

My Hero Automata

Chapters 140-145

Novus Peregrine

Obvious Disclaimer: I do not own My Hero Academia or Nier! Both stories would be very different if I did...

Chapter 140: Deployment

“In startling news today, Aegis Incorporated has revealed a new means to help fight back against the Empire’s Invasion. As all our viewers are undoubtedly aware, Aegis and its co-founders Midoriya Izumi and Yaoyorozu Momo have been critical to the defense of Earth and efforts to fight back against the Empire of Kurrick from the beginning. Not only did they develop the means to close Invasion Gates, but they also created the RADS arrays which have started to make the world’s major metropolitan areas safe again. Nor have they stopped there, making massive strides to open up mining in space and manufacturing in orbit, creating an industrial base safe from enemy action. Now, they’ve made yet another step forward toward a possible solution. Here with me is Doctor Yohana Imada to explain their latest push. Doctor Yohana?”

The studio of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, known also as NHK and one of the few surviving pre-quirk news outlets in Japan, was brightly lit and streamlined. Sitting at an intentionally ‘futuristic’ looking desk, the beautiful but pleasantly serious hostess of their prime news segment gestured to Doctor Yohana. Despite the Jewish last name, the doctor was clearly at least half-Japanese. Dignified and professional looking, he was the very picture of a respectable scientist. Which he was, even if he spent more time as a media representative for the science community than doing actual science these days.

“Of course, Miss Shizuka, it would be my pleasure.”

Shifting to face the ‘audience’ of the camera more than the hostess, the Doctor spoke calmly and smoothly.

“While all of those fine accomplishments are indeed important, critical even! I will, for a moment, draw attention to the fact that Aegis Inc is also the creator and supplier of the new Shieldmaiden Mechs that have been making an impact on the African campaign. This new wrinkle that the brilliant minds at Aegis have introduced is along that line of things. They have produced a limited number of Androids. Fully sapient Artificial Intelligences based off of studies done on Midoriya-sama’s Quirk.”

Izumi, had she been watching, would have likely found it bizarre to be referred to as ‘sama’ by such a noted figure, but no one else even twitched. Whether she realized it or not, Izumi was now one of the most famous geniuses and Heroes on the planet, a household name and someone the scientific community deeply respected. The fact she was young might make some of them a bit begrudging, while it made others all the more impressed.

“Two of these Androids are serving in an administrative and organizational capacity, much as her famous Quirk, known as 2B, has been doing all along. They, 6O and 21O being their own designations, have already massively eased a number of logistics problems by streamlining processes. I’m told that 21O is also working on the next generation of combat mech to follow up the Shieldmaidens. Admittedly, more the focus of the moment is the third android, A2. A2 is a prototype combat model, intended to provide a near-All Might level champion for the African campaigns. Should she prove successful, a limited number of additional combat androids may be deployed to farther stabilize both Africa and other fronts worldwide.”

The camera shifted focus back to the hostess as she directed a concerned look at the Doctor.

“A truly sapient AI, Doctor? Isn’t that potentially dangerous?”

Doctor Yohana smiled reassuringly.

“There is, of course, some manner of risk in such things. But numerous precautions have been-”

Momo, who had been watching the broadcast while she rested between rounds of material creation for Reinery 1, cut the feed off as the timer hit zero and she needed to get back to work...

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It had taken weeks for A2 to finally get here, but as she dove out of the cargo aircraft and activated her Flight Unit, she was satisfied she’d finally get the chance to obliterate some monsters on behalf of humanity. She could admit, at least in the privacy of her own mind, that the time spent until now had *probably* been important. Not just so that she could adjust to all the humans and understand the situation, but so that the local humans could wrap their minds around *her*. Thankfully, her new bosses’ (she’d decided it was a good enough title for Izumi and Momo, who weren’t overly formal types) fear that the humans might freak out a little had *mostly* proven unfounded.

Mostly.

Admittedly, there *had* been a bit of a ‘kerfuffle,’ an odd descriptor 6O insisted on, at first. But it had largely centered on the fact that her bosses hadn’t asked anyone else’s permission to recreate the two Operator units and herself. Once they’d been presented with the full facts, including the extremely limited total numbers of Androids that could even be created in the first place, the humans are settled down a little. Apparently a few hundred total androids, of which less than two hundred were combat models like herself, wasn’t overly threatening. That, combined with the fact that their backups were in a human-controlled orbital installation in case they went rogue, had apparently settled the human militaries down.

In fact, looked at in that light, the local humans had immediately glommed onto the idea that they were an *asset*. A potent and potentially game-changing one. While they had all been warned that 2B was an outlier, being the single most deadly unit ever produced by the YoRHa program, a couple of hundred ‘extreme elite’ units that could realistically throw down with someone like All Might? The humans had, as 6O stated it, said ‘all the yeses.’

Well, sort of.

They wanted to see A2 in action first, as well as see how very limited numbers of YoRHa units acted with humans all around, before committing wholesale. But they were, at least, *very* interested in finding those details out. Something which had caused A2 to be fast-tracked into deployment to the African Front. She'd be working with a team of World Hero Association Heroes, which was going to be very strange since they were *humans*. Their goal was to push as close to one of the Greater Gates as possible, forming a beachhead that a new delivery of Shieldmaiden mechs would pour into and hold open for larger numbers of forces. All in a series of operations that were aimed to *shut down* one of the Greater Gates in Africa, despite how well it was defended.

Now, if only this whole thing didn't feel *quite* so much like the Pearl Harbor Descent Mission during the 14th Machine War...

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[B]Welcome to the SuperHeroes Online Message Boards

You are currently logged in, FistedbyFate (Veteran Member)

You are viewing:

- Threads you have replied to
- AND Threads that have new replies
- OR private message conversations with new replies
- Thread OP is displayed
- Ten posts per page
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- Threads and private messages are ordered by user custom preference.



◆Topic: All Hail Our New Robot Overlords!

In: Boards ► Japan ► Tokyo ► General

RoboisLIFE (Original Poster) (Veteran Member)

Posted on July 1, 2247:

As we all know, from the numerous posts all around seemingly every forum worldwide, our Glorious Robot Overlords have finally arrived!

Yes, yes, much confusion, many panics.

There are plenty of threads out there already talking about everything from the moral implications to the horrifying potential for that Pre-Quirk movie about time traveling terminators to come true.

Those posts are nice and all, but they miss by FAR the most important topic of discussion about our new AI friends. Specifically, that they are all HOT. Seriously, all three of them (four if you count 2B!) are sexy android waifus come to life! As such, it is our duty as netizens to begin the Great Debate.

Which Android Waifu is the hottest?

Is it the gloriously perky and bubbly 6O?

Is the the geeky and adorably serious 21O?

Is it the sexy A2 who's whole vibe just makes you want her to step on you and call you naughty?!

The world must know. Let the Great Debate begin!

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► **Keeper of the Bonk** (Veteran Member)

Replied on July 1, 2247:

I have arrived just in time!

Bonks the Horny Poster

Bad robolover! Don't sexualize the poor Androids right after they come out of the...never mind.

► **Well-Actually**

Replied on July 1, 2247:

Hold it, hold it, hold it. We need to go back several steps guys and gals! Do we even know that these Androids have sexual identities? I mean, they were given female bodies, but that could totally just be a PR stunt to keep people from freaking out, right? If his are newborn AI, they might not even know what sex is? Actually, how old can they be considered, for that matter? Are we creeping on baby andriods?

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► **TrueWaifuEnthusist**

Replied on July 1, 2247:

@Well-Actually

Well...actually, we do know a little bit. While 21O and A2 haven't said a lot, 6O is a chatterbox who's answered a lot of questions already. Apparently, they've actually been around in pure software form for several years, and 2B gave them 'starter info' when they first booted up, too. Meaning they are pretty much adults already, developing much faster than humans. It's also, apparently, why there aren't plans to mass manufacture them. Apparently it takes a lot of time for a 'Seed' to become a real android boy or girl. These three and an unknown but limited number like them were seeded long enough ago to have 'grown up.' But they were originally intended for the invasion.

Actually, I'm betting that's why only one of them is a Combat model. They were probably originally developed as Overwatch for heroes and various Aegis projects. That would explain why 6O is acting as Overwatch for Elite teams in Africa and 21O is being a research assistant up on Forge 1. Maybe A2 was the only one really 'ready and willing' to get into a combat role?

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► GustheBus

Replied on July 2, 2247:

Guys, guys. We still don't have the all important question answered! Is it safe to fist Android girls? Even 6O hasn't answer what their anatomy is like, beyond a few bits like their skin actually being a good replica of human skin in feel. I mean, given what they look like, a man can DREAM. But why would they have been built 'fully functional'? They were rushed for the war, right?

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► CatlynThirst

Replied on July 3, 2247:

Honey, I don't CARE what's under their skirts. They've got working lounges, and that's good enough for me. My only question is where I can sign up for a chance to date one of them! And what I need to practice to make sure they feel good too!

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Chapter 141: An Unexpected Call for Help

Izumi and Momo found themselves in Nedzu's office for the first time in...a month and a half? Roughly that, anyway. With them exiting the Hero track, they'd had less and less exposure to

the mammal of questionable origin, and most of what they *did* have tended to be via conference call when dealing with larger issues. This wasn't that, instead having been a private request from Nedzu that had caught them off guard. As it happened, given that the introduction of 21O and 6O had streamlined and sped up work on Refinery 1, to the point they had just finished their part of things well ahead of schedule, the pair of them hadn't seen any reason not to honor the request for a private meeting.

There was a certain nostalgic quality about accepting their favorite teas from him. Even if it had really only been a little over a year and a half since first entering UA, the events that had happened over that time had made it seem much longer. In a way, it felt like entire lifetimes since they'd first entered as Hero students. In other ways it felt like just yesterday. As they sipped appreciatively, Nedzu put down his own cup and addressed them with more than the simple greetings they'd started with while accepting their teas.

"I imagine the two of you are quite curious about my personal request for a meeting. In truth, while I think the matter is an important one, I find myself in a situation where the official framework for dealing with something is...nonexistent. In part due to my own efforts, ironically enough."

Politely putting down her cup and tipping her head, Momo spoke for both of them.

"You said it had something to do with a distress call, of sorts? I admit I'm having a hard time imagining a situation where a distress call would fall outside normal purviews."

Nedzu sighed, his whiskers twitching in an unusual display of stress. Something he would normally never allow to become so visible.

"As I said, partially my own fault. You see, the distress call came from *Australia*. Specifically, it came in the form of a visit from one of the more intelligent Quirked animals of the island to the floating trade station that...interacts with them. Are you aware of its existence?"

This time it was Izumi who replied, having herself been fascinated to discover the phenomenon when she was studying Quirks in general.

"Yes! The Quirked animals of Australia first approached a few ships that got close enough to their waters, and resulting negotiations with some of the most intelligent resulted in a sort of limited trade. Eventually, a permanent floating platform was built where the Quirked animals with human or near-human intelligence can come to trade for certain refined goods. The trade is minor, but has attracted all sorts of scientific attention over the years, given that it technically represents trade with a newly emergent intelligent species. More than one species, in fact."

Nedzu nodded, chuckling a bit as Izumi's obvious enthusiasm for the subject.

"Quite correct. As you might imagine, I've been quite interested myself. Indeed, I've championed keeping the borders of Australia as neutral territory that belongs to the Quirked Animals there, helping defeat several efforts by the less scrupulous to try poaching from the population there."

Izumi and Momo both nodded at that. They hadn't specifically known that little detail, but it was certainly in line with Nedzu's other efforts on behalf of Quirked Animal kind. For that matter, he'd been one of the driving forces for Japan to recognize some *Quirks* as having sentient rights. Something which 2B and Izumi certainly appreciated the results of.

"Now, initially, despite the Quirk Energy density being exceptionally high in Australia, the Empire either avoided opening Gates there...or may well have been quickly defeated by the more dangerous wildlife. Unfortunately, that appears to have changed."

Izumi frowned, already able to see where this was going. Suddenly, Nedzu making this a personal request and his comments about the situation were making a lot of sense. Speaking up to move the conversation along, she outlined her realization.

"Australia is an unadministered territory. Essentially ceded to the local animal population by international treaty. The World Hero Association has no jurisdiction or representation there, and neither do any governments. If the Quirked animals are under assault there..."

Nedzu signed, took a sip of his own tea, then shook his head and picked up where Izumi had left off.

"It's a bit worse than that, apparently. The representative sent to ask the trade station for help indicated that the Empire has been *raiding for captures* through a number of Lesser Gates. Since the animals there lack the ability to close them easily, even if they *can* and *are* fighting back, they are effectively being harvested. Worse, they are targeting top predators as much as possible, making me think they are looking for new weapons."

Izumi and Momo both grimaced at that thought. There was a reason, a very *good* reason, that Australia had originally been abandoned during the Era of Chaos. For whatever reason, there had been an extremely high rate of Quirked animals there...and the animals on that really-should-be-called-a-continent island had *already* been sort of horrifying. A number of animals that had gained the ability to boost their entire pack/herd, combined with some mad science type that had released a mutagen that made everything there *grow*? Male saltwater crocodiles had been able to regularly reach 6 meters in size *before* the mutagen. After it? Some of them had grown to be nearly twenty.

Nor had those, or the croc named Blimey who had developed intelligence and somehow built an army of sorts out of other Quirked animals, been the only species affected. Incredibly lethal spiders now the size of wolves, some of the world's most venomous snakes sized up to match anything in the Amazon, upsized dingos, cassowaries and bulldog ants. Which wasn't even getting into the *ocean life*. Thankfully, whatever had affected the animals hadn't spread to sharks or other wide-ranging species. It *had* upscaled things like the blue ring octopus, a few species of local jellyfish, and stonefish, though.

In the end, even the vast majority of the locals had 'noped' out and evacuated to elsewhere. Small numbers had stubbornly tried to stay, and *theoretically* there might still be people there somewhere. If there were, however, no one had been in contact with them for at least a century, and their tech level had fallen back to the stoneage at best. Far more likely, the remaining humans had died out or been killed off, leaving the Quirked animals in charge.

The last thing the world needed was the Empire getting its talons on four meter tall, Quirked, cassowaries as cavalry mounts. Let alone to find out what sort of horrors they could come up with some of the more exotic things that might have come out of places like Tasmania. Trying *very hard* not to think of what she knew of the creatures that had once lived on *that* particular island, Izumi tried to respond calmly.

“You want us to respond to the distress call, find out what’s going on, and possibly come up with a way to disable Gates there? Or to allow the more intelligent Quirked animals to run siphon sets?”

Nedzu nodded, looking serious as he replied.

“Yes. Sending active Heroes off the battlefield would be hard to manage, sending large numbers is unrealistic, and sending anyone weaker than you two without numbers to back them up would be more likely to end up with whoever I sent dying without accomplishing anything. The two of you, with Miss Yayorozu’s ability to *build* defenses or provide siphons in place? You stand a good chance of resolving the situation entirely, quickly, and without the Empire being able to take advantage.”

Silence settled for a few moments as Izumi and Momo looked at each other. This wasn’t exactly a small ask. Not just because, even for them, Australia was potentially dangerous. Mostly, admittedly, because they’d be going into a lot of unknowns. Which didn’t even mention the diversion this was from their work on the various space going efforts and development of the mech line.

Yet, the space going efforts were actually stalled for the moment while others finished their part of getting Refinery 1 online. Shipyard 1 would be next, but that was a *much* larger project, and they really needed the Refinery online to start harvesting the near-earth asteroids that the Drone fleet had started the capture process on. There was a limit to even what a One for All boosted Momo could make, and the planned Shipyard was beyond that limit if they wanted to make rapid progress. Refinery 1 and Forge 1 working together could and could make a good 45% of the more finicky shipyard components, leaving Momo to just the structural bits, which were easier to make.

Because of that, and equally because they’d finished Refinery 1 a week early, they had a gap in their schedules. One that would last as much as three weeks, possibly a full month at the outside. They’d intended to shift to working on the Mech project in the meantime...but even that was well in hand at the moment as it turned out that 21O and Melissa complemented each other insanely well. The pair had already worked up a Mark II design for the Shieldmaidens. Heck, they were even creating the barebones of a second mech model that would fill more of a scout and rapid response role. Izumi and Momo could certainly contribute. But they weren’t *critical* at this juncture.

On the other hand, stopping the Empire from gaining access to Cassowary Cavalry sounded pretty important. For that matter, just the amount of QE that the bastards would be able to harvest from the island was horrifying for their long-term plans. No, something had to be done to stop that. Exchanging a tiny nod with Izumi, Momo was the one to speak up for the both of them.

“Alright, Nedzu. You have our attention. We’ll help, so long as we can pull this off in no more than a month.”

The dean looked relieved, and soon they were talking about what information he had and what their best approach would be...

... ..

Thankfully, since they had already been in the process of switching projects, it had only taken a day and a half to hand off various secondary operations to others. 2B actually had the most of that to do in that regard, as they weren't sure how well she'd be able to connect back even via satellite to various ongoing efforts. Thankfully, 6O and 21O had already taken a lot of the load from her regarding the juggling of worldwide communication, logistics organization, and juggling the results from various think tanks. The Operator units were *far* better at that sort of thing that 2B was, even with 2B having gained over a decade of experience, so handing most of that sort of thing over to them had only been common sense. 2B had retained plenty of personal projects and input into various tactical think tanks, strategic committees, and more. But she wasn't *in charge* of any of those, leaving her able to hand them off to the other Androids at least temporarily.

With that done, the method of insertion *into* Australia had needed to be sorted. There were plenty of airborne creatures that wouldn't take kindly to them arriving in their territory, so the only real way to approach was by water. Which, to be fair, was also where their local 'guide' was to be found anyway. Nedzu had arranged for a fast transport out to the *Menagerie Trading Platform*, where the 'distress call' had originated. Currently minimally staffed and never exactly a *tourist* spot, the heavily armored floating trade station was their immediate destination. After that? Well, that would depend on what the cockatoo who had apparently arrived with the message had to say.

They were certain it would prove to be an interesting experience...

Chapter 142: New Acquaintance

"G'day, nice ta meet ya! Th' name is Red Feather, and I'm the representative of the Outback Coalition, I am."

Izumi and Momo were doing their *very best* not to stare, as the three-meter-tall Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo spoke in an accent that was really only heard in old movies from the pre-Quirk era these days. The Cockatoo *did* have patch of red feathers in amongst the white on his chest. Each of which was radiating considerably more heat to Izumi's enhanced senses than they should have. Likely some manner of Quirk that went beyond just his intelligence. Momo, used to being diplomatic no matter how odd the situation was, managed to respond with barely a moment of hesitation.

"It's nice to meet you as well, Red Feather. I take it you were the one to get out the call for help? Can I ask what the 'Outback Coalition is?'"

The cockatoo's head-bob of acknowledgement was somewhere between surreal and adorable.

"Aye, that be me. As for the Coalition, we're a group of those critters on the Isle that have enough intelligence to actually plan, you see? Started in the Outback, but represent most of the Isle now. There's only a few hundred of us, really, but most of us can herd out less intelligent brethren

along at least, and that helps us keep the conflicts down a bit. Well, with eve'yone but the Crocs, that is. They don't play nice with others, no they don't!"

So...apparently there were enough human-level-intelligent Quirked Animals that they'd...formed a government? Hopefully, they hadn't developed *bureaucracy* already, or the world might truly have no hope. Such would truly be the *darkest timeline*. Pushing that thought aside, Izumi finally managed to speak.

"Um, we don't know a whole lot about the situation just yet, could you fill us in a bit? We know that the invaders have opened Gates here and are trying to capture...your people?"

Red Feather did his little dancing bob again, making a slight clicking noise that she didn't know how to interpret and seemed instinctive, before replying with actual words.

"Right. Well, that be the basics of it, really. The Coalition was able to hold them back, at first. But then they started bringing bigger beasties. Beasties only our strongest and the Crocs could push back. We can't reckon how to close those Gate things, and the Crocs are the only ones that really know how to *guard* things. The rest of us usually roam too much for that sort of thing, and it's biting out tailfeathers. We wander off to get food and the rascals pop in to attack one group or another, dragging some off."

That made sense. Even if there were a few hundred 'intelligent' animals, Australia was a *big* place. It wasn't like the animals, Quirked or not, were probably doing things like *farming*. Which meant that getting any one group of their less intelligent comrades to stay in place to *guard* something probably wasn't easy. So even if the fauna here *could* and *would* kill the Empire soldiers, too many hunting teams would manage to slip through and grab targets.

"How long have they been doing this? Has it been months? Weeks?"

Momo's question caused the giant bird to cock its head in an expression that somehow radiated a mix of confusion and concentration.

"Months? That's the thing you two-legs call moon cycles, right?"

Momo and Izumi both nodded. Not because that was fully accurate, of course. But because they should have realized that the animals of 'The Isle' wouldn't measure time based on a near-arbitrary calendar system. Measuring by cycles of the moon was honestly probably closer than they had any right to expect. Red Feather seemed pleased he was right, at any rate, and bobbed again.

"Right then, thought I'd remembered that one right! Let's see, it would have been...two and a half moon cycles ago? The Gates were around a lot longer, of course, but there wasn't much movement through them until then. They'd bring through some sort of crystal things and do some weird chanting, but they ran off quick when anyone challenged them for the territory. Then, things changed. They started hunting some of us, dragging whoever they could catch alive through that glowing hole of theirs. At first, they took enough losses we figured it was a fair trade. But then they figured our lesser kin out and started catching a lot more of us. More than they could possibly need to eat, ya know?"

Izumi scrunched her nose up at that. It was a little disconcerting to hear it put that way, but she supposed if both prey and predator were sometimes intelligent, then a very different dynamic would develop. Pragmatism likely meant this 'Outback Coalition' probably couldn't just come to agreements not to hunt each others' 'normal' members. Many of them were likely natural prey of others, with instincts to hunt or avoid each other. The rarer intelligent animals might be able to make deals, but they'd have to accept a certain amount of...well, the natural order. A few 'lesser' members of the species getting picked off likely wasn't anything to be alarmed about. Just the circle of life, really.

Outsiders hunting their packs/herds/whatevers in large quantities and not for food, though? *That* had likely caused alarm bells, or whatever the animal equivalent was, to start ringing. The time between now and then was likely them making their own attempts to deal with it. They'd never reached out to invite *humans* onto 'The Isle' after all. Doing so must have been something of a last resort. Pushing past those thoughts, Izumi managed to focus down on a technical question of sorts.

"So do you want us to try closing the Gates ourselves? They might just open new ones. We could also make one or two areas immune to them opening the things there, but not the whole Isle."

Red Feather made a little shake that somehow got across a negative response.

"No, no. Nothing like that. No offense, but we'd rather not have the humans here too long. No, we need to be able to close them ourselves. The Nedzu said ye had the tools for this, but that we'd need ta learn how to use them. I'll take ye to The Meeting Place, and ye can show us how they work, yes?"

Izumi nodded. Siphons were actually one thing they genuinely had *enough of*, at this point, unlike RADS arrays. Many different groups were producing many local versions of the siphons worldwide at this point, and Forge 1 was producing some as well. She'd packed away a few dozen of the most robust designs in her inventory. Much to her chagrin, those weren't actually *her* designs. Russo-Kazakhstan was where she'd copied the design from. That particular country was one that had *grown* during the Quirk Wars, having absorbed the parts of southern Russia that hadn't suffered from the crazed Quirk user setting off so many of Russia's nukes and intentionally spreading radiation across much of now-former Russia.

They'd also, notably, absorbed a huge chunk of Russian population, going from one of the least population dense countries on earth to somewhere in the middle of the list. With that mass migration had come a lot of Russia's remaining engineering experts. Which, while not the best at making high-end anything, were *really* good at making incredibly robust technology at the lower end. Some of that expertise had built Russo-Kazakhstan into a minor industrial powerhouse whose products were well known the world over for being insanely durable and hard wearing.

Unsurprisingly, they'd taken Izumi's original elegant designs and *ruggedized the hell out of it*. Short of her making a new set out of the advanced armors they were using on projects like the Shieldmaidens, which they hadn't had time for, the foreign design was their best bet for the locals being able to handle them. Being as rugged as they were would prevent them from needing maintenance for a long time, and providing enough of them meant even a few getting damaged or lost wasn't a critical failure point. Izumi had also grabbed a pair of power generator setups from the

Shieldmaiden project queue. Those generators were insanely durable, and she'd quickly adapted them to run purely off of QE. Hopefully, they'd be able to keep the Siphons charged, as only Izumi's versions of the Siphons had the ability to charge off of drained QE just yet, and only her latest iteration.

"Well then, Red feather, shall we be off? I can fly, and can easily carry Izumi, if that's the best way to get to this meeting place?"

Red Feather made a cackling noise which, after a moment, they realized was a laugh.

"Flying will do for getting to shore! After that, it won't be as safe. Some of the territory even I don't want to fly through. But we'll get there eventually!"

Not feeling all that reassured by that statement, they nevertheless followed as Red Feather took off, with Momo picking Izumi up to carry so her love wouldn't need to waste power on a flight unit...

... ..

"Gah!"

Izumi hadn't had the slightest bit of arachnophobia before she came to Australia, but as she was forced to backhand yet *another* Spider of Unusual Size, the gore from it splattering her in the process, she was fairly sure she might *leave* with some. The stupid things, despite being a good meter tall, were *very* good as hiding, to the point that even Izumi and Momo's sensors barely gave them any warning. They couldn't really *hurt* the pair of them, Izumi's skin was too tough and Momo's armor was even worse, but that didn't make it all that much less terrifying for them to jump you.

Worse, they apparently *could* hurt Red Feather, who had attempted to lead them *around* the territory of the things. Unfortunately, that territory proved to have shifted while Red Feather was stuck awaiting first a reply, and then their arrival. Nor could they go *up*, as the part of the forest they were moving through was directly under the territory of the Wedge-Tailed Eagles, who were now big enough to think Izumi and Momo were proper snack-sized and Red Feather would make a nice meal. Normally, that fact kept the spiders away from this area, which had made their guide muse about whether the Eagles had also shifted. He hadn't wanted to check, though, as apparently the Eagles were among the most dangerous species to him personally.

Down here, among the spiders, he could generally use the fire beam he could shoot from his namesake Red Feathers to roast the enemy. Up above the canopy, he'd be a target for Eagles and Falcons. Understandably, despite the danger down *here*, he considered it the lesser threat. Which didn't make it any less annoying that they had to protect him.

Escort missions were *the worst*.

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"Come now, come now, we're making good time! Why, it took me nearly three weeks to get from The Meeting Place to the Menagerie Trading Post! At this rate, it will be barely five days to do

the same in reverse. I have to say, ye two are really quiet handy to have around. Ye make this trip much safer!”

Izumi glared, while Momo looked pretty thoroughly *done*, but at least still more game to go on than Izumi was. Neither of them had really ‘camped’ before, and hadn’t quite processed that even their extreme abilities weren’t enough to push through to the Blue Mountains, where ‘The Meeting Place’ was, in a day. Yes, they could move quite fast. But constant attacks by a wide variety of creatures, stopping to display their ability to shut down gates by handling one such Red Feather had known about, and simply the *terrain*, had all limited their travel speed.

Red Feather absolutely *would not* fly over a lot of territories, as there were too many giant birds of prey that considered him a nice meal to hunt. Which meant they’d needed to move through rainforest, then regular forest, which had then segued into plateaus, hilly upland and escarpments. The latter hadn’t been as bad, allowing them to pick up their pace...three days in. Thankfully, they *had* brought plenty of camping gear, but the fact that Izumi had needed to deploy *turrets* and have 2B man them overnight hadn’t exactly make for restful sleep while roughing it. It was a very good thing neither of them actually *needed* much sleep, given how little they’d managed.

“Come now, only Grey Kangaroos to worry over! Then we’re into yellow-bellied glider territory, and I’m on great terms with them!”

Grumbling, the two girls finished their breakfast, even as 2B gunned down another pack of 5-meter, slavering dingos that tried to have *them* for breakfast instead. Even knowing most of the fauna here had been super-sized since the pre-Quirk era, both girls were quite convinced by now that the humans that had once lived here must have been batshit crazy...

... ..

Momo had no idea why it hadn’t occurred to her that ‘The Meeting Place’ might be ruins of human civilization. Perhaps it had been just how little sign of the previous inhabitants they’d seen since first following Red Feather. Oh, there *had* certainly been places where ruins were visible, though Red Feather had guided them around the larger former places of human habitation. Apparently, such places were popular with the more *violent* of the various Quirked animals to stake claims too. Having thus seen mostly wilderness, either original or reclaimed from humans, she hadn’t quite expected where they’d arrived at.

The sign declared it had been some sort of railway yard. Though what one was doing in the relative middle of nowhere, she didn’t know. She did get the idea that the sheer amount of gravel, concrete, and pollutants used in such a place had done the job of keeping it cleared of the encroachment of nature far better than any other ruin she’d seen thus far. Add in that it has sizable open space, but also plenty of places to perch on old arches, buildings, or machinery, and it sort of made sense as a Meeting Place. She’d have thought, given the group started in the Outback, that such was where their Meeting Place would be. Apparently, however, practicality had won out in time. The Outback wasn’t exactly *hospitable* for a lot of the species that lived on The Isle, now or before.

Something that was made rather obvious by the array of beings they were faced with now.

Giant magpies and several other bird types were the most common on this little ‘council.’ Various types of Kangaroo were next, followed by a more random assortment of other species. A koala, two dingos, five platypuses (wait, did that one have a *fedora* on?), wombats, possums, and even a single echidna. It was a diverse group, but one Momo noted as having only a handful of predators. Snakes, birds, and the dingos appeared to be it for the predator species, in fact. Notably absent were the saltwater crocodiles or any sort of reptile. The crocs, at least, she had been aware apparently didn’t deign to deal with this group. Honestly, if half of what Red Feather had said about them was true, that was *probably* a good thing.

“G’day, all! As ye can see, I have returned with the aid we sought! These humans have brought with them things we can use to close the hole-dens into which the enemy has taken our people! More will open, but so long as we are vigilant, we can keep closing them so large groups of hunters can’t come through.”

There was chatter among the animals. Not all of it was in anything like human speech. In fact, the vast majority of it was *not*. Which, well, shouldn’t have surprised her. She’d gotten so used to Nedzu, and then Red Feather, that she hadn’t quite considered how few animals really had the right vocal apparatuses for human language. Clearly, they could understand *each other*, which would have to be good enough. She looked on in fascination as a Quoll took center stage...and communicated with completely unhelpful squeaks and cries as it pointed to them. Thankfully, Red Feather was quick to translate.

“Elder Jaquol wants to know how you can do this, given how little you brought with you. If it is some magic that requires the Old Machines, we have little knowledge to help build them.”

Momo nodded at that and waved Izumi forward. Izumi, fascinated but grateful not to be the speaker in this oddest of meetings, started taking things out of her digital inventory and placing them in the center of the large railway turnstile the group of nearly four dozen were all centered around. There were startled noises and more than a few of the animals backed away out of instinct as boxes and crates began to appear, but most quickly got that reflex under control and looked on in fascination.

“As you can see, my companion has a way to transport items in large quantities. We brought many of the ‘old machines’ that can close Gates, though we will have to show you how to use them, and you’ll have to figure out how you can transport them to the Gates to do so.”

There was more chatter as...well, she was pretty sure there were several different chains of translation going on. Hopefully the message didn’t get too mangled in the process. Red Feather seemed calm enough, so she’d just have to trust that this was the normal way of things. It took several minutes for all the animals to get up to speed it seemed. When they did, five of them stepped forward, including that platypus with the fedora. Because yes, that was a clearly a fedora, on a teal platypus, and it looked weirdly pristine. What the heck? Red Feather fluttered over to stand by the group of five. Had they been more than just translating? Her thoughts in that direction were proven true as Red Feather spoke again.

“These five, as well as myself of course, have volunteered to learn how to run your human machines. They all have some level of experience in making old human devices work, which we hope will help here.”

Huh. The equivalent of human engineers? Or perhaps archaeologists? Well, this was certainly going to be an interesting experience...

... ..

“Now!”

There were squeaks and cries as various animals activated their Siphons. A dozen aggressive Quirks and twice as many Kangaroos who were simply large and ferocious enough to fight pressed the enemy back, even as the Siphons came online.

“Good, good! Just keep them away from the Siphons! We can clean up the ones stuck on this side after the Gate collapses!”

Izumi and Momo were doing their best *not* to pitch in, despite their instincts. The first two Gates that they’d helped the local animals close, they’d taken by far the brunt of the Empire’s response, letting the Quirked animals focus on the Siphon devices. Even with some adjustments to make them easier for hands without thumbs to place, it was still a bit of a laborious process for the animals, but they’d gotten better at it after those first two Gates. This time, the first time they were both fighting *and* using the siphons, they were doing well. Momo *did* pick off a single sneaky Gnoll that almost got off a javelin throw at a distracted Siphon operator. But that was the only help they had to give before the Gate collapsed and many cheers went up from the animals.

Shaking her head and smiling at the very odd but effective bunch, Momo decided this might just work out after all. Particularly as Red Feather claimed a few of the Saltwater Clan had taken interest and negotiations were ongoing with them to handle some of the bigger monsters, like Ogres. The crocs wanted the Gates closed too at this point, even if they normally didn’t work with the ‘prey’ very often. Hopefully they would refrain from eating anyone and all get along in this endeavor at least...

... ..

Izumi watched in appalled amazement as the Giant Saltwater Crocodiles *utterly mauled* a group of Ogre Elites. It wasn’t even a contest, the crocs just...shrugged off any of the attacks that would have given even someone like Kirishima reason to dodge. Of course, the Crocodiles were *larger* than the Ogres, and seemed to have enough QE in them that their teeth ripped into even Ogre flesh with ease. No wonder the other groups treated the Saltwater Clan with such caution.

There was no question that it was effective though, with the trio of Crocs that had decided it was worth working with the ‘small ones’ in order to close the Gates acting as tanks. Not, it had to be said, because they considered the Empire a threat. No, they considered them *irritating*, more than a threat. Apparently, at first, the Saltwater Clan had actually *enjoyed* the Gates, considering them to be ‘snack dispensers.’ Something which Izumi and Momo had found more than a little disconcerting. By now, however, the Empire had started both *competing with them by stealing prey animals*, and had actually killed a few dozen Saltwater Clan.

Combined, that was apparently enough to consider their snack dispensers as too annoying to keep around.

Barely.

Shaking her head and wondering just how she'd ended up in this lunatic situation, Izumi did the sane thing and decided it was Nedzu's fault. Oh well, at least it *had* been a somewhat interesting diversion, and hopefully something that would keep the Empire from gaining ground, or terrifying new mounts, here. Shuddering again at the idea of Cassowary Cavalry, Izumi made sure to pay close attention to the second batch of trainees on the Siphons, making sure they were doing a proper job with them...

Chapter 143: Time Doesn't Stop Ticking Away

Setsuna looked down over the new facility from her equally new office window in dazed awe. Once they'd gotten the second Guild Raid Team fully up and operational, Nedzu had surprised her by declaring that they needed a facility of their own to operate out of. Somehow, despite construction ability being desperately needed *everywhere*, the Dean had swung the creation of an entire compound for the Guild to expand into.

Sure, part of how he'd pulled it off was easily explained by it being a repurposing of UA land, with much of the material used being equally repurposed or recycled out of the various Urban Training zones. But you wouldn't know that if you hadn't been familiar with UA before. Heck, even those who *had* been might not realize it, if they hadn't taken an extensive tour of the various training facilities available prior to the invasion. Something Setsuna herself had only done out of boredom and with the ability to split off an eye to have it go wandering around the grounds, looking for interesting things.

The new Guildhall alone was the size of a small mansion, and the rooms assigned to veteran Guild members were quite luxurious. More small studio apartments, instead of the dorms they'd used in the Hero Course. Nor was the Guildhall the only building of the new compound. A new training complex, barracks for the numerous JSDF troopers, a maintenance depot/armory for their power suits and heavy weapons, even a testing range for their personal needs. All of it done at a scale that could *easily* support eight teams, not two.

Of course, *that* was partially explained by the fact they already had third, fourth, and fifth Raid Groups being trained. Only the third team, currently training with Raid Group 1, was anywhere near ready to be deployed. The other two groups contained a lot more people who'd been headhunted out of the various city militias and smaller Hero Schools, shored up by some UA graduates who'd agreed to come back for 'retraining' as Raid Group assets. Those teams each had select members of the two 'veteran' Raid Groups leading occasional training scenarios, but were otherwise following a basic training curriculum intended to get them up to a certain baseline in both individual skill and group operations.

A curriculum that, much to both of their disbelief, Setsuna and Mina had been the primary authors of.

Oh, Nedzu and a number of the veteran JSDF officers and noncoms, including a couple of the power suit operators, had helped. But it was *Setsuna and Mina* who'd had final say on virtually everything, as essentially the Guildmaster and Second in Command of the UA Guild. Which is how, at not yet quite 20 years of age, Set found herself in charge of *several hundred* 'Adventurers' and a couple of thousand military personnel. All feeding into the rapidly expanding Guild system which, if things worked out, would be taking over handling all Rift Bubbles in Japan within no more than a year.

Of course, it wasn't *only* the UA Guild that was part of that Guild System. Three more Guilds with at least one fully formed Raid Team had sprung up. One was a team formed of adult Heroes and Heroines who'd had the mental agility to shift gears to the new methods. Something that was apparently *hard* for existing Veteran Heroes, who'd mostly been solo or small team operators for years or decades. The second was the Shiketsu University team, which got some of its expertise from those they'd sent to train with UA's Guild. Shiketsu was also, like UA, rapidly expanding their Guild program, with two more Raid Groups of their own in training.

The final team, a bit more unexpectedly, was a joint project between the former Seiai and Ketsubutsu Hero Technical Academies. Those schools had been hit much harder by events, but had apparently managed to come out in a functional state by combining. It was an odd mix, and their team was a bit more dysfunctional than UA's or Shiketsu's, but they were effective enough to handle at least modest-sized Rift Bubbles. All in all, the Guild System was being adopted *far* faster than Setsuna had ever expected, and she'd somehow found herself riding the beast as *the* veteran Raid Group commander.

What the fuck even was her life right now?

... ..

"We're all agreed, then?"

There were general murmurs of ascent in reply to Admiral Hilgert's question. The one who eventually spoke up was, appropriately enough, General Beaumont.

"The plan is sound. Though, given how A2 performed, I'd still very much like to push for *more* of the new Androids, as many as the Miracle Kids can whip up. Without her, even the Shieldmaidens wouldn't have been enough to push the assault that let me shut down the Kenya Gate."

Others nodded and the Admiral sighed. A2, despite having a slightly acerbic personality, had quickly grown popular among the troops. Much to her own discomfort, he was fairly sure. Honestly, having been an Anime Kid growing up, he got it. Badass Android Waifu was badass and cute, after all. Even a bit 'Tsun' without being full Tsundere. Not to mention entirely convincing as a 'real girl.' Which, as Hilgert understood it, she pretty much was. An AI so developed that it was sapient and might even have a soul. Certainly, one that had risen far above her original creators' programming.

That was, of course, the issue though.

He and many others felt it was wrong to *push* for what was effectively conscription. He'd sent a review and recommendation up the line, encouraging the higher ups to ask Midoriya and Yaoyorozu if there were more combat Androids coming, but *pushing* didn't feel right. Not even if more like her would be a godsend.

"I'll keep on top of any news there, General Beaumont, I promise. As I understand it, the primary reason for any delay is that the 'Miracle Kids' you're referring too ended up taking an off-grid mission deemed critical enough to pull them in for. No one is quite sure when they'll be back, and no one else knows how to...activate, I guess? How to activate more of the Androids."

The General looked discontented with that answer, but she settled down regardless.

"You're at least happy with the new Shieldmaiden IIs, I trust?"

That caused the General's mood to shift, a grin forming on her face.

"Fuck yeah, I am! The new group didn't just bring my numbers back up to full strength with replacements, but provided another four squads to the 6 I already had. If not for them, I'd say you were crazy to push for another Greater Gate so soon. *With* them, I'm pretty sure we can hack it."

He nodded. It was, after all, the combined assessment of this entire group. While a few squads of Mark I Shieldmaidens had been diverted to the other fronts, the entirety of the new Mark IIs had gone to General Beaumont, as she was currently the one with the best idea how to use them. With reinforcements to shore her up and one of the Greater Gates in her combat zone already disabled, they were hoping to push farther and hit the Greater Gate in Sudan. The Western forces had pushed east, with American-made Hover Tanks filling a similar roll to the Shieldmaidens. They had made it as far as the borders of Chad before stalling out. If the Eastern Forces could shut down the Sudan Greater Gate while the Americans shipped in more resupply, they could have both fronts press in on Chad afterward. Which would secure the entirety of North Africa. It would also leave the combined East and West forces to then push south and pin the remaining invaders between them and the heavy forces that had been pushed into South Africa, allowing them t-

Admiral Hilgert's thoughts were cut off with an abrupt *thud* as the entire ship heaved.

Klaxons rang only a moment later and a bare instant after that one of the guards burst into the room.

"Sirs! Attacks from the water! We've taken hits from below!"

More thuds and the ship shuddered again. None as hard as the first hits, but still very worrying.

"To the flight deck! We need to get you all airborne and back to your commands if we're under attack!"

The snap of that order from the Admiral got all of the men and women in the room moving, many of them cursing. All of these men had been combat veterans even *before* the Invasion and were not about to panic. The Admiral wasn't wrong, though. If something was managing to attack them at sea, they couldn't afford to lose the bulk of the African campaign's high command all at once...

... ..

Nedzu cursed, something he wasn't prone to even alone in the privacy of his office, as he read the reports of what had happened to Admiral Hilgert's fleet. The man himself had, thankfully, lived through the disaster. The fleet had lost almost a third of its ships before the battle was over, but measures taken in fear that the Empire would eventually make it into the water en masse had worked to repel the attack in the end. Where, exactly, the enemy had managed to get enough units into the water to amass an attack against Admiral Hilgert's fleet was still being investigated.

Unfortunately, even when they eventually found out, it would likely already be too late.

They had, up until now, been lucky that the enemy had been unable to gain much traction as a waterborne threat. Unfortunately, as the old saw about 'The enemy get's a say too,' went...it was obvious they *had*. There had been a similar attack against the western coastal fleet, with said fleet losing even more of its ships, including the bulk of its logistics vessels. Clearly a coordinated strike, one meant to cripple the logistics of the ongoing battlefields in Africa. If the attack had happened even a week and a half ago, it might have been enough to cause the African Campaign to start suffering immediate supply issues.

As it was, it was still problematic, but less devastatingly so. The recapture of Kenya entirely had let their forces in control of enough airspace to ship in supplies that way instead of by sea, and Forge 1 was producing war material as well, which could be orbitally inserted as supply drops if needed. Interrupted naval trade, not to mention needing to be aware of possible attacks from the ocean on any coastal area, was going to be a problem in the long term. But it wasn't a crippling one. Not with steps already underway to move their military-oriented industrial base off planet anyway. Claws tapping, he thought hard, then nodded to himself.

"Time to take steps too push harder on the space side of things, I think. With a set of everything but the shipyard already online, we have a proof of concept and all the pieces we need for more explosive growth. Now, who should I contact to get things moving in the right direction..."

Contemplating his contact lists, Nedzu's mind hummed away, reshuffling the bigger picture. Two steps forward, one back. Not ideal, but they were still making progress. That would have to be enough.

... ..

Jirou hissed as she saw the scene in the bunk room aboard Orbit 3. The lower gravity here meant the blood splatter had carried much farther than it would have done on Earth, and her mind was already firing on all cylinders as she attempted to resolve how that was going to affect her investigation. The very last thing she'd thought she was going to be called on for while helping babysit some of Izumi and Momo's projects while they were away was something like this. She supposed it was inevitable, if she'd really stopped to consider it. They now had several thousand people working up in Orbit, all of them from wildly diverse backgrounds and under immense pressure.

Of course, sooner or later, they were going to get crimes of passion.

Anger, in this case, she was pretty sure.

After all, one didn't beat a man to death that brutally if you weren't *thoroughly* pissed off about something. Well, unless you were a psychopath, she supposed. But they'd carefully screened for that sort of thing with every worker up here. No, this screamed of an argument gone wrong and a temper coming into play. The trouble, of course, was that their space operations hadn't exactly taken the time to consider under *whose* laws everyone up here was living. They'd had far too many other things to juggle to consider fine legal details like that.

There wasn't even anything like a security force.

That would waste too much space for something that shouldn't have been needed, or so had been the original thought. An oversight made by scientists and engineers who were a little too willing to believe logic and reason would always carry the day. Something that was going to need to change, even if it only meant a very small detachment of...probably Heroes with Quirks that caused minimal collateral damage. That would get them the most mileage for the least additional commitment. If they could grab WHA Heroes, it would help with some of the legal jurisdiction issues, too.

For now, Jirou was all they had to work with, since she could at least claim she was investigating under the auspices of Aegis Inc internal security and have her girlfriends back her up on whatever conclusion she reached. Grimacing once more as she pulled out a camera to start the process of documenting things as she'd been taught in her second year Heroics classes, she settled in to solve Earth's first murder in space...

Chapter 144: Back to Work

Izumi groaned as she planted headfirst into her Emotional Recharging Station. Momo's glorious boobs, plus the hug that her girlfriend reflexively gave her, slowly restored her will to live once more, just as they always did. They'd been away for just over a month, dealing with the issue in Australia. Coming back, they'd found a massive pile of issues waiting for them.

Pressure for more Androids was among the *least* of the issues, since they'd left another set of frames already under automated production and being periodically checked on by 21O. They could 'wake up' an additional half dozen Androids anytime. Two more Operator units and four more Combat Models. *Dealing* with them, getting them adjusted to humanity and so forth, would take time and effort. Though less with each batch, since 6O and 21O could now handle at least *some* of the process for helping orient their fellows.

A bigger issue was the sudden push to expand the space infrastructure even *faster*, due to the enemy finally managing to mount serious naval offensives. Given the way that could disrupt trade even farther, the push to get more critical infrastructure into orbit as a backup was understandable. But figuring out how to do it, even when given immense resources to work with, was a herculean task. Then, just to add more chaos on top of difficulty, they'd been alerted to the murder aboard Orbit 3. Jirou had actually managed to find the culprit and get them to confess before they'd even gotten back, but there were all sorts of legal ramifications to having dealt with that mess internally. Doing so *had* been the best of numerous bad options, but it was still going to be a thorny issue to sort out.

Then there were the meetings, requests, paperwork hell, and briefings to bring them back up to speed. It had already been an exhausting couple of days and they weren't close to done yet. It was going to be a hell of a slog catching up to everything. Well, one thing at a time.

"So, Androids first? They'll take the longest, technically, but a lot of it will be fire and forget. Doing our part will only take a few hours tomorrow, plus a few hours here and there helping the socialization along. Plus, once they get onboarded properly they'll speed everything *else* up."

Izumi, at least partially recharged, lifted her head out of Momo's tits to respond to her girlfriend's question.

"Sounds like a good plan, I think. Intelli can keep everything else running for a day longer while we handle that, then I think we tell the lawyers to fuck off. The legal grey areas can be figured out later, so long as we get a couple of WHA heroes up here for basic law enforcement. Getting the shipyard up and running is far more critical, doubly so since the Moon Mining team has prototypes ready. If those work, it will speed up the infrastructure work a lot..."

Momo nodded, then moved, dragging Izumi with her toward the bed. Neither of them had the energy for anything *fun* at the moment. They just wanted to collapse and turn off for a few hours before they were expected to keep solving all the world's issues...

... ..

"Alright, nearly...there! Initiate boot up!"

Thankfully, 21O had found the time to go over their initial Android Transfer system, designed to allow Izumi to transfer the data for YoRHa units from their backups stored in her Quirk, into new bodies. 21O had actually worked properly with some of the hardware involved before, or at least versions of it, as their design had been based in part on the systems that transferred Black Box backups into new copies after an original body was lost. As a result, she'd been able to improve the system considerably. To the point they could even do two transfers at a time now.

In this case, it was Operator Unit 14O and Combat Model 4B. The pair had worked together and, just as importantly, 2B had known 4B. 4B had, in fact, been part of the regular squad she worked with during deployments. Part of her regular Descent Team for combat operations. They hadn't been *close*, exactly, but 4B and 11B, the latter of who would be in the next pair, would recognize 2B as their superior officer. More or less, at least. The Operators were simpler, none of them likely to...react poorly...to waking up in a strange place and situation.

Speaking of, there was a clanging sound almost immediately as 4B woke up and *reacted*. Thankfully, before she could do more than break out of the harness holding her, 2B initiated a handshake protocol that caused her former teammate to stiffen, then relax as she got a burst transmission confirming 2B's ID. Operator 14O, thankfully, had only reacted with confusion. To be expected, given that Operators virtually never actually 'died,' and thus she was likely taking in her *first* ever body transfer.

"Wait, you're a human!"

4B, who was out of the charging station now, pointed at Momo with a dropped jaw. Given that Izumi was fully transformed into her 'Android' state and would mostly read like an unknown YoRHa Type, it was understandable that it was Momo who the new Android focused on. They'd been anticipating the reaction, thankfully, and Momo simply smiled.

"I am! Welcome to Forge 1! This isn't your original Earth, but I think you'll find the differences to your liking, since humanity is still going strong here. Even if we are under a bit of a threat that we hope you can help with. That is for later, though. I suggest you check through the rather large packet of data 2B will be sending you, before I answer any questions you might have. You and 14O both, of course."

Still gaping, 4B hesitantly nodded, and started going through the dense packet of experience data that 2B had put together for revived Androids. A packet that had since been enhanced with input from 6O and 21O, though A2 had predictably declined. It would undoubtedly be a long few hours to get the new pair settled a bit to their massive change in circumstances, and then they'd be doing it again twice more later today. Still, the extra help would be nice, once they adjusted properly to how their lives had abruptly changed...

... ..

Izumi rotated the holoscreen, looking over their progress, even as Momo half-floated in the low gravity of Inari 1's construction bay. She'd taken one look at her stubborn girlfriend after the last set of components and called a halt, despite weak protests from Momo. Creation's capacity, fueled mostly by One for All, had grown throughout the massive construction projects that were the five Orbit stations, Forge 1, and Refinery 1. That, however, was a mixed blessing. No matter how much of the energy was taken from One for All, Momo's original Quirk still had to kickstart every creation. Ironically, that kickstart was little different between a 200-ton beam of exotic metals...and a simple matryoshka doll. It still existed, though, either way.

Which meant that sooner or later, if she made enough things consecutively, Momo would still start to visibly lose weight.

These days, it took an *insane* number of creations for that to happen, of course. With the only use of her fat stores being to kick-start a creation, she had to make thousands of things to start seeing a noticeable effect, size being relatively irrelevant. Unfortunately, the sprawling, 15-kilometer Shipyard 1 Complex was such a mind-boggling megastructure that thousands of parts were just a start. With the increased urgency, Momo had pushed herself hard for the last three weeks, pushing aside breaks even when Izumi and Jirou tried to reign her in.

The good news was that Shipyard 1's framework was nearly complete now, and most of its internal components would be coming from Forge 1 or lifted from various ground facilities. All part of an intensified effort to push their space infrastructure development forward at an insane speed. Even now, Dock 1 was already working at partial capacity, building the first prototype of the far larger mining and transport ship design intended to help ramp up raw material collection. If things went to schedule, that ship would finish at roughly the time Dock 5, the last construction dock of the complex, came online.

The pace was staggering, and some part of Izumi knew that it was even necessary, to give humanity the best chance possible. That didn't mean she liked seeing Momo wreck herself like this, though. Once this was done, she was going to make her girlfriend rest, even if it meant kidnapping her and taking her somewhere no one could find either of them...

... ..

Momo smiled, just a little bit incredulously, as she stepped out onto the beach, gloriously nude...and stared up at the Earth hanging in space far above them. The lack of atmosphere on the moon made the blue jewel of their home visible even in the 'day' of the moon. Yet, the fact that she could step out onto an *artificial beach*, naked as the day she was born, and bask in it?

That was *entirely* Izumi's doing.

Her ridiculous, *ridiculous* love had, somehow, arranged the construction of a 'testbed' environmental shield system to enclose a small habitat area on the moon, then filled most of the space with *sand* to create an artificial beach. All behind Momo's back, without the use of Creation at all. Just the space her 'digital' inventory gave her to work with and a lot of fast talking with engineers who *really* wanted to test their systems and ideas but were well down the list of priorities.

After all, much as the final fallback position was to move *people* into space, that would only happen if they started *losing* the war on Earth.

Which, thankfully, was not the case. Far from it, in fact. While the appearance of enemy naval units *had* disrupted things farther, a successful campaign in Africa had resulted in enough of a setback for the Empire that the general trend of the war was in favor of humanity. At least for the moment. Of course, in the greater scheme of things, humanity was still fighting purely on their own ground, which was *not* how you won a war. Yet, even with the naval issues, the combination of dozens of different efforts, not just their own, was getting them closer and closer to being able to launch a true counter offensive at last.

The fighting on Earth wouldn't be done anytime soon. Yet, unless something went badly wrong, it was predicted that the first true assaults onto the Empire's homeworld would begin within no more than another two months. The delay from the original plans wasn't even been looked at as a bad thing, by now, as Melissa, Mei, and dozens of others working together had finally cracked a way to power and operate mech and power armor via pure QE methods. The results were currently being field tested by the Guild, and it was looking promising that they might be able to take them through the Gates as a force-equalizer when the time came.

All of that was for later, though. For now, Momo was going to enjoy the fruits of her *ridiculous* lover's hard work to make *sure* Momo took a vacation. After all, how could she possibly resist being the first person to sunbathe nude on the moon? She wondered if anyone down there had a good enough telescope to sneak a peek? Warmed with a bit of arousal at that thought, she strolled out to the blankets that had already been laid out and created a bottle of suntan lotion.

Now, she just had to wait for Izumi to get out here and rub it into her body. Some things, one should always endeavor to do the fun way...

... ..

Izumi never thought returning to Earth from *space* would be a relief. Space was supposed to be an awesome adventure to look forward to! To be fair, it still was, in some ways. She'd loved their trip to the moon, for example. Doubly so when Jirou had been able to join them on their second and third days of their min-vacation there. She also still wanted to explore the rest of the solar system, some day. See incredible sights, view the universe from amazing vistas, etcetera.

Yet, in the day to day of their current existence, *most* of their time in space had become a horrible slog. A brutal rush and push to build an infrastructure that likely should have been created over the course of a decade at minimum, not in little more than ten months. Honestly, they'd been so hard pressed that they'd had less and less time to give input on the design side, too. Which had just made the whole thing worse, since it wasn't even intellectually stimulating to offset the brutal pace.

So, yes, she was relieved to set foot back on Earth.

Even better was that they would be staying for a while.

At this point, the expansion of the orbital infrastructure had hit the point of being nearly self-sustaining. Yes, technically Momo could provide more materials or more pre-formed parts to build more stations, but it wasn't *critical* that she do so any longer. The first true deep-space mining ship was underway, undergoing a shakedown test that would see it return with a fair bit of material. A pair of transports intended to help land mining equipment on the moon would finish in another two weeks, joining the stream of modified Inari vessels that had already been carting basic equipment and construction drones out that way.

Along with captures of Near-Earth asteroids that were already helping fuel Refinery and Forge 1, the infrastructure they'd built was working away with part of its capacity constantly dedicated to expansion. The skeletal frames of Refinery 2 and Forge 2 were already in place, rapidly being constructed without any input from them at all. There were, to be blunt, now better things they could be spending their time on.

Which is why they were heading to the Aegis Inc Mech Facility. The military *really* wanted mass production of both the Operator Light Mech, so named since 21O had been the primary source of the initial concept, and the Shieldmaiden II – Mod Q, to get underway. Both had already been produced in limited numbers, with the Operator proving to be an extremely useful scouting, rapid response, and pursuit mech in various campaigns around the world. The Shieldmaiden II – Mod Q was more complicated, an overhaul of the original design that was fueled entirely by QE and could thus be taken through a Gate. Neither had been optimized for mass production yet, however, with every current model essentially being hand built.

That optimization for mass production, or rather creating *facilities* that were capable of handling mass production, was something that Momo and Izumi had developed more of a mind for than the design teams. In no small part, it had to be said, that was due to their work on all of the Orbital Infrastructure projects. The unique needs of low-gravity and zero-gravity manufacturing had forced them to get very good, very quickly, at out-of-the-box thinking when it came to manufacturing and assembly processes. Adding in the fact that they had been heavily involved in designing the original Shieldmaiden production facility *and* Izumi was still one of the foremost

experts worldwide in Quirk Energy Theory? Well, they were the obvious people to tap for getting the job done.

Thankfully, this time, they'd be getting to do actual design and testing. Much more enjoyable than playing combination construction worker and 3D puzzle builder...

Chapter 145: Counter Offensive

It had taken three months to work out mass production of the two new Mech Armor models. More accurately, it had only taken about two weeks to work out mass production of the Operator scout/rapid response mech and another two weeks to completely build the facility for it. Mass production, or as close to it as was possible with current-generation Mech Armors, had begun before the new facility was even completed, and Operator units had begun to hit the front lines in decent numbers shortly thereafter. Their presence, alongside increasing numbers of Shieldmaiden IIs, had pressed the enemy hard in Africa, to the point that the Empire barely retained any foothold at all.

There were still dozens of smaller conflict points around the world, and the African Front was hardly 'won,' but the situation was considered somewhat stable. Rifts and Rift Bubbles were now the primary threat once again, rather than wholesale invasion threat from Africa, and the ability to mount a counter offensive had spiked dramatically as a result. In point of fact, due to the efforts of the Harvest Stone research team and a number of smaller captured stones from Rift Bubbles, connections had been successfully formed to two previously-conquered worlds under the control of the enemy. The first appeared to be the homeworld of the Gnolls and was only really useful as a way to sabotage one of the enemy's more prolific forces. A Servant world and species, the Gnolls were too indoctrinated to have a rebellion, but several soft targets that would cripple their ability to reinforce the Empire had been picked out to be hit during the upcoming counter offensive.

The second world was even more promising, as it was the Ogre homeworld, and there was an active rebellion still ongoing there. Though it was a rebellion that had been in it's last gasps, flagging and poorly supplied. *That* was something which agents of Terran Alliance, the organization that had slowly been built out of the old UN and the various agreements that were managing the world wide defense of Earth, could help with. Currently, they had made contact and were using said contact to subtly supply the Ogres with weapons, food, and other logistical needs. Specifically on the weapons front, they were supplying weapons that wouldn't look out of place for the Ogres to have, such as giant mauls and crude-looking swords. The Empire *might* smell a rat if they looked too closely at too many of those weapons, as they were being created with modern methods and materials and only made to *look* cruder than they were. It was winning points with the Ogre's though, as well as causing serious grief for the Empire as their rebellion revitalized.

Such had, until now, been the closest thing Earth and humanity had managed to offensive action since Operation Spear Tip.

The *rest* of what Izumi and Momo had spent the last three months on was about to change that, though.

Specifically, after the first month had been spent on the Operator mechs, the next two had been spent figuring out how to build significant numbers of the Shieldmaiden II - Mod Q. The Mod Q ran *entirely* on QE systems, with absolutely no electronics anywhere in the Mech Armor. Crystalline cable, the equivalent of QE vacuum tubes, and a dozen other developments to make your head spin. All of it had been worked out and shoved into the design of the Mod Q, and the very first thing Izumi had needed to do was rip half of it out, refined it, and put it back in. Commendable as the results had been in some ways, the many engineers and scientists that had worked out the bits and pieces didn't have Izumi's level of skill or knowledge in the area of QE engineering. Which had resulted in the prototype Mod Qs having a lot of downsides, bugs, and tradeoffs that had been less than ideal.

Thankfully, Izumi had fixed a huge chunk of the issues for the production model.

That had taken a few weeks, which overlapped somewhat with Momo concentrating on building the Operator mech manufacturing facility. After the production design was finished, though, they'd had the much larger challenge of figuring out bulk production of the Mod Q Shieldmaidens. A *lot* of previously normal methods had needed to be thrown out, such as how to go about doing wiring. Communication and control linkages within the Mod Q were *grown crystal*, not wire, and figuring out how to do that as parts that could be later assembled by a team into a production model had been a headache an a half. They'd pulled it off in the end, though the time it took to produce a Mod Q was almost half again what it took to produce a normal Shieldmaiden II, despite all they could do.

Despite that, between an initial production run and a significant number of hand-built Mod Qs, they had a solid core of 48 Shieldmaiden II - Mod Qs that were being deployed for the first serious offensive onto the world of Ziltmach, the Empire's home. A three-prong offensive was planned for Operation Beachhead. Two of the three prongs would focus on capturing Greater Gates using traditional forces, clearing the enemy zones on the other side with specialty QE missiles with some nasty surprises, and then sending through an invasion force. Each of those two prongs would be getting 12 Mod Qs, to backup a large Hero contingent and special ops teams made up of 8 Type B combat Androids. Their goal would be to establish footholds, draw attention, and fight off attempts for the enemy to retake or close those Gates.

The third prong was far more ambitious.

Instead of making use of an *existing* Greater Gate, the final prong was going to involve opening their own. Scouts that had snuck through various Gates worldwide had found a sheltered valley near a major Ziltmach industrial city. Test rifts had been quietly opened and a lesser Gate established without the enemy noticing, or at least so it was hoped. While the initial two prongs caused chaos, the third one would be quietly moving components of a Greater Gate through to that valley and establishing their own forward basecamp. Not the quick and dirty fortifications of the other prongs, *this* camp was going to be a proper fortress, complete with powerful shield generators.

Several hundred heroes, 24 Shieldmaiden Mod Qs, 16 YoRHa Type B Combat Androids, five thousand troops, including over a hundred using a new QE-based Power Armor, heavy weapons, artillery...and an aerial service depot that was intended for a mixed QE/Traditional hybrid assault

drones that would require partially being built on site. With materials to do so being largely provided by Momo, Izumi, and a number of YoRHa Operator units that would join Izumi in carrying digitized assets through. Momo's Creation Quirk, combined with Izumi and both Combat and Operator androids carrying through a lot of *parts* converted to data in their 'inventory,' would allow hundreds of Drones to be assembled as a air support unit for the base.

If all went well, they would be fully established before the enemy even realized they were there and would begin the first concentrated assault on a major Empire city. One that was industrially important, but which had only a fairly basic set of defense forces. The Empire was *not* used to being on the defensive, and the hope was that they would be forced to shift commitments across the board, to honor the threat of their cities possibly coming under attack. If it worked, even if they failed to do more than *threaten* the city, it would drastically reduce the forces that the Empire could throw at Earth, as the Empire would have to cover their own cities to protect their logistics from similar attacks.

Doubly so since, at the same time, the soft targets on the Gnoll homeworld would be sabotaged and the Ogre rebellion would be breaking out the heavy ordinance they'd been given.

While something like the Mod Q was a complex development, Ogre sized bazookas and mortars that fired with pure chemical and analog methods were dirt simple. The Empire was about to find out the hard way that the Americans, in particular, never threw *anything* away or lost track of their old military designs. Conversions of old ordinance and upscaling of the M1A1 design from the WWII era were easy for them to hand off to the Ogres...and with the size of the rockets the purely-analog bazooka launched, they were going to make a hell of a statement. Another very pointy stick to force the Empire to divert their efforts *elsewhere*, rather than pouring all their troops into the proverbial breach against Earth.

All in all, Izumi thought the entire thing had a fair chance of success. She and Momo were certainly committed to helping make it work...

... ..

"No! This one goes there, and *that one* goes here! Double check your wiring work, people, we can't have a fuckup now! There's only going to be so much time before the locals notice us, no matter how effective the distractions are!"

The technician didn't question her, swapping the leads he'd been wiring for the Ziltmach side of their Greater Gate even as Izumi moved on. The hardware for the Gate was their own, not captured hardware, as they hadn't wanted to risk there being some sort of failsafe the Zilts could use. That meant there was barely anyone who fully understood the hardware, and of those who did only Izumi and a quartet of Androids were deployed in the first wave. Each of those Androids were YoRHa B-types, but none were as technically savvy as 2B who was, *technically*, actually a Type E model. Part of the reason 2B had been unusually capable of EWAR and engineering had been her hidden type/designation. As an Execution model, she'd been assigned to watch over a scanner unit in 9S, which had required a much greater technical background.

The result was that even the four Androids were answering to Izumi's expertise when it came to the Gate hardware, even as they were doing their own double and triple checks against the

blueprints to try and spot any issues. Everything was being rushed as much as possible, now that they were on the enemy's side of the Gate, but there was only so fast they could go without risking a-

Izumi's steps stuttered as a brief air raid noise went through the base camp.

"Pick up the pace! Hurry people! We'll have incoming soon!"

Putting actions to her words, she practically punched had her own hands deep in the guts of the main control console, furiously making connections between it and the Gate hardware, even as her comm activated. The voice of the General Beaumont, who'd been pulled from the now much smaller African campaign to lead the counter offense, spoke in her ear.

"We've been spotted. Ten minutes to contact. Status."

The short, clipped sentences got the question across, and Izumi had already been mentally running the numbers.

"Twelve minutes. Fifteen if we run into startup problems."

There was only the briefest hesitation from the comm.

"Expedite as much as possible, but don't risk getting it wrong. We can hold through their initial assault without the heavies if we have to."

Izumi nodded, even as the comm channel clicked off as the General shifted her attention. Momo had been busy and the defenses here were already a nasty affair and getting nastier by the moment. Reinforced concrete walls and heavy guns, mostly. They couldn't bring the Mod Qs through until the Greater Gate was up, nor some of the analog artillery and other heavy hardware. But what they had should be more than enough to shrug off any fast response the city could launch. So Izumi trusted to that work and focused down on getting the Gate up. The faster it was up, the more time they had to get the really heavy stuff in place before the Empire could really get rolling.

One way or another, whatever the results would be, the Counter Offensive had begun...

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