

Getting out of the hotel proved to be easier than you expected. The invaders aren't interested in raising the alarm by locking people into the building with shifting spaces and moving corridors. The signage didn't lie – it led you directly towards the nearest exit without any screwing around. When you arrive at the lobby, Asia, Koneko and Barbara are already waiting for you.

Koneko turns *bright red* for some reason.

"Glad to see that nobody got sucked into that virtual world for too long," you joke.

Barbara nods, "The simulation was extremely sophisticated. An unprepared person could easily lose dozens of hours inside without perceiving the passage of time."

"The problem is figuring out how to shut it down. The movement of the corridors must be an active defence system too. We can't find our way behind the scenes and break into the system, and we can't risk causing collateral damage with hundreds and hundreds of people inside either."

"Could we teleport there?" Asia asks.

"I'm afraid not. Our magic circle demands a firm point of which to travel to," Rias explains, "If the destination is moving, then we cannot teleport there. It would require updating the circle second by second as it changes and shifts. Following it with that level of precision would be almost impossible even for the most powerful devils."

Mitsuru chimes in over the radio; "I've sent an advisory notice to a contact I have. A media campaign should keep most people from visiting the hotel and becoming trapped."

But that doesn't answer the problem that you have. You need a way to remove the civilians from the hotel without harming them, and you can't blow your way through the building because it is using some type of folding space technique to protect itself from interlopers. It'll only get more difficult when the invaders realize that you're trying to meddle with the system.

"If it's folding space that we're dealing with, then someone like Lala or Bulma would be helpful."

"I've already contacted them both but it isn't good news. Folding space is almost impossible to break through. Lala's empire uses it to great effect in their home universe."

"Great. So we're really stuck."

"If the system is airtight, then we need only target the personalities behind it. There is always the 'human' element to consider even when we're speaking about a race of interdimensional aliens."

Mitsuru is right. A lot of the enemies you've battled thus far have had their own personality deficiencies that make them act in irrational ways. Pride, anger, greed – those are the core tenants that unite them. If you can find a way to put the operation of the hotel on the line by goading them out, then you could resolve the problem without ever having to directly shut them down.

On top of that letting the police know what's going on would be a good start. They aren't going to be attracting customers with a cordon outside, and once they figure out that the aliens are responsible for opening them they'll do their best to obstruct the hotels. That would make them not worth the time and effort to operate.

"Let's fall back before they figure out who we are. We don't want them to go on high alert," Barbara suggests.

Everyone follows her lead and hustles out of the lobby and back onto the street outside. Considering the urgent circumstances, the normality of the road outside is somewhat alarming. Mitsuru really ought to launch a wider campaign of awareness about how these aliens work – because people are far too eager to jump into any old scam they come up with...

“I could try to break into the system still,” Barbara offers, “It’s better to try than stand around doing nothing.”

“I don’t see the harm in trying. And you’re sure that it’s safe to turn those VR helmets off while they’re still using them?”

Barbara nods, “One-hundred percent. There’s no mechanism I can see that would lead to permanent damage for the user. I’ll see if I can connect to their central server and shut it down remotely.”

The rest of the team stands watch as Barbara works her super-genius magic on a junction box at the back of the building. She pulls out a handheld computer (juiced up with some advanced and mobile computing tech) and tries to break through their firewall. Sadly, she has no luck in getting through.

“This operating system is locked down tight,” she explains, “The processing power they have is so efficient that they’re scrambling the keys cryptographically from second to second. I’d need at least an hour with each one to even stand a chance of getting through.”

She unplugs the laptop and slides it back into her jeans.

“It can never be simple,” you say, “Can’t one of the CPUs we stole get through?”

Mitsuru turns down your idea; “Those mobile CPUs we stole from their explosive devices were just that. They far exceed any CPU produced up till now by humanity, but to the aliens they’re considered low-grade and disposable. I’ve seen the data Barbara sent back from that terminal – we would need our own high-level system to even have a chance.”

“Aren’t you building one right now to go with the new anchors?”

“Yes, but that supercomputer is also using the same CPU technology. It isn’t enough to dismantle a cryptographic security protocol, and that’s pretending that we can somehow grant it access when it’s stored under the garage complex.”

“Shit.”

“Indeed it is. By the way, I have an important matter to discuss with you in regards to that supercomputer when you return.”

“Let’s go back now and regroup. We need a new approach, or some way to lure out the officer in charge of this plot.”

---

Rias, Asia, Koneko and Barbara go off to take care of business around the garage, using the bathroom and getting something to eat. Mitsuru’s previous statement about an ‘important matter’ lures you into her workshop on one of the bottom layers of the underground complex. The elevator doors open and reveal a gigantic chamber painted in darker colours than you’re used to.

A series of metal walkways travel above and across a large pool of luminous blue liquid. Looking down into the miniature lake, it’s possible to see an immense machine lurking beneath the surface. Hundreds of server towers, complete with large cable arrays cover the floor. There is a loud

humming noise coming from them, and the heat being generated is so immense that you can feel it radiating from below.

In the centre of the room at the intersection between each pathway is the main terminal. A leather chair sits at a collection of large screens that are covered with a huge spew of information about how the system is operating. Mitsuru is tapping away at the keyboard with a frown on her face.

“Mitsuru, what did you want to speak about?”

“Ah! You’re back already. Apologies for calling you all the way down here.”

“Is this your new supercomputer?”

“That’s right. This is where the nitty-gritty happens! A revolutionary, liquid-cooled server array and computation system that makes NASA’s best look like an amateur project. Don’t tell them I said this – but they are!”

Easy to do when you steal the tech from an interdimensional empire...

“It drains a huge amount of power and generates an industrial amount of heat. The coolant is being used to heat pipes below the bottom layer, and that water is used to power a series of turbines located off-site.”

“Okay. What’s so urgent that you need me, though?”

“This system is the key to taking our fight to the next level. Not only does it allow me to scour the multiverse with terrifying efficiency, generating millions of coordinates within seconds, but we can also utilise it to assess materials and items taken from their attack drones, and run simulations for new developments like the power-up item we made a few weeks ago.”

“It’s valuable.”

“Exactly. I knew you’d understand the problem. These aliens are masters of cyber-warfare. I’ve noted bugs planted into defence systems for major nations and military forces, which they use to organize their own attacks and confound the authorities. That demonstration of defensive power at the hotel has spurred me to make a request of you.”

“Go ahead.”

Mitsuru adjusts her glasses and swivels around to face you, “We need to ensure that our own defences are just as strong, but we can’t use brute strength to do so. The mobile CPUs we pilfered can’t keep up. In the absence of any better options – I’ve designed an alternative solution.”

She presses one of the keys on the control panel in front of her and the screens switch to an entirely new view. Instead of scrolling command windows and graphs of various types, there’s a 3D plane that is mostly blank aside from one notable object in the middle. It’s an anchor, or at least a 3D model of one.

“This is my latest innovation. The *real* anchor can bring physical objects between universes, but this new digital anchor can also transfer data and keep it here!”

“And what does that mean for us?”

“We can utilise our technology and bring forth assistance from the Goddesses.”

A list of coordinates appears, each earmarked with the name of a Neptunia character.

"I don't like to impose my decisions onto you like this, which is why I've asked you to come here before I do any of it."

"We're partners, aren't we? I trust your judgement."

Mitsuru seems oddly perturbed by that statement, but she moves on regardless.

"Of course, any Goddesses we summon won't be purely digital. I've located a universe wherein they also have the ability to manifest into reality. The challenge lies with containing their existence within the system. It demands immense computational power and even bigger memory storage. Their primary purpose will be to assist us when it comes to locating viruses, protecting the database, and cracking enemy firewalls."

"Sounds good to me. You want me to pick them out?"

"We currently have the capacity to bring two of them into our reality. Let's go to the card press and make a decision."

Mitsuru escorts you out of the supercomputer control room and up a few floors, where a newly created card press room has been constructed. It's much safer to keep it underground where nobody can stumble across it. The room is mostly empty aside from the printer that stands in the middle.

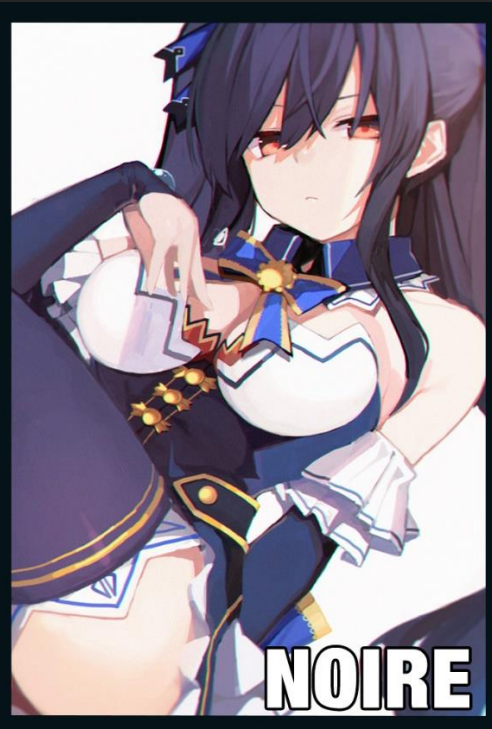
The walls are decorated with a series of glass display cases that contain copies of the cards you've printed thus far. The cases aren't exactly filled to bursting at the moment. The DxD case is the most populated. It's a cute feature that Mitsuru came up with on her own.

"We have enough for seven new cards, but two will suffice for the time being."

You access the terminal and towards the index, which contains the full list of complete and ready-to-use coordinates that Mitsuru has calculated using the central computer. All you have to do is select them and let the machine do the work. You filter the list down to girls from Hyperdimension Neptunia and consider your options carefully.

Neptune herself is going to take the first spot. It'd be odd to introduce her to your world as a larger addition. For a similar reason you also add Noire. She's an iconic character and adds some much needed tsundere energy to your harem that is presently only generated by Koneko.

The machine rumbles to life and prints the cards, which are deposited into a small slot at the front of the printer. A second pair of non-functional cards are also made and placed into one of the glass cases via an overly complicated system of conveyers and moving panels. It'd be easier to do that yourself, but Mitsuru insisted.



“Divinity contained within a pair of playing cards,” you joke.

“Going with the obvious answer, I see.”

Mitsuru takes you on the trip back to the computer room. You briefly wonder how you’re meant to summon one of them when the other girls are still here, but then you recall that the computer contains its own anchor system. You don’t have to send anyone back.

“For the time being you can summon them by inserting the cards into this slot and pressing the red button.”

You take Neptune’s card and slide it in, the console grabbing onto the edge and pulling it inside using rubberized rollers. Then all you have to do is lift the glass shield from the big red button and press it. The reaction from the monitors is immediate. You can see Neptune’s body materializing in front of the anchor.

“Oh, I almost forgot!”

Mitsuru reaches up and lifts away a magnetic flap covering a camera built into the main console, allowing Neptune to see into the outside world from inside of the cybaverse.

“W-Woah! Where the heck am I?” Neptune cries, her voice spilling into the room through a set of speakers. “It’s so dark and gloomy in here!”

Neptune turns around and gasps.

“Wait a minute, I know you two!”

Mitsuru nods, “Yes, I designed it that way. It’s nice to meet you, Neptune.”

“This is amazing!” she cheers, “You’re the real deal! In the flesh!”

“Allow me to apologize for the undeveloped environment I’ve placed you into. I haven’t found the time to code and find good assets for that personal space yet.”

Neptune is so overjoyed with getting to see her husbando for real that she doesn't even care. The main screen glows purple, and a second later a floating projection of her body beams out of the screen and materializes in your reality. She floats to the ground (revealing the profound height difference between the two of you) and starts to poke around the place like a curious puppy.

And by poke – you mean literally. Neptune marches towards you and plants a finger into your stomach, which you can physically feel now that she is using her godly powers to walk around in your world.

“It’s the real thing! I’m so happy to meet you!”

You smile and pat her on the head, “Nice to see you too. Welcome to our world.”

Mitsuru is quick to get down to business, “Neptune, I was hoping that we could rely on your power to help protect our computer system.”

“Sure thing! Just point me at those baddies and I’ll blast ‘em back to the stone age!”

Neptune notices the Noire card that you left on the desk next to the reader.

“Oh, and you’re going to summon Noire too?”

“Not yet. We wanted to ask you first before pulling all of your friends through as well,” you explain.

It’s something of a forgone conclusion that Neptune will agree given her excitable attitude, but Mitsuru walks her through what’s going on and what she’d like her to do. In return she promises to build out the internal space of the system into a more comfortable place for them to hang out. There are a few other caveats to summoning a virtual goddess to consider too.

You simply can’t use the Sledgehammer with them, or rather, the Sledgehammer can’t contain the sheer amount of data that they generate. They’ll have to come through the supercomputer’s anchor and travel to your location to help in a pinch, which should be quick so long as there are computing devices for them to travel through.

Neptune’s main priority is to protect the supercomputer from alien viruses. She can use her power and transform into Purple Heart to destroy them without having to break through the cryptographic cypher that is causing you so many headaches.

Neptune nods along in agreement to everything Mitsuru says.

“Soooo... do I get to have fun with you as a reward?”

You sighed, “Yes. Yes you do.”

“Then why are you even asking? I’ll be happy to give you a hand!”

“And don’t forget to speak with Noire and the others. We might have to bring them along too,” Mitsuru reminds her.

“That won’t be a problem. All of us are totally head over heels for Harem Hero! It’s the best gacha game on the market. Noire has all of the art books and doujins she could get her hands on!”

This is going to be a metatextual nightmare. You can feel it in your bones.

