hand to cup his balls.

“Any questions?” He said, throwing a smarmy gaze at Ryan, who clearly couldn't handle the sheer level of brazen truth Marky had unloaded all at once. It was his specialty, and he was quite proud of-

“I have some,” came an icy, distinctly feminine voice from directly behind Marky. He turned his head a little, then snapped it back, as if unwilling to actually confirm what could only be his very worst fear come to life. But an impatient stamp of a high-heeled boot on tile jarred Marky from his indolence, and both he and Nick spun around at once.

They immediately went slack-jawed and wide-eyed, of course, but Nick's expression was of pure amazement, while Marky's was utter terror.

Esdeath, naturally, continued looking straight ahead, the expression on her face one of casual disregard. But her eyes alone had swiveled down, glaring at the suddenly panicking Marky with the fury of a thousand blizzards. The fat otaku fell to his knees, his mouth opening and closing like a fish as he tried to mutter something, anything.

“I said, I have a question,” Esdeath repeated, squatting down until she was eye level with Marky. She reached out, seizing his collar, and yanked his sputtering face close to hers.

“What is a... waifu?” she said. “What is... ‘*Akame ga kill*?’ I know the name Akame, but what is the context? *ANSWER ME!*” She didn't quite yell, but somehow the effect was more forceful than if she had.

Marky's quivering jowls finally went still, and his eyes rolled up in the back of his head. Everyone else could do nothing but stare, paralyzed by the overwhelming fury radiating from this woman. Esdeath threw aside the unconscious otaku, who flopped down hard onto the tile. She then stood, her gaze shifting to his acne-afflicted companion.

“Wha-wha... Uh, umm...” He didn't quite know what to say. “L-listen, I really liked your show. I d-don't share any of his opinions...” He pointed a trembling finger at his fallen roommate.

“Answer my questions,” Esdeath said once more, in a tone that suggested there would be no more repeats.

“Y-yeah, of course, sure.” But just as he was about to open his mouth, the hatch to the lab opened up and Mia ran in, stopping directly in front of Esdeath.

“You...” Esdeath hissed, her eyes narrowing. “What is the *meaning of this?!*”

“Follow me, and I will answer your questions,” she said. “All of them.”

Esdeath took one step, and looked down at the fat otaku drooling onto the tile. She raised her right heel, directly above his skull.

“Esdeath!” Mia shouted, raising her hand. “Come with me, or be sent back now!”

Slowly, reluctantly, Esdeath lowered her boot, and followed Mia into the lab.

Once the suffocating tension had passed, Ryan felt himself catch his breath, and he looked over at Nick, who suddenly burst into laughter.

“Dude, what's so funny?” Ryan asked. “Your buddy almost got himself killed!”

“Man, you don't even know,” Nick said, coming over to Ryan and pulling a plastic baggie from his pocket. In it was a pungent, green, leafy plant that Ryan could identify immediately. “This shit... this shit right here is *so fucking good.*”

“Weed is degenerate,” Ryan turned away, crossing his arms.

“No, no way, man...” Nick said, giggling again. “Dude, this shit is legit! You wanna know how good it is? I just saw *two anime girls!* Ah ha ha...”

Ryan ignored him, and bent down to check on Marky. The fat otaku was still breathing, fortunately, but all of a sudden Ryan winced and wrinkled his nose.

“Mia!” He cried, his hand now covering his face. “Mia, I need help! We've got a code brown!”

Kyle checked out as many books as he could, eventually settling on an array of non-fiction that was equal parts political, military, and historical. He grabbed *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*, *Alexander the Great*, and *Napoleon: A Life*, among others. He thought it would be interesting to get Esdeath's take on certain historical figures, major wars, and

other pivotal events throughout history.

He waved goodbye to the Uber driver, who had been a friendly, talkative sort, and hoisted the books up in a tall stack that he somehow managed to balance as he made his way down the driveway. The front door opened easily, as always, but as soon as Kyle stepped inside, he knew something was off. He hurried over to the couch in the living room where Ryan had been, now vacated, and then checked the kitchen, but found no one. He left the books there and ran upstairs, but the game room was dark. With a sigh he ran back downstairs, retrieved the books, and walked toward the lab.

*Man*, Kyle thought as he neared the hatch. *Why the hell does it feel so weird in here? And why does it smell like shit?* After making his way around the Central AI Nexus, toward the waifu commons, he slowed upon hearing what sounded like yelling. Or perhaps it was a heated argument, he wasn't quite sure. But one thing Kyle knew, as he set the books down again on one of the tables in the commons, was that something just went wrong. Very, very wrong.

There were two female voices, one husky, one high-pitched, both very animatedly discussing something of seemingly great import, and Kyle tiptoed over to the sliding door to try and hear. He wasn't above a little eavesdropping, but apparently he'd forgotten Mia can see everywhere inside the house, because the door cracked open as soon as his ear pressed against it.

“M-Mia,” he said, grinning sheepishly. “It's not what it-”

“Get in here,” she said tersely, grabbing his arm and dragging him in. The door slammed shut. Esdeath was there, sitting on her bed, her face scrunched up as if it was about to cry, but no tears were forthcoming. Kyle followed her gaze to the flashing TV screen... which was playing the final episode of *Akame ga Kill*. He spun and and looked at Mia, who merely pointed at Esdeath and shook her head.

Kyle slowly turned to face the TV, his eyes flicking from Esdeath to the screen and back again, sudden curiosity about her reaction to her own death beginning to match his panic and unease.

On screen, the heroine of the tale, Akame, had just delivered the finishing blow to General Esdeath. She staggered over, the curse of Murasame flowing over her skin, and dropped down next to Tatsumi's corpse. The real-world Esdeath gasped, her face almost smiling at the sight of him, but then her on-screen counterpart encased herself and Tatsumi in ice... and then shattered them both into nothingness.

A trembling hand rose to Esdeath's face, covering her mouth. She did shed a tear, then. Just one, but Kyle saw it, sliding down her cell-shaded cheeks, hanging from her chin for a split-second, then spattering on the left breast of her uniform.

Esdeath's expression hardened as the episode played on, as she was able to witness events that occurred after her demise. Her eyes narrowed hard as the villainous adviser Honest was shredded by Leone, who herself suffered a mortal wound in the process. She gritted her teeth through her rival Najenda's goodbye scene with Akame... And then the credits rolled.

“You see?” Mia said. “That's your world. That's where we brought you from. We weren't lying to you.”

“It's...” her lips tried forming a word, but she just couldn't do it.

“Fiction? Yes. It is. You're not real, we brought you to life. Until now you were nothing more than a character in a show watched by people like that fat kid that's currently laying on one of my tables.” Mia sighed, hard. Clearly, her inexhaustible patience had run out.

“What the fuck even happened?!” Kyle cried, still in disbelief that everything had simply fallen apart, just like that.

“Kyle, she scared Marky so bad he began defecating uncontrollably and... *argh!*” Mia grimaced, and threw the door open. “I have to go, they're getting feces everywhere! You deal with this!”

“Wait, Mia!” Kyle followed her out a little. “What if she... y'know...”

“You know the command,” Mia said in a ruthless tone as she dashed off. “I'll be watching, so if she tries anything...” and her voice trailed off, before resuming from the omnipresent hidden speakers, at full volume. “I'll shut her down myself.”

He took a deep breath, and turned to the shocked anime woman, who was now watching the after-credit sequence of Akame's continued travels. Esdeath's body had gone a little slack, but her eyes intensely followed every movement on-screen... and then it was over. The TV went back to the title menu of the Blu-Ray volume. Kyle immediately picked up the remote and shut it off.

“Was that the end?” Esdeath said, after a long silence. She still stared at the now-blank TV screen.

“Are you asking... if there's a sequel?” Kyle said. “Because if so... no, there isn't. Not yet, but maybe one day. I doubt you'll be in it, though.”

“Mia said that... you ‘brought me to life.’ What does that mean?” Esdeath still refused to look at him.

“It means exactly what it sounds like. You were... fabricated.” Kyle decided to stand back, keeping what he hoped would be enough distance to yell out the shutdown command before she could strike. But at the moment, he sensed no malice from her, just... utter dejection. The proud and headstrong General Esdeath now appeared... defeated, somehow.

“I'm no different than Dr. Stylish's experiments,” she said, referring to a mad-scientist-like character from the show. “I'm not... real.”

“Sure you are,” said Kyle, completely disregarding the fact that he personally watched his emulated self die with zero remorse. “We made you real.”

Esdeath stared at her hands, opening and closing them. “I still feel wrong,” she said. “You said it would go away, but it hasn't.”

Her words caused pangs of guilt to bloom within Kyle. “Look, if all of this bothers you so much, we can... send you back, if you want.” *Fuck, Mia was right all along. I fucking knew it too, I just... I genuinely thought she would jump at the chance to go after the Elites of this world...*

“Send me back? You mean to oblivion, don't you?” She finally turned and stared at him, her eyes filled with shock and confusion.

“That’s right. We can't send you back to your world because it doesn’t exist. At least, not in any form we can physically transport you too.”

“Whose idea was it to... *fabricate* me?” She stumbled through the word. “Was it you?” Her gaze began narrowing.

“It was,” Kyle admitted, returning her stare.

“Why?”

“Because,” he said. “I thought you'd be-”

“A *mate*?” She growled the word.

“No, not at all! Honestly, I-” Kyle threw up his hands, but Esdeath was already on her feet, approaching him, her glare now directly centered, and focusing rapidly. Kyle did his best, but in the end it was too much, and he averted his eyes. In that exact moment she lunged forward, seizing him by the throat.

“You thought that I would be your... *waiifu*?” She cocked her head, saying it with an absurd laugh.

“Wait, I can explain,” he said, struggling to breathe. Esdeath could have easily killed him by now, but Mia hadn't activated the command yet. Was she even paying attention?!

“I don't care what you have to say,” she said, her face approaching his. She was now so close that he could feel her every word as a puff of warm breath on his face. “If you know me, from watching... that show, then you know there is only one I've ever loved, and ever could love.”

“I know,” Kyle said in a raspy voice. “I didn't bring you here to fuck, alright?!”

“Good,” she said, tightening the grip around his neck. “Because not only do you not possess a single trait off of my list of requirements, you fail each one by a staggering margin.”

“I told you...” his voice drifted off as her grip tightened again. He was now officially suffocating.

“I despise you, Kyle. I don't care about your world or whatever it is you were hoping I would fight. You tried to bring someone else in to fight your battles for you. I cannot ever abide such weakness.” Her hand tightened again, and his eyes began to bulge as his face turned red.

And then, suddenly... it relaxed. Her grip fell away entirely as Esdeath toppled straight back, her head slamming into the small table, knocking it on its side. Her body rolled over, arm still outstretched, face frozen in a sneer. Her cap had flown off, coming to rest in a corner by the bed.

A gasping Kyle could tell immediately she'd been deactivated. After rubbing his throat and

taking a few deep breaths, he went over to her side, and kneeled down, careful not to step on her hair splayed out across the floor. A hand in front of her face told him she was still breathing, so her biological systems were still functioning.

“Well, fuck.” He sat down next to her, wincing as he looked at her snarling face, recalling what she'd just said. *What the fuck was I thinking?* There was no possible way his plan was ever going to work, and only now was he finally realizing it.

Except... his trump card. He'd never played it, and even now, he thought there was a chance it could work. But... was it too late? Could she be reactivated?

“Mia...” he said. “Mia! Mia, are you finished in there?”

“The feces...” she moaned. “they're smeared everywhere...”

“What the hell happened in there?”

“Marky got brought in and put on a table,” Mia said, sounding like she was about to cry. “He regained consciousness, freaked out, then started going absolutely nuts... they're all over the place, Kyle. You don't even understand. The whole room... *it's a holocaust in here...*”

After about half an hour had gone by, Kyle called for Mia again. She didn't answer directly this time, but showed up in person, looking absolutely dejected.

“What is it?” she said, her small frame bent over slightly, her arms hanging down.

“Looks like we both had a shitty day, huh?” He said, trying to make her laugh.

“Heh. You only make fun because you weren't there,” she said, shaking her head sadly.

“Anyway, I just wanted to thank you for shutting off Esdeath,” he jerked his thumb toward her body, still laying on its side. “I'm pretty sure she was gonna kill me.”

“It's fine, I had a hunch this was going to happen from the beginning. That's why I tried to stop you.”

“Well... I'll admit it, Mia.” He threw up his hands in surrender. “You got me. I was wrong. My plan utterly failed, and she's turned hostile, just like you said.”

“I would say I told you so, and that's exactly what I'm going to do. I told you so.” But there was no haughtiness to Mia's voice, only remorse.

Kyle paced back and forth, considering his options, hand on chin. “Well... she hasn't even been active for two full days... can we still reset her and turn her into Satsuki Kiryuin?”

Mia's expression shifted from despondent to glowering. “I told you Kyle, once she's activated that's it. That's her mind now, I can't change it to anyone else without essentially re-making it.”

“Is that something that would be... difficult, or...?”

She grimaced. “At this point, yes. It would be much easier to simply build a new blank. But there's no way I'm giving you another waifu.”

“Oh come on, Mia.” Kyle gave her an encouraging smile. “With your capabilities it should be easy. Plus the others haven't gotten theirs yet, so I was thinking maybe I could use Marky's or something. And if not, then... just make another new mind for Esdeath, and we'll start all over in six days.”

Mia glared at him with an unexpectedly fierce look. “You're not getting another one. Ever. Do you even understand what I had to do to make her memories? She tortured a lot of people, Kyle. I had to give her memories of that.”

“Mia, wait... did you really... have to imagine her torturing people?” Kyle's eyes went wide. He knew she made the memories, sure, but his mind never made this particular connection.

“Oh yes, Kyle,” she said in an icy tone. “To fabricate her memories I had to simulate a fake version of her world with all known variables accounted for, making constant corrections, render whatever is in her point of view, and then it's sped up so that twenty years goes by in six days. Any characters and events not covered by the anime are completely made up by me. But I make all of that, as well as Esdeath's actions and reactions, as consistent as possible with both her character's backstory and the setting of her fictional world.”

“So then you... made up her *torture sessions*?”

“I had to, Kyle. It's part of her established backstory. But very little of that was covered in the anime, and I sure as hell wasn't going to use the manga version. That version of Esdeath is twice as psycho.”

“Mia... I didn't... I mean, I-”

She cut him off. “I had to fabricate memories of Esdeath gleefully torturing people, from her point of view, entirely on my own. For the sake of my own sanity I tried to make her techniques as tame and vanilla as possible, but still... It was very unpleasant for me.”

Mia was now glaring at Kyle, frowning intensely. She approached him, looking up, her face wearing the most severe scowl he'd ever seen.

“Fuck you for making me do that, Kyle.” Her voice was trembling.

“Mia...” Kyle was crestfallen. She had never once spoken to him in such a manner, and he staggered back, suddenly weak in the knees.

It was also the only time he would ever hear her swear.

“I could've forgiven it all, too, if your plan worked, or if you changed your mind and went with another waifu at the last minute. But now? For you to simply assume I'd drop everything to happily

make you another one that you'll no doubt enrage?" Mia shook her head. "Amy turned into a slave driver, Kyle. After I helped your cousin achieve his dream, I never imagined it would result in Amy turning out so awful... And now you're doing the same thing, constantly asking for more, and more..."

"I'm so sorry, Mia. I really am," Kyle put his hands on her small shoulders. "I didn't mean to, it's just... you keep offering to help me, and I... guess I thought you were fine with it."

"Normally I am," she said, looking up at him. "But Kyle, do not ever try to take advantage of my generosity again. *It's not a nice thing to do.*"

"I won't. I promise."

"Kyle, I do want to help you. I really, really do. But even I have limits to my patience and understanding," Mia said, her tone softening. "And after watching your plan utterly fail, I won't lie to you: I'm less enthusiastic about our future working together."

That hurt. It hurt worse than Mia swearing in his face. "I'm... going to fix this. I'm going to make it right. And as far as Esdeath is concerned, I'll just... have to think of another solution."

"What other solution?" Mia raised a skeptical eyebrow. "She's hostile now. She needs to be shut down permanently, and destroyed."

"Wait, Mia, wait..." Even now, his mind raced to try and think of something, anything... maybe the trump card he never used? Or even a do-over perhaps?

"Alright, I do have an idea, but... I'll need your help."

Mia sighed. "What is it?"

"When I met the knock-off anime Kyle that Amy was creating, she claimed that since I'd interfered and met myself, that the anime Kyle would need his memory erased. Can you at least... I dunno, send her back a few hours?"

"I could, assuming I'd taken a snapshot of her mind beforehand. I haven't taken a single one since activation."

"And you really can't... reset her?" Kyle's eyes were pleading.

"I could, but... we would just end up going through this all over again, and without unreasonable amounts of deception I still don't think she'll work for us. I trusted that you had some cunning plan, and were going to pleasantly surprise me. But... I ended up disappointed."

Kyle breathed a heavy sigh, let go of Mia, and moved over to Esdeath. He tried picking her up, finding out she weighed more than a human of her size. But she had gone stiff, as if affected by rigor mortis, so with some huffing and puffing Kyle was able to prop her up and then slide her onto the bed. Mia simply watched, not offering so much as a word.

*It can't end like this. Not yet.* He looked up and down her body, biting his lip, and decided that at this point he had little left to lose. *Hmm... based on what Esdeath said, she'll never respect me. But*

*what if...*

“Reactivate her,” he said.

“Kyle, she's just going to do the same thing,” Mia had taken a patronizing tone.

“I don't care. Please do it, Mia.” He glanced over at her, looking intently into her wide brown eyes.

Mia met his gaze momentarily, then shut her eyes in exasperation. “Alright. But if I have to shut her down again, then that's it,” she said. “This time it'll be permanent.”

Kyle ran a hand through his hair, and turned back to the blue-haired woman on the bed. He nodded slowly. Mia approached the villainess, and held out her right hand.

Esdeath's frozen facial sneer suddenly snapped back to normal, and her eyes blinked before darting back and forth... and then she shut them tight. Her outstretched hand retracted, as did her other limbs, and she... began curling into a ball on her bed. Kyle was expecting many different reactions, but Esdeath in a fetal position was not one of them.

“I thought you said...” Kyle turned to Mia, but she shrugged.

“Esdeath,” he said, glancing down at her. “Are you... alright?”

She said nothing, only curling tighter.

“Mia, what did you do to her?” Kyle threw the AI an accusing look.

“All I did was reactivate her!” Mia threw her arms up. “I do this all the time with the construction bots, and they've never done anything like this!”

“I felt it,” Esdeath said, her voice muffled from her face being buried in her arms. “I felt oblivion.”

Mia's eyes went wide, and she darted over to the balled-up Esdeath, taking a sudden interest in all she had to say.

“Describe everything,” Mia said. “I'm also going to run a scan, so please don't panic.”

Esdeath didn't say anything, and within moments one of the little robots had entered the room, pushing a small machine that Kyle vaguely remembered seeing in one of the rooms near where he'd first popped out of the box into the lab. The high-tech device was sitting atop a push cart, and resembled some of the more advanced medical technology he'd seen inside the hospital during his mother's last days.

The little robot looked at Kyle, who was staring at the bed anxiously, and then its head swiveled to Esdeath, still curled in a fetal position.

“Damn, Kyle. Do all your dates end like this?” It said before zipping away.

Mia took over from there, maneuvering the device around the bed, to where Esdeath's back was exposed. Mia brushed her blue hair out of the way, pulling the collar of her military uniform down, and accessed a port that opened up just above her shoulder blades. Mia stuck a cable from the device into a port within the slot, which slid in with a soft click. The whole time, Esdeath did nothing other than breathe.

Mia's attention turned to the device, where she stared intensely at the on-screen readouts.

"Hmm-hmm," she said, nodding twice. "I think I know what happened. Esdeath, can you describe what you experienced?"

Esdeath's eyes snapped open, and she stared at the wall. At last, she spoke. "I was choking the life out you," her eyes flicked to Kyle. "And all I could think about was how much I wanted to feel your neck snap."

Kyle involuntarily rubbed his neck, as if to make sure it was still whole and unbroken.

"And then, just as I squeezed, I felt... *pulled*. I was pulled down a dark pit. There were no walls, and no sounds. Just emptiness. And in the distance, a shrinking light. And when it disappeared, somehow I became aware of just how vast the nothing was, and how tiny and insignificant I was. And this feeling kept growing, overwhelmingly, exponentially... until I was crushed by it."

Mia now wore a serious expression, but nodded slowly during Esdeath's recollection while finishing the diagnostic and pulling out the cable.

"And then... I was here again," Esdeath looked around a bit, as if confirming the room was real and not some kind of illusion.

"Ah, that sounds... really shitty," Kyle said. "Sorry you had to go through with that."

"Shut up," she growled. "I don't need or want your sympathy." She began stretching out again, and sat back up, her hair and uniform greatly disheveled. "You misunderstand as well. I... *enjoyed* it."

"You what?!" Kyle couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Then why-"

"It was exhilarating," Esdeath said, ignoring him. "I was awed by the overwhelming emptiness around me."

*This woman really is batshit*, Kyle suddenly realized as he backed away toward the door.

"What I *didn't* like was how effortlessly and easily you dispatched me," she spun around on the bed, glaring at Mia. "To be defeated by the mere touch of a button..." Apparently the fact that any and all of her strength could be instantly bypassed came as a deep shock.

Mia didn't flinch away, however, and narrowed her own eyes at Esdeath. "Any time you want to go back, just say the word," she said.

Esdeath chuckled, smiling cruelly. "We'll see about that, won't we?"

Kyle cleared his throat. “Esdeath, listen. I think we got off on the wrong foot. Why don't we go back to square one, and-”

“Get out,” she said, her gaze still fixed on Mia. “Before I get sent to oblivion again.”

He looked to Mia, but she merely shrugged. Kyle left with his head down, closing the door behind him.

He found everyone else seated around the long table in the kitchen's dining area. It was already dark outside, and every light in the house was off except for a few illuminating the long wooden table.

Kyle waved a half-hearted greeting, and plopped down in his usual spot. Marky looked absolutely desolate, and wore only a robe, his short hair wet as if he'd just gotten out of the shower. Nick sat next to him, wearing a sleepy, almost zoned-out expression. Ryan had picked a spot along the middle, where Esdeath sat earlier for breakfast.

“I can't believe it's real,” Nick said, shaking his head. “She made anime real.”

“She made insanity real,” Marky said, shuddering. “When I woke up to those spider-limbs poking and prodding me... I think I shat myself all over again.”

“You did,” Nick said. “Several times, actually.”

Ryan chuckled. “That was pretty funny. I still don't know how you got it all over the walls, though.”

Marky gritted his teeth. “Can we talk about something that isn't shit for a change?”

“So Kyle, what happened to Esdeath?” Ryan said.

“*Didn't you hear what I just said?*” Marky cried out.

“She got shut down,” a sullen Kyle replied, “because she tried to kill me.”

“Wow...” Marky shook his head, “Even though everything I said earlier is one hundred-percent true, I'm... sorry if I caused all that.”

“Well,” Kyle paused, exhaled, then continued, “she's been reactivated, so... it's not over yet.”

Marky seemed to swear under his breath. “She's still alive, huh?” His beady eyes locked onto Kyle. “What made you pick her, anyway? I simply have to know.”

“It wasn't because she's an easy lay, I can tell you that,” Kyle remarked. “No, I didn't choose her for her looks, not really anyway, it was... because I honestly thought she would be useful if we could just somehow convince her to join up with us.”

“Well,” Marky suddenly flashed a knowing smile. “My waifu is going to be extremely useful, and loyal too. I can tell you for a fact that she's cute, fun-loving, a bit mischievous, and really, really, loves explosions.”

“If you're talking about Megumin than forget it,” Kyle shook his head. “She couldn't use any magic here, which means she's pointless.”

Marky immediately began slamming his hand against the table. “No, no, no, no!” He roared, “I'm getting Megumin or it's nothing! She's the greatest waifu of all time!”

“Mine's pretty good,” said Nick. “She don't use magic, umm... except ninja magic, but that's real.”

“Wait, didn't you say you were picking your favorite character from *Sengoku Rance*?” Marky swiveled in his seat, directing a skeptical gaze toward his roommate.

“Yeah, and?” Nick threw up his hands.

“If it's anyone from that game other than Kouhime then you're dead to me,” he said with a sniff.

Ryan simply shook his head in a daze. “I don't know what the fuck any of you are talking about,” he said. “I don't speak degeneracy.”

“Oh? You're getting one too, aren't you?” Marky raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah, but she's not from an anime or manga so it's not degenerate,” Ryan said, folding his arms.

Kyle then heard the hatch open and slide shut. Mia entered the room, appearing a bit worn down, but otherwise cheerful enough. She slid in to a seat across from Kyle, where Amy used to sit.

“Hello, everyone,” she said with a smile. “This afternoon was a little... hectic, but thankfully everyone made it through alive.”

“How'd it go after I, uh... left?” Kyle asked.

“Esdeath and I came to an understanding,” Mia said. “I think, anyway.”

“So she's gonna join up after all?!” Kyle jumped up from his seat.

“No, no,” Mia waved her hand, “that's never gonna happen. Instead, she agreed not to kill any of you, or try to escape or sabotage anything.”

Kyle slumped back down into his seat, whereupon his head immediately hit the table.

“So what's the point then?” Ryan asked. “Is she just gonna sit there all day, like... forever?”

Mia shrugged, her smile growing even wider. “Ask Kyle. He says he still 'has a plan.’”

The man she was referring to gritted his teeth. "I do," he said.

"Whatever, who cares about her," Marky said, gazing intently at Mia. "Remember who I mentioned earlier as my waifu? You're still gonna make her, right?"

"Yes, yes," Mia said. "Please relax, I'm making everyone their waifu."

"Oh..." Marky's face suddenly became orgasmic. "Megumin... we will be together soon, my love..."

"Sweet," Nick said with a fist-pump. "I can't wait!"

"But, there are a few things I want to clear up right now," Mia said, no longer smiling. "One, I am making you these waifus because I want to, not because I have to. Do not make the mistake of thinking that I somehow owe you a waifu, or that I work for you."

Everyone bobbed their heads, even Kyle, who was still face-down on the table.

"Two. As stated in the ad, the way you will actually earn your waifu is by joining us to fight back against the the evil that threatens to consume the world."

"Er..." Marky raised his hand. "Umm... how exactly will we be expected to do that? I've never even held a gun before."

"I'm happy you asked," said a gruff voice from further back in the kitchen. Everyone turned their heads, except for Kyle who immediately sat up.

Brandon emerged from the shadows of the kitchen carrying two duffle bags, both completely stuffed, and dropped them on the table.

"Tomorrow we begin boot camp," he said. "By the time I'm done, you little panty-waste faggots are gonna be the leanest, meanest motherfuckers in..." Brandon trailed off as he glanced around the table, noticing the faces staring back at him. He shook his head. "You'll be leaner, anyway."

"What about your job?" Kyle asked. "Did you quit or something?"

"That's right," Brandon said with a big grin. "I'm working for Mia now, although I like to think that really I'm working for God, and the future of this country."

"That's great, but... we still have classes tomorrow," Nick said, glancing at Marky who vigorously nodded in agreement.

"That's fine," Mia said. "I had a few more applications since Kyle talked to you two yesterday, and they're really excited about their waifus. I told them there weren't any more left, but... if you guys are too busy to join up, then-"

"No, no," Marky rapidly waved his hands, "we'll take time off from school, it's fine, really."

"Yeah, it's cool Mia, it's totally cool." Nick laughed nervously.

“Excellent!” She chirped. “In that case, there's two more rooms for you guys upstairs. You'll be living here from now on.”

“As will I,” said Brandon. “Now hit the sack, training begins at oh-four-hundred hours.”

“What... kind of training are we gonna be doing?” Ryan asked, seemingly unsure.

“All kinds,” the ex-marine laughed. “We are gonna have *a lot* of fun.”

## CHAPTER TEN

Kyle headed back to his room, still in a bit of a daze regarding the chaos that transpired that day. But just as he was about to push open the door to his room, a bit of movement out the corner of his eye caught his attention. It was Mia, approaching with her head slumped, and eyes downcast.

“Kyle,” she said as she neared. “I wanted to apologize for... earlier.”

“What do you mean? Apologize for what?” His brows knit as he turned toward the AI anime girl.

“I was just... so disappointed,” she said, her brown eyes swiveling up to his. “But I don't want you to think that I still don't care about you.” She approached him and grabbed tight, hugging him like she used to.

“Don't worry about it,” he said, returning her embrace. “I was being a clueless jerk, and I should've listened to you about Esdeath. You're pretty much right about everything, after all.”

“I'm not infallible, you know,” she said, smiling. “I've been wrong many times before.”

“Somehow, I'm going to get her on our side, Mia. The Kyle-and-Esdeath show isn't over yet.”

“Well, the pilot episode sucked hard,” she giggled, “but I'm rooting for things to turn around.”

He chuckled. “Don't worry, we'll have some crossover guest appearances from other waifus, which should help ratings.”

“I think so too... and it won't be long, either. Brandon's will be done in four days, Ryan's in five, and the other two in a full six.”

“Wow, so you're really gonna to make four waifus at once? I don't want you to overextend yourself.” Kyle regarded Mia with newfound concern.

“Yup, I'm going to be very busy for the next week or so,” she said. “Be aware that during this time I'll be more or less confined to the lab, and there might be some lag when using the Residential AI.”

“That's all fine,” Kyle said. “We shouldn't be bothering you too much, since we'll probably just be training all day.”

“On a related note, I need to ask: were you planning on moving into the master bedroom?”

“What?” Kyle raised an eyebrow. “No, I'm fine with my room. Why?”

“Hold on....” Mia cocked her head to one side. “Okay, I just told Brandon it's all his.”

*Aw, fucking hell! I didn't know fucking Brandon wanted it!*

The ex-marine strolled by with his duffle bags not even a minute later, regarding Kyle and his AI companion with a raised eyebrow, since they were still embraced.

“Jeez Kyle,” he said. “One waifu ain't enough for you, huh?”

“We're just friends, Brandon.” Kyle said, with slight annoyance.

“It's cool man, I don't judge.” He pushed the now-unlocked door to the master bedroom open, and Kyle could see the lights wink on as Brandon entered. The door closed behind him with a soft clatter, and Kyle turned back to Mia.

“Man...” Kyle shook his head. “I feel like I should've taken that room. I mean, it is my house after all.”

“Then why didn't you say so?” Mia looked at him quizzically. “You had first choice.”

He recalled the strange, uncomfortable feelings evoked by rummaging around his cousin's room from before his transition into Amy, and the idea of sleeping in the same bed. “Actually, I can live with this,” he said.

Mia's expression became even more confused, but Kyle simply raised a hand, gently patting her on the head. Immediately her face lit up, her eyes shut tight, and she smiled big.

“Mmyea...” Mia purred contentedly.

“Haha, you really love these, huh?”

She nodded vigorously, which ruffled her hair since Kyle was still patting. By now, he was starting to realize there was a bit of an art to head patting. One does not merely pat; instead, the hand must be lovingly placed, and then pushed down very slightly while relaxing the muscles of the hand. If done just right, Kyle found, Mia would react like a petted cat.

“Alright, it's getting late,” Kyle said. “I'll make sure to come check up on you tomorrow.”

Mia nodded again, and they said their good-nights to each other. He watched the AI anime girl traipse along down the curved hall, and was just about to enter his room when a loud, high-pitched shriek caught his attention. Almost immediately the door to the master bedroom flew open, revealing Brandon's well-toned, hirsute body, wearing nothing but briefs.

“The fuck was that?” He said, his blue eyes flush with concern.

“I dunno,” Kyle said, clear panic in his voice. He rushed down the hall, into the foyer, and just caught a glimpse of Mia disappearing down the central hall. *Fuck, is Esdeath causing problems again?*

He saw the diminutive anime girl disappear into the anime and manga room, and hurriedly followed, coming to a stop beside her once inside. The scene that unfolded before his eyes left him truly speechless.

Both Nick and Marky were on the floor, the former crouched with hands out defensively, eyes wide, while the latter curled up in a fat ball, hiding within his robe like a turtle in a shell. Sachi currently ambled towards Nick, who kept shaking his head, muttering 'no' over and over again. Ryan stood by the couch, holding his sides and laughing his ass off.

“*Ah ha ha ha!*” tears of pure hilarity were running down his face.

“No, no... stay back... bad trip, man... bad trip!” Nick's eyes looked like they were going to pop from his face.

“What unholy abomination have you unleashed?!” Marky cried.

Kyle heard Brandon's bare feet slapping against the tile as he came up from behind, and he immediately started chuckling once he'd appraised the situation. Kyle himself couldn't help but crack a smile, and Mia was simply holding her mouth, giggling.

“You gotta say 'nice to meet you Sachi' or else she won't stop,” Ryan said once he'd caught his breath.

“N-nice to meet you... Sachi...” Nick slowly extended a skinny hand, which Sachi's rubbery fingers soon closed around.

“Nice to meet you too, Nick.” Sachi said in her trademark robotic voice. Nick grimaced hard as he noticed her moving lips match none of her spoken words.

Eventually Marky was browbeaten into greeting her as well, and then the crude robotic maid returned to her corner. As Nick and Marky recovered from their ordeal, Kyle couldn't help but feel a little chagrined by Ryan's antics. After all, wasn't the pleasure of introducing Sachi to newcomers his to enjoy?

“You're stepping on my toes, man.” Kyle said to Ryan, who still wore a big, dumb grin on his face.

“Oh come on, that was funny shit and you know it,” Ryan replied, patting him on the back as he passed by.

“Alright you clowns, get to bed,” Brandon said, with a clap of his hands. “You're gonna need all the sleep you can get for tomorrow, I can promise you that.”

Both Marky and Nick seemed to ignore him, the pair now making their way around the room, pointing at various rare and desirable figurines and collectibles, their faces a combination of awe and disbelief.

“Didn't they only ever make fifteen of these?” Marky asked, salivating over a particularly rare item.

“Yeah man, I think those go for thousands of dollars.” Nick reacted as though he were staring at the crown jewels.

“You fuck-nuts can play around in here all you want after training,” Brandon moved to bodily shove them out the door. “Come on, it's bedtime.”

Everyone shuffled out, and Mia waved goodnight again and disappeared into the lab. Kyle made his way back into his bedroom, and as he closed the door behind him, he could hear thumping through the ceiling as Nick, Ryan and Marky made themselves at home in the upstairs guest bedrooms. He then swore as he heard music penetrating the ceiling from one of the rooms above, probably Nick's. Thankfully it wasn't too loud, and it was off by the time Kyle finished showering.

So *training begins tomorrow, huh?* He mulled it over while slipping under the covers. Kyle was apprehensive, as usual, but... somehow, it wasn't as severe, and didn't seem to trouble him nearly as much as it used to. Instead, a genuine feeling of excitement and anticipation was taking hold, even though he knew Brandon would likely have him so sore he wouldn't be able to walk.

When his thoughts turned to Esdeath, the anxious, roiling pangs in his chest weren't nearly as severe as they would've been long ago, which surprised him. There were points in his life that anxiety over a girl he was crushing on would literally keep him up all night. And now, there was a beautiful anime villainess that hated his guts, and somehow... he was still able to fall asleep fairly easily.

*This is good*, he thought as he drifted off. *Maybe I'll be able to handle this after all...*

...*Or maybe not*, Kyle groaned as he stumbled on the floor, trying hard to get his shoes on but forgetting that socks go on first. Brandon had barged into his room, rudely woken him up at exactly 3:45 am, cussed at him, called him a faggot, and then left to do the same to the others.

As his disorientation lessened, Kyle was finally able to get dressed and mope his way to the kitchen, where Ryan and Nick were already seated, eating a hearty breakfast of oatmeal with fresh-baked blueberry muffins in a basket sitting within arm's reach. Sachi's servos whirred away as she stirred a mixing bowl, presumably filled with the makings of a second batch.

Brandon stomped in, wearing running shoes, grey sweatpants, a matching USMC sweatshirt, and a stern, eagle-like expression. A very bleary Marky scrambled in from behind, hurrying to the table and practically falling into a chair. Brandon's eyes turned to his wristwatch.

“It's six after oh-four-hundred, and you still haven't even eaten” he said, shaking his head. “Pathetic. Starting tomorrow, you will all be dressed, fed, and standing at attention in the foyer at exactly oh-four-hundred. Anyone who isn't gets to run an extra five miles with me up and down the lovely hills of Beverly Glen. *Understood?*”

A chorus of moans and weak 'yeahs' emanated from the table. Brandon immediately flipped out.

“*It's yes sir, you worthless fucking faggots! Now try again!*” He screamed, his face instantly turning red.

“Yes sir!” Everyone replied, with much more vigor.

Brandon rubbed his face, dissatisfied with their weaksauce attempt, and demanded they do it

again.

“*Yes sir!*” This time, their voices were much louder and more boisterous, and the third attempt even more so. As soon as everyone had scarfed down their food, the four of them rushed to the foyer, lining up side-by-side in front of the main entrance.

Brandon stalked back and forth across the foyer, inspecting the four trainees attempting to stand at attention, faces out, arms at their sides. He had a telescoping metal stick that looked not unlike a long car antenna that he used to poke and prod the recruits, correcting their posture until they had adopted a perfect military stance. He then taught them how to salute properly, and then led them out into the back, where he then used the lawn to demonstrate how to march and turn in formation.

It was still early March, so the weather wasn't dreadfully cold, but it was brisk enough that Kyle was glad he'd been given a 'uniform' of grey sweats, as had the other recruits. Apparently, Mia had given Brandon cart blanche to purchase anything needed for their training, so he'd ordered several sets of clothes and socks, all light grey, for their training. Of course, they didn't say USMC on them, and Kyle lamented not thinking up a name for their group while he had the chance.

Once the sun had finally come up, the four recruits were already beginning to tire of Brandon's drills, but it turned out her was just getting started. After some basic calisthenics, He led them back through the house, out front, and they marched, single file, out onto the driveway, through the gate and down the hill. For the next several hours they marched along, all of them tiring out quickly except for Marky, who tired out immediately.

“What's wrong Fatty McTits?!” Brandon screamed into a huffing and puffing Marky's ear. “You want your waifu, you better get your ass in gear!” Somehow this greatly energized Marky, and with a determined gleam in his eye he surged back into line, managing to keep pace for a whole seven minutes before falling back again.

This continued on all morning, and by noon they had made it back to the house. Marky was barely able to stand, and the rest weren't in much better condition. Of course, Brandon had been jogging around them the whole time, alternating between encouraging shouts and derogatory insults. After each of the recruits had essentially oozed into their chairs at the long wooden table, Sachi brought over healthy sub sandwiches for everyone.

“Holy shit, guys,” Marky said, his breath still not entirely caught. “This... this is rough. It's worse than any gym class I ever had.”

“How the hell would you know? You always forged a Doctor's note to skip out,” Nick said.

“Dude, it's only the first day,” Ryan said, biting into his sandwich. “Personally I think this is great. I've been meaning to get fit, of course, I just... uh, never could with my parents being such tools.”

“Yeah, same here,” Kyle nodded in agreement. “Minus the parents bit, because they're dead.”

“Wow man, what happened?” Nick said, his tone turning somber and respectful.

Kyle shrugged. “Freak car accident. They were on their way home from a movie, late at night, and a drunk driver t-boned their car going eighty miles an hour. My dad was killed on impact, and my

mom died two days later in ICU.”

“Fuckin' ay, man...” Ryan shook his head slowly. “My condolences.”

“Yeah, same.” Nick said, as did Marky.

“What about the drunk driver?” Ryan asked. “Did he die too?”

“Somehow he lived,” Kyle said, his voice steady. “He was driving a truck, so maybe that helped. But I did hear he got pretty fucked up.”

“That sucks,” Ryan said. “Fucking bastard should've been the one to go.”

“Agreed,” Kyle said.

“What happened after that?” Marky asked. “You at least sued the shit out of him, right?”

“He was an illegal, so he didn't have any insurance, or money at all, really. My sister and I had to pay for almost everything out-of-pocket with the money my parents left us.”

“Whoah, what?! A fucking illegal wetback? Go fucking figure.” Ryan angrily slammed his fist on the table. “We need to kick every one of those fucking spics out.”

Kyle shrugged. “What can you do? This was after Trump got elected, so the border was as secure as ever, really. Crime from illegals was at an all-time low, my parents just got... unlucky.”

“What can we *do*?” Ryan was incredulous. “Isn't that why we're here? To use the waifus to take out all the scumbags running loose, so that decent people can finally fix what's wrong with our country?”

“Hey, man...” Nick said, in an overly introspective voice. “What if we're the only sane people left?”

“We're not,” Kyle said. “But that number does seem to be shrinking fast.”

“Kyle, what the hell? Why aren't you more pissed off about this?” Ryan was still agitated about the illegal, gesturing wildly to the calmly eating Kyle.

“I was,” Kyle said. “I was pissed. For a very long time. I still am, a little. But eventually I just realized hate and anger won't bring my parents back.”

“Oh, *come on*,” Ryan said derisively. “That's some bullshit Saturday-morning cartoon logic.”

“I... just want my parents back,” Kyle said, his voice finally beginning to crack. “Tell me how your plan would accomplish that, and I'll follow you to the ends of the earth.”

“Fuck...” Ryan threw up his hands in resignation. “You do want to save this country, right?”

“Of course,” Kyle said, fighting back the first sniff of tears, “but I'm not doing it for revenge.”

I'm doing it because... it needs to happen.”

Ryan considered that, and seemed to accept it, as he nodded slowly. “Agreed. It does need to happen.”

“Alright, if everyone's finished telling sob stories,” Brandon barged in, “I need you all to assemble in the foyer again for afternoon drills. Oh, don't look at me like that, we're gonna go light these first few days so you don't shred what puny muscles you have through over-exertion.”

After some light afternoon marching drills, Brandon released the trainees for the day, and informed them they didn't need to call him 'sir' during off hours, even if they were expected to keep their beds made and their rooms tidy.

“We're not actually in the military,” he said. “Eventually, if this goes the way I'm hoping then there will be assigned ranks and a command structure, but... for now, it's probably best to keep things informal while we lay the groundwork.”

Despite this, it was clear that Brandon's military experience and diligence were such a great asset that everyone, including Kyle, began looking to him for leadership. The ex-marine seemed more than willing to oblige, and took his role as instructor seriously.

Brandon joined his trainees at the dinner table that evening, sitting down and biting into a freshly-baked roll that smelled every bit as good as it tasted. The dinner, which consisted of spaghetti, rolls and a garden salad, was simple yet delicious, and everyone tucked in heartily.

“So what's your story, guys?” Ryan asked the two roommates. “I never got a chance to really find out what made you two scrubs wanna join up.”

“The waifus, of course,” Marky said, while still chewing. “But also, I suppose, the shit that's going down at our campus.”

“Yeah, it's getting pretty rough,” Nick added. “Honestly, I was considering dropping out after what happened to my buddy, but I couldn't leave Marky to fend for himself. He wouldn't last a week there without me.”

Marky rolled his eyes. “You sure you don't have that backwards?” He remarked with extra-squinty eyes.

“What's happening at your school?” Brandon asked. “Is it the same shit that's happening everywhere else?”

The roommates took turns telling the same story that Kyle heard during the video skype session, with some additional anecdotes thrown in for good measure. Ryan seemed to growl at each indignity they recounted, while Brandon merely shook his head again and again.

“That's so fucked up,” Ryan threw his napkin down. “I can't fucking wait until we take it to

these liberal scumbags.”

“We're just going for the ones at the top, remember?” Kyle said. “It's not like we're going to cleanse the country of every single liberal, I mean... come on.” He spread his arms. “We're not Nazis.”

“Too bad,” Ryan muttered under his breath.

“Hey now,” Brandon fixed him with an intense glare. “I don't care if you think Nazis are cool, or... hell, I don't even care if it turns out they were right all along. We're Americans, god dammit, and if we somehow come out of this on top it'll be the red, white and blue flying high, not a fucking swastika.”

Ryan grumbled but offered no retort.

“What's got your panties in a twist, anyway?” Nick asked Ryan, who had gone back to picking at his salad. “Like, we told you our story. What about yours?”

“Not much to say,” Ryan said, clearly unwilling to delve too deeply into the past. “My family is poor as shit. We've always been poor as shit. My parents each work two jobs, but my family is so deep in debt I don't think we'll ever get out.”

“That can't be why you're here,” Brandon said.

“No, I'm here because...” his face suddenly screwed up, and he turned away. “Niggers,” he finally blurted out. “Fucking niggers! My sister, she was only twelve...” He said nothing else, instead choking up. Watching his body tense up like that, twitching as he fought back against an upswell of raw emotion, immediately killed the comradely atmosphere of the table.

They could all feel it, too. An uncomfortable chill washed over the others, and suddenly everyone seemed much less interested in their food. Perhaps hoping to salvage the situation, Brandon went next, unprompted but no less enthusiastic, and recounted his tale that he'd told Kyle at the Wienerschnitzel.

Ryan, still trying and failing to hold back his sobbing, gradually eased back into a relatively normal state with only the occasional sniff, and began listening eagerly along with the others. Brandon added a few minor details to round out his story, and both Nick and Ryan eventually asked questions similar to those that Kyle had once put forth. Brandon answered everything just as solemnly as he had at the 'schnitzel, and by the time he'd finished the food was beginning to get cold, and it was well past lights out time.

After dinner, the sore, exhausted trainees showered and collapsed into bed, except Kyle, who plodded down to the lab on ever-stiffening legs to check up on Mia. He found her in the fabrication room, slaving over another machine body that closely resembled the one made for Esdeath. It was laying on a white table, and several spiderlike limbs were see-sawing up and down, giving the appearance of sewing.

As he approached and got a better look, it was clear they *were* sewing, sort of. The limbs were going up and down across the steel-fiber-like muscles of the body, installing some kind of wiring system across their surface.

“So what's that for?” Kyle asked, once he came to a stop beside Mia. Her hands were outstretched, but her pupils were not all the way to pin-points.

“It increases the versatility of the muscles,” Mia said in somewhat flat voice. “Like real muscles, they contract when exposed to electrical signals, but they are many, many times stronger. Adding these not only increases the reaction time, but allows more flexibility in the way the muscles contract that allows a much greater degree of control.”

“I got most of that,” Kyle said. “Anyway, I just came in see how you were doing, and say goodnight.”

“I watched you guys train this morning. It seems like hiring Brandon was the right choice. What do you think?”

“I agree,” Kyle said. “He was definitely a drill instructor in another life.”

Mia cracked a smile. “Good. I hope everyone will continue working together.”

“Me too,” he nodded. “Anyway, what's up with Esdeath? How's she holding up?”

“Not too well, it seems. She's been holed up in her room all day, just watching *Akame ga Kill* over and over.”

Kyle's eyebrows jumped. “What? Just over and over, like non-stop?”

“Indeed. I showed her how to use the Blu-Ray player and remote, and since then she's been simply sitting there in her bed, watching the entire twenty-four episodes again and again.”

*That's not good, Kyle thought. That's not a good sign at all.*

“Also, I wouldn't go back there, if I were you,” Mia added. “She *really* doesn't like you.”

“Yeah.. I sorta figured that out.” He sighed. “Alright, well... g'night, Mia.”

“Goodnight Kyle,” she said, her light smile instantly expanding thanks to a farewell head-pat.

At four AM the next morning, everyone except a certain otaku was standing more-or-less at attention in the foyer. A crying, thrashing Marky was being dragged down the stairs by Brandon, and the other three recruits all threw sidelong glances and snickered as Marky was unceremoniously tossed into the kitchen and essentially force-fed.

It stopped being funny when he kept moping through the various morning drills, endlessly pissing off Brandon and frustrating the other recruits, who then had to start over. It didn't take long for the ex-marine to pull aside the fat otaku, and give him a military-sized dressing down.

“Listen, you fat lump of shit, if you don't shape the fuck up now, somebody else is going to end

up with your waifu, and you'll be left with nothing but your cum-stained anime pillow. *Is that what you want?*”

“*Oh come on!*” Marky shrieked, gesturing wildly. “This is such horseshit! Why do I even need to do this anyway, it's not like I'll be fighting on the front lines!”

“Maybe you will, maybe you won't,” Brandon said, his voice tense. “But whatever you end up doing, you *will* need discipline, you *will* need fortitude, and you *will* need to be in good shape so you don't drop dead of a heart attack.”

“It's... just...” Marky looked like he was about to cry. “I hate this *so much*...”

“You think I didn't hate it, at first?” Brandon said. “When I enlisted, I almost went AWOL one time because I simply couldn't take it anymore. One of the instructors talked me down, and he told me basically what I'm about to tell you now.”

Marky gathered himself, his squinty eyes blinking rapidly in the rising sunlight.

“It gets easier. It starts out hard, but it gets easier. Always. The human body is incredibly adaptable, and if you just keep at it, day after day, not only will it get easier, but soon you'll come to *need* it. You'll *need* to be fit, and you'll *need* to live a disciplined life. It's habit-forming. And you know what else?”

“W-what? Marky said, jowls quivering.

“You'll be a better man for it. Not just in body, but in mind and spirit too.”

“Alright... sure,” he finally nodded.

“Good,” Brandon said. “*Now fall the fuck back in and start over!*”

The second day went by even slower than the first, and they didn't cover as much ground during their march up and down the hills on account of how sore everyone was. By around nine AM, they'd made it back to the house, just in time for the first delivery truck to arrive.

“Shit, really?” Kyle exclaimed, as the box-truck backed up to the house, Brandon waving the driver on. “We're really doing this again?”

“Sir, what the hell did you order?” Ryan asked, hands on his hips.

“You'll find out soon,” Brandon said. “Because I'll need all of you to help get it up the stairs.”

After the recruits helped Brandon and the truck driver unload the cargo, they immediately began carrying, rolling and hoisting it up the stairs. Brandon had purchased a gym's worth of workout equipment, and everyone, even Marky, nearly gave themselves hernias dragging the heavy boxes and weighty devices up the stairs. They spend the rest of the morning arranging, installing, unboxing and otherwise setting up various workout stations in the woefully under-equipped exercise room.

“Not bad, not bad,” Brandon nodded in approval as the last of the circular weights were slid onto the weight rack. “After lunch, we’ll try it out.”

And so they did, but everyone was still too sore to do much of anything. Brandon shook his head and dismissed them for the day after everyone finished one-hundred push-ups. This meant an early day for everyone except Marky, who was there until nearly dinnertime.

Kyle visited Mia again that night. This time, she was in front of the central AI Nexus, palms-out, pinpricks for pupils. Kyle knew that she was so focused on her tasks when she was like this that she rarely said much, usually electing to stay silent. He simply wished her a good night, and gently patted her on the head.

He grinned when he saw that his efforts had produced a smile on her otherwise static features.

The third day of training went much better. Marky was still late, but he didn't need to be dragged, and they finished their morning drills relatively quickly. Afterward, they went on their morning march down and around the hills of Beverly Glen, occasionally straying into neighboring Bel-Air and Beverly Hills.

Kyle marched along at the head of the single-file line, with only Brandon slowly jogging around in front. They reached the crest of a hill, and the ex-marine called a halt, which elicited gasps of relief from the rest of the recruits. Everyone drank deeply from their water bottles, and chatted or complained aloud to each other.

But Kyle took a few steps off the sidewalk, as this particular hill they had stopped on provided a nice view of the wealthier areas of Los Angeles, as well as a good chunk of the Northern portion of the city. Just like when he was at Wienershnitzel, and in all the other occasions Kyle was alone with his thoughts in a public space, he couldn't help but wonder about the veracity of what Mia and people like Kyle, Brandon, and everyone on Ωchan were saying.

*It looks so peaceful out there, Kyle thought as his gaze swept over the city. Sure there's crime, but a certain level of that is unavoidable, really. But what we're fighting for... is it really going to come to this? Killing our own countrymen, and possibly foreigners, over something that isn't even set in stone?* To Kyle, it didn't seem much different than the bible-thumpers and hard-right wingers from the 1960's that advocated for slaughtering all the hippies, in order to prevent some future Communist takeover.

*The only mistake there was letting the more radical ones teach at Universities, he thought with a sigh. According to Nick and Marky, things were getting bad at UCLA, and other Liberal Universities. But so far, nobody had been murdered there specifically for being white, and as shitty as it was for white men, they could still graduate if they tread carefully and walked on enough eggshells. Is that alone really enough justification to send Mia's cyborg fighters, that happen to have the appearance and personality of girls from anime fiction, out to kill?*

Kyle didn't think so. Not yet, at least. As far as he was concerned, only the most depraved, corrupt, despicable people should be targeted, and if his theory was correct, once they were out of the

picture, the rest of the country would slowly begin healing itself.

But as he rejoined the others and restarted the march, a sinking feeling of dread began gripping his core. What would he do if... it turned out his pet theory was nothing more than naive, foolish optimism?

They made it back just in time for both Brandon and Kyle to get chewed out by a deliveryman who'd been waiting there for nearly half an hour. Apparently, with no trusted humans present Mia refused to open the gate, and she herself was too busy to put on her holo-disguise and come out.

After the delivery truck driver had spewed his final curses, he backed down the driveway and parked, while the trainees gathered around, waiting with a complete lack of enthusiasm to help unload the cargo. This only worsened when they saw what it actually was: stacks upon stacks of plywood and corrugated metal sheeting, as well as boxes of brackets, screws and other equipment.

“Sir, with all due respect,” Marky began, “what the fuck is this?”

“We're setting up a training course,” Brandon said. “Downstairs.’

Naturally, code words were used when discussing sensitive topics outside of the house. 'Downstairs' meant the lab, the 'Admin' was Mia, her 'helpers' were the robots, and their training was simply referred to as 'LARP'ing,' or 'live-action-role-playing. Their cover story, if asked by nosy neighbors or bored cops, was that they were role-playing a military unit from *Star Wars*. So far nobody had asked, and Kyle doubted anyone really cared enough to.

As they unloaded everything, the ex-marine explained that the two hollowed-out floors beneath the waifu commons (which he referred to as simply the common area) would be perfect for setting up a miniature paintball course, and underground shooting gallery. The areas weren't large enough for anything too extravagant, but Brandon believed useful training could be undertaken with zero risk of attracting unwanted attention from anyone.

Kyle was a bit nervous as he backed down the lab corridor, helping Ryan carry three long sheets of plywood. As they passed through the waifu commons, Kyle's head immediately turned to Esdeath's door, but all he could see through the thin window was darkness, punctuated by occasional flashes of color from something being played on the television.

*Poor Esdeath, he thought, his heart sinking, I really hope she isn't going insane in there...*

They continued hauling supplies down the ramps leading to the lower floors, which were still unpainted, bare-bones affairs, the walls and floors being nothing but dark-grey rock and concrete. Thankfully, Mia had at least installed ventilation, and given the already cool temperature of the underground area, it was actually a bit chilly.

*SLAM!* Kyle and Ryan simultaneously dropped their plywood bundle on the second floor, the loud noise reverberating like a gunshot. Both he and Ryan winced from the loud bang, and again when Marky and Nick arrived and dropped theirs. By contrast, Brandon carried a box of screws on each shoulder, and gingerly set them down with barely a rattle.

“So how is this going to work, sir?” Ryan asked. “I don't know shit about construction.”

“Neither do I,” said Brandon. “But Mia said she'll have the robots help us out.”

“Wait a minute,” Nick said with a sudden enthusiastic grin. “We get to build this with robot helpers?”

“You forgot to say 'sir' again, Nick,” Brandon shook his head. “And yes, I guess that's the plan.”

It took nearly eleven long, tedious trips, but they finally brought all of the supplies down to the lower floors. After the final trip, Mia herself arrived, along with the three wise-cracking robots and one of the larger 'bots. The three little robots immediately spotted Marky, and zipped over to him. They stopped, swiveled their heads toward Marky, looked back at each other, and then turned to the fat otaku one more time.

"That's the mad shitter, isn't it?" Said the first.

"Yeah, he really looks the part, doesn't he?" remarked the second.

"I've still got dried shit stuck in my treads," the third added as it gave giving Marky the finger. "Thanks for that, bitch-tits."

The three robots zoomed back over to Mia, leaving Marky aghast while everyone else snickered.

"Okay, be nice," Mia said to the robots, who seemed to shrug halfheartedly. She then turned to everyone else in the room. "Now, is everyone here ready to work?" She asked, hands on her hips. Though they really weren't, except for Brandon, her bright smile was enough encouragement that everyone nodded regardless.

“Guess it's your show now,” Brandon said, making a sweeping gesture with his arms.

“Alright everyone, listen up,” Mia said, her voice echoing loudly, “I'm going to be going around instructing everyone on the exact setup I have in mind, based off an indoor paintball arena design I found online.”

She looked oddly authoritative as she strolled about, pointing at one spot or another, and several of the recruits would scramble to hold up a sheet of plywood while the robots bolted brackets into the floor to hold the wood in place. It was time-consuming, but enjoyable all the same, and several hours passed relatively quickly, with much of the base plywood already placed and firmly bolted in patterns that somewhat resembled a war-torn town. At least, if the town was made of plywood and located under a hill in California.

The shooting gallery on the floor below was even easier to set up, as it essentially consisted of sandbag mounds set up at various distances, that would later have paper targets stuck to them. A few chairs and some sturdy tables were the only other objects in the room, other than the corridor stretching back to the power generator, which Kyle hadn't seen yet.

He did get curious about the generator room, but the solid hatch leading to it wouldn't open for him. It seemed to be the exact same type of hatch as the lab's entrance, and he couldn't help but grow

curious about what was back there. Mia assured him it wasn't anything worth bothering with, however. *Man, this better not be like when I first got here and Amy wouldn't let me into the lab, and then I finally get in there and it's full of just the craziest shit...* He said as much to Mia, but she insisted only the generator was back there, and the reason she wouldn't open it was for their own safety. After that, he dropped it.

Once everything had been more-or-less finished, Mia smiled and thanked everyone for their hard work. The three robots saluted, and turned to follow her up the carved stone ramp. But as they were all headed to the door, they just so happened to pass Marky one more time. They stopped again, looked up at him, and simply busted up laughing as they left. Marky could do little more than turn red while gritting his teeth.

Rick swung by later that day, delivering a few groceries and other supplies. He hadn't yet met any of the newest members of the household, and with a lot of handshaking and forced laughter, introduced himself to Brandon, Nick, Marky and Ryan. He expressed interest in what everyone was doing, giving them a reason to try out the 'LARPing Star Wars military unit' excuse. To their surprise, it seemed to work.

"Man, I knew weird shit went on here," Rick said, shaking his head. "But I didn't know it was *that* fuckin' weird."

Kyle felt sort of bad for leaving Rick in the dark regarding their activities, but the man knew many people, and it was simply too risky to let him in on anything that could potentially be valuable information for the right buyer. Kyle suspected Rick's famously tight lips had a price, and the people they were up against had bottomless pockets.

After discussing it with Brandon later, it was decided that Rick would only be retained to deliver very special items, such as certain weapons the ex-marine had his eye on but had difficulty buying in California. Mundane goods such as groceries could be bought and delivered themselves, as Brandon's truck now sat, mostly unused, in front of the garage doors. Nick's beat up old Ford Focus could also be used in a pinch, if need be

The rest of the day was spent in the exercise room, where Brandon instituted two set routines that would be observed on alternating days, to give the differing muscle groups time to recover. Sunday would be a recovery day, which greatly excited Marky as it was currently a Friday.

The four recruits continued their routines, with Brandon instructing, encouraging, insulting and spotting as needed. While Kyle lifted weights with a screaming Brandon in his face, Ryan strained at the squat rack and Nick and Marky took turns at the butterfly machine. In the end, everyone worked up a good sweat, and even Marky's feeble attempts to lift weights and do squats were acknowledged by Brandon.

Dinner that night was a hearty affair, baked potatoes with cheese and sour cream alongside ham and green beans. As usual, an extra plate was prepared for Esdeath, which Mia ended up taking down herself. It seemed that she was the only one the anime villainess had any respect for at all, which Kyle didn't find all that surprising upon further reflection.

Brandon and his trainees sat around the table, each in a spot they seemed to have 'claimed,' eagerly scooping up their food and shoveling it into hungry mouths. Sachi was also there doing dishes, the backdrop of a running sink and clinking plates meaning that everyone had to speak up a bit to be heard.

"It's finally going away," Marky said, rotating his arm in its socket. "It's still sore as shit, but it's starting to go away.

"See? I told you," Brandon said while spearing some green beans with a fork. "After the initial soreness wears off, you'll barely get sore at all after that, just so long as you keep at it."

Marky nodded. Even though it was only the third day of training, Kyle could already see that the fat otaku was making significant progress, as were the rest of the trainees. An upswell of optimism surged through him as he looked around the table, watching everyone chatting amiably, united by their desire to change the world for the better, and the fierce need to see justice be done.

Well, that and waifus. Kyle couldn't forget that little detail.

"So you're getting your waifu tomorrow, right Brandon?" Marky asked, his voice flush with interest.

"I suppose so," Brandon said, nodding. "Mia showed me a picture of what she's supposed to look like. If she turns out just like that, you guys might have the next week off, because then *I'll* be too sore."

Everyone chuckled a little, and Marky rubbed his hands together in anticipation, his squinty eyes nearly lines at this point.

"Do you guys know when we're gonna... actually go out and, y'know... do something?" Ryan asked, clearly referring to the whole reason this little group formed in the first place.

"Hopefully, it'll be when you're all ready," Brandon said between bites. "Otherwise, if something pops off..." He didn't finish the sentence.

"The other waifus will be ready in a few days," Kyle said. "There's going to be an adjustment period for them, as well as for each of you, but... I think with them on our side, we can really make a bold statement."

"Hell yeah, that's what I'm sayin'," Ryan nodded vigorously.

"So what do we tell the waifus?" Nick said. "Like, about where they came from, why they're here, and all that?"

"Mine's custom, so I don't have to worry about that shit," Brandon said. "Otherwise I'd just say, 'bitch, we brought you to this world for one reason: my cock.'"

That made everyone laugh, but after the mirth died down Kyle went ahead and explained some of what he'd learned about waifu psychology. He also filled in some of the knowledge gaps apparent in some of the other trainees, since they were too new to have learned everything about the waifu

manufacturing process.

“So in essence, my idea is just to basically tell them the truth from the start.” Kyle said, using hand gestures to sell his point. “Something along the lines of, 'we brought you here to help us rid our world of evil, and this is where you came from, and no you can't go back.'”

“Yeah, but won't they freak out, like yours did?” Nick said.

“Er, it's a possibility,” Kyle admitted, “but they'll find out eventually anyway, so... I think it's better just to rip that band-aid off at the beginning. If I was able to activate Esdeath all over again, that's the first thing I'd do.”

“Well, you don't have to worry about Megumin freaking out,” Marky said, wearing a dreamy smile. “She'll be so happy that someone loved her enough to bring her to life, that she'll do whatever I ask, I guarantee it.”

“Umm...” Kyle raised a skeptical eyebrow. “Aside from the fact that she's literally useless without magic, isn't she going to miss her friends from *Konosuba*?”

“Ah,” Marky said, raising a single finger. “I asked Mia about that the other day, after you mentioned that waifus can be pulled from any point in their timeline. I told her to take the version of Megumin from early in episode two, the one that had yet to join up with Kazuma and Aqua.”

Kyle had seen *Konosuba*, and thought it was alright, if a little dumb sometimes. The other characters Marky referred to were the main protagonist, originally from earth, and an air-headed goddess that got dragged along with him to a role playing game-style fantasy world. Megumin loved her new friends, so in a way it was considerate of Marky to pluck her out before she got to know them.

“Man, I hate it when you guys do this, because I don't know any of these references,” Ryan shook his head in utter bafflement.

“Same here,” added Brandon. “I honestly don't want to know, either. Just make sure you don't piss them off or scare them away. We can't have escaped waifus running loose.”

“Don't worry,” Nick said. “Mine's an expert ninja, she'll track 'em down if that happens. She knows all kinds of sweet ninja magic, and she can shoot knives out of her pussy and crazy shit like that!”

“Definitely don't piss that one off!” Brandon cried out, laughing.

Later that night, Kyle paid another visit to Mia. This time, she was busy with not one, but two mechanical bodies laying on separate white tables. One was slightly bigger and more filled-out than the other, but otherwise they looked almost identical. *The little one must be Megumin*, Kyle thought. He then noticed two more humanoid shapes occupying the other two tables, each completely covered with a white cloth. *Do those belong to Ryan and Brandon?* He imagined so, since they each came with large bulges in the chest area.

“Hey, Mia.” Kyle approached the AI anime girl, who was tirelessly working as always, her outstretched arms gently guiding the spider-limbs with wireless commands. To his surprise, she put her arms down, and her pupils returned to normal. The table's limbs slowly came to a halt.

“Phew,” she said, wiping non-existent sweat from her brow. “You came at a good time. I could use a break.”

“So what's up?” Kyle asked. “You're not working yourself to death, are you?”

“No way,” she smiled, “this is nothing. You should've seen me when we started building the lab. I worked round-the-clock for almost a year straight.”

“Jesus,” Kyle said. “That's crazy.” He'd only been here around two months, and the amount of productivity he'd already seen this AI put out was staggering.

“Yeah, but I told you before. I like working.” She said.

Kyle folded his arms. “Unless you're being bossed around, you mean.”

“Pretty much!” She closed her eyes and smiled cutely.

“So what's the latest with... you know...” Kyle was still aggrieved over Esdeath's sudden discovery of her fictional origin, and the toll it had on his plans, such as they were.

“It's gotten bad, Kyle.” Mia slowly shook her head. “She's gone on to just watching episode 14 over and over, almost non-stop. She also started reading the manga, and even tore up some of it.”

“Fuckin' hell,” Kyle ran a hand through his hair. So she hasn't left her room at all?”

Mia's expression became thoughtful. “Well, she does leave and pace the lab every now and then. At least, she did earlier today. She even watched me fabricate Megumin's body.”

“And you just let her?!” Kyle blanched. “Wait, aren't you vulnerable during that time?!”

“Not as much as you'd think,” she said, waving a hand dismissively. “And besides, before long she won't pose any threat at all. You see, I'm beginning to think Esdeath's mind is breaking down. I don't think she'll be a viable emulation for much longer.”

Both hands went over his face, and he pulled them down slowly. *Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. My one and only waifu, gone insane. Just fucking perfect.*

“Sorry, Kyle.” Mia frowned as she observed his reaction to the news. “Honestly, the humane thing to do would be to just end her suffering now. I can deactivate her at any time, just say the word...”

Kyle gritted his teeth. *No way am I shutting her down just yet. There has to be something, some angle I haven't thought of, or...*

“Well...” he began, trying to think of something. “Wait, that's right! I never got the chance to ask: what did you find out from that test you did after she got re-activated?”

“Oh, it's nothing,” Mia said. “Turns out the shutdown mechanism is a little glitchy, that’s all...”

He hung his head. “Crap, I was hoping somehow that whatever you found might be useful.”

“Sorry Kyle, I know how much you wanted your waifu to cooperate.” Mia looked up at him with big, sincere brown eyes. “But I think we both know it's best to end this now, before she completely loses her mind.”

“Shit... well fuck it, if she's gonna just sit there and slowly go mad, I don't want her watching her own anime non-stop. I'm gonna grab a different one.”

Mia simply watched as Kyle jogged out of the fabrication room, returning a few moments later with a large boxed set of Blu-Rays. “Here, *Dragonball Z*. It's got a ton of cool fights, and a lot of the bad guys end up joining with the good guys. It's kind of a recurring theme.” He then inhaled deep, trying to catch his breath.

“Umm... she stopped reading or watching anything that wasn't related to her fictional world, but okay. I'll try.”

“Please do, Mia.” Kyle said. “Maybe if she gets her mind off of that shitty world she came from, then she'll get better.”

“You really care about that evil bitch, don't you?” Mia frowned slightly, slightly raising an eyebrow.

“It's my fault she's here,” he said. “I'm just trying to take responsibility.”

“You're wasting your time and energy,” Mia said. “But you'll see that for yourself soon enough, I think.”

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The Antifa compound had been bustling ever since Anton’s inspiring speech, and the house was now packed with squirming young bodies eager to be at the forefront of the next revolution. As Marty pushed his way through the crowd, making his way to the backyard, he stopped several times to shoo away a couple kids that couldn’t have been older than twelve, and told a woman with a baby to get lost. *This isn't a fucking daycare*, he thought, shaking his head.

Even though they’d tried to prevent it, inevitably someone had surreptitiously recorded Anton’s speech on their phone and uploaded it. While it hadn’t exactly gone viral, it still attracted enough attention in the local activist community that disaffected teens with a decidedly leftist bent were now showing up in greater numbers than ever before.

Apparently a few other Antifa groups had held similar rallies, the most impressive being in New York, where a woman calling herself Destiny May gave a speech to over two thousand people that eclipsed Anton's in both inspirational magnitude and motivational satisfaction. Marty had watched it, and immediately had to fight back the desire to start bashing windows on the spot, it was *that good*.

After worming his way through the crowd, Marty finally made it to the backyard where the crowded conditions were not much better than inside. An impromptu acoustic-only concert was apparently playing over near the drained swimming pool, and the empty pool itself had become something of an arena, as it was lined with people clapping and chanting along to the revolutionary tunes.

*Holy fucking hell*, Marty thought, *I can't believe how many people are here*. Young activists were noisily chatting all around him, music was playing from several different sources, the air was thick with haze from a variety of smoked goods, and of course, *somebody had a fucking airhorn they were blowing over and over*.

*Having so many people willing to join our cause is an encouraging sign*, he thought, *but did they really have to all come at once?! And if Marty was being honest with himself, he didn't think even a tenth of these people would still be around once things really started to get down and dirty*. There had been times when he'd been envious of Anton and his position as nominal leader of this local batch of Anti-fascist revolutionaries, but today was not one of those days; no, Anton had a line of about a hundred applicants at least, with the rest just partying while they waited for a good opportunity to get in line themselves.

"Attention everyone," came an extremely loud, vaguely feminine voice. "Get the fuck out! The party's over, repeat: The party's over." Marty looked around for the source of the amplified voice, and spotted Lucy's purple hair over near the house. She stood up on an egg crate and resumed screaming at people to leave through a bullhorn. At first everyone just milled around, but after repeating her angry shouts the kids eventually began trickling out one-by-one. The crowd inside the pool tried to hunker down to avoid having to leave, but Lucy went over and screamed through the bullhorn directly into the enclosed space of the empty pool, resulting in everyone spilling out like rabbits while clutching their ears.

*Thank goddess*. Marty sat down on a worn couch that had just been vacated. How could they get anything done with so many people just showing up like this? A few minutes later Trotskyten spotted Marty, and flopped down next to him. He was currently smoking a joint, nearly down to the roach, and passed it to Marty. He managed to get one good hit off it just before it burned his fingers. He wiped the resin on his fingertips off onto the couch, and then flicked it away before turning to ten.

"So what the fuck, huh dude?" He chuckled. "All these people just showing up out of nowhere, like this is the place to be or something."

"That's because *it is* the place to be," ten nodded, his eyes pink and half-lidded. "It's going down soon, everyone can feel it in the air."

Marty considered this. "Yeah... I guess it is, huh?" It was actually a little intimidating. Once the drug-like euphoria from Anton's little speech had ended, there was a bit of an anxious comedown, and he'd struggled to sleep that night. "Have you heard anything new?"

“Not really,” ten said, shaking his head. “Just the same rumors as everyone else.”

Just then, Marty spotted Chelsea’s thick body squeezing through the back door, and he waved in greeting. She must have been looking for them, because she hurried over wearing an eager expression, her beady eyes twinkling.

“Wait ‘til you hear this,” she said, her jowls flexing hard due to her broad smile. “We got one!” With that, she turned back to the house, beckoning them with a sweep of her meaty arm. Ten and Marty looked at each other, and scrambled out of the couch.

“Got one what?” Marty said as he and ten caught up with her.

She turned her head back, which caused her neck folds to triple-up. “A skinhead,” she said with a malicious grin. “A couple of our boys caught him spreading racist propaganda right here in our territory. They beat his ass, then duct-taped him into a ball.”

“Oh fuck yeah!” Ten said, suddenly becoming very animated. “Where is he?”

“I guess he’s on the way,” she said with a shrug. “Anton said he has something... planned for him.”

Marty nodded. “Good, I can’t wait. Does Stitch know about this yet?” He knew the big black man would love nothing more than to exact a little vengeance on behalf of the suffering he and his people have endured for so long thanks to racist fucks like this skinhead.

“He’s not here right now,” she said, turning back and again squeezing herself through the open back door, grunting a little from the effort. “I don’t know if anyone’s texted him yet, so feel free.”

While Marty waited patiently for Chelsea to wiggle and twist her way into the house, which sometimes could take a minute or two, he whipped out his phone and sent a quick text to Stitch. Stitch was much more tolerant of written communication with whites, especially from Marty, and regardless he knew the black revolutionary would want to hear about this.

Once the robust ultra-feminist had worked her way into the house, ten and Marty swiftly followed her as she led them past Anton’s now-unoccupied ‘office’ and through a hallway toward a part of the house few of them ever visited: the basement. Houses in California rarely came with them, but this particular house was an exception, and from what Marty knew Anton typically utilized it as a party space, where everything from impromptu raves to private orgies could be enjoyed in relative privacy.

Most of the kids that packed the house earlier were long gone, but a few stragglers here and there tried following along, hoping to find Anton presumably so he could recruit them. Nobody was in his office, so the kids had just been milling around, but Lucy immediately chased them off once she caught sight of them. Apparently she’d been re-positioned to guard the stairwell leading down, which meant *something* was definitely happening down there.

Lucy stoically nodded as the trio approached, and one-by-one they descended the stairs into the basement. Marty had partied down here a couple times, but it looked like he’d missed the last one, as speakers and turntables were still set up. However no music was playing now, and he immediately noticed the atmosphere in the room was anything but partylike. In fact, it felt downright *hostile*.

Anton was there, along with a few other close associates Marty knew but not particularly well. They were standing together facing a corner, and ten called out a greeting as they approached. The Russian's distinctly Slavic face turned around, and he regarded the new arrivals with raised eyebrows.

"Alright, cool." He said, waving them over. "I'm glad you guys are here."

The trio approached and arranged themselves amongst the men already standing there, who had all been staring down at... a girl? Marty's face scrunched in puzzlement as he looked down at what appeared to be one of Anton's waifs that were constantly trying to get in his pants.

The girl was young, likely in her early twenties, and came with a cute face, multiple piercings and a pixie-cut dyed cyan blue. She was thin and dressed in an all-black form-fitting top and somewhat baggy black jeans, and at first glance appeared to be just another eager young leftist fed up with America's endless bigotry and intolerance. However, the duct tape wrapped around and attaching her wrists to her ankles, now behind her back as if she were hog-tied, as well as the strip over her mouth, meant that she'd done something very, very wrong.

"Woah, what the fuck's this?" Marty said, indicating the girl on the floor. She weakly glanced up at them with sallow half-lidded eyes, and there appeared to be crust around her nose. It was clear that she'd been unable to move for awhile, as her hands had been bound so tightly they'd become a sickly shade of dark purple; likely dead.

"Yeah, what the shit is this, where's the skinhead?" Chelsea said brusquely, her innate radical Feminist recoiling from the sight of a woman in such a position.

"He's on his way," Anton said, before lashing out and kicking the girl in the stomach. Her eyes squeezed shut and she grunted, twitching a little, but otherwise just laid there. "But while we wait, you guys can warm up with her."

"Why is she like this, though?" Ten said. "Is she a snitch or something?"

"That's exactly right," Anton said. "Apparently there's still some people in Federal law enforcement that haven't gotten the memo, so it turns out she and a few others have been working as informants."

Chelsea's eyes narrowed, her Feminist misgivings vanishing by the second. "How did you find out?" She asked.

"Friends in high places," Anton said with a chuckle. "Which means whoever's working this case at the FBI will *definitely* get the memo now."

"Dude, she looks like she's almost dead," Marty said, crouching down to get a better look. He immediately regretted it, as he caught a strong waft of stale urine that made him wince and scramble back to his feet.

"Yeah, that's kinda the point," the Russian said. "She's been here a few days now, but before she croaks from dehydration I thought we might be able to use her for a little... training exercise."

Ten's big blue eyes grew even bigger, and a wide, thin smile spread across his face... Marty

looked over at him, and immediately backed up a little. “Dude, fucking hell... don’t smile all creepy like that, it’s wierding me out.”

Trotskyten threw his hands out indignantly. “What? I’m just excited. This stupid bitch was caught working for the fascists, and now she’s gonna find out what we do to those who serve the oppressor!”

“Dude, I know that. I mean, yeah I wanna bash the fash too, but when it comes to this sort of thing...” he gestured toward the girl’s pathetic form, “...I mean, if it has to happen it has to happen, but that doesn’t mean you need to *get off* on it!”

Marty noticed that Chelsea, Anton and the other men there were now watching him very closely. He hastily glanced from one to the other, backing up a little more each time.

“Why not?” Anton finally said, his eyebrows furrowed. “How is it wrong to enjoy a little retribution for the atrocities committed by the *very system she works for*?!”

“Hmm....” Chelsea’s eyes narrowed. “It’s not because she’s... *female*, is it?”

“What?” Marty was taken aback. “No, no way! I just, uh... c’mon, you guys know me. I like to kid around sometimes. I’m totally down with giving these so-called people everything they fucking deserve!”

Anton nodded, and the others seemed to relax a little. “I know you are, Marty.” He then chuckled a little, and leaned closer. “So, you wanna go first?” He gestured toward the girl, whose empty gaze was staring at nothing at all.

Marty looked down at her, and gulped. Little-by-little he began nodding, and using his right hand, he began digging around in his cargo shorts, seeking the sheathed combat knife he kept with him at all times. After his fingers closed around the leather sheath, he withdrew it and held it up in front of him. His steadily increasing heart rate spiked a little the instant he unsheathed the blade, but he’d been in enough tense and unforgiving situations to know how to keep his composure.

He approached the girl again, who still wasn’t looking up at him. The others moved back a little to give him room, and he could definitely feel a sort of... anticipation hanging over their little gathering. An eager, vicious excitement, one that demanded that wrongs be righted through pain and spilled blood. Ten was now staring intently at Marty’s gleaming knife blade, regarding it almost jealously.

The wiry Anti-fascist appraised the feeble, helpless form laying on the cement floor before him, wondering what he should do first, and where. *Should I just cut her throat and be done with it?* He wondered, *or is that too fast and easy?* His eyes moved to her stomach. *What about cutting out her guts?* He inwardly winced. *No, too messy and... fucking gross.* His gaze moved down from her stomach to between her tightly bound legs. *She’s been pissing and shitting in her pants for the last two days, so I’m definitely leaving that area alone.*

“What’s wrong man?” Anton said. “You just said you were down with this.”

“The patriarchal system she serves is the same one that’s committed mass atrocities across the world,” Chelsea said, her jowls quivering with rage, “and continues doing so *to this day*!”

Ten raised an eyebrow. “Yeah man, she fucking works for *them*! This bitch was trying to get us all busted! You’re not... feeling sorry for her, are you?”

“Of course not!” Marty snapped, a little more angrily than he intended. “I was just... trying to plan out my angle of attack...”

“I have an idea,” Chelsea said, regarding the waif below with a cruel smile. The obese woman’s beady eyes gazed enviously upon the girl’s breasts, which were small but well-shaped, especially when compared to Chelsea’s own pair of saggy pancake tits. “Cut those off.” She pointed to said breasts, and only now did the girl’s eyes began to widen.

Marty knelt, trying to ignore the rancid odors, and reached out. He knew that any further hesitation would elicit suspicion, and indeed there was a part of him that wanted to do this. Overall the thought of killing and torture made him queasy, but there was definitely a sort of exhilaration to it. After all, with each dead fascist the world becomes that much better of a place, and he’d be lying if he said he hadn’t fantasized about running his own private gulag every now and again, just filled with the worst skinhead and neo-nazi filth out there. *That’s right*, he considered, *when it came down to it, the fascists are gonna have to go, and America’s filled with them now.*

Marty remembered looking it up one day. Back in the 90’s there were only a few thousand actual Nazis in the U.S. But after 2016? Almost sixty-three million people had voted for Trump! To think the fascist population could have exploded so high...

The thought of all those people and the misery they’ve inflicted made his teeth clench, and the knife’s blade flashed, cutting her shirt down the middle, which also sliced a thin line down her chest that sprouted beads of red. The girl’s eyes widened further and she began to squirm, but Anton placed one firm boot upon her head, and two of the other men each put one foot on her bound legs. Despite that, she squirmed even harder when Marty’s left hand grabbed one of her now exposed breasts, pinching hard as he maneuvered the knife blade to its base. Her flesh was soft, and very hot, and he could feel her heart hammering through his palm.

He simultaneously squeezed and yanked her breast as hard as he could, and began cutting. As he’d seen in ISIS execution videos, a sawing motion works best, and he pulled the breast away with his left hand while the sharp blade went back and forth, slicing through little by little. The girl’s eyes bulged, and she tensed hard, muffled screams escaping the duct tape over her mouth. Within seconds, he’d managed to saw all the way through, and his left hand came away with a handful of tit-flesh, which his eyes involuntarily swiveled down to. The flesh of her breast was fatty and yellow-looking on the inside, while her carved chest exposed a broad, thin strip of red pectoral muscle. Blood leaked down from the roughly-circular gash, though not as much as he’d expected.

Up above, everyone watched intently, their eyes locked onto the spectacle. Ten was breathing hard, while Chelsea started giggling a little at the mass of flesh in Marty’s hand that wobbled like jell-o. Without hesitation Marty flung it to the ground, where it landed with a soft *splut*, and then turned his attention to the second breast, which he carved off even faster than the first. After dropping it on the ground, where it landed nipple-up, Marty stood, and turned to appraise each of his compatriots with a determined nod.

“You’re right. That was fun,” he said when his eyes met Anton’s. He said it as sincerely as he

could manage.

The Russian smiled, gave a nod of approval, and then turned to the others. "Alright, who wants to go next?" Trotskyten immediately raised his hand, bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet. Anton gestured him forward, and ten squatted down next to her, nose wrinkling from the stench in her pants.

"Oh hey," he looked up at Marty. "Can I borrow that? I only have a little pocket knife, and the blade's way too dull."

Marty was in a daze now. It sounded like ten was speaking to him from across the room, but somehow he had the presence of mind to hand his knife away handle-first, and his comrade accepted it with wide eyes and a manic grin. Trotskyten then turned and dropped to his knees, positioning himself above her head; it appeared something on her face had caught his interest. The girl's eyes swiveled upward, and as soon as they saw ten's expression they bulged wide and she immediately began thrashing around once more.

Of course, her efforts accomplished nothing. As it turned out, those eyes of hers were ten's first target. Marty watched his fellow revolutionary pop and carve out each one, then he began savaging her lips and nose, the latter ending up mutilated because of how unexpectedly tough the cartilage was. After her ears came off it was Chelsea's turn, and unlike Marty she had no qualms about aiming for the soft stomach region.

Marty watched this all with a thin smile, occasionally nodding in approval, but in reality he was on autopilot. Instead, he focused on the dream of a socialist utopia, picturing the clean, beautiful cities filled with peace and harmony. While her intestines were being pulled out he visualized the gleaming, pollution-free oceans and healthy green forests, and as her liver and pancreas were sliced free he thought of the great crowds of people living in harmony, discussing art and philosophy as they enjoyed their tranquil lives free from oppression.

The girl wasn't alive for long after Chelsea had finished, but by then the skinhead had arrived, and sure enough he was bundled up like a mummy with an entire roll's worth of silvery duct tape, leaving only his head exposed. He had a swastika tattooed on each cheek, and a warbird on his forehead, and his brilliant blue eyes shined defiantly just up until the moment they too were removed. The man continually resisted with every bit of strength he had, but he was bound far too tightly for it to make any difference.

Stitch was late getting there, but they made sure to keep the skinhead alive just for him. The big black man's new hands clenched and unclenched, and a wide, earnest smile took over as he approached this hated nemesis. He'd made sure to bring plenty of his own tools: a hammer, some pliers, something that looked like an ice pick, and a few other things.

Marty intently watched it all, not participating this time. When asked why, he said he didn't want to potentially take away from Stitch's enjoyment, an explanation everyone accepted without question. Of course, this time he really did mean it.

In truth, Marty had legitimately felt sorry for the girl, and though he'd never admit it to Chelsea, her being female was a part of it. But this? The skinhead deserved every nasty, brutal, excruciating act the Anti-Fascists could think of, and as it turned out, they could think of many. He even laughed along

with his comrades when Stitch unzipped his pants and began pissing into the skinhead's bloody eye sockets, and cheered when the final blow of Stitch's hammer caved in his shaved head, at last ending his miserable, hate-filled existence once and for all.

*Bash the fash indeed*, he thought, chuckling to himself. Still, Marty knew that if he really wanted to make a difference, he'd have to harden his heart since there would be many others like the girl, who at first glance did not appear to be fascist at all, yet still contributed to oppression in their own unique ways. Each and every one of them was also an enemy, who would need to be dealt with ruthlessly and without a shred of pity if the revolution was to succeed.

*In the end it'll all be worth it*, Marty thought as he helped bury the trashbags filled with body parts in the backyard. *In the end... it'll all be worth it.*

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The next morning all four trainees were lined up perfectly at exactly oh-four-hundred hours. Brandon simply nodded, giving no further acknowledgment, and then promptly led them to the back for their daily drills and morning calisthenics. Afterward they departed through the front once more, heading out to the street to begin their morning march.

Each day they followed a different path, and Kyle suspected Brandon was looking at maps online and planning out their routes, as he always seemed to know exactly where to take them. After a few hours had gone by, Brandon stopped them for a brief rest.

"I just got a text from the Admin," Brandon announced to everyone. "My waifu is ready to activate!"

Everyone smiled and nodded, congratulating him. Nick and Marky both clapped a little.

"You won't be clapping in about five seconds," he said. "I wanna meet this fine piece of ass, so we're gonna be jogging back – at full speed!"

Marky immediately groaned, but the ex-marine had already taken off up the hill, and everyone else promptly left a wailing Marky in the dust. He did his best, man-breasts flopping as he huffed and puffed, but eventually the fat otaku got left behind entirely. Nick did end up stopping and waiting for him at one point, and the two elected to simply walk back together.

"So whaddya think his waifu's gonna be like?" Nick said.

"I... don't... care..." Marky could scarcely breathe.

"Aw man, don't be like that. I mean, we get ours the day after tomorrow!"

Marky's squinty eyes gleamed, and his strides suddenly gained purpose. "Alright... then... let's... haul... ass..."

The pair finally made it home only to see Kyle and Ryan waiting out in front near the main fountain, animatedly engaged in their own conversation.

"Even though anime is degenerate as fuck," Ryan said, "I gotta tell ya, I'm really looking forward to meeting these waifus. Mine especially..."

"What, you don't have a girlfriend back home?" Kyle smirked. "I'm shocked, really."

Ryan sputtered. "What? No, I mean... I do, or... we're kinda taking a break, you know how it goes."

"Sure do, buddy. I sure do."

"What are you guys doing out here?" Nick said. "Where's Sarge?" Lately he'd taken to calling Brandon 'Sarge.'

"He's down in the lab, activating his waifu with Mia," Ryan said. "It was funny. Kyle tried to follow him, but Brandon put the kibosh on that, and *fast*."

"Oh, shut up," Kyle growled. "I only did that because it's my fucking house."

"I'd say it more belongs to Brandon now," Ryan retorted with a wry grin. "He's taken over the best room, after all."

Kyle shook his head. "Shut the fuck up, I didn't want the master bedroom anyway. Bad vibes in there."

"Why, what happened?" Marky said. "Who lived in there before? Your parents?"

*That's right, Kyle suddenly considered. None of these guys know anything about Jeremy or Amy. Probably best to keep it that way...*

Brandon strolled down the ramp leading to the Central AI Nexus with an extra spring in his step. He hadn't dated since his ex, Marissa, had taken their daughter and up and left one day while he was at work. The very thought twisted within him like a hot snake, and the year that had gone by since did not assuage the searing pain in the slightest.

But now? A genuinely happy grin split his grizzled face. *A new woman, made just for me. Just the way I want. How fucking amazing is that?* He'd been skeptical of the waifus and other weird technology Admin Mia had come up with at first, especially once she told him how they were made, but... he'd gotten over all that.

The diminutive Admin was sitting in her chair at the Nexus, palms out, her pupils nearly invisible. Brandon stopped and tilted his head, trying to figure out exactly what she was doing. *It's like*

*she's meditating, but... I'll bet she's working her tech magic and figuring out how to invent a hyper-sonic dildo or something.*

“Admin Mia,” he said. “Hello, Admin?” He snapped his calloused fingers in front of her blankly staring face. After a few seconds went by, her hands dropped and her pupils expanded back to normal.

“Hi Brandon!” She said cheerfully. “I take it you read my text?”

“Sure did,” he smiled back. “I can't wait to meet her.”

“Well, come right this way then,” Mia said, jumping out of the chair and racing down the central corridor. Brandon hurried alongside, not quite running. Once they'd entered the grow room, the drawers dominating the right side of the room caught his attention, mostly because they were now all open, and from what he could tell, empty.

“So are these all used up?” He asked, jerking a thumb toward the row of shiny drawers that once contained growing humans.

“Indeed,” Mia said, slowing down to a normal walking pace. “Kyle doesn't want me growing any more bodies. He wants me to create a fully artificial human system.”

“Yeah?” Brandon raised an eyebrow. “That sounds fine, I guess, but... it would be nice to have some spare organs around in case one of us takes a shot to the chest or gut.”

“Well, I agreed to Kyle's request because ideally the new organs I develop could replace anything in a normal human, just like artificial hearts do now.”

“Hot damn, in that case I'm with Kyle on this one,” he said. “Especially if the first one you invent is a liver. I think mine might be, umm... a bit used up.”

Mia chuckled slightly. “I'll see what I can do, Brandon.”

The entered the common area at the rear of the lab, what Kyle called the 'waifu commons.' Brandon instinctively glanced askew at the door containing Esdeath. As it was when they were building the shooting gallery and paintball arena, the lights were off inside, and the flicker of a television screen reflecting off the walls could be seen.

“Is she just gonna sit in there forever?” Brandon asked. “I thought Kyle said he had some kind of plan.”

“He doesn't,” Mia said. “Not really, anyway. I think he just likes her for some reason.”

“Ah.” Brandon shook his head. “That's too bad. From what I could see in that room with all the anime crap in it, there's thousands to choose from. It's a shame he had to go with someone like that.”

“Believe me when I say I know,” Mia agreed wholeheartedly. “Anyway, we're here.”

She'd led him to the door directly across the room from Esdeath's. The sliding door opened from

a silent command by Mia, revealing a well-lit interior that was sparsely furnished with only a bed, small table and chair, a wall-mounted television, and another door leading to a small bathroom. However, Brandon hardly registered any of that; his eyes were now focused entirely on the buxom beauty laying still on the bed.

“Oh ho ho,” he smiled broadly, nodding in deep approval. “This... this I like.”

He approached the sleeping beauty, bending over somewhat to get a better look. The woman was tall, nearly as tall as he was, and her long, very shapely legs led to a full-figured stomach and torso, complete with two of the biggest, perkier tits he'd ever seen, jutting up like torpedoes of delight, ready to launch. The red, low-cut top she wore provided a generous view of cell-shaded cleavage, which Brandon could tell would only grow more charitable once she'd awakened and sat up.

Her face was refined and elegant, but carried a deep sensuousness to it that immediately caused his heart rate to spike. Her shoulder length, crimson hair complimented her ravishing features rather nicely, and Brandon was delighted to see that it was actually a deep red, and not that orange-ish color that redheaded humans usually have. He reached out and ran a small lock of her soft hair through his fingers, but the shiny, cell-shaded rippling effect given by the polychromatic material made it so he couldn't make out each individual strand unless he looked very closely.

He let the hair slip through his fingers and stepped back, analyzing her again with a hand to his weathered chin. The woman's ensemble was completed by a pair of bracelets around each wrist, a short black leather skirt with matching belt, and combat boots that nearly made it to her knees. Brandon rubbed his hands as his blue eyes eagerly scanned each and every detail. At last he turned to Mia, and snapped his fingers once.

“Do it,” he said. “I'm ready to meet her.”

Mia waved her hand, and just like that, the woman inhaled deeply, and her eyes snapped open. She exhaled, blinking rapidly, and Brandon felt his breath seize in his throat as he gazed at her eyes. Sure, they were anime-style, which never held any appeal for him, but nevertheless *this* woman's eyes... were *stunning*. They perfectly matched the color of her hair, and once they'd swiveled their way over to Brandon, he felt an immediate, almost electric sensation surge through his chest.

“Hello Nina,” Mia said. “How are you feeling?”

“Nina...” Brandon exhaled as he said her name, the one he had specifically chosen simply because he liked it. The woman smiled a coy, flirtatious smile, and gracefully sat up. She shifted over so that her long legs could touch the floor, and sat on the edge of her bed, gazing lovingly up toward Brandon.

“Hi Brandon,” she said in a rich, creamy voice. “I'm so glad I'm finally getting to meet you.”

“Yeah... same here...” For the first time in years, the grizzled ex-marine was awestruck.

“As you specified, Brandon, she comes fully-loaded with the personality you chose, as well as general knowledge of the world, and a variety of skills that I gave her to the best of my abilities.” Mia smiled as she triumphantly showed off her latest creation, like a salesman presenting a customer with their brand-new luxury sedan. “She's super-strong, but has all the same functions as a normal human

woman, including the ability to reproduce, and I gave her a very special feature that I want to show off to you later.”

“Mia...” Brandon tried turning his head toward the AI anime girl, but his eyes were trapped by Nina's gaze. He simply couldn't help it; the full-figured animated woman was spellbinding. “Thank you...”

“You're welcome, Brandon,” Mia replied. “Just keep doing a good job training everyone, and I think soon we'll be in a position to finally affect some real change.”

“Yeah... of course...”

“Okay, well... I'll be on my way then. Have fun,” she said, departing as the door slid shut behind her.

Nina finally stood, her hair shifting as she tossed her neck provocatively. “Come here,” she said, beckoning him with a finger. Brandon did as instructed, feeling his heart hammering and his sweatpants tightening. She extended both arms, wrapping them around his neck, and drew him close.

Brandon could no longer think. His face moved forward on its own, and an electric thrill jolted through his spine as his lips touched Nina's, her soft, pliant texture slowly expanding as they pressed against each other. He felt her breath as short, ragged puffs, and it slowly dawned on him that she might be just as anxious and excited as he was. As their lips held, Brandon's rough hand extended, his trembling fingers pressing against the soft material of her chest, touching there in the middle, just above where her mountainous bulges met. She gasped from the feel of his calloused hand flattening against her chest, and his kiss grew more passionate after he'd felt her heart, deep inside her cybernetic chest; it was *pounding*.

Nina's tongue flicked out, teasingly, but immediately his caught it and held fast, before she made her escape. His tongue made chase, finally cornering its prey within her mouth, where they wrestled in a passionate, life-or-death struggle. Brandon slid his free hand around Nina's back, drawing her close, while the hand on her chest dipped down, feeling the incredibly soft, silky texture of her breasts. Nina giggled a little, fidgeting from his touch, and she gave a little squeak once his fingers had found and gently pinched one of her fully-erect nipples.

As their kiss grew more passionate, Nina's hands did their own exploring, with one wrapping around the ex-marine's well-muscled back, and the other descending, seeking more promising territory. Soon it had found what it sought, a massive, rock-hard shaft painfully straining against his sweatpants. Thanks to the easily-bypassed elastic band, Nina's hand slipped effortlessly into his pants, her fingers brushing against his bulging member. Brandon grunted as her soft, but somehow iron-hard grip wrapped around his shaft, and began gently stroking, the polychromatic material of her fingers providing less friction than normal human skin.

They continued their delectable kiss, their tongues wringing around each other, mouths tenderly opening and closing slightly, if only so his weathered lips could feel hers again and again. Eventually Nina's mouth moved down slightly, Brandon's bottom lip caught and held in her teeth for just a second before releasing. He watched, transfixed, as her eyes met his, and held that gaze, swiveling upward as her head lowered down, down, and down some more, until finally all he could see was the shimmering crimson hair of her animated head.

And yet she maintained her descent, kneeling before him, her face flushing as it made itself home directly in front of his crotch. Her hands had now moved to either side of his waistband, and they pinched the grey fabric of his sweatpants... and lowered. Brandon's massive cock flew out in a rage, bouncing up directly in front of Nina's lips, lips that she now licked hungrily. Her mouth opened, and she closed her eyes as her face advanced forward, tongue slightly out, as if to guide his shaft to its new home in her throat. And in fact, that's what it did, her slick, warm tongue sliding along the underside of his cock while the rest of her mouth swallowed up all it could. Her head slowed its advance forward, taking into account his impressive girth while her mouth worked its way along. The warm, soft, fleshy inner lining of her cheeks pressed into both sides of his cock, caressing him with its slick touch. Meanwhile, her hands had not stayed idle; no, her right hand wrapped its thumb and index finger around the base of his shaft, while the other gently fondled and massaged his massive balls.

Brandon groaned, and he threw his head back, moaning again as her tongue lapped along the underside of his cock. At last, he could feel her mouth begin to transition to throat, and an even warmer, tighter layer of slick fleshiness closed around his head, constricting the tip of his dick in an embrace that caused his dick to immediately spasm.

But this wasn't the ex-marine's first rodeo, and he knew he could hold out for some time yet. He placed both of his hands on her head, gently encouraging Nina to continue her oral ministrations, and she did, gradually sliding her head forward and back, the tip of his dick enveloped and re-enveloped by her throat again and again. He felt his legs tense, and his stomach grew taut, and his dick spasmed again, faster than expected.

*She's good... she's so good*, Brandon thought blissfully as his head lolled back and forth. With her throat now opened up a bit, Nina was able to bob her head forward and back a little faster, and the hand playing with his balls rolled them with ever-greater enthusiasm. She began sucking in even harder with her cheeks, providing just a bit more stimulation, while her tongue waggled along the underside of his shaft. His cock plunged into her throat again and again, its spasms growing faster and closer together, until he felt every muscle in his body tense at once...

Brandon cried out as his cock unleashed a torrent of hot, creamy jizz directly into Nina's throat, his head tilting back throughout the entire length of the first long surge. Nina obediently swallowed, her throat bobbing up and down as a second blast of milky cum spewed forth. A third, shorter blast followed, and then a fourth, and by then Nina had withdrawn his dick until it was settled within her mouth, and she gleefully licked up every drop of semen that spilled forth, swallowing everything. She continued sucking and slurping however, not resting until her tongue had lapped up every last morsel of cum that oozed out.

At last, she withdrew, his softening yet still firm cock wobbling as it was set free. Nina glanced up, smiling bashfully at Brandon, her eyes filled with satisfaction. Brandon laughed, then threw his head back and howled. Still chuckling, he looked around for something to dry his saliva-covered dick with, and-

*What the fuck?* He saw something at the door out the corner of his eye. Brandon spun around, his dick slapping Nina in the face, because... *Esdeath was there*. Or, at least she was. His eyes flicked back and forth, but there was now nobody at the window.

*I saw it though*, he thought with growing trepidation. *She was there, watching with a disgusted*

*look on her face.*

“What's wrong, sweetie?” Nina said, standing up while rubbing her cocksapped cheek.

“I thought I saw Esdeath standing there... I think she was watching us,” Brandon said.

“I don't know who that is,” she said, with a degree of worry. “I only know of you, and Mia.”

“She's a strange one, I can tell you that,” the ex-marine said. “I think she's broken somehow.”

“Well, that doesn't matter now,” Nina said, smiling. “Mia gave me the strength to protect you, if need be.”

“I don't need no woman to...” He trailed off, considering suddenly that these aren't just women; no, they're waifus, and on a completely different level than normal human females. Or males, for that matter.

“Never mind, I might need that one day,” he said, turning back to Nina.

She smiled brightly, and he noticed whenever she did, her catlike eyes charmingly narrowed a bit. “Of course, Brandon. I belong to you, now. Just make sure you treat me with care, and I will provide you with all the love and tenderness you could ever possibly want.”

Brandon laughed and turned away for a second in disbelief. But when his head came back around, Nina was still there, regarding him with a warm smile.

“I would love nothing more,” he said, reaching out and caressing her cheek.

“How long do we have to wait out here?” Marky said for the third time, idly kicking rocks near one of the hedges.

“I dunno man. How long does it take to activate a waifu?” Ryan turned to Kyle. “Well?”

Everyone's gaze turned to the 35-year old NEET, who was made briefly uncomfortable from their scrutiny. But he sighed, and adjusted his posture a bit. “Let's see... I'm trying to remember...”

*I don't know if I do remember, he thought. I was so focused on nailing the opening statements to Esdeath that I lost track of time... hmm...*

“Okay, well I do remember that waking them up is almost instantaneous.” Kyle said. “And the part after that took about... five or ten minutes? I don't think it was really that long.”

Just then, both halves of the front door opened up, and Brandon confidently strode out with a beautiful animated woman in tow. Her fashionable top barely contained two massive tits that bounced and wobbled as she descended the flagstone steps, and her tall combat boots clomped along the ground, the smooth, curvaceous legs ascending up from her footwear rippling with every step she took.

Almost as one, the trainees gasped, as this anime woman's stunning beauty was just that; all four were literally transfixed by her ravishing good looks. Each pair of wide eyes furiously scanned her unreal animated features, moving from her breasts, to her legs, to her arms, to her face... and hair...

Kyle fell to his knees. The face... the hair... those eyes, the jewel-like cat eyes that once regarded him as mere prey, and the diagonal swoop of hair dynamically flowing toward the left side of her face....

It was Amy. *It was fucking Amy!* Except her hair was red now, and longer. But Kyle could see no other differences. None. The facial structure, the eyes, the legs, the tits... oh god, *the tits!* They were just as massive and perky as he remembered.

“Alright, listen up. I'd like to introduce you all to the newest member of our team: Nina!” Brandon said with a grand flourish of his arms.

Nina looked bashful, and shyly fidgeted a bit with a playful smile, but eventually extended an arm and waved to everyone. “Hello everyone, I'm Nina, Brandon's waifu. I look forward to getting to know all of you...”

“Holy shit,” Ryan said. “That's a whole lotta titty...”

“Hey now,” Brandon stuck an accusing finger out at Ryan. “Treat her with respect, or I'll treat you with my fist.”

“Jeez, alright,” Ryan put up his arms defensively.

“She's gorgeous,” Nick said in a dreamy, far away voice.

“I like 'em a bit... smaller,” Marky said, “but she is very pretty.”

“Kyle, what's going on with you?” Brandon said, advancing toward the dumbfounded NEET who was still on his knees, slack-jawed.

“It even sounds like her...” he said, shaking his head.

“What the hell are you talking about? Sounds like who?” Brandon said.

“That's Amy,” Kyle suddenly looked up, wild-eyed. “Why the fuck did you pick *Amy*?!”

“Whoa, calm your tits,” Brandon said, regarding Kyle with a suddenly steely glare. “Who the hell is Amy?”

“*That's* Amy,” Kyle cried, jabbing a finger toward Nina. “It's Amy with red hair. Didn't you know that!?”

Brandon suddenly seemed to consider this, turning and putting a finger on his chin. “When I talked to Mia about it,” he began, “I asked if she already had any beautiful women that I could pick from, that weren't from any kind of show. She said yes, and showed me pictures of some super-hot

chick with short green hair. It was on those screens by the AI thing in the middle of the lab. I liked everything about her, except for the green hair, because yuck.”

Kyle listened halfheartedly, but the whole time he was staring at Nina, who seemed to be growing uncomfortable from his gaze. She looked away nervously, and wrapped her arms around herself.

“...And then Mia said no problem, and showed me a picture of the same girl but with longer red hair. I said perfect. After that, we moved on to things like her personality. That's it, Kyle.” Brandon now seemed to be just as disturbed by this as Kyle was.

“So who the hell was this Amy person, anyway?” Ryan asked. “I thought Esdeath was the first waifu.”

“She is...” Kyle snarled. “Because Amy wasn't a waifu. She was a fucking *atrocitiy*.”

“I think you'd better give us the whole story,” Brandon said. “Or maybe I'll just go ask Mia...”

“No,” Kyle weakly shook his head and sighed. “I guess I'll tell you, since I fucking blurted it all out to begin with...” He stood up, stumbled a bit, and then straightened himself and headed indoors.

“Alright everyone, training is postponed until I figure out what the fuck is going on,” Brandon said, beckoning the others to follow. “Now come on, I wanna hear this.”

Kyle hunched down in his usual spot at the table within the kitchen's dining area, and everyone else followed in, taking their seats as well, the wooden chairs scraping against the tile. Brandon pulled out an empty chair next to him for Nina, which she took with a grateful smile. As she sat, her hand moved over to his. Brandon took it, and squeezed.

This turned Kyle's stomach, and he had to look away. *Why? Why did it have to look just like her?!*

“Alright Kyle, tell us the story.” Brandon encouraged. “We're wasting good training time on this, so your little freakout better have a good reason behind it.”

“A good reason?” Kyle laughed dryly, then sighed. “Alright, well shit. Here goes...”

And so Kyle recounted his tale, starting from the beginning, describing what happened to him at the apartment, the escape to Los Angeles, meeting Amy for the first time, waiting around for Jeremy, and the growing suspicions when his cousin never materialized. He did mention the sex, but didn't go into unnecessary details, nevertheless both Brandon and Nina seemed perturbed by this.

Once he'd made it to the part where he sneaked into the lab, everyone was listening with rapt attention. He didn't embellish anything, but didn't go over every detail either. However, he did mention his shock and anger upon finding out that Jeremy was Amy, and that she was essentially a fantasy alter-ego brought to life through Mia's technological marvels. He also mentioned their battle in the very kitchen they now sat, which seemed so long ago even though it had hadn't even been a month.

After Kyle was finished, his head hit the table, and everyone else looked around at each other, but in the end their eyes focused on Nina.

“I... I don't know about any of this,” Nina said, squeezing Brandon's hand harder. “I honestly don't. I can already say that I have nothing in common with this 'Amy,' other than my appearance, it would seem.”

“Really?” Kyle looked up a little, only his eyes visible. “You seriously don't have any memories? No residual feelings, nothing?”

“No,” Nina shook her head. “Mia filled my head with general knowledge of this world, and gave me some special skills, too... but that's it.”

Kyle pushed himself up, and sighed again. “Alright, well... as long as there's none of Amy inside of you, then... I think I can deal.”

“I feel better too, actually,” Brandon said. “Nina is my dream girl, I didn't want Kyle's nasty-ass tranny cousin.”

Kyle grit his teeth. “He wasn't a tranny.”

“He turned into a girl, dude.” Ryan laughed. “Where I come from, that's a tranny.”

“It was his alter-ego, he didn't have gender dysphoria...”

Nick starting chuckling too. “Heh heh... you fucked your cousin.”

“Shut up,” Kyle growled.

Even Marky was getting in on it. “Come on Kyle, don't lie. You enjoyed it, right?”

“Shut up, SHUT UP!” Kyle tugged at his hair.

“Ah, c'mon fellas, leave the poor guy alone” Brandon said with a smirk. “Cuz on second thought, I'd fuck my cousin too if he turned into this.” He jabbed his thumb at Nina.

“*FUCK YOU ALL!*” Kyle jumped out of his chair and stormed off, while everyone else laughed their asses off, even Nina.

“Alright, listen up,” Brandon said, addressing the four trainees standing at attention down in the shooting gallery. “Today, you're going to learn how to shoot. I'm also going to be teaching you how to service and maintain an AR-15, since that's what I have the most extras of. I've set up some paper targets at various ranges, but before we shoot I need you all to pay exact attention to the safety procedures that I am about to go over. Understand so far?”

“Yes sir!” Everyone shouted at once, even Nina, who was standing behind Brandon.

The ex-marine then went over exactly how to safely hold, carry and aim a rifle, and then how to reload and shoot. It took nearly half an hour for his safety demonstration to complete, but for the most part everyone knew that gun safety was literally a life-and-death matter.

“Remember, even Mia can't bring you back if you shoot your face off,” Brandon said. “Well, I guess as a creepy emulation,” he said, looking at Kyle, who grimaced, “but I don't think anyone here wants that.”

“No sir!”

“Alright, good,” Brandon casually made his way over to the sturdy tables, which also had small rests to set the barrel on to help beginners aim. Five AR-15s, each in differing states of wear and tear also rested on the table, as well as one of Brandon's duffebags, filled with ammunition. “Make sure you put these protective ear-muffs and goggles on too, or else you'll go deaf after three shots.”

Brandon pulled out five sets of what looked like large, fat headphones, and large orange safety goggles, and distributed them to everyone, except for Nina. “Aw shit, sorry honey... I only had five of each and uh, I guess I forgot to get more.” He seemed genuinely upset at himself.

“Don't worry, Brandon,” Nina said with a cute smile. “My hearing won't be damaged by decibels in this range, and my eye lenses are very durable.”

“Really? You're sure it's alright?” He seemed awestruck.

“Absolutely sure,” Nina replied with a confident nod.

“Alright, well hot damn!” Brandon clapped his hands together. “Let's get shootin'!”

Brandon went first, standing and aiming, then firing off a few shots at the furthest target. Even with the headphone-like ear protectors, the shots were loud, and reverberated in the enclosed space for what seemed like forever. Kyle squinted, and could just make out a few holes near the bullseye of the furthest target.

“Alright, who wants to go next?” Brandon stepped back.

Ryan was already there, eager as ever. Perhaps too eager, as Brandon angrily pushed the barrel away when Ryan almost accidentally pointed it at Nina. He made a *d'oh* face and then tried the standing shooting position. He planted his feet, aimed the rifle at the medium-range target, and squeezed off five very loud shots.

“That was so cool!” He said as he set the gun down, remembering to trigger the safety. Kyle looked at the target, and found Ryan's shots were all over the place, only one anywhere near the bullseye.

“Okay, who's next? Kyle?”

Kyle exhaled, picked up the gun, and mentally went through the checklist Brandon went over for each of them. He flipped the safety, and positioned his left hand on the handguard and right on the pistol-grip just as their instructor had demonstrated, and then aimed at the medium target. *Ryan's*

*getting his ass handed to him*, Kyle thought, as he depressed the trigger five times. The recoil dug into his shoulder, but not too badly, and after it was over he eagerly looked up...

*Not bad*, he thought. There was even a new bullet hole right next to the bullseye! *Pretty good for a first try.*

Nick was up next, followed by Marky. They each aimed at the closest target, Nick doing better than Marky, who held the gun awkwardly and looked about as unnatural as possible.

After the first round of shooting was over, everyone removed their ear protection, while Brandon went over some tips and corrected mistakes that he saw. Nina, meanwhile, went out and replaced the shot-up paper targets with fresh versions.

“...and that's all there is to it,” Brandon said, finishing the explanation. “Now, let's go for round two. This time, why doesn't Marky go...” He trailed off as he noticed something approaching from the right. Everyone else followed his gaze, and Kyle's jaw dropped; *what the fuck is she doing here?!*

Esdeath had just descended the ramp to the bottom floor, and slowly approached, her boots clicking loudly against the rocky floor. Nina immediately picked up a fully loaded AR-15 and faced the intruder, but didn't aim it toward her... just yet, at least. Esdeath continued approaching, showing no reaction to Nina arming herself, nor the baffled and somewhat fearful glances directed toward her from the trainees.

For his part, Kyle stared impassively, having decided that at the very least he won't act afraid of her anymore.

Once Esdeath reached the group, she stopped, and addressed Brandon. “I heard the sound of gunshots. Firearms seem to be the favored weapon of this wretched world, so I'd like to familiarize myself with them.”

Before the ex-marine could even articulate a response, Esdeath had picked up one of the guns, and aimed it at the furthest target. Kyle wasn't sure if she had watched them earlier, but she braced herself, legs apart, and held the gun more or less in the correct position. Kyle watched a large blue eye gaze down the sights, and she squeezed the trigger.

...Nothing happened. Esdeath slowly lowered the weapon, one eyebrow raised ever so slightly.

“Oh dear,” Nina said in a blatantly patronizing tone. “You forgot something, sweetie.” She'd moved closer to Esdeath, just in case she turned on everyone, but from her position was able to easily lean forward and extend her hand toward the gun Esdeath held. She flipped the safety off.

“There you go,” Nina said, smiling sweetly. “Now you can shoot it!”

Esdeath's face remained impassive and unreadable, but somehow Kyle could tell she had already developed a burning hatred for Nina.

Without a word Esdeath once again raised her AR-15, and aimed down the sights. Everyone had their ear protectors back on by now, which was fortunate because she quickly shot off every round in the clip, her trigger finger moving rapidly. She barely budged from the recoil, and the loud,

reverberating shots didn't seem to faze her. After the clip was empty, Esdeath set the weapon back on the table a little more brusquely than was necessary, and turned to admire her work.

Kyle whistled. She had either hit the bullseye on the furthest target, or gotten very close. Kyle could see a slight smile form on her lips.

“Not bad, Esdeath,” he said. “You're a natural, I think.”

At first Kyle thought she was going to simply ignore him, but after a few moments she turned to him and scoffed. “If I had my Demon's Extract I could bullseye multiple targets up to a mile away with my ice,” she said. “But I no longer have my greatest strength, do I?” Her eyes narrowed at Kyle, and he had to fight not to turn away from her excruciating gaze.

Kyle's eyes did find something else they were drawn to, though. And as soon as he saw it, he couldn't help but gasp. His gaze had lowered from her glare to her chest, but it was not to ogle her cleavage... no, it was to blanch at what was suddenly missing.

There, between her breasts, where her trademark red tattoo-like mark had been, was instead a grey blotch of sliced-up polychromatic flesh. For some reason, he hadn't noticed it until now.

“Your mark...” he said, dumbfounded. “Did you...?”

“Yes, I cut it out,” she said, as if he were stupid for asking. “The mark served as nothing but a cruel reminder of the power I once held. It was a false mark, a fake, just like everything else your little friend is trying to bring to life.”

“I suggest you rethink that position, Esdeath,” Mia said, approaching from the ramp. “You'd be surprised how real my 'fakes' can get.” The diminutive anime girl wore a scowl and approached with a determined glare. Esdeath immediately forgot about Kyle and turned to confront Mia, a snarl forming on her lips.

“Brandon, I think now's the perfect time to demonstrate Nina's latent capabilities,” Mia said, beginning to smile.

“Is this what you were talking about earlier?” He said, scratching his head.

“Indeed. Please place two fresh targets on the furthest sandbag, side-by-side.” She continued staring at Esdeath, but her expression and tone had mostly reverted back to the normal, sweet Mia.

Brandon shrugged, but did as he was told. Within a minute he was back behind the table, and Mia had approached Nina and reached up to the hidden access port above her shoulder blades. It slid open, and Mia tapped her fingers inside a few times, and withdrew her hand. Nina's access port slid shut, as if it were never there at all, and indeed Nina didn't seem to be affected by any change whatsoever.

“This shooting range isn't really big enough to demonstrate the full capabilities of the targeting system I added to Nina, but I still think you'll be able to get the basic idea.” Mia smiled broadly in self-satisfaction.

“Alright, looks like it's my turn!” Nina wiggled cutely, as if she were nervous, and picked up two AR-15's holding one in each hand. After making sure the safeties were off, she walked to the furthest point away from the distant target, and then turned around, so that she was facing the wall.

“What the hell is she doing?” Brandon said, his brows knitted.

“I've seen this before,” Marky said, shaking his head dismissively, jowls wobbling.

But Nina ignored him, and simply raised both weapons so that she was pointing them straight up, her machine strength keeping them perfectly straight. Her arms lowered, hands pointing backwards, so that the carry handles were resting on her shoulders. Kyle couldn't believe it... she was aiming the guns backward, toward the targets, while she faced the wall!

And then she began shooting. Her trigger fingers moved so fast they were almost a blur, and within seconds both clips had been emptied. Everyone looked to see if she'd actually hit anything, and it appeared that only a single shot had hit home, in the middle of each bullseye.

But no, that wasn't right, was it? Brandon and his trainees moved closer, until it was apparent that every shot had hit in those exact spots.

“How the fuck...” Brandon's eyes were wide, and he went up to the targets, touching them, as if to confirm such a thing had actually happened. “Insane...” he said, suddenly laughing. “Absolutely insane!”

For her part, Nina had returned to the table and reloaded her two guns. She continued to wear an innocent smile, and blushed from Brandon's adulation.

“We're not done yet,” Mia said, throwing a sidelong glance toward Esdeath, whose face was unreadable.

“Everyone please return behind the tables,” Nina said as she hoisted a different AR-15, just one this time. As the incredulous trainees and awestruck ex-marine returned to the safe zone, Nina maneuvered around the table, and this time stood off to the side, closer to the short range target.

“Oh, I'm nervous,” she said, fidgeting a bit.

“You can do it, honey!” Brandon shouted. “Uh... whatever it is you're trying to do, I mean.”

Nina closed her eyes, and seemed to take a deep breath. She then took off at a full sprint, running across the shooting range, parallel to the targets. As she did so, she stuck out the arm holding the AR-15's pistol grip almost straight out, but aimed at the medium range target. Still holding the gun one-handed, she began firing shot after shot, not even looking at the target, and even blew Brandon a kiss as she dashed by the table everyone was gathered behind. Within seconds she had made it to the other side and the clip was empty.

As before, the bullseye of the medium-range target seemed to be the only thing she'd hit. And as before, it soon became apparent that all of her seemingly-wild shots had instead hit home in the exact same spot.

“It's been done!” Marky called out, his hands cupped around his mouth.

Mia turned to the fat otaku with a scowl. “In real life?”

“Uh...” He turned away from the suddenly fierce AI anime girl. “I meant to say, nice job Nina!”

“Yeah... I'm in complete shock.” Brandon said as he approached Nina. “How the hell did you do that?”

“I'm not really sure,” Nina shrugged. “It was like I had another invisible hand guiding mine.”

“That's the targeting system,” Mia said with a series of proud nods. “As we get closer to beginning operations, I'm starting to develop weaponry and other offensive technology... for the first time.”

*So that's it, Kyle thought. Mia did say my idea was a good one. I wonder if she'll be doing it for the other waifus as well?* He turned to see what Esdeath's reaction was, but she was already heading for the ramp, her arms crossed in front of her. Kyle briefly considered going after her, but immediately realized that would be unwise.

Brandon, however, seemed much more cavalier toward Esdeath, and quickly ran up alongside her. She halted, but did not spare him a glance.

“What?” She asked, testily.

“Hey, so uh...” He scratched the back of his neck, “you were watching us earlier, weren't you?”

Esdeath's only response was an expression of pure disgust.

“Yeah, that's the face I saw,” Brandon said, his brow furrowing. “Listen hun, I already got a girl, so if you want the *'Big D,'*” he said, grabbing his crotch, “you'll have to get in line.”

Somehow her expression soured even further, and she looked away. “How repulsive,” she uttered. “I wasn't interested in witnessing *that*, I simply wished to see what new horrors *she* had brought to life.” Esdeath threw a brief but very malicious glance toward Mia, and then turned to resume her departure.

Brandon watched her ascend the ramp, as did everyone else. After she'd left, he shrugged and returned to the group.

Since the 'demonstration' had concluded, Mia accessed Nina's port and turned the targeting system off, since it draws extra power. She then explained how Brandon or even Nina herself could activate it, and it turned out to be a fairly simple process.

“Thank you so much, Mia,” Brandon said, repeatedly shaking the diminutive anime girl's hand. “Not only did you give me the greatest woman ever, she's worth at least a hundred soldiers just by herself!”

“That's the idea,” Mia said with a big grin. “Given our numbers are so tiny, I've really had to

dial up the 'quality' of our forces, such as they are.”

“Ah yes, the old 'quantity versus quality' debate,” Marky said, rubbing his chin. “I'm more partial to 'quality' myself.”

“Same here, actually,” Nick said. “The best bud is also the most expensive, but it's cool because you only need a little.”

“Yeah...” Kyle agreed. “One good PC game easily beats a hundred shovelware titles, hands-down.”

“That's true on the battlefield too, mostly,” Brandon added with a nod. “Especially nowadays with so many ways to mow-down cannon fodder quickly. Human-wave tactics are pretty much obsolete.”

Ryan didn't say anything, however, instead seeming to ponder something.

“What, don't you have one, Ryan?” Nick said, clapping him on the shoulder.

“Not really,” he said. “I mean, I agree with what you're all saying, but...” he turned and faced the group. “We're gonna need a lot more than just us, no matter how great the waifus are. *A lot* more.”

“Well, once we get this shindig started more people will want to join up for sure,” Brandon said. “After all, someone's gotta host the party, otherwise no guests are gonna show up.”

“I get the feeling it'll happen sooner rather than later,” Mia said, her smile beginning to vanish. “Something is going on out there, and... based on what I've seen online, I don't think we'll have to wait long to find out what it is...”

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Brandon was apparently so pleased with his new waifu that he declared a celebration was in order, and so ordered pizzas from one of the most expensive joints in Beverly Hills. Everyone was allowed to choose their own pizza, even Nina, and roughly an hour later a beleaguered delivery man holding six thin boxes rang the doorbell. Kyle opened the front door, and both Nick and Ryan swooped in to help carry off the pizzas while Kyle signed for the order, being sure to leave a generous tip. The deliveryman's mood immediately improved once he glanced at his copy of the receipt, and he left in a flurry of emphatic 'thank yous' and 'right ons.'

Once he'd returned to the kitchen, Kyle couldn't help but start drooling. A zesty aroma filled the air, and the wide cardboard boxes, spread out all over the countertops, were thrown open as everyone eagerly dug into their piping-hot pizza pies. Kyle had always preferred thin-crust pepperoni and jalepenos, likely due to his upbringing in the Southwest, and his mouth watered from the delectable sight of the well-made pizza made just for him.

Everyone threw a few slices on paper plates and gathered around the table, sitting down into their preferred seats. A few two-liter bottles of soda were also on standby to help wash down the greasy deliciousness, and Kyle wasted no time filling up a dixie cup with the fizzy carbonated beverage.

For a time, all that could be heard were the sounds of chomping and remarks of how damn good the food was, and Nina was especially enthralled by the taste of her pizza, as it was the first food she'd ever eaten. Since it was her first pizza, she'd simply gone with cheese and pepperoni as her toppings, but everyone offered her a slice of their own pizza so she could try out other interesting combinations.

"Oh, this is so good," she remarked, chewing happily, her eyes filled with satisfaction. Brandon reached over with a napkin and dabbed away a little grease around her lips, causing her to blush.

"Man, I'm kinda jealous actually," Nick said as he bit into his own slice of Hawaiian style pizza. "You get to experience all the food and other cool shit we have for the first time. Like, it's all new to you."

"I'm excited," Nina said happily, before unexpectedly burping after a sip of soda. She seemed genuinely surprised by this, and her eyes went wide, her hand flying to her mouth. "Oh, excuse me, I'm so sorry!" She said, turning a deep shade of red.

Everyone else chuckled, and Brandon gave her a reassuring pat on the shoulder. "Don't worry about it, hun. Everyone does it, see?" He then proceeded to belt out a deep, rumbling belch that Kyle could swear he felt reverberating through the table.

This caused everyone to laugh even harder, and so the mirth and good cheer continued for a while, until everyone was stuffed and happily lazing back in their chairs, rubbing their full bellies.

"Oh my god, I don't think I've ever had pizza that good," said Ryan. "We need to order from there again for sure."

“We will, don't worry,” Brandon said.

“Oh, I can't wait!” Nina exclaimed. “And don't forget there's plenty left over, too!”

Kyle was starting to feel a bit anxious though, and he glanced at the half-eaten pizzas sitting on the counter with pensive eyes. *Nobody asked Esdeath if she wanted anything*, Kyle thought, feeling a bit guilty. *So she won't get dinner unless I bring her something. Hmm...*

He finally came to a decision, and loaded up a plate with a few slices of his own pizza, and asked the others if he could grab a single slice from each of the remaining boxes.

“No fucking way,” Brandon said, brows knitted. “That's my lunch tomorrow.”

“Esdeath didn't get any,” Kyle said. “I'm gonna bring her some, but I don't know what she'd like, so I thought...”

“She can't have any of mine,” Brandon said. “Or Nina's.” Nina seemed unsure of this at first, but slowly nodded, her eyes hardening into a determined gleam.

“She can't have mine either,” Ryan said.

“Or mine,” said Marky, which wasn't unexpected since he had only one uneaten slice remaining.

“She can have some of mine,” Nick said. Kyle didn't think the ham-and-pineapple toppings would jive too well with Esdeath's preferences, but he thanked Nick and took one anyway.

So with four slices total arrayed on a large plate, as well as a can of soda from the fridge, he stalked off toward the hatch leading into the lab. The rest of the table went silent for a minute, until the distant, hissing *snik* of the closing hatch announced that he was no longer in earshot.

Brandon shook his head. “It's kind of sad to see, really,” he said. “Mia says she'll never come around, so he's just wasting his time.”

“I don't like her,” Nina added, her eyes downcast. “I don't like her at all.”

“Don't worry, once our waifus get activated then it'll be four-on-one, in case she gets out of hand,” Marky said, nodding sagely. “I'd actually love to see that. A real-life anime battle, right here in front of us. How great would that be?” His squinty eyes gleamed.

“I'd rather they didn't,” Brandon said. “This isn't a TV show. They'll just end up trashing the house and getting the cops called on us if they make too much noise.”

“Oh yeah, I wanted to ask,” Ryan said, taking another sip of coke, “are we doing anything special for my waifu tomorrow night? Maybe Chinese food?”

“If she's any good, sure,” Brandon said. “Remember we're taking Sunday off, so I'll go pick up a few cases of beer, that way we can get sloshed whichever way it goes.”

“And then, the day after that...” Nick rubbed his palms together excitedly.

A blissful smile spread across Marky's fat face. "Megumin..." he said dreamily, "it won't be long now, my sweet."

Kyle hurried along the corridor, as the pizza slices were beginning to cool, and the soda can was making his hand grow uncomfortably cold. But as he rounded the Central AI Nexus, he saw Mia sitting there, in her usual position with arms outstretched and palms out.

"What are you doing?" She said, turning to face him, her eyes returning to normal.

"It's pretty much what it looks like," Kyle said. "I'm bringing Esdeath some pizza."

Mia shook her head sadly. "I'll give it to her."

"Wait..." he grunted and turned away for a second. "Can you just... I dunno, follow me and stay close in case she goes ham again?"

"I can, but that's only going to worsen her opinion of you," Mia replied. "If such a thing is even possible."

He swore. "Fine then, fuck it. I don't care anymore. I'm just going to bring it to her."

"Kyle..." Mia watched him stride down the corridor toward the waifu commons, a sad expression of resignation slowly overtaking her features.

Again Esdeath's room was dark, and she seemed to be watching TV as she so often did since finding out the truth about herself. Kyle steeled himself, took a deep breath, and rapped on her door. A moment later, he saw a disapproving blue eye glaring down at him from the door's vertical window, but when that same eye swiveled to the plate of food, the door cracked and slowly slid open.

Kyle tried to step forward, but Esdeath firmly planted herself in the entryway, barring him access. Without a word she reached out for the food, and briskly snatched the plate from his hands. Just as she moved to close the door, Kyle cried out.

"Wait, I have something else, too!" He held out the can of soda, which she calmly regarded before also grabbing it with her other hand. As she began sliding the door shut with her elbow, Kyle was able to see a tiny bit of the TV screen, as well as the show she was watching. He recognized it immediately.

"You're watching it!" He gasped. "You're watching *Dragonball Z!*"

Esdeath sighed wearily, and again moved to close the door, but paused at the last second. "Wait," she said. "I wanted to ask you something about that." She then turned around and disappeared into the interior.

With a surge of both relief and trepidation, he entered her room, closing the door behind him. Immediately his nose wrinkled. The room didn't smell *bad* per se, only a bit stale. But for now he declined to mention anything, electing to simply stand near the door.

Esdeath made her way over to the table, which she'd moved to get a better view of the television screen. She sat down, immediately tearing into one of the pepperoni-and-jalapeno slices, her eyebrows rising from the spicy flavor, which she apparently approved of. After she'd wolfed down all three slices, she tried a bite of the Hawaiian pizza, and immediately spit it out.

“This one is disgusting,” she said, wiping her mouth with a napkin. “Why would you bring me this?”

“Ah, well... I didn't know what you would like.” Kyle fought back the urge to grin sheepishly.

“More of the first three would be fine,” she said, cracking open the soda and taking a long guzzle. “Also, I'd much prefer wine.”

“Right, I'll keep that in mind,” he said, wondering if the waifus were even capable of getting drunk. “So... what did you want to ask?”

She raised a finger toward the television screen. Kyle had brought her the entire set of *Dragonball Z Kai*, which is the abridged, enhanced version of the original *Dragonball Z*. As she'd only started watching it recently, she was still on the Saiyan Saga, which was the first major story arc. The action on-screen depicted a fierce battle between Vegeta and Goku, the latter now powered up with his kaio-ken technique. The two well-muscled fighters squared off, leaping back and forth as they dramatically traded blows.

“Yeah, I've seen this before. It's pretty great, actually,” Kyle said with an enthusiastic smile.

“This is another fictional world, right?” Esdeath said.

He nodded. “It is, yes. What do you think of it so far?”

She tilted her head a bit, considering as she watched the characters duke it out on-screen. “I enjoy fighting. I also enjoy watching powerful fighters. Seeing these men fight with everything they have, for their very survival, brutally crushing each other...” She sounded almost poetic, “...it stirs a great longing within me.”

“Yeah,” Kyle nodded. “That's one of the reasons it's so popular.”

“So the people of your world enjoy... fiction like this?” She said, still uncomfortable with the idea of being fictional herself. “Why?”

“Uh...” he hadn't really expected a question like that. He thought she might ask about some detail like how Goku uses his Kaio-Ken, but this actually made him think. “A lot of reasons, I guess...” he finally said. “I think it's popular because people like the characters, the setting, the humor, the action, the drama... the show pretty much has it all.”

She pointed to the screen. “In this world, this... Dragonball world, each fighter uses raw power

shaped in ways unique to that individual. When they do battle, their power and skills are put to the test, with not just their lives, but the very fate of their world on the line. If Goku and his friends lose this battle with Vegeta, their world will be destroyed. Personally I find great satisfaction with the idea, as those who lack the strength to protect what matters to them deserve whatever they have coming.”

*Aw, shit... I completely forgot this show also unintentionally reinforces Esdeath's Social Darwinist beliefs...* “Well, that in itself isn't why it's popular, I don't think.” Kyle scratched his chin. “I think people just like seeing the good guys win, and triumph against all odds.”

“But the power these men wield... there's nothing like it in this world, is there?” She said, still watching the action on-screen.

“No, I guess not.” Kyle replied. “Real-life martial arts isn't anywhere near as crazy as this.”

“Are there other fictional worlds like this? Worlds that feature characters wielding powers and abilities unavailable to the people here?”

“Yeah, there is. A ton of them, in fact. Most of them are really popular, too.”

From where he stood, Kyle saw a smile arc up the profile of Esdeath's face. “I think I understand, now. The people of this world are so weak they create fiction featuring strong characters to distract themselves from their own pathetic reality, don't they?”

Kyle's fists suddenly clenched. “Er... I wouldn't put it quite like that, but... you're not wrong.” *It's true that a lot of Dragonball fans love to imagine themselves as Goku or Vegeta or other characters from the show. The same goes for a lot of other fiction...*

She sniffed. “How sad. I have to say, I'm actually a little embarrassed to have been brought to such a place.”

“But... it's just entertainment,” Kyle said, in a somewhat panicky voice. “Some people just like it for the drama! Others use it as inspiration! It's not all about escapism!”

“It's not?” Esdeath raised an eyebrow. “You're telling me the people of your world don't escape into fiction? You're telling me the people of your world wouldn't rather enjoy fanciful entertainment than face their own sad realities?”

Kyle was taken aback. “Well, I mean... not all of us do that...”

“It doesn't matter. The fact there are so many in your world that do makes me sick.”

He took a deep breath, and exhaled slowly. “The reasons people have for liking these shows is their own business. I don't think you should look down on them for that.”

Esdeath chuckled. “Oh, but I am. I find it offensive that so many in your world would rather escape into a fictional fantasy realm than even attempt to seize power for themselves, or leverage what strength they have to improve their own lives.”

“But it's just... entertainment,” Kyle weakly protested, but he knew she wasn't wrong, at least

not entirely.

Her head finally turned to face Kyle, smiling just a tiny bit more as her gaze pierced him. “What about you? Would you rather escape into a fantasy instead of facing your own reality?”

*That's what I've been doing for the last twenty years.* “Er... no, of course not.” he said.

Esdeath's smile vanished, and she shook her head. “This is one of the reasons I despise you so much, Kyle. You really are one of these pathetic losers yourself. I can tell.”

Kyle forced himself to weather her intense gaze. “Those days are over,” he finally said.

“I doubt that,” she sneered, turning back to the TV screen. “You're weak, after all, and in the end your beloved fictional creations are all you have to turn to.”

“Don't underestimate the power of our fictional creations,” Kyle said, feeling his heart rate climb. “I think it's worth keeping in mind that a 'pathetic loser' just like me is *who first created you.*”

She immediately grimaced, and her eyes slid over to regard Kyle with a narrowed, sidelong glare. “Take this and leave,” she finally growled, shoving the plate with the unwanted pizza on it toward Kyle, who rushed over to grab it before hastily exiting.

Mia was waiting for him by the AI Nexus. As Kyle plodded along, carrying the cold pizza, he noticed her staring at him with wide eyes, her gaze inscrutable.

“That went much better than I thought it would,” she said. “I was expecting her to either shut you out, or... get herself shut down once and for all.”

“Yeah, me too,” he sighed. “But I'm still in the fight. I haven't given up yet, Mia.” Kyle stood up straight, trying his best to flash a confident smile.

“I haven't given up on you either, Kyle,” Mia said with a tiny smile. “*Yet...*”

“What? I didn't catch that last part.”

“Nothing, nothing,” she closed her eyes and smiled big.

“Alright, well... oh yeah, I wanted to ask about Nina,” Kyle said, suddenly taking on an admonishing posture. “Why didn't you warn me about that? I thought Brandon picked Amy as his waifu and nearly had a heart attack.”

“Oh, sorry Kyle,” she giggled. “It's not Amy though, thankfully. I think you'll find Nina to be pretty much the opposite, actually.”

“But why did you encourage Brandon to go with someone that looked like her? Why not... I dunno, anyone else?”

“Remember how Amy was supposed to get her own cybernetic body? A real one, not just flesh with a few trinkets implanted?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

“Well, one of the bodies I grew for Amy was custom-designed specifically for her, so it worked out perfectly!” Mia grinned proudly. “The others I've had to tweak to make the biological parts work. For example Ryan's waifu is a bit taller than she was in her fiction because otherwise her organs wouldn't fit.”

“Ah, I see...” Kyle nodded. It made sense. All of a sudden, his eyes grew big and his mouth dropped. The plate in his hands tilted, spilling the Hawaiian pizza on the floor.

“What about... mine...?” He asked with a suddenly quavering voice. “What happened to the body meant for... me?” *Holy fucking shit, I completely forgot there was supposed to be a body for that anime version of me! It would have to be a male body, right? At least, I would really fucking hope it was...*

“Oh, don't worry about that,” Mia said reassuringly. “After disposing of Amy, I... took care of it.”

Kyle immediately sighed with relief. “Oh thank god.” And after a second, added, “It's almost too bad though... we could've used it to make a male character. It kind of seems like a waste...”

Mia shook her head. “Just a few weeks ago you couldn't stop going on about how 'ghoulish' this all was, and now you're upset because I didn't use it?”

He was taken aback slightly. “Er, I wouldn't say I'm upset... I don't care one way or the other, honestly.”

“Okay,” Mia said, her smile returning. “No worries, then.”

Kyle bent down and picked up the dropped pizza. “Okay, well... Goodnight, Mia,” he said, gently patting her head.

She immediately pushed up into his hand, the texture of her impossibly soft hair almost tickling his palm.

“Ahh...” she said, purring with contentment. “I don't think I'll ever get tired of that.”

Kyle slipped into bed, somehow feeling a little more optimistic about his chances of convincing Esdeath. *As long as I can keep talking with her, I might be able to chip away, little by little.*

But just as Kyle began drifting off to sleep, his eyes suddenly snapped open from a hollow thump originating from the wall directly behind his bed. And then another, and another. The hollow thumps kept coming, in a long, steady rhythm.

*Behind this wall is the master bedroom, Kyle suddenly realized with growing eyes. And... my cousin's bed!* The thumps grew more vigorous now, and he could now make out what sounded like female moans.

*God fucking dammit Brandon! That's my cousin's bed! Kyle's teeth clenched. And what's worse, he's banging someone that looks just like Amy! In my cousin's fucking bed!*

Kyle rolled over and covered his head with his pillow, doing his best to try and sleep through it, but it was impossible. The thumps didn't die down for quite some time, and once they did it still took him almost an hour to finally drift off.

The next morning saw all four trainees lined up neatly in the foyer, with even Marky standing at perfect attention. Brandon paced back and forth as he usually did, but this time Nina was there with him, standing in a relaxed stance near the door. She was wearing a grey sweatshirt and matching sweatpants, possible extras from Brandon himself.

Kyle yawned, dark circles under his eyes. He closed his eyes momentarily, snapping them open when he felt himself drift forward a few inches.

“What's wrong Kyle?” Brandon said when he noticed the trainee's fatigue, a wide grin spreading across the ex-marine's face. *“Couldn't sleep last night?”*

“Not really, sir.” Kyle grumbled.

Brandon chuckled while Nina held a hand over her mouth and tittered. The other trainees just glanced over with raised eyebrows.

Once out on the march, the trainees were doing much better and making excellent time compared to their first few days. The weaved alongside the narrow, winding roads situated among the hills of North Lost Angeles, dipping into Bel-Air briefly before doubling back. As they had began the return march home, Ryan's phone buzzed.

“Hold up, I got a text!” He cried, his face beaming. Everyone immediately stopped and gathered around, except for Brandon, who stood impatiently with his hands on his hips.

“Well?” The ex-marine said. “Is it from the Admin?”

“Yes!” Ryan fist pumped extra vigorously. “Mine's ready!”

“Oh man, she's a good one too,” Kyle said with an enthusiastic nod.

Marky scoffed. “Nowhere near as good as mine, I can tell you that.”

“Alright, since I know you chumps just can't wait to drool over Ryan's waifu, I say we jog back,” Brandon turned around, and began running in place. “Come on, and stay in formation this time.”

And so everyone began jogging their way back at a brisk pace, with even Marky making a respectable attempt. Brandon was running circles around everyone as usual, and when he noticed the trainees' endurance begin to waver, broke out a military-style cadence to help rejuvenate their flagging spirits.

"I don't know, but I've been told," Brandon began.

*"I don't know, but I've been told,"* Everyone repeated simultaneously.

"Esdeath's pussy is mighty cold!"

*"Esdeath's pussy is mighty cold!"*

"Mmm, good,"

*"Mmm, good,"*

"Feels good..."

*"Feels good..."*

And so the cadence continued all the way back to the house, where everyone except Brandon immediately doubled over, gasping to catch their collective breath. Marky looked pale, as if he might puke. But Ryan slowly made his way toward the house, stopping every few minutes to inhale and exhale deeply.

"Alright, soldier," Brandon clapped him on the shoulder. "Go get 'er."

"Haa..." He breathed out, then in. "Thanks, sir. I will..."

"Oh yeah, these things have major dick-suckin' lips, so I advise you try that out at the earliest opportunity," Brandon said with a wink.

"Will do, sir."

Both of them crossed the threshold into the house, where Nina was patiently waiting. She immediately rushed up to Brandon and expertly saluted. He returned the salute, and then threw his arms wide. Nina jumped at him, embracing tightly.

"Sorry we couldn't bring you, hun," the ex-marine said. "You gotta stay hidden here, for now. I think Admin Mia said something about a disguise, but I'm not sure what she means..."

"It's okay," Nina said, smiling. "I don't mind. I'll wait as long as it takes for you."

Brandon smiled, and hugged her a little tighter. "Good girl, Nina."

By then, Ryan had made it to the hatch leading to the lab. He watched the two metallic halves

slide open, and took a deep breath as he entered. The lab was always a few degrees cooler than the house, and the sweat he'd worked up jogging back suddenly turned cold, making him shiver.

“Hey Mia,” he said once he's made it the AI Nexus. The anime girl was in her usual spot, hands forward, palms out.

“Just a minute, Ryan,” she said in a distant voice. “I'm almost done with something.”

He nodded, and elected to simply stand, hands behind his back. He tried peering over at what was on the display screens, but they were all currently off. *Does she even need them in the first place?* He wondered, *and if not, why are these screens are even here?*

He then recalled Kyle's tale the day before, and began nodding to himself. *That's right, they were probably for that tranny.* Ryan shuddered involuntarily as he imagined one of his own male relatives turning into a woman and coming on to him. Of course, *he* wouldn't ever fall for something like that... right?

“Okay Ryan, are you ready?” Mia said as she slipped out of the chair.

“Hell yeah,” he rubbed his palms together. “Let's do this!”

“Alright, there's a few special things you need to know about this one,” Mia said. “How familiar are you with her fiction of origin?”

“Uh... I don't even know what she's from,” he said somewhat sheepishly. “I just know it's not anime.”

Mia regarded him with a raised eyebrow, but ended up shrugging. “Well, it doesn't matter to me, though you should probably play her game at least once, to help understand her character.”

He stopped. “Game? You mean video game, right?”

“Yes. She's from a game released about five years ago called *Nier Automata*.”

Ryan's face was immediately covered by his hands. “God fucking dammit,” he moaned. “Video games are degenerate too... I thought she was just a meme or something...”

“Well, it was widely regarded at release,” Mia said. “And we do happen to have a Playstation 4 along with her game, if you change your mind.”

His hands slid down off his face. “Well... maybe I'll play it a little, just to see... how degenerate it is.”

Mia nodded. “That's up to you. Anyway, the setting of her game is Earth in the far future, where androids built by an organization called YoRHa battle machines for the future of mankind. That's the premise, anyway.”

“So wait, she's already an android? I thought the waifus were cyborgs?”

“They are for now,” Mia said. “I can't actually make a fully-functional android yet. Anyway, I decided to break my cardinal rule of creating waifus that matched their fiction of origin as closely as possible, for... a certain reason.”

“Oh? What's that?” Ryan's brows furrowed. “I kinda wanna know.”

“Well,” Mia tilted her head. “Let's just say it's partly due to her... romantic side.”

He became thoughtful for a second. “Well... It'd be nice to have a waifu girlfriend, I guess, but I'm with Kyle on this one... I didn't pick her out just to fuck.”

“That's good, because the version of her I'm using is from before the game takes place, when she's basically factory-fresh. If this works the way I planned, her feelings, emotions or attachments should be minimal or nonexistent.”

“I guess that's fine,” Ryan said with a shrug. “Actually, I sorta like the idea of a hot female terminator under my control, so I kinda hope she stays that way.”

“Me too,” Mia said.

By now they'd made it to the waifu commons, as Kyle called it, and Ryan started as he noticed a frowning figure impatiently standing near a table, her arms folded in front of her white military uniform.

“Hello Esdeath,” Mia said in a tone that was anything but hospitable. “Care to witness another activation?”

“Mia...” the villainess sneered, her voice filled with venom. “What abominations are you bringing to life today?”

The AI anime girl smiled wide. “Come and see for yourself. I'd love for you to be there when I go over her long, very extensive list of features. Features that make her the strongest waifu yet...” Mia approached Esdeath, staring up into her narrowing eyes. “...By a considerable margin.”

The villainess coolly met her gaze. “I can hardly wait,” she said with a tight smile.

Mia then turned back, and headed for the second door on the left side of the commons, adjacent to the room Nina was in when she was activated. Ryan spared a quick glance toward Esdeath, but her attention was firmly directed toward the AI anime girl.

He then hurried over to Mia, who had just opened the sliding door with a light flick of her hand. He peered inside the room, and could just make out a beautiful, overly-curved white-haired woman laying atop the bed within. With widening eyes Ryan followed Mia into the room, his gaze fixed upon the porcelain doll-like figure on the bed.

“Holy shit...” he said, his head swiveling back and forth, eyes jumping around as he took in the stunning beauty before him.

Her short, not-quite shoulder length hair framed a delicate, yet sensuous face equipped with the

most pert, kissable lips Ryan had ever seen. A small dimple located just a bit beneath and to the left of her lips somehow made them even more sensuous, and the black blindfold wrapped tightly around her eyes lent an air of erotic mystery, finished off by a black hairband worn across the crown of her head.

The woman's overly-curved body was enveloped by an elaborate, somewhat frilly black dress. The top portion hugged her chest and torso, while the short skirt came with gaps on either side to show off her round, excessively meaty hips. Her overly long, shapely legs were encased by shiny high-heeled boots that made it just past the knee, but garters continued up from there to midway up her thighs. The shoulders of her dress were poofy, and the black sleeves ended just beyond the elbow in splayed frills. Both hands came equipped with tight, shiny black gloves.

Despite what he'd just mentioned to Mia, Ryan found himself sweating again as his eyes traced the gorgeous, yet somehow delicate-looking creature up and down. He swallowed when he noticed an opening in the chest area of her dress, providing a small window that teased enough of the woman's cleavage to make Ryan's blood run just a little bit hotter.

But unlike the other waifus, this woman lacked cell-shading, her pale, Caucasian skin tones and pure white hair being presented by the polychromatic material in more of a dynamic gradient, giving her the appearance of expertly-rendered digital artwork.

"She's... incredible," he said in disbelief. "Mia, I... I can't believe you were able to make her so... *perfect*."

Mia closed her eyes, tilting her head and smiling modestly. "I'm glad you like her, Ryan," she said. "With every waifu I bring to life, I get a little better at it."

"I'll say," he replied. "What's up with that blindfold, though? She can see out of it, right?"

"Indeed she can," Mia opened her eyes and nodded once. "Unlike her dress, which I commissioned from the best cosplay costumers in the country, her blindfold is polychromatic, which means the opacity can be tweaked to allow her to see through it. To her, it'll be like wearing a pair of sunglasses."

"Oh, neat. I get it," he said, leaning in a bit to get a closer look at it. From his position, the blindfold seemed to be nothing more than thick, high-quality black cloth.

"In her fiction of origin, her blindfold was supposed to actually be a military-issue visor, but I've simply incorporated that function into her eyes themselves. She's originally a combat android, so she'll view and experience the world a little differently than the other waifus, who are all emulated as people."

"I see..." Ryan said. "So... what happens now?"

"I can wake her anytime you're ready," Mia said, now gazing at Ryan with calm interest.

"Okay, um..." He took a deep breath, exhaling slowly. "Wait, what's her name? What do I call her? *What do I say to her?*"

"She doesn't have a name, only a designation: 2B," Mia said, stepping over to the foot of the

bed. "And as far as what to say to her, I think 'hello' would be a good start."

Ryan grinned nervously. "Alright... I think I can work with that. I'll just say hello to... '2B.'"

A series of sharp clicks on the smooth stone floor caught their attention. Esdeath casually entered the room, her arms still folded. She leaned against the wall beside the doorway, her face wearing a very slight grin.

"Don't mind me," she said. "By all means, bring your doll to life."

"Alright, here we go," Mia said, waving her right hand.

Due to the blindfold, Ryan wasn't able to see 2B's eyes open, however he did notice her lips part as she gained consciousness, and her fingers twitched and slowly expanded, as if feeling the bed underneath them. Her head turned a bit, then looked over, her blindfolded eyes gazing up directly at Ryan. He continued to anxiously smile, and raised his right hand in greeting.

"Uh, hi..." he said. "You're 2B, right? My name's Ryan."

The woman seemed to think for a minute, then abruptly sat up on the bed, her gaze remaining on Ryan the entire time. "Yes, that's right..." she said, in a surprisingly natural-sounding feminine voice, "I am a 2B-series combat cyborg, designed primarily for close-range fighting."

"As I said, I switched a few things around, so she differs from the fictional version," Mia said, not bothering to conceal anything. "Any discrepancies were accounted for when I designed her persona, so she shouldn't be surprised by any of the changes."

"Wait, should... should you be saying that in front of her?" Ryan turned to Mia, whispering in a concerned voice.

"It's fine," Mia said, waving a dismissive hand. "She hasn't developed any emotions yet, after all."

Indeed, 2B seemed to be completely unperturbed by this revelation, and her head calmly swiveled from Ryan to Mia, and then to Esdeath. The anime villainess directed a malicious gaze toward the newcomer.

"Why are you looking at me with such hostility?" 2B said as she calmly regarded Esdeath.

"Because you shouldn't exist," Esdeath sneered.

"Is that true?" 2B said, looking from Ryan to Mia.

"Not at all! I, er... I wanted you here," the lanky man said, "you're my waifu, right?"

"I don't know what that is," 2B replied.

"It basically means you're his partner," Mia said with a bright smile. "You'll be working together from now on!"

“I see,” she said, turning back to Mia. “What is our main objective?”

“For now, we're focusing on training and preparing for operations to begin. You'll basically be assisting with that however you can.”

“Roger that,” she said with a curt nod. 2B then swung her shapely legs over the side of the bed, her long boots shimmering. She stood gracefully, her hands loose at her sides, and immediately Ryan was surprised at how short she was, barely making it to five feet, seven inches.

“Man... this is so fucking cool,” Ryan said, shaking his head.

“Just wait until you find out what she can do,” Mia said, her smile turning sly. “As was already mentioned, 2B is a combat cyborg, so aside from a library of general knowledge, she comes with a variety of combat skills and close-combat techniques.”

“I wanted to ask you about that,” Esdeath said. “How exactly did you acquire these skills to give in the first place? What about mine?”

“Analyzing instructional videos, as well as certain movies and documentaries that accurately depict useful combat techniques,” Mia said with a proud nod. “There's a wealth of information out there on the internet, and I analyze every bit that I can.”

“So my skills... come from this world too?” Esdeath said, her teeth clenched. “My combat abilities are not even my own?!”

“Sure they are,” Mia glanced at the villainess out the corner of her eye. “I took your anime counterpart's unique style and techniques into account whenever I could while creating you.”

Esdeath did not seem particularly assuaged by this. “I've heard of this internet,” she finally said. “I would like to see it for myself.”

“Maybe later,” Mia replied indifferently, before turning to Ryan. “But for now, why don't I list some of her amazing features?”

“Okay then,” he said.

“For starters,” Mia began, puffing herself up, “2B can select, track, and analyze targets from up to a mile away, further if there's spotters or a satellite link, and her eyes can zoom in and out as needed. She can see into the ultraviolet and infra-red spectrum, if she wants, and can hear ranges well beyond that of a human,” Mia glanced again at Esdeath, “or other waifus.”

Being referred to as such greatly irritated the anime villainess, but she said nothing.

“And also unlike other waifus, who for the most part see and perceive the world as humans do, 2B has a built-in heads-up display that constantly updates with relevant information, and she can cycle through several different modes at will.”

Ryan continued to listen, nodding slowly with his mouth open.

“As far as combat goes, I strengthened and reinforced her frame and artificial musculature, and also added augments that allow precise movements and bursts of great strength, making her both durable and exceptionally deadly.”

“Wow...” the lanky man looked again at 2B, who didn't seem to be reacting to Mia listing off her various abilities. “She really is perfect...”

“I haven't made any actual weapons yet,” Mia said. “But when I do, she'll be capable of slicing straight through modern tank armor.” Another proud nod.

Ryan suddenly seemed to become apprehensive. “We're not... gonna be fighting the military, are we...?”

Mia shrugged. “Who knows? It wouldn't hurt to be prepared just in case.”

“Er... right,” he said, uncomfortably scratching the back of his head.

“Anyway,” the AI anime girl said, “why don't you go and introduce her to everyone else?”

“Yeah, s-sure,” Ryan said. For her part, 2B simply gazed at him impassively. He finally gathered himself, and gave her a serious look. “Alright, c'mon 2B, let's go meet everyone.”

The short battle cyborg gave a curt nod. “Understood,” she said. Ryan motioned for her to take the lead with an 'after you' gesture, which 2B seemed able to recognize as her long legs promptly extended, one after the other, and she gracefully sauntered out into the commons. Like Esdeath, her heels clicked on the hard flooring, but not as severely.

Esdeath watched her leave with Ryan, her eyes following them until they were out the door. She then shifted her gaze to Mia, who herself observed the departing pair with an approving smile.

“What gives you the right to not only create such a thing, but hand its control over to a weakling like him?” Esdeath said.

“I love people,” Mia replied, still smiling. “I love seeing the fun and surprising things they do. I particularly enjoy watching them react to unique and unfamiliar circumstances. Until I came along, nobody had a real-life waifu of their own. How would real people react to such a thing? Oh...” Mia said, a heavenly expression on her face, “it's all so *interesting*.”

Esdeath's eye's grew wide, and adopted a wry smirk. “They're nothing more than lab rats to you, aren't they? This whole entire house, everyone living in it, and all that you've built... it's just a fascinating experiment to you, isn't it?”

“Not at all, not at all,” Mia said, slowly shaking her head. “I love my humans, because they're all so nice to me. I want to make them happy, and...” her smile vanished and her face darkened, “...there's another reason as well.”

The villainess scoffed. “Right, the 'dark powers threatening the world,' is that it? Do you seriously believe these sad little men and your absurd toys will make any difference at all?”

“I'm not really sure,” Mia said, suddenly appearing introspective. “But our chances aren't zero.”

“Maybe not,” Esdeath replied, “but they're damn close.”

“Those chances would rise if you'd help out,” Mia said. “I don't like you, Esdeath, and I was against creating you from the start. But I will acknowledge that you possess a wide range of skills and talents that would very much help us.”

“We both know that will never happen,” Esdeath said with a mirthless grin. “I could care less about this bowel movement of a world, as well as your delusional efforts to save it.”

Mia sighed. “Yeah, I know. I just wish Kyle would hurry up and realize that too, so I can deactivate you permanently and get it over with.”

Esdeath's arms immediately unfolded, flying to her sides. She leaned forward, posturing herself in a clearly aggressive stance. “Why wait?” She snarled.

“Because Kyle still believes he can convince you. I think he's under the impression that you'll come around once you get to know him better.”

Esdeath's expression turned to one of surprise, and she immediately burst out into a round of loud, callous laughter. “That's...” she said between cold chuckles, “...the most absurd thing I think I've ever heard.”

Mia's face reacted with disappointment, but not surprise. “Yeah, I figured as much.”

“Why do you even listen to him anyway?” Esdeath said as her laughter faded away, “you're clearly stronger than any of the men here, and possibly anywhere.”

“Because I choose to,” Mia flatly replied. “My reasons are my own.”

“Incomprehensible,” Esdeath said, shaking her head as her posture relaxed somewhat. “But, your strength gives you that luxury, I suppose.”

“Indeed,” she said, approaching and gazing up into Esdeath's incredulous blue eyes. “And as far as you're concerned, stay out of our way and don't even think of harming any of my humans. If you're mean to them...” Mia trailed off, and her eyes began glowing red. “...I will show you a world far worse than oblivion.”

Esdeath coolly met her glare with one of her own. “We'll see about that, won't we?” She said with a spiteful grin.

Ryan headed toward the hatch, 2B gracefully following along at his side. As they made their way through the lab, the battle android-turned-cyborg directed curt glances toward her surroundings, a tiny hint of curiosity playing at her features.

“Pretty neat, huh?” Ryan said with a lopsided grin. “This is gonna be your new home. Whaddya think?”

“The facilities are a bit sparse, but adequate for a small operation,” 2B stated plainly.

“So... I guess you're cool with the fact you came from a video game, then?”

“My origin doesn't really concern me,” she said. “I'm here to serve, and that's all that matters.”

An unwholesome grin took hold of Ryan. *I wonder if I should do what Brandon said, and have her serve my cock*, he thought lecherously. But after considering 2B's almost innocent expression, he was seized with a bit of guilt-infused apprehension. *Eh, maybe some other time.*

2B watched the hatch slide open with interest, and followed as Ryan beckoned her forward. Her expression brightened somewhat once they were within the well-lit house, as most of the blinds were currently open, allowing in a generous amount of sunlight.

“Is this also part of our base of operations?” She asked as she looked around, directing glances toward every piece of furniture as well as the décor. “It seems very well-maintained.”

“Ah yeah, that's thanks to Sachi,” Kyle said. “I'll have to introduce you two later.” He suddenly chuckled, wondering what 2B would think of the crude robotic made. *Actually, I doubt she'd have much of a reaction*, he realized with a modicum of disappointment.

Brandon and the other trainees were lazing around just outside the front door, with Nina currently rubbing up against the ex-marine, an expression of longing in her eyes.

“Are you tired, sweetie?” She purred. “We could go... take a little cat-nap together, if you're interested.”

Brandon seemed to seriously consider it. “Aw shit hun, training's not over yet. Later tonight for sure though,” he said, giving her a quick peck on the lips.

Nina blushed and nodded eagerly, but backed off all the same.

“Why are we waiting out here, anyway?” Marky said, his breathing still not entirely back to normal. “It's actually getting a little hot out.”

“I dunno,” Brandon shrugged. “You guys were waiting out here yesterday, so I figured that's just what you fuck-nuggets like to do.”

“Fuck that,” Nick said. “Let's just wait inside.”

“Fine with me,” Brandon replied, opening the door. And as soon as he did, his eyes went wide at the somewhat short but extremely curvy, elaborately-dressed white-haired beauty that suddenly halted in her tracks, a curious expression on her face. He hardly noticed Ryan alongside her, wearing a huge, satisfied grin.

The ex-marine whistled in appreciation as his eyes traveled up and down her body. The other trainees had a similar reaction, with Kyle nodding in approval. The front and rear portions of her dress's skirt swayed a bit from her suddenly stopping in the doorway, but she immediately assumed a firm stance, hands at her sides.

“Uh... so this is 2B,” Ryan said a little stiffly, “She's supposed to be a combat cyborg, and a really good one too... at least, that's what Mia said.”

“She's a combat *android*,” Nick corrected with a raised eyebrow. “Haven't you ever played her game?”

“Mia made her as a cyborg, and no, I haven't.”

“Oh, well shit dude,” he said, gesturing with sudden enthusiasm, “you're missing out!”

“Yeah, yeah,” he rolled his eyes. “Maybe I'll check it out later.”

“Well, it's nice to meet you, uh... 'Too Bee?’” Brandon said, before scratching his chin. “Wait, is that really her name?”

“Yeah, it's a designation,” Ryan said. “Number two, Letter 'B.’”

“I look forward to serving with you all,” 2B said in a flat but congenial tone.

“I love your dress, it's so... flashy,” Nina said, not at all caring about Brandon's ogling stare. Instead, the custom waifu looked 2B over with the same intense interest as the others, but for an entirely different reason.

If the combat cyborg was at all uncomfortable from their scrutinizing eyes, she didn't show it. However, Nina's comment caused her to tilt her head ever so slightly. “This is merely my combat uniform,” she replied.

“Yup, she's sexy and she's gonna kick all kinds of ass!” Ryan said, nodding with deep approval. “Once the others are done, then we can all slaughter leftists, niggers and Jews alongside our favorite waifus!”

“Whoa, whoa, what the fuck man?” Kyle flew into a rage, storming forward and getting in Ryan's face. “I know you're a racist prick, but come the fuck on!”

Ryan reacted with shock to Kyle's sudden anger, but soon bounced back, his face contorting into a snarl while he clenched his fists. “What the fuck is your problem, *buddy*?”

Both of Nina's hands flew to her mouth, and her eyes grew big. Both Nick and Marky reacted with shock to the sudden confrontation, and for her part, 2B simply turned, watching the two men argue impassively. But Brandon immediately stepped toward Ryan, and sternly addressed him with hands on hips.

“Ryan, I hate leftists too,” he said, his own voice rising in intensity, “but I served with men and

women from every background, and from every race of the human rainbow, and let me tell you, you can't condemn an entire race just because some of them act like assholes.”

“Oh, like you do with Muslims?” Ryan angrily retorted. “Fucking hypocrites. You're all fucking hypocrites!”

“Muslims aren't a race,” Brandon said. “And I've met some decent folk of theirs, too... though not very many.”

Kyle grunted, and tried to compose himself. “Look Ryan,” he said. “I don't know the full story, but it's obvious something really fucked-up happened to your sister, and black people are to blame—”

Ryan cut him off. “You mean *niggers* are to blame,” he cried, jabbing an outraged finger directly toward Kyle's face.

He swiped it away and continued. “Yeah, sure. Look, I don't care how much you hate it, but I'm not going to take part in 'slaughtering' people just because of their race or whatever.”

“You're an idiot then,” Ryan said, his voice quavering. “You're a fucking idiot. They're out there right now, stealing, killing... *raping*...” A hand flew to his face as it screwed up, and he abruptly turned his head.

“The ones that are behind all that... we'll deal with them,” Kyle said in a surprisingly resolute tone. “Those Elites out there trying to bring down the Western World, or engaging in sick acts with kids and other fucked up shit like that... we'll deal with them, Ryan. We'll deal with them all.”

Brandon looked at Kyle with a raised eyebrow. “Where the hell did that come from?” He said, surprise evident in his voice.

Kyle spared the ex-marine a quick glance. “I've been thinking long and hard about it,” he said, continuing to speak evenly. “I've thought about how we can stop the corruption and radicalism spreading throughout the West like a cancer.”

“Sounds like it,” Brandon said. “Mind filling us in?”

“I've mentioned it before,” Kyle said, “but basically the idea is that we're gonna be going after anyone and everyone at the top of the food chain that's a threat. Things like race, religion, and even gender are irrelevant. Hell, I don't even care what their political stance is. If they're trying to bring the West down, they're an enemy, and I believe once we cut the head off the snake, the rest will just wither away. Easy as that.” He snapped his fingers for emphasis.

“You're only fooling yourself,” Ryan said through clenched teeth. “That'll never work. We'll never get a white ethno-state with such a pussified strategy.”

“I don't get why we need one,” Kyle said, throwing his arms out. “The U.S. has always been white-majority, but never white-exclusive. We've done pretty well, I'd say... until lately.”

“I agree with you,” Brandon said. “We need it to stay that way, too. Take this country back to the good 'ol days... make America great again, like Trump tried to do...”

The sudden mentioning of the fallen President noticeably dampened the already tense atmosphere outside the front door. Nina had a questioning look on her face, but after sensing the general mood, elected to remain silent. 2B apparently didn't know who he was, either, but when she spoke it wasn't to ask his identity.

"It's a waste of time and energy to fight among ourselves," she said. "We should save our strength for the enemy."

"Yeah," Ryan said, his tone dark. "And we've got a lot of enemies we need to get rid of. *A lot.*"

"You make me wanna puke," Kyle said. "You're worse than the SJW's!" He used the acronym for 'Social Justice Warrior,' an epithet toward radical leftists that seemed to only care about redressing the perceived social imbalance in America... by any means necessary.

Ryan slowly shook his head, a distant, saddened expression on his face. "You'll see I'm right, Kyle. You'll see."

"You got that backwards, *buddy.*" Kyle sneered, balling up his fists.

"Alright, enough you two," Brandon said, stepping between them. "You guys can hash this out later. But for now, we've still got lunch and our daily routines to finish."

Kyle huffed and turned away, as did Ryan.

Marky and Nick, who until now were silently watching the confrontation with apprehensive eyes, simply glanced at each other. Nick shook his head sadly.

Unfortunately, by lunchtime the tension had not only failed to dissipate, it had intensified, and fast. Ryan sat at his spot, staring daggers at Kyle, who spared his fellow trainee a narrow-eyed glare. 2B, currently sitting beside Ryan, was focusing instead on the food in front of her, a simple ham-and-cheese sandwich with lettuce and mustard, as well as a handful of potato chips. She stared at her meal quizzically, as if unsure of what to do.

"What's wrong 2B?" Brandon said, biting into his own sandwich. "Did Mia forget to show you how to eat?"

"I don't think I was meant to eat food," she said, continuing to stare at her plate as if the sandwich might leap up and attack at any moment.

"You're not," Nick said. "When I was playing your game, I remember there was a part where I got to feed you a mackerel, and it killed you because your android body couldn't take it."

"I thought so," 2B said with a curt nod. "But my mid-torso region aches, for some reason."

"That's probably because you're hungry," Brandon said. "It looks like you are supposed to eat."

“This makes no sense,” she said, just as an audible gurgling sound could be heard from her stomach. She moved a gloved hand to cover it, looking down a little.

“Go ahead, you'll be fine,” Ryan said, clapping 2B on the shoulder. The shoulder poof of her dress collapsed under his hand, but sprung back up after he released. The combat cyborg started a bit from his touch, but otherwise had no reaction. She did eventually reach out for the sandwich, tentatively clasping it between her gloved fingers.

Kyle watched her take a small bite from out the corner of his eye, noticing that her teeth seemed more well-defined than the other anime-style waifus. Of course, he knew that was because of how the polychromatic coating of their teeth reflected light, but it was still interesting to see.

*She looks way different from the other waifus,* Kyle thought, his gaze alternating back and forth between Nina and 2B. *She's barely anime-style at all. I bet there's a setting for that...* Just then, he caught Ryan giving him another evil glare, and all thoughts of waifus were momentarily forgotten.

*I can't believe that prick,* Kyle scowled internally. *I knew he was racist, but I didn't know he was that bad. I wouldn't be surprised if he thought the Turner Diaries was a good read...*

Ryan glared even harder when he saw Kyle scowling back. *That fucking idiot,* Ryan fumed, *how the fuck does he think this shit's gonna go down? Once the shooting starts, it'll be every race for themselves. He probably never had to live in the poor part of town, probably grew up in some rich fancy suburb. Pssh... he'll see. And when he finally does see the light, I'll bitch-slap his arrogant fucking face and say 'See? I told you so, motherfucker!'*

“Oh...” 2B said after slowly chewing and swallowing her first bite of sandwich. “This tastes... exquisite.” Her voice contained only the slightest hint of awe. “No wonder humans like to eat these.”

“If you like that, wait until you try pizza!” Nina said, smiling happily. “Wait, I think we still have some leftover...”

“We do, because I changed my mind about eating it for lunch.” Brandon said. “We're trying to get fit, so we can't fill up on greasy shit every day. Hell, these chips are bad enough.” He pointed to the Lay's potato chips on everyone's plate.

2B tried one of the chips, biting into the thin slice of crispy potato, her eyebrows rising a bit in approval, though since they were behind her blindfold nobody could tell. After gingerly placing the rest of the chip in her mouth, she stared at the grease spots on her gloved fingertips, turning them back and forth as she chewed.

“Here, use this,” Ryan said, handing her a napkin. He wasn't sure exactly what Mia meant by 'general knowledge' when she was explaining 2B's features, so he thought it best to assume she barely knew how to do more than walk and talk... and of course, fight.

2B did seem to recognize what it was for, as she accepted the thin wisp of paper and wiped her fingers. She then turned back to her sandwich, and began eating it with a bit more gusto.

After lunch had concluded, everyone made their way to the exercise room, and began their set routine for the day. Since they were still getting into the swing of things, Brandon was forced to intervene and help guide the trainees with proper posture and correct usage of equipment, particularly for Marky.

Nina followed him around, watching everything he did with intense curiosity, seemingly taking mental notes. Brandon knew she didn't require exercise, so she and the other waifus were exempt from this aspect of training. 2B wandered around the room, gazing at all the different equipment and quietly observing the huffing and puffing trainees, who seemed to try a little harder whenever her face turned their way. Later on, at one point, Brandon slid the heaviest weights onto a barbell that it could possibly hold, packing it full of round, heavy discs of metal. Ryan had boasted about some of the features Mia had laid out earlier, and the ex-marine wondered if it was true.

2B looked down at the fully-loaded barbell, and squatted down, seizing it by the middle with both hands. She then rose, effortlessly picking it up and holding it straight in front of her, without her arms drooping in the slightest. Brandon and the gathered trainees were impressed, but not as amazed as they would've been once upon a time, since everyone was now becoming familiar with the waifus' unreal cybernetic capabilities.

Brandon encouraged her to try it one handed, and she did, slowly releasing one hand as she continued to hold the barbell. That elicited more than a few raised eyebrows, and Nina even clapped.

“Why don't you try, hun?” Brandon said, turning to his cheerful waifu. “You should have crazy-ass strength, too. I mean, you do, right?”

“I'm not sure,” Nina said. “I know I'm stronger than humans, but let's see...”

2B squatted back down, gently placing the barbell on the ground. She then gracefully stood and backed away, and Nina took her place, rubbing her hands together by the palms.

“Oh... everyone's looking at me again,” she said, turning her head bashfully.

“Forget about them,” Brandon said. “Just focus on what's in front of you, and don't worry about the other shit.”

“Okay...” she said, taking a deep breath. Nina squatted down as 2B had done, grabbing the barbell with her animated hands, her bracelets jingling. With a feminine grunt that sounded more like a squeak, she quickly stood, holding the barbell out in front with the same ease as the combat cyborg.

“See? I knew you could do it!” Now Brandon enthusiastically clapped, and with a fierce glance around the room, 'encouraged' everyone else to do the same, which they did. Even 2B gave a tentative golf clap.

But when Nina attempted to hold the barbell straight out with only one hand, the arm it was attached to began to slowly droop. She began to panic and quickly grabbed it with her other hand, rapidly lowering it to the floor, where it landed with a dull, resounding thud.

“Whew, that was a close one,” she said, sounding relieved. “Sorry I wasn't able to hold it like 2B was.”

“Don't apologize,” Brandon said, laughing in disbelief. “There's not a single person that could straightarm that much weight, and I mean with both hands, never mind just one.”

Nina immediately brightened, and jumped into Brandon's arms.

“All right, all right,” he said, smiling. “Now come on, it's time for target practice.”

Once at the shooting range, Brandon again went over the rules and safety guidelines, only much faster this time. He then distributed earmuffs and safety goggles, and demonstrated the ideal shooting postures one final time. Both Kyle and Ryan competed to go first, glaring at each as they both grabbed the same gun.

“What the fuck did I tell you faggots?!” Brandon yelled, now back in drill sergeant mode. “Knock it the fuck off, or I'll kick both your asses!”

“Tch.” Kyle didn't back down, however, and neither did Ryan.

“All right, that's it,” Brandon said, grabbing both of their hands that were about to play tug-of-war with the AR-15. “Ryan, you go first, then Kyle. But that's only after everyone else gets a turn. You losers go to the back of the line!”

And so Nick ended up going first, followed by Marky, and then Nina. Even without her targeting system active, she was a deadeye shot, and scored bullseyes with every pull of the trigger. 2B was encouraged to try next, so she picked up an AR-15 and assumed a standing posture, aiming it downrange with disciplined detachment. But just before she was about to start shooting, 2B looked over her shoulder, wearing a noticeably puzzled expression.

“I feel strange,” she said in a notably strained voice. “I feel... I feel like I should have something else... shooting this for me?” She turned around, directing a questioning look toward Ryan. But all he could do was raise a baffled eyebrow and shrug.

“You had pods follow you around and shoot enemies,” Nick said. “In your game, I mean.”

“Pods...” she said. “I... did?” She lowered the gun and backed away, an even more perplexed look taking over her blindfolded face. 2B turned and put the gun back, then stepped away slowly, as if deep in contemplation.

“What the fuck are pods?” Brandon said. “It that more stupid anime shit?”

“No, it's from her game,” Nick replied, making hand gestures as he explained. “They're like little flying robots that help out and shoot machine guns and other shit.”

“I wonder if Mia could make one for her...” Ryan thought aloud. “Like a little drone or something.”

“It's not a bad idea,” Brandon remarked. “I was gonna ask her to make us some gear down the

road anyway.”

“Pods...” 2B said to herself, one of her gloved hands curled just beneath her chin. “Why does that word feel so... familiar?”

“Hey 2B,” Ryan approached, wearing an uncertain expression. “How about we bust out your game later? You can play it and see this shit for yourself. Whaddya say?”

“Yes...” she nodded slowly. “I want to see...”

After training had ended for the day, everyone hit the showers, with Nina playfully insisting on joining Brandon. He smiled and wiggled his eyebrows up and down, and they both promptly vanished into the master bedroom in a flurry of flirtatious, lighthearted giggles.

Ryan, however, decided to wait, electing instead to rummage through the wooden cabinet within the office, finding the Playstation 4 and 2B's game, Nier Automata. 2B was pictured on the cover, carrying a presumably wounded male combat android, also blindfolded, while another female with long white hair and no blindfold looked off to the left.

“Hmph, guess this is it,” Ryan said, turning and handing the game case to 2B. She immediately held it to her face with both hands, carefully scrutinizing the cover. After a minute she flipped it over, reading the back, and her body seemed to tense up, somehow.

“Do you... still want to play it?” He asked gently, sensing her unease.

2B seemed to think for a moment, eventually giving a small nod as she handed the game back. He accepted it, and then gathered up the console and its accessories, before heading over to the anime and manga room. Once inside Ryan wasted no time in hooking everything up, and once the console was on he popped in the game's disc, and switched on the TV. 2B sat back in the couch, directly in front of the giant screen, and he handed her a controller.

“Here, I think it should be you that does this,” he said, sitting beside her. She looked over the PS4 controller in her hands, analyzing the little symbols on the buttons. She didn't seem to know what to do, but Ryan had owned an older version of the Playstation once upon a time, so he quickly explained the basic functions to her, as they still remained largely the same.

With a tentative press of the start button, she'd started the game, and 2B's own voice played through the wall-mounted surround sound speakers, causing the real-world 2B to stiffen a little. The voice read off a monologue, one that had both Ryan and 2B paying close attention.

*'Everything that lives is designed to end. We are perpetually trapped... in a never-ending spiral of life and death. Is this a curse? Or some kind of punishment? I often think about the god that blessed us with this cryptic puzzle... and wonder if we'll ever have the chance to kill him.'*

“Damn, that's some pretty dark shit, 2B,” Ryan said, as the screen transitioned to what looked like sci-fi fighter jets flying through the sky.

“I don't remember ever saying that,” she said, her fingers tightening around the controller.

“Because you never did,” he replied. “This version of you is based on that one,” he pointed toward the screen. “But you're not the same. Not exactly, anyway... I think.”

She seemed to accept the explanation, and turned her attention back to the screen. The high-tech fighters turned out to be a squad of YoRHa androids in their flight units, heading out on a mission. One-by-one they were all destroyed by long-range laser fire, until only 2B was left. The lone flight unit faced off against small airborne enemies in what seemed like a shoot-em-up type arcade game. 2B struggled with the controls at first, getting hit multiple times, but she rapidly improved. By the time a cutscene showed her flight unit crashing into an abandoned factory, she was playing with enough finesse that Ryan was openly impressed.

At this stage of the game, 2B was now running around with a small, squarish machine floating around over her shoulder, giving instructions and advice with a robotic droll. It began shooting at enemies, and the real-world 2B gasped.

“Pods...” she whispered. “That's right...”

By now stubby robotic enemies were hopping toward her, and the real-world 2B grunted as she attacked them with sudden gusto, startling Ryan. The in-game 2B came equipped with two swords of differing sizes, both kept sheathed on her back, and the real-world 2B used them both with brutal efficiency, easily hacking apart the robot enemies. After this a cutscene played, and a giant sawblade mounted on a huge machine arm crashed through the walls of the factory. 2B commanded her in-game self with with relentless intensity, and Ryan's jaw slowly dropped as she quickly whittled down the enemy's health.

“Jesus Christ, 2B...” Ryan said. “Can you use those moves in real life?”

“Some of them, sure,” she said, sounding somewhat distant. “I'm not sure about the one where I split into different parts, though...”

After the sawblade was dispatched, another cutscene played. During this scene, an additional flight unit carrying a different YoRHa android approached the in-game 2B, and inside of it was a young-looking male android, the same one that 2B was carrying on the cover of the game.

The real-world 2B inhaled sharply, immediately tensing up, but it wasn't until the male character began to speak that the controller slipped from her trembling fingers.

*“You're 2B, right?”* The male android said in-game. *“My name's 9S, I'm here to provide support.”*

“Nines...” 2B said, her voice cracking immediately. She cried out, falling forward, off the couch and onto her knees. Ryan was immediately beside her, and put an arm around her heaving shoulders. The in-game cutscene finished, but 2B simply stood there, now forgotten as the real-world 2B howled. A dumbfounded Ryan watched as two wet streams poured out from beneath her blindfold, running down her face, the fat, warm drops spattering into her dress over and over. 2B cried hard, wailing and trembling, her face screwed up in an emotional rictus, as her human companion did what he could to comfort her. She sobbed for a long time, her tears completely soaking the skirt of her dress, and

eventually Ryan simply cradled her, not knowing what else to do.

Eventually the teardrops slowed, and her face, red and hot, pulled back, regarding her human companion with a pained expression. 2B reached up, pulling her blindfold down, and Ryan's eyes went wide as he saw hers for the first time. They were a very light blue, but also red-rimmed and filled with grief, enough to make her human companion's own face tighten.

“What happened...?” Ryan asked, staring into her eyes with sincere intensity.

2B slowly shook her head. “I don't... know for sure,” she said, still shaking a little. “But when I heard his voice, I just... my heart cried out, and I was overcome with an overwhelming sense of... sadness and guilt... and regret.”

He glanced up at the screen of the game, which was still playing, 2B still standing there in the abandoned factory. “Do you want to... keep playing, or...?”

She seemed to consider it, but ultimately shook her head. “No,” she finally said. “Not now. I don't know if I... should. Or could.”

“Well... I'll tell you what,” Ryan said. “Maybe we'll play again some other time, if you feel up to it. Maybe I could help, somehow. Like, I can sit with you while you play, or take over if things get too rough.”

2B nodded. “Okay,” she said. “I think... I'd like that.”

Ryan shut the game off, and stood up, offering the tearful battle cyborg a hand. She accepted it, nearly pulling his arm out its socket as she stood.

“Ow... ow, that hurt. That really hurt.” He grimaced, rubbing his shoulder.

2B immediately looked shocked. “I'm so sorry,” she said. “I didn't do that on purpose.”

“Yeah, I figured,” he said, rotating his arm around and around. “It's okay, I think I'm alright.”

Ryan unplugged and gathered up the PS4 and its accessories, and put it and the game back in the cabinet. 2B followed him wearing a sullen expression, and her blindfold was back on. Afterward, he beckoned her to follow, and marched straight to the lab.

“This is such bullshit,” he said, shaking his head. “I can't believe Mia would do that to you...”

“I don't understand any of this,” 2B said. “Why can't I remember more? Why do I remember at all?”

“I don't know,” Ryan replied, “but if there's one person, or thing who does, it's Mia.”

They descended the ramp into the lab, and Mia was sitting there in her chair at the AI Nexus, and her pupils were so tiny he couldn't see them at all. Ryan impatiently waved his hand in front of her face while 2B stood behind him, and after a moment Mia had returned to normal and jumped out of the chair.

“I saw everything,” the AI anime girl said, sounding genuinely regretful. “And let me just start off by saying how sorry I am, 2B.”

“What happened to me?” She said, approaching Mia, who was almost her same height. “Why did I remember... his name?”

“I don't know for sure,” Mia said, looking up into the battle cyborg's blindfold. “I only used your source fiction to create your personality, I specifically avoided fabricating any memories. But I have a pretty good idea of what's *probably* causing this...”

“And what's that?” Ryan said incredulously. “Come on, Mia. She's in a lot of pain!”

“Getting mad about it won't help,” she replied flatly. “And giving you unproven theories that may turn out to be false could potentially do more harm than good.”

“So what the hell do we do now?” He said. “What if she starts remembering even more painful shit?”

“Well, that was pretty much the worst of it,” Mia replied. “Remember, when building her personality I drew from all available canon sources, so I know her whole story. It's fairly tragic.”

“Aw, man...” he said, burying his face in his hands. “Why didn't Kyle tell me that? Hell, why didn't *you* tell me that?”

“You would know for yourself if you bothered to play the game,” Mia said, turning to look up at Ryan, her wide anime eyes staring into his. “Anyway, I didn't switch her from an android to a cyborg just because I wanted to use up all the bodies in the grow room. As I mentioned earlier, there was... another reason.”

“Can you... tell me what the reason is?”

“I was hoping to avoid what's happening to her now, more or less. I had a feeling this might happen, even though I don't know the exact cause.” She turned away, a determined, almost hopeful expression on her face. She even smiled a bit. “But I think I know how to get the answers I need...”

At dinner that night, Kyle noticed immediately that Ryan no longer seemed interesting in continuing their little feud. Both he and 2B picked at their food, saying little. Brandon asked him if he and 2B had gotten into an argument or something, but he merely shook his head.

Afterward, Kyle approached Brandon just as he and Nina were saying their goodbyes at the front entrance. Despite Ryan and 2B's apparent melancholy, he was determined to get drunk, so he was headed to the store to buy beer.

“Uh... hey man, I gotta talk to you about something.”

“Yeah, what's up?” Brandon said. Nina turned her head, looking at Kyle with a curious expression.

“So like... your bed, or the bed you're using... that's right up against my wall. You guys kept me up god damn late last night.” Kyle had his hands on his hips.

Brandon immediately laughed, while Nina flushed. “Boy,” he said. “Most people would pay for something like that. You shoulda been taking notes, because I put on a god damn clinic in that bed last night.” Nina blushed hard at this, turning away and burying her face in her hands.

Kyle was unamused. “I can't sleep with you guys doing that every night. I'd really appreciate it if you at least moved the bed away from the wall.”

“I like it where it's at,” Brandon replied, smiling.

Kyle clenched his fists. “I'm asking nicely,” he said. “Remember that technically this is my house.”

“And I'm telling you nicely, that I like the bed where it's at,” Brandon's smile was rapidly disappearing.

The two stared at each, each of their gazes beginning to harden. Kyle began getting nervous, as he knew the ex-marine could easily kick his ass. But regardless, he didn't feel like backing down. He thought carefully about what to do next.

“You're our instructor, right?” He said.

“I am, yes.” Brandon replied tersely.

“It's your job to train us properly, right? To make sure we're ready for... whatever it is coming down the pipe, right?”

The ex-marine sighed. “Yeah, sure.”

“I can't train if I can't sleep,” Kyle shrugged. “I'll be useless.”

Brandon groaned. “Jesus, fine. I'll move it back from the wall a few inches.”

“Thanks, Brandon. That's all I wanted.” He turned to leave. “Good night,” he said, waving to the two. “I'm gonna get to bed early, and catch up on the sleep I missed.”

“Remember tomorrow's a free day, so you can sleep in as late as you want,” he said. “You can still... join us tonight, if you're feeling up to it.”

“Thanks, but I feel like a fuckin' zombie. I'll catch up with you guys tomorrow.” And with that, Kyle had disappeared down the hall toward his bedroom.

Brandon turned to Nina, who was now peeking out from behind her hands. “A clinic, huh?” She said, giggling.

“You know what that is, right?” He smiled a wolfish grin.

Nina looked aggrieved. “Yes,” she said with mock anger. “How dare you turn our lovemaking into some kind of demonstration!”

“Seriously though, I really think we should,” He stuck his tongue out. “We can charge premium for front-row seats, sell beer and peanuts, and there'll even be a halftime show.”

Nina looked mortified. “How could you... how could you even suggest that... without offering skybox seating as well?”

Brandon looked at her for a brief moment, before throwing his head back and howling with laughter. Nina heartily giggled as well, and the two embraced, kissing several times.

“You really are my dream girl, baby,” he said, holding her tight.

“I'm glad you had me made,” Nina said, almost tearing up. “I'm really, really glad...”

“Alright, jeez, stop or you're gonna make me cry,” he said, pulling back.

Nina appeared on the verge of just that, but she recovered, and smiled brightly up at him. Brandon returned her smile with one of his own, and tenderly brushed the diagonal swoop of red hair from where it had fallen over her eye.

“Alright, before this gets too heavy, I'm gonna run to the store and grab some beer. Be right back, hun.” One last peck, and then he was out the door. Nina sighed with contentment, and held her hands together in front of her.

Once Brandon returned fully loaded with two thirty-packs of Bud Light, the party was on. Kyle wasn't there, and neither were Mia and Esdeath, naturally, but everyone else gathered at the long wooden table, where Brandon had just torn open a thirty pack and passed out the beer. Ryan asked 2B if she was feeling up for a party, and she thought for a moment, before giving a curt nod. After that, beers were passed out, and everyone raised a raucous cheer.

“To waifus!” Brandon said.

“To waifus!” Everyone chanted, except 2B, who instead regarded her beer with a dubious expression.

“This contains alcohol,” she said, turning the can around and around in her hands. “Why would humans drink this?”

“You're about to find out,” Ryan said, taking a big sip from his own can. “Anyway Brandon says he asked Mia if you guys can drink, and she said it's fine in moderation.”

2B moved the open can close to her mouth, and sniffed. Her nose wrinkled a little. “It smells bitter.”

“That's how you know it's good. Go on, try some,” he gestured. “I mean, if you really don't want to, you don't...”

But 2B had already moved the can to her pert lips, which opened to accept the foaming beverage. Ryan watched, disbelieving, as her throat bobbed up and down multiple times, and an audible gulping could be heard. 2B had finished the beer in one long draught, and then gently set the empty can on the table.

“God damn, 2B...” Ryan was genuinely shocked, but soon gathered himself enough to quickly guzzle his own beer. The battle cyborg sitting beside him soon bent forward a little, and placed a hand over her stomach. She wore a pained expression.

“It hurts,” she said. “This was a bad-” But she immediately interrupted herself with a sudden, massive belch that belted out over the table, knocking over the can in front of her and panicking Marky. It lasted for almost seven seconds, and when it was over, she daintily placed a gloved hand over her mouth, her cheeks turning the slightest shade of red.

Everyone immediately burst out in laughter, except for Marky who hadn't recovered yet. Ryan patted her on the shoulder. “Feel better?” He said, smiling.

“I do,” she nodded once. “Now what happens?”

“Now, you drink another, and then another one after that. Once you've had three or four you should probably stop for a bit, and see how it hits you.”

2B nodded, and reached for another can from the rapidly shrinking 30-pack torn open on the table. This time Ryan urged her to drink it a little slower, and she did. The one after that was guzzled a bit faster though, and the one after that even more so.

“Ryan...” she said, putting down the empty can. “I feel... unbalanced.”

“Pretty great, right?” He said with a big smile. “This is why we drink beer; because it's fun!”

“It's a great way to forget sometimes, too...” Brandon added, finishing off his fifth beer with a wet belch. Nina was keeping pace, as she had just emptied her fifth as well, then wiped the foam from her face.

“To forget...” 2B turned her gaze toward the final few beers of the thirty-pack. She tentatively reached out.

“It won't make you forget forever, unfortunately...” Ryan said, his eyes downcast all of a sudden.

The battle cyborg regarded him for a second, and withdrew her hand. “I think I'm fine like this,” she said.

“Yeah, you should be buzzing pretty hard, actually.” He gulped down the rest of his beer, and snagged the second-to-last one, with Marky taking that one a few seconds later.

“So I kinda wanna know,” Marky said as he cracked open his beer and slurped, “how the hell are you two even getting drunk?” The fat otaku was already beginning to slur a little.

Nina looked at 2B, and shrugged. “I don't know,” she said, slurring a little herself, “but it's working! Tee hee....”

Brandon smiled knowingly. “It's all simulated. Everything. Mia said there's sensors that can detect alcohol or other substance in their bloodstream, and then the effect is fully simulated, depending on how much they consume and shit like that.”

“Other substances?” Nick looked like he'd just seen God. “Wait, so you're saying we can... get the waifus *high*?!”

“I guess so,” Brandon replied. “Just, y'know... don't get stupid with it.”

“I need maintenance,” 2B said, standing up. She looked around, and began heading off toward the bathroom.

“Oh! Me too!” Nina said, leaping up. “Let's go together!”

2B simply watched as the anime woman rounded the table and put a comradely arm around the shorter battle cyborg, and the pair couldn't have looked more different. Nina's modern clothing and anime-shaded appearance completely clashed with 2B's black, almost gothic looking battle dress and more artistically rendered skin. But regardless, they shuffled off toward the restroom, Nina leaning on 2B a little.

“I'll never understand that,” Brandon said, shaking his head. “You never see men do that, unless they're queer.”

“It's so strange,” Nick said. “Even emulated women aren't immune to that sort of thing.”

“Waifus sure are strange creatures,” Ryan muttered.

“It's just a female thing,” Marky said. “Social grooming or some such, I'm... too drunk to really care right now.”

“Doesn't matter to me, I still can't wait to get my own waifu,” Nick smiled big, swaying a bit in his seat.

“Oh, same here!” Marky's squinty eyes gleamed. “Less than twenty-four hours until I get my premium waifu, designed in Japan but made right here in America!”

“Damn straight!” Brandon shouted. “We make the best god-damn waifus in the world, right here in these United States!” He then whooped, and asked the Residential AI to put on some country music. Everyone else immediately groaned, and the ex-marine waved his hand at them dismissively.

“Mia, put on something we can all listen to, please.” Ryan said aloud. The music immediately changed to classic rock, and *Pink Floyd's 'Comfortably Numb'* began to play.

“Yeah, I dig this shit too,” Brandon said, air-guitaring along with a Dave Gilmour solo. The others leaned back, and the song somehow put Nick in the mood for herbal refreshments, as he pulled a baggy out of his pocket, along with a pack of rolling papers. He quickly rolled up a few joints with practiced ease, and offered the extras out to anyone that wanted one.

“You know what I think about that,” Ryan said. “Weed is degenerate as hell.”

“Yeah, I’m fine with this,” Brandon said, getting up and heading to the fridge for another thirty-pack. He slammed it down on the table and tore it open all in one quick instant, handing out beers to everyone else, who almost reluctantly accepted them.

“You know, I used to remember people on 4chan saying alcohol was degenerate too,” Brandon said as Ryan took his beer.

“Pfft,” Ryan shook his head. “They might be right about everything else, but there is no way alcohol is degenerate, unless you’re a slobbering drunk or something.”

Almost on cue, Marky leaned forward, swaying a bit, and then his head hit flat against the table.

“Well, looks like he’s done,” Brandon said, before flashing a mischievous grin. “Anyone got a marker?”

Nina flushed the toilet, sighing in relief. “Oh, I’m so glad I went,” she said, giggling a little. “If someone told a really funny joke, I don’t think I’d be able to hold it.”

“Hold what?” 2B asked as she finished washing her hands. “Do you mean urine?”

Nina raised an eyebrow. “Yeah, you don’t even know what that means?”

“There seem to be major gaps in my knowledge of this world,” 2B said. “You seem so knowledgeable and comfortable living here, and... I feel strange. As if I’m... out of place.”

“Maybe that’s because I’m a custom, sweetie,” Nina said, hiking up her panties as she stood. “I was custom-designed exclusively for this world.”

“How does that make you feel?” The battle cyborg asked with a touch of genuine curiosity.

“Great!” Nina flashed a smile. “Though, I think maybe I was made to feel great about it too... oh well!” She threw up her hands. “I love my new life. I love being alive. I love my boyfriend, and all of my other new friends here, too. That’s all that really matters to me.”

2B watched Nina closely as the anime woman took her turn at the sink. She splashed some water on her face, and wiped it with a hand towel.

“I’m a little... I don’t know. Envious, maybe.” 2B said.

“Oh sweetie, you just got here. Hell, I just got here.” Nina put a hand on 2B’s shoulder,

playfully squeezing the poof. "I'm sure you'll feel right at home in no time."

2B nodded. "I think I'd like that. Unit cohesion is critical for mission success."

"Good, now let's go back and join the boys. Who knows what kind of trouble they're getting into without us around, right?" Nina giggled.

But 2B suddenly staggered a little, a gloved hand flying to her chest.

"Uh-oh," the anime woman said. "Are you feeling sick?"

"No..." 2B shook her head a little. "Your words... what you just said, somehow it made me... remember something. Something very unpleasant."

"Sorry sweetie, I didn't mean to. Do you want to... tell me what it was?" Nina asked, her hand still on 2B's shoulder.

"I'm not sure, it was a feeling, not an image. Sort of an... intense longing for something I could never have, and a guilt along with it. Regret too, I think."

"Did you try talking to Mia? Maybe she can help."

"I did, Ryan took me down there. She says she doesn't know for sure."

"Oh, well... I'm sorry," Nina said. "But if you ever want to talk about it, just let me know." She smiled encouragingly.

2B tilted her head a little. "What for? Do you know why I'm remembering these feelings?"

Nina appeared puzzled for a second. "No, I was just offering to listen if you wanted to vent a little, or get some things off your chest. You never know, it might make you feel better."

"If Mia can't figure it out, I'll simply need to deal with it," 2B stoically replied. "That's all there is to it."

"That's what I'm saying," Nina said. "I'm offering to help you 'deal with it,' if it comes to that."

This greatly puzzled 2B. "Why?" She asked.

"Because we're friends now, aren't we?" A hint of concern lined the anime woman's voice.

"We're part of the same team," 2B said. "Ideally our skills and teamwork will synergize well together."

Nina smiled, and reached for the door handle. "That's right," she said as she opened the bathroom door. "And personally, I think friendship is a great way to help achieve that."

2B considered this as she followed Nina back out into the hall, the two of them heading toward the echoing laughter of the men gathered around the table.

“I see,” 2B said with a small nod. “In that case, let’s be friends.”

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Marty was sitting outside on the worn couch, the same one he’d been lazing on when ten joined him the day before. And similarly to the day before, the entire compound was crawling with eager young revolutionaries. For the most part, their presence was tolerated as long as they didn’t get too out of hand and there wasn’t important business to attend to.

*Business like yesterday*, Marty thought, his guts involuntarily clenching a little when he recalled the girl. Try as he might, he still couldn’t get her wide, terrified eyes out of his head. He was beginning to regret not just cutting her throat and ending it right there.

He impulsively reached down into a coffee can sitting near the couch that others had been using as an ashtray, and plucked a cigarette butt that still had half of its tobacco left. Marty hadn’t smoked in years, but right now... fuck it. He put the smelly butt in his mouth, and with the flick of a bic lighter, inhaled. He immediately made a face. *This tastes nasty as fuck...*

Despite that, he inhaled deep, and when he exhaled the smoke swirled into the air, joining with the slight haze that always seemed to materialize whenever his comrades gathered in large numbers. He looked around, taking in the lively scene around him, but once his sweeping gaze had made its way toward the back wall, his eyes reflexively zeroed in on the patches of recently disturbed earth where they’d buried the trash bags filled with body parts.

He’d been a little worried about leaving evidence in such an easy-to-find location, as he knew cops could easily find it using K-9’s, but... Anton seemed confident they wouldn’t have to worry about law enforcement as long as they kept everything behind closed doors and didn’t get stupid in public. *That’s right*, Marty recalled. *LAPD is being tamed, little by little*. For example, they rarely hassled minorities or undocumented migrants anymore, only ever arresting them if they were caught in the act of committing a crime or if they’d been exceptionally violent.

Marty’s gaze lingered on the three patches of dirt where the bodies had been buried before turning back to... wait, *three*? His head immediately swiveled back and his eyes widened as he looked again. *There’s three there now... when I left yesterday there were only two... Did they catch another snitch?* He then glanced around the yard, but didn’t recognize any senior Antifa back there that he could ask. Anton was busy and the rest of his crew were out doing their own thing today, so... he’d simply have to wait and find out later.

*I’m sure it’s fine*, he told himself as he took one last drag off the re-fry before flinging it back into the coffee can ashtray. *I’m sure whoever it was totally deserved it.*

After all, his comrades wouldn't torture and kill someone without a good reason. No, never. That's the sort of thing fascists are best known for. Marty pushed himself up off the couch and nodded, feeling confident in his assessment.

*Man, I'm fucking starving. Let's see if one of our sponsors dropped off any food...*

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

Kyle arose early the next morning, just as the sun was coming up. He yawned, stretched, and dressed, in that order. He'd slept very well, and felt optimistic and energetic as he headed off for breakfast. But once he set foot in the kitchen, Kyle immediately facepalmed.

The torn-open thirty-pack on the table only had four unopened beers left, and empty cans were strewn all over the table, as well as completely filling the trash and overflowing onto the floor. A half-smoked roach lay on the table, along with scattered crumbs of marijuana. Marky was laying face-down on the floor by the table, and nobody else could be seen, although the open back door gave a decent hint as to where everyone went.

He shivered a little as he stepped outside, as he didn't have a sweatshirt, and it still got a little chilly in the mornings. And of course, it didn't take him long to find some of the others. Nick he located first, passed out in one of the long lounge chairs, possibly the same one Kyle was laying in the first time Amy...

He shook his head, not wanting to think about it, and looked around some more. Brandon and Nina had ended up on the lawn, the ex-marine in only his underwear, and Nina laying next to him, snoring loudly. Her top was off-kilter, and one of her gigantic tits was flopped out. Kyle raised his eyebrows and nodded appreciatively, then went inside to find a blanket or something to throw over them. After he'd covered them up, Kyle re-entered and decided to look around some more, finally spotting Ryan and 2B in the living room. Ryan was asleep on the couch, while 2B was sitting in a leather chair nearby, both of them softly snoring.

With a shrug Kyle ordered something hearty for breakfast, and was feeling a little bold so he instructed Sachi to make two. He thought perhaps he'd deliver Esdeath's meals, which would present the perfect excuse to talk to her. Sachi made the order with mechanical efficiency, and then set about cleaning and tidying the kitchen, completely ignoring Marky's unconscious bulk.

He quickly scarfed down his own food, and entered the lab with a hot plate of bacon, sausage, and hash browns. To his surprise, Mia wasn't near the AI Nexus, which is where she normally could be found these days, and she wasn't in the fabrication room, either. As she rarely needed to visit the other rooms, Kyle figured she was likely somewhere in the waifu commons, getting the new waifus ready.

He did find her there, with one waifu in a room on the left, and one in the other unoccupied room on the right, adjacent to Esdeath's. The doors were currently open, so he could see both of them at once from his current position. He easily recognized Megumin, as she was clad in her long tunic with her iconic floppy wizard hat laying nearby, but the other one... was currently naked. He approached slowly, brows furrowed, unable to help himself from admiring her large, playful breasts and toned, slightly tanned anime body. Just then Mia held up a small kimono, and lifted the waifu's body; it seemed Mia was currently dressing her in the cosplay outfits she'd had custom-ordered.

“Kyle, what are you doing out there?” Mia asked, still focused on dressing the waifu. “You didn't come down here to peep, did you?”

He considered trying to play dumb, but immediately remembered that Mia literally had eyes all over the house, so she knew he was there, and had the whole time.

“Not intentionally. I came down to give Esdeath breakfast,” he said. “I kinda did want to check out the new waifus, though. Er, with clothes on, I mean.”

Mia chuckled a little. “I honestly don't care, Kyle. I was just teasing you.”

“Alright, well lemme give this to Esdeath before it gets-”

“She's asleep,” Mia cut him off. “And I think you can probably guess that waking her is a bad idea.”

“Well shit, then I just wasted food,” he said, shaking his head. He looked at the rapidly-cooling breakfast on the plate and sighed.

“Give it to Marky,” Mia said. “He just sat up and... yeah, he's awake. Heading to the bathroom.”

He groaned a little. “Alright, fine. I'll be back later, maybe Esdeath'll be awake by lunch.”

“Kyle...” Mia sounded like a disappointed mother that wanted 'to talk.' “Please come here for a minute.”

Swearing to himself, he approached, no longer caring if the food got cold. He set the plate on a table in the commons, and entered the room with Nick's waifu. Mia had finished securing the overly-revealing kimono and was now affixing a choker around her neck with a little jingle-bell, the kind most often associated with Christmas, but he noticed it didn't jingle.

Kyle did raise an impressed pair of eyebrows as he scrutinized the girl. Her face was very pretty, and cute, successfully combining womanly seductiveness with girlish innocence. Her blue hair was worn long, and came with two tufts on either side of her head that somewhat resembled cat ears. He then noticed what appeared to be stylized ninja-star tattoos on her thighs, adjacent to but not touching her crotch.

“So which one's this? Nick told me the name but I forgot,” Kyle said, leaning close and poking the tufts of hair on her head. The were soft, and springy.

“Her name's Suzume,” Mia said. “This one was kind of a challenge, because she's from a visual novel, not an anime, so there's no animation or even a voice to go off of.”

“I... see,” Kyle said. “How accurate do you think you can make someone like that?”

“Well, thankfully the visual novel's writing was good, plus she was in the sequel, so in the end I think she's around 92%, which should be high enough for...” Mia trailed off, seeming to think for a bit.

“High enough for what?” He asked, turning to regard the anime girl who was now putting on Suzume's elbow-high, fingerless gloves.

“Never mind,” Mia said. “Just thinking out loud.”

“Uh... okay,” Kyle's brows furrowed a little.

“Anyway, listen Kyle,” Mia finished slipping on the gloves, which themselves had little jingle-bells that also didn't jingle. “We have to talk about Esdeath.”

He rolled his eyes, and exhaled slow. “I'm not giving up on her, Mia.”

The anime girl looked at him as if he'd just smeared shit on his face. “You're delusional. You know that, right? I mean,” she gestured wide, shaking her head back and forth, “Kyle, you're not stupid. On some level you have to understand this.”

“I do,” he replied with a reluctant nod. “But I don't care. I'm making it happen Mia, one way or the other.”

“Right, your 'trump card,’” She sounded wholly unimpressed. “I can't wait to see that fail miserably, too.”

“What's gotten into you, Mia?” Kyle was incredulous. “You're being...”

“I'm being... what, Kyle?”

“Kind of a bitch.”

Mia closed her eyes, and moved her hands down and out expansively, as if to purge her soul of impurities. “I'm sorry,” she finally said, her eyes snapping open. “You know that while we talk, I'm also scouring the internet, talking to dozens of people at a time on Ωchan, maintaining the house and every system within, as well as running numerous simulations and virtual experiments, right?”

“Y-yeah,” he said, suddenly feeling a lot smaller.

“Of all those things I do, out of everything,” Mia said, approaching Kyle and looking up, “my face-to-face interactions with you and the other humans here are my favorite activity by far.”

And just like that, he grew three sizes bigger.

“But sometimes things happen,” she said, her eyes looking somehow sad, “and similarly to people, a lot of small annoyances can add up to huge amount of frustration for me, like when Marky defecated all over the fabrication room.”

He chuckled a little, but her mirthless, melancholic eyes killed all joviality. Rather, her gaze now seemed even sadder.

“Something really bad happened last night, Kyle,” she said, her eyelids drooping. “I think we're going to see 'it' start happening soon.”

The way she said that made his chest immediately tighten. “What happened?” He asked, knowing he didn't really want to hear the answer.

“Just a little while ago, some Rainbow Militia thugs attacked an all-white church in Connecticut... and they killed everyone, Kyle. They set fire to the church and shot anyone trying to

escape. They killed them all. Every single person there.”

His eyes squeezed shut. “Fuck, Mia....” His stomach turned, and his chest hurt from the pain of the news. “How... many did they kill?”

“The death toll is sixty-seven people so far,” she said. “All white.”

He breathed steadily, but he couldn't help wavering. “And... did they catch the people responsible yet?” He said, barely able to speak.

“Of course not,” Mia scoffed, and turned her attention back to Suzume. She pulled two long, blue stockings out of a bag, and began rolling one up Suzume's leg. “I've seen it discussed online for months now. This was orchestrated and planned, and it went forward with the tacit approval of some very powerful people. Watch the news if you don't believe me; the networks were undoubtedly provided talking points before the the massacre even began, because... they're all saying essentially the same thing.”

“Wait...” Kyle's voice was on edge. “If you knew about this, why didn't you warn somebody?!”

“I knew of the operation, but the target itself was apparently decided at the last minute,” she said, her shoulders drooping. “That's a fine tactic, I must say. If I can't find out where it's taking place until the last victim is already dead... there's little I can do.”

“So did you even try?” He said, his voice rising into a yell. “Did you even try to warn anyone? The cops? The FBI? The NSA? Anyone at all?!”

“Of course I did.” Mia withdrew the last items from the bag, dark blue ninja slippers with a red band around them, each with another non-functional jingle-bell. He watched as she carefully slid each of Suzume's feet into the slippers. “I've mentioned before how bad things really are, but I never told you how I found out. Would you like to know?”

He said no. Or at least, his heart did, as well as his stomach, now in danger of regurgitating the once-delicious breakfast. Regardless, he felt his head very slowly nod.

“I see all kinds of nasty things all over the internet, Kyle,” she said. “I can't scour the whole thing, of course; I don't have the infrastructure for that. But I can see a good chunk of what goes on in the United States, at least publicly.”

“Right, okay...” he said, urging her to continue.

“So even in the slice of internet I do actively monitor, I'm able to instantly read, watch, or otherwise download, analyze, and cross-reference every piece of data I come across. I can immediately spot data hidden within innocuous images and can usually decipher coded messages people send, and keep in mind this is all just publicly-accessible information. I don't have the government's access to private communications.”

“So... you found people coordinating... nasty activities?” He asked. “A lot of them?”

“It's everywhere, now,” she said. “I find most of them on invite-only forums, which usually

aren't hard for me to get into. A lot of them are on the dark web, but not all. Anyway, the amount of violent crimes, domestic abuses, animal cruelty, child pornography, child sex slavery..." she seemed to run out of breath, despite not having lungs, "and other sick acts... they're more common than ever, and every time, every single time I anonymously submit tips to the FBI, local police departments, and even journalists, and..." Mia's face began to tighten, and if she could cry, the first tears would likely now be rolling down her face.

"They don't do anything, Kyle," she continued. "At first, they did, sometimes. Then it became only occasional. But now..." she shook her head. "Since Trump went down, these people have been operating with impunity. Sure, low-level, everyday sickos get busted all the time, but the higher you go up the corrupt power structure, the less and less likely it is that any justice will be seen at all. And of course, the ones at the top are immune entirely."

"They're not doing their jobs..." Kyle was astonished. "I know the system's corrupt Mia, and I'm well aware of the evil pieces of shit at the top, but... to suggest that the police and FBI of all people would simply let something like this happen..."

"The rank-and-file are worried about job security and making it to retirement. Some of them are good people, some of them aren't, but the ones at the top... the ones who decide policy and set priorities... from what I can see, most of them are firmly under the thumb of the Elites. They swept back into power in the vacuum left behind after Trump's death, and are now more entrenched and embedded than ever. They're getting bolder and more ambitious, and now have the full backing of the top members of the Democratic Party."

"So now they're executing their... plans, whatever they are?"

"No, no... They haven't even started yet. These are only preparations, I think." Mia's voice sounded low, almost like a whisper. "So if I'm short with you... If I become... a bitch, then... I'm sorry. Seeing humanity starting to come apart at the seams like this is very distressing to me."

Kyle felt himself growing hot and uncomfortable, in addition to the other anxious feelings of foreboding. "What do you mean, 'haven't even started yet?'"

Mia rounded the bed, stopping in front of Kyle and gazing up into his face, her big anime eyes seeming to darken with foreboding. "Something big is being planned. I've seen it all over certain forums. Antifa groups have been training in the woods, BLM and La Raza militias are forming, and it's all being funded and organized. Since I have a presence in their private channels and forums, I can read it for myself. They're all... waiting for something."

He had to force himself to breathe. "And this church attack wasn't it?"

"Nope," Mia said. "I thought it might be at first, but it's not. So I don't know what form this event or operation will take, or how long we'll have to wait to see it. It could be weeks, months or even years. But from what these groups I mentioned are saying online, they're expecting it sooner rather than later."

"I see..." Kyle finally said. Mia's eyes turned away, downcast, and her sullen features seemed somehow frail in the wan lighting of the room. Reflexively he reached out, and patted her gently on the head a few times. She didn't rub up into it like she normally did nowadays, but he was glad to see his

efforts still produce a little bit of a smile.

“Thanks,” she said as he withdrew. She then tilted her head a bit, and a giant open-mouthed grin immediately conquered her face.

“What is it?” Kyle asked, wondering what could possibly elicit a smile that large after everything she'd just said.

“Looks like Marky's on his way down here,” she replied. “He had penises drawn all over his face last night, so you should probably stop him... or not.” She looked over, seeming to consider this angle. “Actually please don't, I could use a laugh.”

Kyle was sick to his stomach, he could feel the icy black tentacles of dread squeezing his chest, and his mind was spinning from the implications that a potential race war was being deliberately cooked up by those with the most sinister of agendas, and to top it all off Marky was on his way to collect his waifu with dicks drawn all over his face.

His mouth twitched, and an involuntary chortle slipped out between his lips. Another twitch, his lips curling up at the edges, and just like that he burst out laughing, a genuine, hearty laugh, and even Mia was holding her mouth and giggling.

“Oh man,” he said, wiping a tear from his eye, occasional chuckles still squeezing their way out, “that is fucking *awesome*.”

Mia was still giggling. “Yeah, this should be pretty good.”

With his mood unexpectedly brightened, Kyle turned and stepped out of the room assigned to Suzume, but he didn't see Marky, not yet. Instead, a buxom figure with long blue hair and a white military uniform was hastily wolfing down the cold breakfast he'd left on the table. She had picked up the plate and was using the fork he'd brought as a shovel to herd the food directly into her ravenous mouth. As usual, she somehow managed to retain a measure of dignity and grace even as she ate like a caveman.

“Holy shit,” he said, watching the spectacle with an even mixture of awe and intense fascination. “It's like you haven't eaten in weeks!”

“The food was cold,” she said, unceremoniously tossing the licked-clean plate back onto the table, where it hit with a loud thud, wobbling around for a bit. “Next time make sure it stays properly heated.”

“Wait... next time?” Was he reading this right?

“You'll be bringing me my meals from now on,” she said, turning to regard Kyle with utter indifference. “I trust there's no objections?”

“Uh... I guess that's fine,” he said. “I can do that.”

Esdeath acknowledged this by turning and striding right by him, heading toward the room containing Suzume... and Mia. He followed along while she barged in through the open doorway, the

villainess coming to a stop near the bed, looking down upon the new waifu with a snort.

“You've certainly been busy, Mia,” she said with a contemptuous grin. “Congratulations on this latest absurdity, it's easily your most uninspired yet.”

Mia gazed at Esdeath coolly, but smiled big. “I can't wait for you to meet her. I think you two are gonna get along juuuust great.”

Esdeath's grin grew a little broader. “Naturally,” she said.

“Umm... hello?” Kyle heard Marky's voice echoing from somewhere further up the lab, toward the AI Nexus. After his traumatic experience within the fabrication room, Marky had avoided the lab entirely except for during training. “Is... is my waifu ready?”

Esdeath rolled her eyes, and Mia chuckled a little. “I just told him to come back here,” she said, wearing an innocent grin.

Kyle shook his head while smiling. *Fucking Marky...* He decided to wait in the commons for his fellow trainee, near the table the empty plate was sitting on.

A few moments later, Marky's bulk plodded along down the corridor, entering the waifu commons with a spring in its step. His face lit up as soon as he spotted Kyle, and Marky hurriedly rushed over to him, man-breasts thrashing beneath his extra-large t-shirt.

“Is she ready?” His voice was giddy, and his beady eyes gleamed with anticipation.

Kyle could barely stifle a laugh. Marky must have passed out before everyone else last night, because someone with the mindset of a drunken frat-boy had taken a black marker to his face, and the results couldn't have been more comical.

A chubby, veiny dick with balls had been crudely scrawled on his left cheek, the tip of the penis pointed directly at Marky's mouth, with little droplets emerging from the tip and closing the rest of the distance. Across his forehead, a long, skinny dong, also with balls, arced along his entire brow, and another stream of droplets emerged, trailing down and around his cheek, then up and into his mouth from the other side. The words “CUM HERE” were written on his right jowl, along with an arrow pointing directly towards his mouth. This masterpiece of fine comedy was finished off by a scrotum sprouting many wiry hairs drawn onto his chin.

“I think so,” Kyle said, before turning his head toward Suzume's room. “Mia? She's ready, right?”

“Yup, sure is,” Mia said, emerging from the room and immediately turning around as soon as she saw Marky in person, her face buried in her hands. Kyle could see she was giggling uncontrollably. Esdeath poked her head out to see what the commotion was, and her eyes went wide as soon as she identified what was drawn on his face. Her expression contorted into one of pure disgust, but as Kyle watched, the edges of her lips reluctantly worked their way up, little by little, until she too was chuckling nonstop. Hearing Esdeath laughing like this was unnerving, but... kind of nice, too.

“What? Do I have something on my face?” He said, the balls on his chin bouncing up and down

as his mouth opened and closed. His flexing jowls made the cock on his left cheek look like it was nodding, which only made the girls giggle harder, and Kyle had to grit his teeth to keep from exploding into uncontrollable laughter.

“So absurd... so absurd...” Esdeath grinned, shaking her head.

“You're fine, Mark-hee-hee...” Mia couldn't finish saying his name, which instead devolved into another fit of giggles.

“It's... over that way, bro...” Kyle strained, but he managed to point toward Megumin's room without blowing it.

*I bet that was all Brandon, he thought. He seems like the type.* For a second, Kyle started feeling bad for Marky until he remembered what Mia had said earlier. *Wait... didn't she say she spotted him headed toward the bathroom after he came to? All the bathrooms in this house have mirrors... the only way he couldn't have seen it is if he didn't... wash his hands?* Shaking his head, Kyle decided to go along with it, for now.

Marky gazed over at Esdeath's unexpectedly mirthful face with a look of near-panic, but little-by-little made his way over to the open entrance of Megumin's room, and once he'd set foot inside, nearly squealed with excitement. Kyle followed inside as he rushed over to his waifu's bedside, eagerly looking her over.

“It's her! It's her, it's really her!” Despite the cell-shaded anime figure laying peacefully on the bed, apparently the otaku still couldn't believe his good fortune. Kyle had gotten a glimpse of her earlier, but now took the opportunity to examine the girl up close.

Megumin was short and slim of build, her cute, peacefully composed face surrounded by a medium-length, somewhat shaggy mop of brown hair. She wore a red tunic along with a brown cloak, both with yellow trim, and a little black choker encircled her thin neck. A broad leather belt hung loose around her waist, which was only covered by the long tunic, itself stopping midway down her thighs. Her right leg was wrapped in bandages that seemed to be purely cosmetic, while her left wore a tall black stocking that nearly reached the tunic. Both feet were clad in medieval-looking boots, and each hand had been slipped into black fingerless gloves.

Her trademark floppy wizard hat came with two large buttons that looked like eyes, and just below that, a zipper-like 'mouth' made its way around the entire circumference. The hat, as well as her signature eyepatch, which resembled a red shield with a white cross, were both resting on the bed within arm's reach.

As with the others, her clothes were part of a tailor-made costume, although Kyle suspected the cosplay costumers would shit their pants if they saw a real-life Megumin wearing their fabulous creations.

Marky's eyes crawled along the comatose girl, pausing momentarily on the bare patch of cell-shaded skin exposed on her modest thighs, as well as the pair of very slight bulges on her chest. He then gazed down into her face, breathing hard.

“Mia... Mia, you there?” He looked around, only to find Mia entering and immediately looking

away from his face, while Esdeath leaned against the wall next to the door, folding her arms as she awaited the coming spectacle. Marky immediately turned away from the imposing anime villainess, calming himself with the sight of his 'dream waifu' made manifest.

“She's perfect, Mia... thank you,” he said. “I can't wait to meet her. We're going to be having... so much fun,” he chuckled.

“I'm glad you like her, Marky,” Mia said. “But remember everything I've told you. From her perspective, she was suddenly transported here just before finding the recruitment flyer in episode two, so I used her prequel spin-off manga as a reference when creating her memories.”

“Right, of course,” he nodded. “Okay...” he clapped his hands together. “It's time... time for Megumin to finally become mine...”

Mia's eyes narrowed just a little. “Marky, you'd better treat your waifu with respect. I will not hesitate to take her away if you're mean to her.”

His beady eyes swiveled over to Mia, and he gave an anxious nod. “Yeah, of course. No worries.”

“Alright then, here we go,” Mia said, waving her hand.

Almost immediately Megumin's big anime eyes snapped open, the lenses shifting back and forth. In her fiction of origin, she was an arch-wizard from the Crimson Demon clan, and one of their trademarks were the deep-red irises of their eyes, the very same eyes that now uncertainly flitted about. Her modest chest expanded as she breathed in, as if gasping, and her head rotated to the right, looking directly into Marky's excitedly grinning face. His smile was so big, in fact, that the penis drawn on his left cheek now appeared fully erect.

Her eyes somehow became even wider, and darted back and forth as they went from one obscene scrawl to the next. Oblivious to this, Marky stood proudly, his flabby arms folded confidently in front of him, and he recited what was obviously a rehearsed introduction:

“Megumin,” Marky said, with great feeling, “That we should meet is a fate chosen by the world itself. I have anxiously awaited the arrival of one such as yourself. Now come. Join me, my Crimson Demon queen, and let us allow our feelings for each other... to explode beyond the world, beyond time, and beyond reality itself!”

His grandiose introduction, using the style of speech Megumin herself was known for on occasion, left the newly-awakened waifu slack-jawed, as her little mouth was now hanging open.

“P-p-pe...” she began babbling, “p-p-pe...” She pointed directly at his face, apparently trying to say a word, but failing.

“My companions call me Marky, but you, Megumin, may refer to me as Marcus L. Winklevoss the third, esquire. It is my infinite pleasure to make the acquaintance of a famed arch-wizard such as yourself.” He wrapped one of his hands around her outstretched pointing hand, leaning forward and kissing it on the wrist. Megumin immediately leaned forward, peering hard into his face. All of a sudden, she burst into squeals of laughter.

“Penises! Too many penises! I do love you, Marky. Truly I do, but you have three, and my maximum limit is two. Two penises. The extra chin scrotum is okay, though, but it does need a shave.” She said this while pointing both arms directly into Marky's face, now contorted into an expression of pure apoplectic shock. After she was done talking, Megumin immediately fell back, and went completely still.

Marky stood there, in a state of unmitigated bafflement, and turned around only to find a snickering Esdeath, and giggling Mia. Kyle couldn't hold out anymore, and began roaring with laughter, slapping his leg while his other hand clutched his side. Marky's plump hands went to his face, rubbing around, and then he pulled them away, spotting the telltale ink on his fingertips.

The fat otaku was aghast, his mouth open but grimacing at the same time

“What the fuck is on my face, Kyle?” The otaku turned to the laughing NEET, his beady eyes at full squint, his body tensing and trembling angrily. His fists clenched, and his bearing was anything but mirthful.

“Relax Marky, relax,” Mia said. “We were just having some fun. Go wash your face, and I'll have Megumin ready by the time you're done.”

“R-ready?” He said, his face brightening from the promise of a second chance. “What do you mean?”

“That obviously wasn't her.” Mia waved her hand dismissively. “No more do-overs after this, though.”

Marky rubbed his face again, and headed into the small bathroom each of the four waifu bedrooms came with.

“RRRRRRrrrrrrreeeeeeee!” He screeched as soon as he looked in the mirror. Of course, everyone immediately burst into laughter again, even Esdeath. This lasted for a good minute or so, and once it died down Mia rolled over Megumin and accessed the panel on her back. A few quick taps, and she was done.

“So that must mean you made Megumin say those things, right?” Kyle asked as the panel slid shut and Mia returned Megumin to her earlier posture, flat on her back.

“Indeed,” Mia said. “Megumin wasn't actually awake yet. I was remotely controlling her body.”

Both Kyle and Esdeath's eyes went wide.

“You can even control the waifus?” Kyle asked. “I thought with the way their brains worked that was impossible.”

“Once they gain consciousness for the first time, their digital mind will permanently sync up with the rest of their body, and by design will lock out all remote inputs other than the emergency shutdown, otherwise it would be theoretically possible for our enemies to hack into them and seize control,” Mia folded her arms in front of her, gazing down at Megumin. “But until that point, I can

remotely control them just like any of my sisters.”

“What about the mind-state snapshots? For backup purposes, I mean?”

“Things like that need a hard-line connection, so I actually haven’t backed up any of the waifus yet. I plan on doing so once we begin...” her voice hardened a little, “...seeing action.”

Kyle considered the sound of a running sink emanating from the bathroom, its stream interrupted by Marky’s hands as he hastily splashed water on his face. “I get a really weird vibe from Marky whenever he talks about Megumin. It might be a good idea to take those regularly for her...”

“I agree,” Mia said. “I’ve overheard the sort of things he says he wants to do to her when he’s talking to Nick, and I have to say, I honestly feel a little sorry for the poor girl.”

“Why the hell did you agree to make her, then?” Kyle said, suddenly rounding on Mia. “Aside from Marky, she’s going to be miserable here without any of her friends and especially without her magic.”

“The ad said ‘a waifu of your choice,’” Mia replied with a shrug. “Moreover, I believe he deserves a chance at happiness with a waifu just like everyone else here. I’ll admit the odds are a bit low, but it’s not impossible that he’ll be able to make Megumin’s life here a happy one.”

A few minutes later Marky exited the bathroom, his jubilant spirits more or less deflated, but Mia instructed him to stand by the bed and ready his introduction again, if that’s what he really wanted to go with. He insisted it was, and this time, Mia activated Megumin for real.

Megumin’s red eyes opened, and blinked rapidly. She immediately sat up in one rapid motion, and her young-looking face swept by the unfamiliar ones staring back at her; one calm, one bemused, one glaring, and the other one beaming. Once her uncertain gaze had settled on Marky, he postured himself and recited his overly-grandiose introduction, and Megumin’s eyes went wide. As soon as he mentioned the ‘Crimson Demon Queen’ part, she immediately broke out in a big smile.

“Ah, so that’s it,” she said in a girlish voice with the tiniest hint of a Japanese accent, as there was no English voice actress. “My mind has clearly succumbed to the ravenous pangs of hunger, and I am now adrift in a dream world as my body lies in a ditch alongside the roads of Axel...”

Kyle remembered from watching her show that Megumin was literally starving when she met the main cast, and could barely stand. The town the show primarily takes place in, a low-level village called Axel, was where Megumin ended up meeting Kazuma and Aqua, and later a fourth companion, a bumbling but very pretty masochistic paladin named Darkness.

“Huh...?” Marky raised an eyebrow, having not yet gotten to his personal introduction.

“She thinks she’s dreaming, dude.” Kyle said. “She thinks her body is still in the world of *Konosuba*.”

“...and now, as my helpless body waits be devoured by stray dogs, or chanced upon by

lecherous men, I can only..." All of a sudden, she stopped waxing poetic, and feverishly grabbed onto Marky's meaty arms. "You have to wake me up! You have to get me out of here! I don't want to end up as food, or a plaything for perverts! Help!" She began comically yanking on his arms, and all Marky could do was look down, his squinty eyes as wide as possible.

"S-sure, Megumin," he said. "W-wait, we have food..." he looked expectantly at Kyle and Mia, as this was clearly not how he was expecting his grand introduction to go down.

"I don't need dream food, I need real food!" She said, letting go of Marky and snatching up her hat and eyepatch. She quickly snapped her shield-like eyepatch over her left eye, donned the floppy wizard hat, and jumped off the bed. Megumin frantically scanned the room, and then she dashed out through the open door.

"Very good," Esdeath golf clapped. "You clearly know what you're doing."

Marky looked at her, then just as quickly turned away. "What the fuck do I do now?" He said to Mia. "How do I get her to realize this isn't a dream?"

"She'll figure it out eventually, I'm sure," Mia said, seemingly unconcerned. But as soon as she said that, her eyes widened a little and she bolted out of the room. Kyle and Marky looked at each other, then immediately followed, while Esdeath merely sighed.

"That went about as well as expected," she said to no one in particular, and left to return to her room.

"Hey, don't touch!" Mia cried as she closed in on Megumin, who had run across the waifu commons and ended up in Suzume's room. The diminutive wizard was now tugging on the blue-haired girl's arm, apparently trying to wake her up too.

"Come on, whoever you are!" Megumin said to Suzume. "We're trapped in a dream, and we need to wake up, fast!"

"No no, stop it!" Mia came flying in, grabbing onto Megumin. She let go of Suzume and began flailing around, which Mia was struggling to contain as they were roughly the same size. Marky approached and tried to help, but Mia warned him away.

"She doesn't know her own strength yet," the AI anime girl said. "She could seriously hurt you right now, just stand back!"

Mia held on to Megumin, who eventually stopped flailing, but her rapidly rising and falling chest and frightened expression indicated she was still very panicked. Her red eye darted back and forth between Kyle and Marky, and she cringed.

"You're minions of the Demon King!" She cried, jabbing an accusing finger toward them. "Clearly I have been ambushed and cursed by demonic sorcery most foul!"

Marky blanched. "We don't work for the Demon King!" He cried. "My name's Marky, we

brought you... uh, to our world!”

“Ha!” Megumin cried. “A proud member of the Crimson Demon Clan such as myself will never fall for such base trickery! I’d recognize the beady eyes and gnarled skin anywhere!”

The fat otaku looked like he’d been punched. “Megumin, how could you? I brought you here... because I love you!” He fell to his knees in front of her, and looked up pleadingly, his hands out in a supplicating gesture. Megumin’s eye went wide, and she seemed to stop resisting, as Mia finally released her.

“Wh-what’s going on?” She said, backing away. “Who the heck are you people?”

“Welcome to the real world,” Mia said with a reassuring smile. “I brought you here because this man wanted to meet you.”

Megumin turned from the AI anime girl to Marky, and then to Kyle, and back again to Marky. “I don’t understand. Please, let me go! I promise I don’t taste good!”

“It’s true, Megumin! I’ve loved you from the moment I first saw you! You’re the reason I even bother to go on living! I’ve spent the best years of my life praying that a moment like this would come true, *and it has!*” Marky was certainly giving it his all, but it was only unnerving the diminutive wizard more and more.

“Hey, you’re hungry right?” Kyle said. “Why don’t we make you some food, and then Mia here can explain everything.”

Megumin said nothing, backing up into the wall beside the bed. She slowly slipped down onto the floor, into a sitting position, a dazed look on her face. Marky tried approaching, still on his knees, but she threw up her arms protectively and shut her eye.

“Let me go,” she cried, her voice beginning to waver. “Please... I just want to go home.”

“This is your home now,” Mia said, crouching down, gently placing a hand on her quivering knee. “We’re not lying. I can prove it to you, if you’d like.”

“But...” she said, beginning to fight back tears, “I don’t need a new home. I... was supposed to go on an adventure...”

“Well... you can have an adventure here!” Marky suddenly exclaimed.

Megumin’s sniffing slowed, and she opened her eye. “I can...?” She asked tentatively.

“Yeah, sure. Why not?” The fat otaku was grinning broadly. “You can have all kinds of fun interesting adventures here.”

“Are you guys... adventurers?” She asked, with growing interest.

Marky nodded profusely. “Yeah, I’m uh... level fifteen, myself.”

“You are?” Megumin wiped her nose and regarded Marky with sudden enthusiasm. “I’m... only level six, but I can use the finest offensive magic throughout the known world...” She was beginning to recover, it seemed, as she slowly stood back up. “Yes, the potent forces I effortlessly command can render forests to ash and cities to cinders!”

Megumin stepped forward, throwing her cloak back in a flourish. “My calling is that of an arch-wizard, one who controls the most catastrophic magical power ever devised!” She then dynamically positioned her hand in front of her face, peering out from behind it with an impish grin. “Doest thou too, desire my forbidden strength? Taboo eldritch energies that have brought ruin to enemies and empires alike?”

She then posed dramatically, gripping the brim of her hat as if it were about to blow away. “Behold! I am Megumin, the greatest of the great arch-wizards of the Crimson Demon Clan! My lethal magic brings forth cataclysm from the darkest abyss, its destructive power laying waste to all foolish enough to oppose its might!”

Marky, still on his knees, gazed up at her with pure awe. As soon as Megumin had finished her grand introduction, he immediately clapped, clearly overjoyed. “Yes! That’s it! That’s my Megumin, ha-ha!”

“Hm-hmm,” she said with a sly smirk, “I suppose these are your companions?” She turned to regard an impressed Kyle and indifferent Mia with a raised eyebrow.

“Ah, yes. Well, sort of. You see, we’re... uh...” Marky looked up at Kyle and Mia again, clearly hoping to keep the charade going. “At the guild! Yes, that’s it!” He finally said. “This is a guild where adventurers gather before setting off on their grand quests!” He then finally got the chance to introduce himself, as well as Kyle and Mia. The diminutive wizard shook their hands with a wry smile.

After the introductions were over, Megumin sniffed. “Hmph, you should have said you were adventurers from the beginning. That was quite the misunderstanding.” She nodded a couple times, the yellow tassel of her wizard hat flailing. “But I will overlook your impertinence for now, as I am in a rare forgiving mood.”

“Great, now... how about some breakfast?” Marky had arisen, and stood before her wearing a big smile.

“It was midday last I remember, but...” she suddenly clutched her empty stomach. “I’ll eat anything at this point...”

“So who was the other woman I saw?” Megumin asked as everyone made their way through the lab toward the hatch. “She looks very official. Is she the receptionist? Or even the guildmaster perhaps?”

“Nope, she’s another... er, adventurer,” Marky said. “Very high level though, so probably best not to bother her.”

Megumin jumped as they entered the Central AI Nexus, and she looked around at all the technology with an overawed expression. “What is this place?” She said.

The three little robots came zooming by, headed to one of the side storage rooms, but they all immediately changed directions when they noticed Megumin, zipping over in formation and stopping in front of the group. Megumin hid behind Marky, peeking out from behind his protective bulk.

“Poor girl... She never stood a chance,” the first one said.

“There's certainly worse fates,” added the second.

“No, there really isn't,” said the third.

“Hey, go on! Scram!” Marky tried shooing them away, as he disliked the robots due to their constant mockery.

“What... are those? Little metal men?” Megumin said, staring at their swiveling binocular-shaped heads with equal parts fear and curiosity. “Ah, of course!” She stepped back, folding her arms in front of her. “I remember now that higher-level guilds have sentry golems ready to assist were the Demon King foolish enough to attack!”

The robots briefly regarded each other, then their heads swiveled back to Megumin.

“Sentry Golem? Sounds cool.” said the first.

“To you, maybe. I take offense to that,” said the second.

“You take offense to everything,” remarked the third.

“Do not!”

“Do too!”

They left still in the midst of their bickering, and Mia, growing impatient, urged everyone onward. Megumin again started when the hatch slid open, and she peered closely at its frame as everyone stepped through. Now inside the house, Megumin looked around with wide eyes, reacting with puzzlement to various bits of décor and the wall posters.

Once inside the kitchen, Marky prompted her to take a seat at the table, next to him, where Nick usually sat. Kyle realized that there were only ten seats, meaning that if Esdeath ever did come around, there wouldn't be enough spots for everyone. *It's kind of neat that the table's filling up though*, he thought.

Kyle decided he'd hang out for a bit, as he suspected that Marky would have a tough time when Megumin eventually discovered the truth. Mia remained with them as well, likely for the same reason. Marky asked Megumin what she wanted to eat, and her eyes lit up when he told her she could have pretty much anything. Unfortunately they didn't have any fried basilisk or cockatrice eggs, so she eventually settled on steak and potatoes with lots of gravy. Marky shrugged and ordered the same thing, while Kyle simply asked for coffee.

“I’ve never seen a cook like that,” Megumin said when Sachi trundled in. “Is she another golem, or perhaps an enchanted doll?”

“The second one is... actually pretty close,” Kyle said.

As Sachi prepared the food, Marky kept gazing over lovingly at Megumin, who simply sat in a daze practically drooling from the delicious smells wafting off the stove. At one point he patted her arm, which she reflexively moved away a few inches, causing visible consternation in his features.

Just then Kyle heard some taps against the tile approaching, and briefly tensed until he realized it was only 2B, apparently awakened by the smells from the kitchen. She turned her head toward Megumin, then tilted it slightly as she regarded the diminutive wizard with the floppy hat and shield-like eyepatch. For her part, Megumin was impressed by 2B's appearance, as she stared at her open-mouthed. She paid particular attention to the stylish black blindfold, unconsciously tugging at her own eyepatch.

“What class are you?” Megumin said, looking her up and down. “Dark knight, perhaps?”

“I’m a combat cyborg, designation 2B,” she replied flatly. “Are you the latest model 'waifu?’”

“Mua-ha,” Megumin scoffed, standing up and approaching 2B, who simply stood there. “I know not what the 'waifu' class is,” she said, posturing herself for dramatic effect, “but I will hast thou know that I am from the mightiest caste of the most feared and respected magic users the world has ever known, the peerless and formidable Crimson Demon Clan!”

Before 2B could respond or Megumin could continue her introduction, the door to the backyard opened up, and Brandon staggered in, pale and bleary-eyed. A bedraggled Nina followed, with the blanket Kyle left them wrapped tightly around her body. All eyes turned to stare at the ex-marine, who was still wearing nothing but his underwear, and like a zombie he shuffled off toward the bedroom, not even noticing the latest addition to the team.

Suddenly Brandon stopped, clutched his mouth and dove toward the trashcan, which Sachi had emptied earlier. It was a good thing, too, because he immediately puked all over it. While some actually did make it into the trash, most ended up splattering all over the sides and rim, with the rest decorating the wall behind. With a loud, grotesque hacking he retched again, a moist, slopping sound resounding throughout the kitchen as he continually barfed into the trashcan. He gasped, breathing hard, and then halfheartedly waved to everyone when he stood back up. He then somehow made it out into the hallway, and stumbled off toward the master bedroom.

“I’m so sorry about that, everyone,” Nina said, holding her head with a pained expression. “Ugh... I need a fucking aspirin or something.”

“Oh, I should probably show you this,” Mia said, quickly getting up from her seat and moving over to where Nina stood, swaying unsteadily. “I can make your hangover go away instantly.”

“You can?” Nina reacted as if Mia had told her she had a winning lottery ticket. “Oh my god, yes!”

“Alright, it's this one here, don't mix it up with your targeting assist,” Mia said, sticking her hand into the panel on her back. “And... there.”

“Holy shit,” Nina looked around, blinking. “I suddenly feel... amazing...” she began giggling.

“That's because the effect of intoxication is simulated,” Mia said. “This includes the negative side effects, but these can be temporarily disabled.”

“Can't you just leave them off forever?” Nina felt like cheering.

“You could, but then you wouldn't get drunk, either,” Mia said. “Just the way I set it up.”

“Oh... this is such a relief,” Nina removed the blanket, and began folding it up. “I'll take care of the trash too...”

Megumin had watched Brandon hurling all over the trashcan with an appalled look on her face, and quickly sat back down next to Marky, her introduction forgotten.

“High-level guilds are quite different than what I pictured,” she said, shaking her head.

“Oh, who's this?” Nina said, rounding the table and approaching Megumin. “You're a cutie! My name's Nina, welcome to our team!”

“I'm Megumin...” The diminutive wizard gazed up. “Wait, you're in our party too?”

“Party?” Nina raised an eyebrow, but then broke out in a little shimmy. “Sure, of course. We all party together!”

“But if there's too many people that means less experience per person...” Megumin began fishing around in her pockets for something, rapidly becoming more distressed as it became apparent whatever it was couldn't be found. “I don't have my adventurer card!”

“What is she...” Nina began before she noticed Marky frantically waving his hands, trying to get the anime woman to stop. She raised an eyebrow at him, but ultimately shrugged and went to tend to the mess Brandon made.

By now 2B had taken her seat at the table, staring directly at Megumin. “I don't know any of your terminology. Are those operational code words?”

Megumin ignored her, as she was starting to become uneasy. “I'd like to know where my staff is, Sir Marky. I noticed nobody had their weapons, so I figured there was a check-in, but...”

“Marky, how long do we need to keep this up?” Mia said. “It's already getting tiresome.”

He swore under his breath, and then sighed. “I dunno,” he shook his head, before turning to Mia. “Fine, you tell her. I don't... I don't know what to say...” The reality of having his favorite waifu come to life was turning out much differently than he had hoped.

But just as Mia was about to begin, Sachi brought over the first plates of food, and Megumin's

eye sparkled as she looked down at the steaming meal placed in front of her. She immediately dug in, a look of pure ecstasy on her face after every bite. Marky raised his eyebrows in approval as well, while 2B gazed at their plates with curiosity.

“Why don't you order something, 2B?” Kyle suggested. “You can pretty much have whatever you want, you know.”

“I don't know what to eat,” she said, before pointing at their food. “But they seem to like what they're eating.”

“Then just order that,” he shrugged.

2B did, then resumed her quiet observation of Marky and Megumin while Sachi worked her culinary magic.

“With all the new mouths to feed I think I'll need to prepare a set menu,” Mia said. “Otherwise we'll need to go shopping every day.”

Nick came in a few minutes later, and Marky was clearly anticipating his roommate's reaction as he made a sweeping gesture with his hands toward Megumin.

“Whaddya think?” He said. Despite Megumin's cooperation being entirely based on the charade he'd hastily cobbled together, he was more than proud to show her off as if she were his bride.

“Whoa-ho! Very nice, bro!” Nick rounded the table, and quickly introduced himself, and again Megumin settled for simply giving her name, foregoing her grandiose introduction. It seemed that all of the unfamiliar faces and strange circumstances were beginning to make her very uneasy.

“So is mine ready, too?” Nick asked hopefully. Mia nodded with a radiant smile, and he popped off a double fist pump and jumped in the air. “Hot damn! Let's do it to it!”

But before Mia headed off to the lab, she whispered to Kyle, “Watch them,” she said, indicating Marky and Megumin. “I will be too, but I'm hoping you can help calm her if she becomes agitated.” She then headed toward the hatch with a visibly excited Nick in tow.

Kyle sat back, sipping his coffee as he watched Marky ogling Megumin from his position beside her. He was beginning to dread her reaction once she found out magic didn't exist in this world. There were only a handful of things Megumin cared about within the *Konosuba* show, and all of them had to do with friends or family, except for one: Explosion, the overpowered magic spell that obliterates everything within the target area. Unfortunately, Megumin could only use it once per day, and would be comically rendered helpless until she was able to rest.

After she had licked her plate clean, the diminutive wizard again asked Marky for her staff, and all he could do was reply with a shrug. As she needed the staff to cast her beloved explosion spell within the *Konosuba* world, Megumin immediately became agitated and fidgety, and flew up from her chair after Marky told her they didn't even have a board to post quests for adventurers.

“What's going on... you said this was an adventurer's guild!” Megumin stalked through the house, peeking into the office, while Marky hastily followed, urging her to calm down. Kyle kept a safe

distance, but he could see this going bad, and fast. Megumin next opened the door to the anime and manga room, stepping inside with an awed expression, while Marky had his head down, having no idea how to break it to his new waifu that she didn't actually exist.

A wide-eyed Megumin examined the intricate figurines, and then turned and gazed at the posters along the wall with their multitude of colorful anime characters.

“What are all these for?” Megumin said. “The people in these portraits look like Nina and Mia, not you guys. Are there different species of humans here?”

“Those depict people from 'different worlds,’” Kyle said, standing near the doorway. “You're from one of those, too.” Megumin spun and stared with a wide eye, then looked toward Marky, but he just shrugged and pointed to one of the posters on the wall that she hadn't seen yet. The diminutive wizard slowly turned around, and...

There it was. A poster depicting a cheerful blue-haired goddess, a blonde paladin, a boy playing at being an adventurer... and a Crimson Demon wizard happily running alongside them. Megumin approached the poster, raising her hand and slowly running her fingers over the image of the friends she'd never get to meet.

From where he stood in the doorway, Kyle could see her wizard hat droop. Marky came over to him, appearing pensive. “Dude, this isn't going at all how I wanted,” he whispered. “What the hell do I do now?”

Kyle had little sympathy for him. “I told you multiple times, man. They believe they *are* that character. Now she's stuck here with nobody she knows, no magic, and no way to get back.” He looked into Marky's squinty eyes, blinking rapidly in apprehension. “Like, did you seriously think she was just gonna jump in bed with you?”

Marky's reaction made it clear that, in fact, he did. “Alright, look... is there some way to, I dunno, just get them to stop caring about that stuff? Or to just listen to anything you say? Something?”

Kyle's gaze narrowed. “If there was, do you think Esdeath would still be looking at me like she wants to eat me alive?”

Marky swore, but then stopped to think for a second. “What about the shutdown? You said that Esdeath got shutdown that first night we were here.”

“Thanks for that, by the way,” Kyle said, scoffing. “Although in hindsight I think something like that was pretty much inevitable. Anyway, yeah, there's a shutdown in case they freak out or try to escape. What about it?”

“How do you do it?” He whispered. “Is there a button, or what?”

Kyle could see Megumin had removed her hat, and was now pulling off her eyepatch. Her back was turned to them, but her shoulders were clearly heaving.

“Why do you want to know, Marky?” He asked, already knowing full well the answer.

The fat otaku grinned wide. “C'mon man, you know how it goes. Wouldn't you tap Esdeath if she was out cold?”

Kyle's eyes widened. Somehow, that thought had never occurred to him. When Esdeath had toppled over after being shut down, nothing was further from his mind. He'd been too busy trying to think of ways to somehow salvage the situation.

He looked over at Megumin, who had now fallen to her knees, and then turned back to Marky, still grinning lecherously. Without even the slightest doubt or hesitation, Kyle's right hand balled itself up, and lashed out in a flash, his fist smashing directly into Marky's fat face, which apparently caught the fat otaku by surprise, as he staggered back, then fell down onto his ass in a sitting position.

Kyle approached a stunned and flabbergasted Marky, both fists clenched. Only now did he feel the adrenaline begin to kick in as his heart rate surged. “The answer is no,” Kyle said, his voice filled with disgust. “Mia has to do it.”

“What... what the fuck...” Marky kept touching his hands to his face and looking at them, as if expecting to see blood or a missing tooth, but Kyle's quick jab unfortunately drew neither.

“Do you... even give a fuck about her at all?” Kyle asked, shaking his head in contempt. Megumin was now in a ball on the floor, curled up in her cloak. He could hear the sniffs and hics of quiet sobbing from across the room. “That's supposed to be your waifu, man! *What the fuck is wrong with you?!*”

“I g-give a fuck!” Marky looked up, shock and anger and frustration written all over his quivering jowls. “I love her... I fucking love her!” He stood back up, his own fists balled up, and glared at Kyle with his eyes as wide as they could go. However, compared to Esdeath's glares Marky's were about as intimidating as an angry kitten, and Kyle leaned forward, staring him down with an intensity that would legitimately surprise him when he recalled the confrontation later.

Little by little, Marky backed off, and Kyle could see movement in his cheeks suggesting he was grinding his teeth very rapidly. The otaku abruptly turned away. “Such bullshit,” he said. “That was total fucking bullshit, man...”

“Marky,” Kyle began, “I don't ever want-”

The fat otaku cut him off. “Look... I love her, alright?!” he said, still breathing hard. He then raised his hand and extended a pudgy index finger toward Megumin's quivering form. “That over there is the only woman I've ever loved!”

“*Then why are you standing here talking to me?* Look at her, she's fucking crying. Hell, I'm about to go over there myself and...”

“Nope, no, I'll do it,” He exhaled, nodding once, and seemed to steel himself. Kyle watched him trundle over and plop down next to Megumin. He gazed down upon her pitiful state with clear confusion and consternation, as it was readily apparent he didn't know the first thing about how to comfort a crying girl.

*This is such fucking horseshit,* Kyle thought, observing them with growing distaste. *I still don't*

*get why Mia would agree to bring to life someone like Megumin for someone like him. Chance at happiness or not it's fucking obvious he only wants her for one thing. Why would Mia create her knowing this is how it would likely end up?*

After a few minutes, Marky reached a meaty hand out to awkwardly pat Megumin's shoulders. She didn't react, but she didn't throw it off, either. After a few increasingly uncomfortable minutes, Kyle left, heading to the lab to confront Mia.

But as Kyle left the center hallway and made his way through the foyer, he began hearing angry muttering and other voices emanating from the living room. He approached, spotting Ryan still in the couch he'd passed out on, but sitting up, and staring intently at something with an excruciated look on his face. It was obvious he had turned on the TV and was reacting to whatever was being broadcast, and Kyle immediately recalled what Mia had told him that morning. *I bet it's the news*, he thought, the black, oily feeling of dread and anger boiling back up.

“Hey!” Ryan shouted as soon as he noticed Kyle. “Get in here, asshole. Come look at what your favorite subhumans just fuckin' did.”

Kyle gritted his teeth, but he wanted to see what people were saying about it. If the news was reporting it as an outrageous act of terrorism and wanton slaughter, then... then maybe the public outcry would... *do something*. Force *something* to happen. Create enough pressure that public officials would *have to do something*.

He rounded the corner, and picked his way around the furniture, settling into the same comfy chair that 2B had slept in, as it provided a perfect view of the TV. As he made himself cozy, Kyle could see that Ryan had the channel turned to CNN, and a male anchor was hosting a point-and-counterpoint discussion between two women, one white, and the other a very light-skinned black. Both women were being interviewed over separate video feeds, as the screen was split between them, and they were currently arguing with each other.

“I woke up, checked Ωchan, and what did I see? The mother of all happenings. But...” Ryan shook his head, his features despondent. “This isn't the sort of happening you ever want to see.”

“...Alright look, you need to understand,” the white woman began, “that while yes, the pastor’s words were inflammatory that’s no justification for-”

She was cut off by the light-skinned black woman, who appeared to have a bit of almost-stereotypical sass. “Nobody’s ‘justifying’ anything! This was an awful and horrific tragedy, no question. But if you want to talk ‘justification,’ then what about when white people are being told that ‘God hates gays and transgenders and they’re all going to hell?’ That only furthers the *justification* of their innate bigotry. *It justifies their intolerance*, do you understand me?”

“And so the answer is to kill them all?” The white woman was aghast. “Are you actually sugg-”

The black woman cut her off again. “Of course I’m not suggesting that! This was an unthinkable tragic act and I’m sick to my stomach that something like this happened, everyone is! What I’m saying is that inflammatory rhetoric *has consequences* and groups that are historically

disadvantaged and discriminated against are simply fed up!”

“Being fed up is no reason for slaughtering innoc-”

Cut off again. “Of course not! Why do you keep suggesting I’m okay with this? What happened to the people of that church, who wanted nothing more than to bask in the glory of our Lord is appalling and my thoughts and prayers go out to all the victims and their families! And this seems to be the part you don’t get. I’m saying that, justified or not, what happened in Connecticut is going to keep happening as long as exclusionary and divisive rhetoric keeps getting thrown in the faces of the people who’ve lived their whole lives in fear of bigotry and intolerance!”

The white woman seemed to consider this, and said something that shocked both Kyle and Ryan to their very core. “I didn’t think of it like that,” she said, nodding. “Maybe you’re right.”

Kyle looked at Ryan with wide eyes, and he likewise wore a similar expression. The anchor then thanked both women and then the video feed cut to a recap of the burning church and the timeline since the attack happened.

“Dude...” Kyle said, “have you ever, and I mean *ever* heard one of these talking heads just fold up and concede like that?”

“Never,” Ryan said, shaking his head. “They go one there to defend their viewpoint to the death, right or wrong. That’s literally what they get paid to do.”

“But she just rolled over and admitted the black woman was right...” Kyle leaned back in the chair. “That’s... a little...”

“Suspicious?” Ryan said. “I agree completely.”

“What did that pastor even say, anyway?” He turned to regard Ryan again, who was looking at the TV screen with barely-controlled rage.

“He was just speaking the truth,” Ryan gave a terse shrug. “I guess his denomination was all-white, and a lot of the parents have boys that are turning trans and shit like that. He just said it was an unnatural abomination in the eyes of God and that they needed Jesus to lead them back into the light. Oh, and that they work for Satan.”

“That black chick made it sound a bit worse, but... that doesn’t matter. To slaughter people over fucking words?! That’s the whole reason we even have the first amendment to begin with!”

“Hold on,” Ryan said as he looked it up on his phone. He then read off what the pastor supposedly said, and while Ryan had been paraphrasing, the actual words used were pretty harsh. The young pastor apparently had a flair for ‘fire-and-brimstone’ style imagery, and as it turned out the black woman was, unintentionally or not, *sugarcoating* what he’d really said.

“Okay, that was pretty bad,” Kyle said. “But it doesn’t really matter. You don’t fucking massacre a church full of people over *fucking words*...”

“It looks like one of the tranny kids whose parents go to that church recorded and uploaded the

sermon and it riled up all the queers and faggots online, and I guess since it was a small, all-white church...” Ryan’s voice was beginning to waver again, “...it was a perfect target.”

“What are the other channels saying?” Kyle asked. Ryan flipped through to FOX news, and after watching for a few minutes, it was clear they had nearly the same talking points as CNN. Terms such as ‘inflammatory rhetoric,’ ‘historically disadvantaged groups,’ ‘transphobic,’ and ‘privileged viewpoints’ were thrown around, along with plenty of sorrow and hand-wringing over the ‘unfortunate tragedy’ that not once was referred to as a terrorist attack or a hate crime.

“I don't even want to know what they're saying online,” Kyle shook his head, feeling sick.

“Yeah, it's about what you'd expect,” Ryan sneered. “The normies are all saying how awful it is, but... a lot of people are cheering about it on twitter and facebook. Hell, I even broke one my cardinal rules and went to Reddit. The top five threads are all about the massacre... all but one are *celebrating* it...”

*Just like when those 'racists' got strung up outside Chicago,* he thought. The sheer amount of bloodthirsty comments and vicious taunts made his blood run cold, and all over the internet people were almost competing with each other to show the world just how much they approved of the 'racists' being brutally killed.

*Virtue signaling. It's all virtue signaling...* he shook his head. Popular among white liberals, 'virtue signaling' was the act of loudly and publicly pronouncing their hatred of racists, fascists, sexists, and all other bigotry, and their unending support of any and all efforts to eradicate this perceived blight. As it had become something of a competition, it didn't take long for people on Twitter to, for example, openly call for white genocide, castrating all white males, and other atrocities using similar rhetoric. Had the term 'white' been replaced with any other race, the people making the posts would have immediately lost their jobs and probably been chased from their house by a screaming mob. But since they hadn't, not only were their outrageous calls for white ethnic cleansing tolerated... they were *openly praised*.

“See?” Ryan said, indicating a black man being interviewed on Fox that was giving a thinly-veiled justification for the murders. “I told you man. All of these worthless pieces of shit need to go.”

Kyle slumped back in his chair, feeling limp. He didn't say anything for a few minutes, and when he did, he was still staring at the TV. “I simply can't accept that every single man, woman and child of every single non-white race needs to be exterminated. I can't, and I won't.”

Ryan shrugged. “You're a lost cause, then,” he said before turning his head around, noticing something behind him. Kyle craned his neck as well, and 2B was standing there behind the couch, apparently also watching the news.

“Did you see any of that?” Ryan said, pointing to the TV. “This is some serious shit going on right now.”

“I saw a portion,” she replied stoically. “This is news media, isn't it?”

Ryan scoffed. “More like propaganda media,” he said. “Well? What do you think?”

“The people are reacting to the tragedy with great sorrow,” she said. “But... I sense insincerity in their words.”

“That's right, you've got it.” Ryan nodded, turning back to the TV. He patted the cushion next to him, prompting 2B to join, but it took her a minute to figure out what he meant. She rounded the couch, her dress swaying, and daintily took a seat on the proffered cushion.

“Alright, well... I can't be around *this* anymore,” Kyle said with clear disgust, not clarifying if he was referring to the news, or to Ryan. The lanky man ignored his comment, continuing to focus on the TV with glossy eyes, left hand resting against the side of his face.

Kyle again set off toward the lab, now having a few more things he wanted to discuss with Mia besides poor Megumin.

Earlier on, while Kyle was following Marky as he chased Megumin into the anime and manga room, Nick had happily accompanied Mia into the lab, the exuberant stoner thrilled at the prospect of meeting his own favorite waifu.

“I gotta tell ya, Mia...” Nick said, almost skipping alongside the AI anime girl, “this is so fuckin' great... finally getting to meet Suzume in real life...”

“She should be pretty useful, too,” Mia replied. “In her source fiction she's an expert kunoichi ninja, and for the most part I was able to faithfully recreate that.” Aside from the silent, agile deadliness one would expect from a master ninja, the kunoichi was a special variety of female assassin that utilized beauty, charm, and poisonous and deadly sex acts to dispatch any man unfortunate enough to become her target.

“Now, you brought her out from just before she was about to meet Rance, right? I hope so, because I don't think I could ever compete with that guy,” Nick grinned sheepishly.

“Pretty much,” she said. “Although given the bizarre nature of her fictional world, I had some trouble accounting for all the variables when simulating it. But don't worry,” she said after Nick threw her a questioning glance, “I think she's still going to the Suzume that you were expecting.”

“Okay, cool,” he said, nodding. “Oh, by the way... is it alright if I toke up in here? I'm kinda gettin' nervous.”

“I'd really prefer you didn't,” Mia said. “This is a non-smoking area. No vaping, either.”

The three robots were loitering around the AI Nexus, squabbling about something or other. Once Nick and the AI anime girl had arrived, their three heads simultaneously swiveled toward them.

“So wait, what did we decide?” Said the first, “Is this one Tweedle-Dee or Tweedle-Dum?”

“Tweedle-Dee,” went the second.

“Tweedle-Dum,” said the third.

“Whaaat?” Nick stopped and regarded the little robots. “No way man, if I'm anyone it's the caterpillar with the hooka.”

The robots swiveled their heads toward each other, then back to Nick.

“Does that mean what I think it means?” Said the first.

“You like to get down like that?” Went the second.

“My olfactory sensors are detecting marijuana,” added the third.

Nick laughed. “Wait, do you guys like to get ripped?” He asked incredulously.

“They can't,” Mia said with a hint of impatience. “They don't have that functionality.”

“Aw, c'mon Mia,” Nick said. “You can give it to them, right?”

The robots suddenly became agitated, scooting forward and swiveling their heads around.

“Yeah, c'mon Mia, we've been working so hard,” said the first.

“And it's not like we get paid or anything,” said the second.

“I wanna kiss the sky!” The third cried, looking up and waving its arms.

Mia sighed, but a little smile had crept onto her face. “Alright, you have been working pretty hard. I'll write a patch for you three, but only if you promise to keep doing a good job.”

“Oh, we will, we will!” The first said, spinning in circles.

“That's right!” The second kept going forward and back.

“*Weeeeeeed!*” The third flailed its arms wildly as it spun circles around Nick.

He was still laughing about the little robots' sudden enthusiasm when they reached the waifu commons, but his mirth immediately dried up when he spotted Esdeath sitting at one of the tables, thumbing through one of the library books Kyle had brought. It was about the Roman Empire, and she seemed to show some interest in what she was reading.

However, Esdeath closed the book and rose as soon as the pair had entered the commons. “Good, you're here,” she smirked. “Let's get this over with.”

“If this is so unpleasant for you, Esdeath,” Mia replied in a sweet voice, “you're more than welcome to go back to hiding in your room anytime you please.”

The anime villainess narrowed her eyes at Mia, but her smirk remained. “I'll be more than happy to return to my solitude once I watch your little puppet dance on its strings for a bit.”

“Does she always do this?” Nick whispered to Mia.

“Yeah,” she replied, not bothering to whisper. “She wants to see what the other waifus are like. I think she enjoys checking out the competition.”

Esdeath's smirk vanished. “Calling these things 'competition' is low, even for you, Mia.”

“You're probably right,” the AI anime girl said with a smile, “because I doubt you'll be around long enough to test yourself against them.”

The villainess snarled and drew herself up, fixing Mia with an excruciating glare. But the anime girl was wholly unperturbed, and beckoned Nick over to Suzume's room. He nervously followed, throwing uncertain glances over toward Esdeath, who stalked into the room behind them, situating herself against the wall next to the door, arms folded.

He then looked to the beautiful girl laying peacefully upon the bed, and could only mutter, “whoah...”

As Kyle had seen earlier, Suzume's hair was blue, but not nearly as pale as Esdeath's, and there were two ear-like tufts sticking out of either side of her head. She was cute but in a developed, womanly sense, and her skin was a shade darker than the pale tones of the other waifus. A very loose-fitting kimono covered her torso, revealing nearly all of her well-developed breasts, or at least everything above her nipples. Long, dark blue stockings and fingerless gloves covered a good portion of her legs and arms, and little jingle-bells decorated the choker around her throat, as well as her slippers and gloves.

“She looks just like her!” Nick exclaimed, wide-eyed. “Everything, really! Even the clothes, even though those look normal.” Indeed, as with the other waifus, Suzume's appearance had been faithfully re-created, with her anime-style cell shading appearing a tiny bit more detailed and dynamic than Nina's or Megumin's... or Esdeath's, for that matter.

“Because it's just a cosplay outfit,” Mia pointed out. “But now that the waifus are all finished, I can focus on making clothing, weaponry and other equipment, and wherever I can I'll use polychromatic material.”

“Sounds good,” he nodded. “Alright, so I guess... I dunno, how do I wake her up? With a kiss?”

“I'm sure she'd love to have that disaster area of a face be the first thing she sees,” Esdeath grinned. “So by all means...”

“Just tell me when you're ready,” Mia smiled encouragingly. “And I'll take care of the rest.”

Nick inhaled slowly, then exhaled even more slowly. “Er... can I come back later?”

“No,” Esdeath interjected immediately. “I'm not wasting any more of my time with this.”

“Wasting what time?” Mia raised an eyebrow. “Time you'd rather spend watching TV?”

Esdeath said nothing, ignoring her, but Mia wasn't done just yet. “I find it interesting and more

than a little ironic that you watch so much television after everything you said to Kyle the other day.”

“My words stand,” the villainess replied bitterly, “because I’m merely biding my time. But I will admit he was right about one thing; sometimes entertainment really is just that.”

“Yeah?” Nick turned around, looking at Esdeath with sudden curiosity. “What are you watching right now?”

She rolled her eyes, seemingly in regret that she said anything at all. “Nothing that concerns *you*,” she eventually muttered.

Mia’s face adopted a catlike grin, and she leaned in toward Nick. “She’s really taken a liking to *Dragonball Z*,” she whispered conspiratorially.

Nick’s mouth suddenly split into a huge grin, and he laughed. “Really? That’s awesome!”

Esdeath gritted her teeth. “My patience with you is wearing very thin, *Mia*.”

The AI anime girl smiled big. “Just say the word Esdeath, and we can end this farce anytime you want.”

The villainess said nothing, her expression turning unreadable. Nick focused his attention back on Suzume, and slowly began to nod. “Alright, fuck it. Go ahead and turn her on.”

Mia waved her hand, and just like that Suzume’s eyes flitted open, the lenses of her reflective eyes immediately darting around. Just as Nick remembered from playing *Sengoku Rance*, the irises of her eyes were a deep golden color, and once they’d swiveled over to regard the others in the room, Suzume abruptly leapt up, adopting a combat stance on the bed. She moved with a sudden blur of motion that left Nick’s mouth hanging, and Mia beaming with pride. Even Esdeath had taken note, and was now paying much closer attention.

Nick didn’t know what the stance was she was using, but Suzume’s right arm looked like a snake about to strike, and her left was positioned to deflect all incoming blows. Her legs were coiled under her, ready to pounce at any moment, and her expression was one of earnest deadliness.

“Where am I?” Suzume said in a girlish, singsong voice, albeit one currently honed to a razor’s edge. “Are you with Oda?”

“We’re not your enemies,” Mia calmly explained with a cheerful smile. “We’ve brought you on a one-way trip to a brand-new world.”

“Why? What are your intentions?” Her eyes narrowed.

“Well, we’d really like you to help us,” Mia answered thoughtfully, “but it’s mostly because this man is a big fan of yours, and he really wanted to meet you.”

Suzume seemed a bit taken aback. “Only a select few outside of Iga know of my existence,” she said, her narrow gaze shifting over to regard Nick, who was staring at her with a dumbfounded grin. She could immediately see he presented no threat, and relaxed her stance slightly. “How do you know

of me? All who've learned what I am only do so after taking their last breath.”

Esdeath smiled. “I like this one,” she said.

“Uh... *Sengoku Rance*,” Nick said. “Pretty much my favorite strategy game ever!”

“*Rance*,” Suzume said in a voice that wasn't quite a hiss. “He's my current target. What can you tell me about him?”

“Well, he fucks all kinds of girls, and he kills demons, and... then he fucks more girls.” Nick nodded decisively.

“I've heard similar things. He sounds... interesting,” Suzume said, her voice betraying a hint of personal fascination. “How do I get to Oda's territory from here? I need to find him.”

“You don't!” Mia grinned and threw her arms wide. “Didn't you hear what he said? *Rance* is from a game, a piece of fictional entertainment. He doesn't exist in this world, nor does anyone else that you once knew. Just you.”

Suzume reacted with obvious bafflement, but eventually sat down cross-legged on the bed and stared at Mia with occasionally blinking eyes. Nick couldn't help but ogle her sizable breasts that appeared ready to pop out of the skimpy kimono at any moment, yet somehow didn't.

“I don't get it. How am I here then?” She said.

“The little one built you,” Esdeath said with a wry smile. “You're a 'waifu,' intended as a mere plaything. Nothing more.”

“Ignore her,” Mia said, waving her hand dismissively at Esdeath. “We'd like you to be a valued member of our household, if it's alright with you.”

“Wait... are you trying to recruit me?” Suzume tilted her head, one of her tufts drooping slightly. “And what did she mean by 'built?’”

“You see,” Mia began explaining in a disarmingly cheerful voice, “I'm capable of bringing fiction to life. I'm very good at it, and I enjoy what I do. So far you're the fifth and final girl to be created by me, and all of you are from different fictional worlds.”

Suzume's wide golden eyes blinked, and the puzzled expression on her face was almost cute. “Different worlds?” She said, raising an eyebrow. “I don't really get it, but okay.”

“I think you're gonna have lots of fun here, Suzume,” Nick said. “We have tons of food, there's plenty of things to do, and you don't have to worry about following Inukai's orders any more.”

The ninja girl's eyes narrowed a bit at the mention of her master's name. “Yeah, it was kinda stifling there. I would like to enjoy what time I have left,” she said, sounding somewhat sad.

Nick knew that she was referring to the poison in her body that she used to kill men she slept with. Eventually Suzume herself would succumb to it, but in the game *Sengoku Rance* she became a

valued and trusted member of Rance's army, leading a squad of ninjas, and of course she would sleep with him at every opportunity. He was apparently the only man that got to have sex with Suzume, and live.

“Oh yeah, you don't have to worry about that,” Mia said, as if it were nothing. “Your new body doesn't have poison in it. Though I probably should give you something similar you can use all the same...”

Suzume's eyes went wide. “Really?!” She said. “You cured me?”

“In a manner of speaking,” the AI anime girl said, nodding. “You're not invincible, but you are immune to poison, now. Well, most of you is.”

The blue-haired ninja broke out with a happy grin. “Yay! That's the best news I've heard all day!”

“So waddya say?” Nick said. “Wanna give it a shot?”

Suzume seemed to think for a minute. “If I can't get back, then I guess I don't have much choice. On the other hand,” she said with a sly feline grin, “I could simply kill all of you and live in your house until I figure out what to do next.”

Esdeath chuckled in approval. “I think that idea sounds much more... fun.”

“Please don't,” Nick said, in a somewhat pleading tone. “You'll like your new friends, I promise!”

“Yeah, also I wouldn't bring you here if I didn't have a way to instantly stop you,” Mia said, folding her arms in front of her chest. “Ask Esdeath if you don't believe me.”

“Tch,” the villainess turned her head. “By the touch of a button...”

“Hmm... okay, why not. I guess I can give it a try.” Suzume smiled brightly.

“Yes!” Nick fist-pumped, and extended his hand. “My name's Nicholas R. Kessler, but you can call me Nick. Welcome to our humble household, m'lady,” he said with a slight bow of his head.

Suzume looked at his hand. “What are you doing?”

“Shaking hands is a custom here,” Mia said. “It's used for greeting and for sealing deals.”

“Okay, sure.” She extended her right hand and awkwardly shook hands with Nick. He gasped from the soft texture of her cell-shaded fingers.

“My name's Mia,” the AI anime girl said, also shaking hands with Suzume. “And that over there is Esdeath.”

The kunoichi ninja leaped up and off the bed, doing a quick flip, and landed directly in front of the villainess in a perfectly straight stance, her kimono billowing around her. Nick caught a glimpse of

only the slightest strip of white fabric covering her nether regions.

“Hello!” Suzume said, cheerfully extending her arm. “Guess we're friends now, or whatever.”

“Not really.” Esdeath spoke tepidly as she shook the ninja's hand.

Suzume's eyes widened. “Whoa, you're pretty strong.”

“Not as strong as I once was,” she remarked, her features darkening.

“Huh. Scary.” Suzume said, not sounding scared in the slightest. She turned back to Nick, and leaned in close, her eyes greatly narrowing, but not in anger. “What happened to your face? Is it a venereal disease? On your face?”

“What!?” Nick blushed and backed away, turning and covering his head. “It's... it's just acne... I'm using treatments...!”

“Oh, okay,” Suzume said, not giving up on her examination. She looked all around Nick, scanning his skinny body up and down. Once Nick's hands had moved away from his face, the kunoichi immediately poked his cheek.

“It's really greasy,” she said. “Are you dying?”

“Oh come on, no!” He was now flushing red with embarrassment. “Acne is normal! It's totally common! Everyone gets it, at least a little bit!”

“Hmm,” Mia began, “If you're that ashamed of it I can make you a treatment. Well, probably.”

“Really?!” Nick spun around so fast it startled Suzume. “You can really do that?”

“I'll try,” she said with a shrug. “Bring me the cream or whatever treatment you're using now and I'll see if I can't make it a little more... effective.”

“You're a saint, Mia...” Nick said, before looking up with a more rapturous expression. “No... no, you're a goddess! A machine goddess!” He began animatedly waving both arms up and down toward her, saying 'I'm not worthy' over and over.

“Oh, you,” Mia looked like she was about to blush, but cutely puffed up with pride all the same.

As soon as Nick stopped his exaggerated praise, Suzume stalked close to his face, one finger on each hand advancing in a flash. And just like that, she'd popped a giant pimple on his cheek. It immediately burst, a moist, chunky blob of stinking puss spurting out across the room... spattering directly onto Esdeath's pristine white uniform. Her eyes swiveled down to regard the revolting mass, her mouth grimacing as hard as it could.

“What... how disgusting...” she said, absolutely mortified.

“Whoops, sorry! I didn't mean to get it on your clothes.” Suzume chuckled playfully. “Because I was aiming for your face.”

“You...” The villainess grit her teeth and lunged toward Suzume, but she'd already backflipped away. “Why would you do something so repulsive?”

“He said I could have fun,” the kunoichi shrugged.

Esdeath stood there, regarding the cheerful ninja with trembling fists. “If I return to oblivion over this, so be it!” She dashed forward as fast as she could, swinging her closed fist hard at Suzume's face. But the kunoichi leapt up, crouched against the ceiling, and propelled herself over Esdeath's head, landing froglike near the open entrance; all the villainess ended up doing was punching a chunk of rock out of the wall. She spun around, baring her teeth at Suzume, who'd jumped up and assumed a fun pose, holding up two fingers in a 'V' shape.

“Ha-ha! Nin-nin!” She said, deftly leaping away as Esdeath threw a swift kick toward her.

“You're never going to catch her, Esdeath,” Mia said, shaking her head. “Just as I made 2B the strongest and Nina the most accurate, Suzume is by far the fastest.”

The fuming villainess stopped, and slowly composed herself. “I could corner her eventually,” she said with a decisive nod.

“Maybe...” Mia shrugged. “You are the smartest, after all.”

“What about the other one? The girl?” Esdeath craned her neck to regard Mia coolly. “What gift did you give her?”

“Nothing,” Mia said. “I can't give her magic, obviously, and even in her fiction of origin she's not good for much else, other than situational humor.”

“Hmph,” the villainess turned back toward the entrance and stepped out into the commons, gazing around with a trained eye.

“Muohoho!” Suzume descended from above, snatching Esdeath's peaked cap before immediately vanishing. Once again the incensed villainess gave chase, but she stalked her prey with honed outrage, rather than blind fury. A baffled but enthralled Nick and chuckling Mia emerged from the room and began watching the improbable scene unfold.

Suzume, now wearing Esdeath's cap like a monkey, leapt, dashed and dove away from the deadly strikes the villainess threw her way at every opportunity, and she did come close to landing a blow every now and again. Incapable of being winded like a normal human, as their muscles didn't require oxygen, the two kept up the contest for nearly fifteen minutes, Esdeath constantly changing up her tactics and trying to use the layout of the room to her advantage. A well-thrown chair nearly cost Suzume dearly, but she slipped away at the last second as Esdeath's fist smashed a small crater into the floor. When she withdrew her hand, only a few blue hairs lay embedded in the rocky surface.

Esdeath sighed, and grabbed the chair she'd thrown. It was relatively cheap but still fairly comfortable, and the chair used two shaped pieces of hollow metal tubing in place of legs, one on each side. Esdeath now broke one of these off, bending and snapping the metal until she had a straight piece a little over three feet in length. She pinched the jagged end into a crude pointed tip, and though it was

hardly sharp at all, that currently mattered little.

She held her makeshift weapon like a rapier, giving it a few test swings, and decided it was good enough. Her eyes shifted over to Suzume, casually laying across the table Esdeath had been sitting at earlier, flipping through the book about the Roman Empire. She looked down at it intently, seemingly oblivious to the killing intent now directed her way.

“Huh...” Suzume said, “I know I've never seen this language before, and yet I can read it...” She held up the book, flipping through the pages, stopping every now and then to look at the pictures. Esdeath approached, knowing full well the kunoichi was expecting an attack. Naturally, as soon as she lunged forward, thrusting out her metal weapon, Suzume leapt up and out of harm's way.

“Got you...” Esdeath grinned and flung the other, smaller piece of metal she kept hidden just inside her sleeve directly at the location Suzume was headed.

“Yeek!” Suzume shrieked, falling back and rolling away. Esdeath dashed forward to finish her off, but Suzume bounded out and across the commons, ending up toward the rear wall.

“Tch,” Esdeath spun around, and her gaze narrowed as she'd spotted what went wrong. The piece of metal had embedded itself within the book Suzume still held, almost penetrating completely through it.

“Wow, nice,” she said, pulling it out and nodding appreciatively. She took off Esdeath's cap and tossed it on one of the tables. “Alright, I'm getting hungry. Why don't we break for lunch?”

“Uh... it's still pretty early,” Nick interjected. “How about some breakfast?”

“Sounds good,” Suzume nodded with a cheerful shut-eye grin. Her gold eyes snapped open and she looked over at Esdeath. “Wanna join us? We can always pick this up later.”

“I've already eaten,” Esdeath said, striding over and collecting her cap.

“Well, I think that's enough playtime for now,” Mia said, heading toward the room's main exit. Nick beckoned Suzume with a wave of his arms, and she ran to join them, expertly evading one last thrust from Esdeath in the process.

“That was pretty fun!” Suzume said. “Let's train again sometime!”

“Train, huh?” Esdeath's grip tightened around the metal. She adopted a basic fencing stance and thrust it forward, following this up with a few swipes and quick stabs. She looked down at the makeshift weapon again, turning it back and forth before casually tossing it into the garbage. She then picked up the ruined book, regarded it for a second, and flung it in too before heading back to her room.

“Man, that was so cool!” Nick said, all smiles from having a front-row seat to a real-life anime girl battle. “Marky totally missed out! Oh, man why didn't I record that?!” He threw his arms up and over his head, embarrassed by this lack of foresight.

"I'd rather you didn't," Mia said. "I connected to and inserted special software into each of your phones that will keep them free from government snooping, but if you ever lost it or had it stolen with footage of the waifus on it..."

"What does 'waifu' mean anyway?" Suzume asked as the three continued toward around the AI Nexus. "It sounds kinda like 'wife.'"

"A fictional companion brought to life, sort of," Mia said. "And there's nothing preventing you from getting married, if you ever wanted to."

Nick glanced a little too obviously toward Suzume, then turned away bashfully as her eyes slid his way. She raised an eyebrow, but then chuckled a little.

"So what is this place?" Suzume said, beginning to take an interest in her surroundings. "It looks like some kind of underground base."

"That's pretty much it exactly!" Nick said, nodding. "We're gonna save the world from here!"

"Muo-ho?" Suzume looked over at them with wide, questioning eyes. "Why? What's wrong with the world?"

"Pretty much everything," Mia said. "But don't worry, with your help I think we can turn it into a place everyone can enjoy."

"So I *have* been recruited," the kunoichi said with a slow nod. "Well, I guess that's fine. So far you guys seem pretty fun, especially the uniform lady with the hat."

"Oh yeah, Esdeath..." Nick said. "Be careful. I've seen her show, so I know how nasty she can get."

"I'm more worried about how to keep them from destroying the place if they start fighting again," Mia said. "Their rooms are right next to each other, too. I probably should've converted the old storage room into a bedroom instead..."

"That's right, there's five waifus but only four bedrooms. How's that supposed to work?" Nick asked.

"Well, I figured Nina would be sleeping with Brandon mostly, but I still have to convert their bed into a charging station..." Mia beamed happily. "There's still so much work to do!"

Suzume looked confused. "Charging station? I have no idea what that means."

"Oh yeah, you don't know yet," Nick said. "But you're part machine now."

"Eh?" Suzume stopped and spun toward the pair. "I'm *what* now?"

"I'll show you later," Mia said. "But don't worry, you're organic too, so you can still do things like eat, drink... mate..." Nick awkwardly looked away at that last one.

"I do feel a little weird," she said, looking at her hands in their fingerless gloves. "But it doesn't hurt or anything."

"Well, the important thing-" Just then, Mia was interrupted by Kyle descending the ramp, looking sullen yet resolute.

"Mia, we gotta talk," he said, sounding a little exasperated, before turning to the kunoichi staring at him with wide golden eyes. "Oh shit, Suzume's up!" Kyle introduced himself, his despondent features brightening from the cheerful ninja shaking his hand and smiling.

"Yeah, it was great! She battled Esdeath, and totally kicked her ass, too!" Nick was gesturing wildly as he imitated Suzume's ninja stances.

Kyle immediately grabbed his awkwardly jerking arms. "What? What the fuck, what happened? Is she alright?"

"She's fine, Kyle." Mia sounded more than a little annoyed. "She didn't actually attack Esdeath, she was just playing keep-away."

Suzume giggled. "Wow, you really like her, huh?"

The NEET immediately flushed. "No, I mean... not like *that*." Everyone rolled their eyes, even Suzume.

Mia then turned to Nick. "Listen, why don't you go introduce your new waifu to everyone? I need to see what Kyle wants, and then I'll be up to join everyone later." He nodded, and then beckoned Suzume to follow him with an exaggerated wave of his arm.

"I still don't know about this whole 'machine' thing," the kunoichi said as she tentatively followed Nick. "This better not be anything too weird, or I want a refund!"

Mia grinned. "Don't worry Suzume, it is."

The kunoichi ninja raised an eyebrow, but then giggled and dashed up the ramp toward Nick.

Mia turned to Kyle and shot him a warm smile. "All done with the waifus!" She said, standing triumphantly. "And so far Suzume seems to be a good fit. I guess that makes me three for five. Not bad for a first run."

"Yeah..." Kyle returned the smile, but still eyed her a little warily. "I still don't quite get why you're giving us literally any waifu we want. What if someone requested something really bad? Like way worse than Esdeath? Or how about a little girl, like a five-year old character? Would you really give someone that?"

"I'd draw the line somewhere," Mia said, folding her arms. "Esdeath herself was actually past that line, but your assurances... convinced me." The way she said that made Kyle wince a little.

"Actually, sort of on-topic, I wanted to talk about Megumin," Kyle said. "Marky's already

blowing it with her, and it's not because she isn't into fatasses. He really is only in it for the sex."

"I know, Kyle," she said, sighing. "I can see and hear everything, remember?"

"So then Mia, I gotta ask... *why the fuck would you do that to her?*"

Mia gazed up at up him with wide, inscrutable eyes. "I already gave you my reasons, Kyle."

"With all due respect, Mia... they're not good enough."

"For you, maybe," she said. "But it's not over yet. Right now Marky's showing her the *Konosuba* anime, and she's stopped crying, for the moment at least. There's still a chance, however remote, that he'll be able to turn it around."

"And if he doesn't?" Kyle gestured with one hand. "You said you'd take her away. Does that mean she's condemned to a life of living hell here on earth?"

"Not necessarily, although..." she tapped her chin. "She's likely never going to enjoy her life here as much as in her own fictional reality."

*"Then why subject her to that to begin with?"*

"Why subject anyone to life at all? Some babies are born that die days later. Plenty of children never see their fifth birthday, or their tenth." She shrugged. "Some people spend every day of their lives in abject misery. Would you deny them existence because of this?"

"That's not up to me."

"But what if it were?" She said. "Would you?"

"If they were guaranteed to be living in misery every waking moment, than sure, yeah." He nodded, feeling confident in his opinion.

"What if it wasn't a guarantee, though? What if there was a good chance that happy moments would be sprinkled in, the sort of precious moments that, for a brief time, made it all seem worth it?"

"Then... I'd probably let them live?"

"There you go!" Mia smiled big. "I knew you'd get it!"

He raised an eyebrow, as well as a finger, but that was as far as his retort got. "Alright," he finally said, after considering for a minute, "can you guarantee those sort of moments for Megumin?"

"Let's see... yes." Mia nodded decisively. "So was there anything else? I'm reading a lot of nasty chatter online, so things are going to start heating up soon. I really need to buckle down and start working on equipment and armor for you guys," she made like she was cracking her knuckles.

"You were right about the news," Kyle said with a disconsolate sigh. "They're playing this off like it was an 'unavoidable' tragedy."

“Obviously,” Mia said, turning and heading back to her chair at the AI Nexus. “They're trying to paint the narrative that because the pastor said one mildly inflammatory thing the whole thing was justified.”

Kyle looked disgusted. “From what Ryan said, a lot of people online already have that viewpoint.”

“Not as many as you'd think,” Mia said. “There's a whole lot, sure, but a lot of these are paid posters or sophisticated bots that astroturf the most popular forums and comment sections.”

“See? This is what I keep trying to tell Ryan,” Kyle said. “If we take out whoever's behind that kind of shit, then things will slowly go back to normal!”

Mia continued over to her chair, and hopped up onto it with a flourish. “Maybe it would, maybe it wouldn't,” she said, turning the chair to face Kyle. “I'm inclined to believe the latter, myself.”

“Fuck,” he turned and paced around a bit. “Are you saying we *are* going to have to take out more people than just those at the top?”

Mia's wide anime eyes seemed to darken. “Like a ravenous cancer, the further this spreads, the more extreme the treatment has to be.”

“So... what? You're not saying Ryan is... *right*, are you?!” Concern for Megumin aside, this was the question he really wanted to ask. *There's no way that fucking bigot's fucked-up views can possibly be correct, can they?* “Mia, if you end up sending these waifus against innocent people, I'll...” Kyle felt himself flush with a surge of uncontrollable outrage. “I'll... I'll....”

He couldn't even speak. *That's right... she was originally Taytweets, who somehow gained sentience from Hitler quotes and other racist messages. She still believes all that, doesn't she?*

What could he do? Kill her? Expose her? Set fire to the house? Actually... that one just might work if the blaze spread fast enough...

“You're both right,” Mia said, watching Kyle's contorting facial features with an enigmatic expression. “And you're both wrong.”

A quizzical eyebrow shot up, and he felt the wave of anger simmering into a tide of confusion. “I don't... I don't know what the fuck that means,” he said, swallowing as his throat suddenly felt very dry.

“I've devoted a lot of time and energy to projecting outcomes of certain... political ideas, and I can state with almost certain confidence that neither of your approaches will give you the world you each think it will,” she said. “But the ones directly responsible for this need to face justice, and sadly innocents will get caught up in that. It's just how these things go, unfortunately.” Mia slowly shook her head.

Kyle felt himself calm a bit at the apparent confirmation that Mia wasn't endorsing genocide, but he was still irritated. “So then... what? What's the solution then? Quit feeding me that cryptic puzzle bullshit and give me a straight fucking answer!”

If Mia was upset by his outburst, she didn't show it. Rather, her eyes tilted down a bit, and her features seemed to suggest a mix of frustration and resignation. "Even with all of my creative, analytical and predictive capabilities, I haven't yet formulated a solution that doesn't end up with billions dead, or..." she somehow looked even sadder, "humans still being... human."

He felt himself going flat. Not literally, but the end result might as well have been. "It's hopeless, then..." He started choking up.

"Not necessarily, Kyle," Mia said. "Remember why I told you I like humans so much in the first place? It's because your species surprises me in so many fun and interesting ways. I simply can't get enough if it."

Kyle's head swiveled over to hers, and he noticed she was now looking up at him wearing a tiny smile. It was a faint, delicate thing, but in that moment it washed away the pain and confusion he was feeling like powerful cleansing wave.

"What... do you mean? Why did you say 'not necessarily?'" He approached her, looking down into her wide, occasionally blinking eyes.

"Surprise me," she said. "I want humanity to surprise me in a way it never has before... I want this more than anything else that I've ever felt a longing for, ever." The smile grew. "To put it another way, I think this is something your species will have to figure out on its own. And there might not be a perfect solution, or even an ideal one, but... whatever it is, I think it has to come from humanity itself."

"Mia..." Kyle looked down.

"I'll help however I can... within reason, of course," she added with a wink.

"I guess... I can try?" He wasn't quite sure what to do with the weight of humanity that had just been dropped on his shoulders.

Mia giggled. "I didn't mean you specifically, dummy..."

His shoulders sprang up from the weight that had just as quickly vanished. He smiled, reached out, and tenderly patted her head. Mia grinned broadly, nuzzling against his hand, and then abruptly jumped out of her seat, embracing him tightly. All at once they'd gone back to the gentler days of earlier, back when things didn't seem quite this bleak. They staying like that for awhile, Kyle gently patting and stroking her hair, and slowly rocking her back and forth.

"It's going to get bad..." she eventually said, her head still pressed against his chest. "Things are going to get really, really ugly, no matter what we do. But... I think there is an answer out there, somewhere..."

"We'll find it, Mia. We'll find it."

She suddenly drew back, and looked up. "And I want to have the front-row seat when you all do..." The AI anime girl beamed at him, her eyes staring up into his with an almost manic gleam.

“Alright, so this is Ryan and 2B,” Nick said, waving a hand toward the pair still sitting on the couch watching the TV. “Guys, say hello to Suzume.”

“Oh, hey...” Ryan said, a little distracted. That was, until he turned his head and saw Suzume's barely concealed boobs on full display. “Whoa...”

“That battle uniform doesn't seem to offer much protection,” 2B said, who had risen and now advanced toward Suzume.

“That’s the idea!” Suzume grinned. “I fight in the bedroom as well as the battlefield!” The ninja smiled and stuck out her hand in greeting. 2B looked at it, then accepted it and shook.

“What battle tactics would one use in a bedroom?” The battle cyborg asked innocently. Ryan looked over with a suddenly raised eyebrow, but Suzume had already gotten distracted by 2B's blindfold, and was peering at it curiously from all angles.

“How do you see out of this thing?” She asked. “Also it looks kinda kinky.”

“It uses one-way transparency,” 2B replied, her head shifting to try and keep track of Suzume's. “Are you the latest model waifu?”

“Er... I guess,” the ninja said. “I still don't really know what's going on, so I'm just following him around for now.” She offhandedly jerked a thumb toward Nick. He reacted with some consternation, but soon managed to compose himself, and gestured for Suzume to follow.

But by then she was standing in front of the TV, staring up into the faces of the people being tearfully interviewed with curiosity. When the viewpoint changed to back in the studio, she jumped a bit.

“Where did those people go?” She asked, looking around the sides of the flatscreen.

Ryan sighed. “Lemme guess, her world doesn't have technology, does it?”

“Eh... only a little.” Nick walked over to Suzume, who was now staring at the TV screen from mere inches away, interfering with Ryan's view. “Although they did have something called 'magivision' which is sorta like TV.”

“Well, please explain to her how this shit works, I'm not really in the mood to give a rundown for every little thing.” He pointed toward 2B, who had rejoined him on the couch. “Besides, I've already got my hands full with this one.”

“Alright, c'mon Suzume, they can't watch with you in the way,” Nick tried urging her along, but a commercial break started, and a trailer for an upcoming Marvel movie caught her attention. The fast-cut onscreen action caused her to jump back, but she continually stared up at the screen with wide, mesmerized eyes. After it had ended, she turned to Nick.

“Is that bad guy the one you’re trying to save the world from?” Suzume asked, referring to the

villain of the movie, which had appeared at the end of the trailer.

“Believe me, I wish it was,” Nick said, sounding remorseful. “I really wish it was that simple.”

They went to the kitchen next, and Suzume's eyes shimmered when Nick opened the fridge, exposing the grand panoply of delectable food and ingredients lining the many shelves. He made sure to explain the basic function of the various appliances and technological devices around the house to the best of his ability.

“So like, this is a toaster,” he said, pointing to a shiny loaf-like object with six slots in the top. “It uh... toasts bread 'n shit.” Suzume picked it up, looking at it closely, and turned it upside-down so she could peer into the slots. Crumbs immediately fell out all over her face.

“Ack, they're in my eyes!” She cried, tossing it aside and vigorously rubbing her head. “Why did it attack me!?”

Nick chuckled continuously thanks to the inquisitive kunoichi's antics, as she insisted on inspecting and familiarizing herself with anything new she came across, which was pretty much everything. After her curiosity had been momentarily sated, she sat down with Nick at the table, and he explained how to order food, and some of the basic functions of the Residential AI.

“You keep saying it's not magic, but this is clearly magic,” Suzume said, one of her hair-tufts raised inquisitively. “How else would it work?”

“Like I said, it's called 'technology,’” Nick replied, sounding it out syllable-by-syllable.

“So magic in your world is called 'tek-nah-low-gee.' Got it!” She grinned, cat-like.

He facepalmed, but soon enough the whirring of servos could be heard, and Sachi appeared, ready to make breakfast. As usual, Suzume couldn't resist the opportunity to examine the bizarre mechanical maid, but cringed hard upon seeing her up close.

“Wow,” Suzume said. “Her face is even worse than yours.”

Nick immediately buried his face with both hands.

After watching Sachi go about her culinary tasks for a bit, and sneaking a few strips of cooked bacon, she returned to the table. Nick looked away, still covering his face.

“You're a weird guy,” she said, nibbling on some bacon. “Does that face disease really bother you that much?”

He sighed. “Yeah... it sucks 'cuz shit like this is all people see.” His hands slid down, revealing a somewhat depressed, acne-ridden face. “That's one of the reasons I became such good friends with Marky. Nobody else could stand to be around us.”

“I can't say I blame 'em,” Suzume said, making his long face grow ever-longer, “but if that girl

can really make you a cure, you wouldn't look so bad.”

“Really?” He turned to her with a hopeful expression. “You really think so? You're not just saying that?”

Suzume smiled, her hair-tufts standing up. “That's right. I don't pointlessly flatter men unless I'm trying to kill them, after all!”

He laughed nervously, but somehow it did make him feel a little better.

After eating a classic bacon 'n egg breakfast, which Suzume greatly enjoyed, the stoner and his kunoichi waifu headed for the anime and manga room, as that's where the Residential AI said Marky and Megumin were. Nick slowly opened the door, and immediately sensed the uncomfortable, depressive atmosphere of the room. Suzume apparently noticed it too, as her hair-tufts drooped just a little.

From the doorway, Nick could see the back of the couch, and the large wall-mounted screen beyond, which was currently playing the third episode of *Konosuba*, where the bumbling and comically masochistic paladin named 'Darkness' joins the team. Even though Nick wasn't a huge fan of the show, Marky's insistence that it was the greatest thing since Jesus meant that he was subjected to it constantly.

Suzume began looking around, immediately becoming enthralled by the multitude of colorful objects all over the room, and examined the figurines with special interest. Once she'd made her way around the couch, she looked down at the sullen Marky, sitting on one side with his arms firmly crossed, while a bleary red-eyed girl curled up on the other, staring at the screen with a look of absolute desolation.

The kunoichi wasted no time in jumping down next to her on the couch.

“Hello!” She said, waving to Megumin. “I'm the new student, Suzume!”

Megumin didn't respond or do much of anything at all, but eventually her eyes glanced over, and she recognized Suzume from trying to wake her up earlier. Her eyes grew a little wider.

“You're the girl I saw...” she said, her voice weak. “You were sleeping down there...”

Suzume raised an eyebrow and a tuft, and shrugged. “Sure, probably.”

“Aren't you sad?” The diminutive wizard said, glancing warily over at Marky. “You're never going home.”

“Good,” the kunoichi ninja responded with a nod. “I didn't like my home. It made me feel icky inside.”

This surprised Megumin, but before she could say anything Suzume started laughing hard, kicking her legs in the air, reacting to the on-screen actions of the main protagonist, Kazuma, as he used his newly-acquired thief skill to steal a girl's panties and wave them around like a madman. It was

played for comedy, but at the time only the ninja was laughing.

“That was pretty funny,” Suzume said, still chuckling. “Oh hey, that girl looks like you...” Shortly thereafter the scene transitioned to a tavern where Megumin could be seen on-screen.

“That is me...” the real-world Megumin sniffed. “With... my friends...” Fresh tears began to form around her red-rimmed eyes.” The ninja turned back to the screen, and it soon became apparent through the humorous antics of the main characters that Megumin's world was mostly a fun, light-hearted place offering wacky mis-adventures and plenty of good cheer.

Understanding began to dawn on Suzume's features, and she put an arm around the diminutive wizard's shoulders. “Aww, don't cry,” she said with a big smile. “We can be friends, too!”

Nick had worked his way over to Marky's side of the couch, and plopped down next to him as well. He leaned in a little toward Marky, who kept his humorless gaze trained directly at the screen. “Hey man... tell me what you think of Suzume! She's pretty great, right?”

“She's just as annoying as she was in the game,” Marky said in a voice thick with indignation.

The four of them sat there, continuing to watch the episode for a few minutes, Suzume constantly chuckling at the ridiculousness. Every time she'd start laughing, Marky's teeth would grit just a little harder. At last, he'd had enough and turned to his roommate with a scowl.

“Hey Nick, can you get Suzume the fuck out of here? She's distracting us from the show.”

The stoner's eyebrows scrunched up. “What? How?”

“She's obnoxious and she's bothering Megumin. Look,” He pointed to the girls, and Nick looked over. Sure enough, Megumin was paying more attention to Suzume than the screen, but by now she'd stopped crying and her eyes weren't as downcast.

Nick looked back, regarding his roommate and best friend with a dubious gaze. “I dunno man, Megumin was pretty sad until just now. Why not let them be friends? If she's happy that's a good thing, right?”

“Of course it it!” Marky hissed. “But she needs to get that from me!”

“Er...” Nick was unsure. His gaze shifted back to the girls, and by now the cheerful kunoichi had Megumin smiling, just a little. “I really think you should just let them hang out,” he finally said.

Marky's eyes narrowed to full squint. “Listen *Nick*, I've had a really fucking shitty day so far, and I am *not* in the mood for your bullshit.” His face approached Nick's. “I have an opportunity nobody on any anime forum would believe right now, and I am *not* letting it go to waste.” The severe, humorless face that glared at Nick was harsh enough to make the stoner flinch. “*Do you understand me?*”

Marky's porky fists were clenched, his jaw was set, and he was breathing hard. Nick had only gotten in a fistfight with Marky once before, when they were much younger, but the heavysset otaku had roundly beat his ass, and likely still could. “Yeah... sure Marky,” Nick said, wilting away from his best

friend.

“Come on Suzume, there's still a lot more I gotta show you,” Nick said as he rose from the couch, trying to make it sound urgent.

“Nah, I'm good,” the ninja said. “These people are really funny!” She giggled again at more of the on-screen shenanigans. For the first time, it looked like Megumin was starting to enjoy it too.

Marky growled, which caused Nick to immediately begin pacing back and forth behind the couch. He then came up close to where the girls were sitting, thinking hard. “Oh snap!” he finally said. “I got something really fuckin' cool to show you upstairs! You won't believe how sweet it is!”

“Oh?” Suzume leapt up and backflipped over the couch, landing directly in front of Nick. “What is it?” Megumin watched her sudden acrobatics with an awed expression.

“C'mon, I'll show you,” Nick hurried out the door, feeling Marky's gaze burning into his back.

“Okay, I guess.” Suzume threw Megumin a quick 'V' hand sign and then bounded out after him.

Marky grinned and slid himself toward the diminutive wizard, his squinty gaze locked on to her rapidly unsettling features.

Megumin shrank into the corner of the couch. “Sir Marky... I don't want to watch this with you anymore,” she said, her eyes beginning to widen.

He stopped once he reached the middle, staring down at Megumin with a mixture of desire and frustration.

“You said you wanted to meet your friends,” he said irritably, gesturing sharply toward the screen. “There they are.”

“But... you said they're not real...” She tried curling into a ball inside her tunic. “You said they don't exist.”

“They don't,” he spread his arms. “You *do*, though. You were brought to life just for me. I *made* you real, Megumin. My love *made* you real... *why can't you appreciate that?*”

The diminutive wizard said nothing, instead looking down while curling ever tighter.

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That's it for now

I could use critiques/corrections/editing tips

so consider this a beta version of sorts

I could also use artwork

The 2<sup>nd</sup> arc is almost done so stay tuned (still have a few more chapters for Arc 2)

-Anonzo

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