March 24th, 2014, Cybertek Headquarters, New Mexico, 10:00 AM EST

I slumped to the ground with a groan, holding my head with exhaustion. “You ok?” Ruby asked casually, staring down at my shaking form. She didn’t take a shot, but to be fair, we were surrounded by five jedi killing robots who were inherently loyal to me, and one black magic wielding demoness.

[For holding together a quinjet projection for eight hours at top speed, you earn (2) Gold Ability Ticket Rolls]

Hoping I got something mildly useful, I spun, ignoring the others as I feigned (or mostly didn’t feign) recovery.

[Monarch's Indifference]
|Rare Ability|
Authors PoV - Allows you to suppress your emotions completely and act with complete indifference to accomplish your goal. This also completely counters any mind manipulation or telepathy ability aimed toward you.

[Sing]
|Rare Ability|
Allows you to imbue emotions and intent into your voice that allows it to further resonate with whoever hears it. This effect is amplified when singing, and even further when singing skillfully.

I grimaced. Neither was BAD, but both were kind of underwhelming for the situation. At the very least, it netted me another ability slot. I was now at twenty abilities, and I had to admit I was pretty smug about netting two rolls. Granted, DOING it had almost killed me, and probably would have if not for my Iron Man trait.

Even so, and even with my Cow Form ability slotted to draw power from, I had BARELY managed to hold on long enough to get here. Luckily it was pretty early in the day, so we should have some time for me to recover before we went in.

Ruby, apparently noting that I wasn’t interested in discussing my exhaustion, frowned down at the company headquarters. “So…Cybertek. I’ve heard of them. One of Hydra’s science divisions. What exactly are we doing here? You said we’re supposed to be sticking it to Garrett. He’s not exactly the nerd type.”

“Garrett is a cyborg,” I said absently. “Keeps it on the DL, but Cybertek installed his hardware. Once he got some juice with Pierce he basically took over it, coopting the place for his Centipede project, but the end goal was to empower himself personally. The latest generation of Centipede serum, a machine that installs cybernetics, not to mention the chance to get in good with Shield.”

Her head snapped up. “Get in good with Shield?” she demanded. “They-”

“Stop,” I said sharply, slotting my new Sing ability to see how it worked. Her mouth snapped shut. “The enemy of my enemy is my friend,” I told her bluntly. “You were Hydra’s weapon for years, by taking you in, I made them my enemy. Needlessly antagonizing Shield would be stupid. We don’t need to join or anything, but having them as allies is useful, especially since they're on the run and have a limited means to interact.”

She grit her teeth. “But I was Hydra, there’s no way they’d-”

“Ignore you?” I said bluntly. “You bet that tight little ass they will. You’re eighteen, Ruby. Shield is full of bleeding hearts who lost their shit over a sob story. You’re a tiny, deadly, harmless looking teen with a pretty face and big doe eyes. I’ll probably have to beat Coulson off you with a stick to stop him from shoving a mug of hot chocolate into your hands and covering you with the nearest blanket. Not to mention that your Hydra training was never complete, so you never went into the field or actually killed anyone.” She bristled and I rolled my eyes. “Not that I don’t think you could and would. I wouldn’t have recruited you if I thought you were weak. But the fact that you haven’t popped your murder cherry makes you the EXACT type of fringe case Shield eats up like catnip.”

I wasn’t worried about Shield fucking with Ruby, even if they recognized her, which since her mother raised her in a bunker like a survivalist lunatic, they almost definitely wouldn’t. I was a LITTLE worried about Ruby fucking with Shield, though I was counting on Daisy to do some of the heavy lifting brat taming my new psycho attack dog. Even without her powers, the girl was deadly in a fight, and Ruby had a type.

Ruby being bi wasn’t EXACTLY canon, but her being in her late teens when the show happened made her claim about having posters of Daisy on her wall take on a slightly different tone. Given Daisy had only really become Quake within the last year at that point, that little factoid spoke to me less of sweet childhood memories and more of sneaky hands under the covers. She’d given off some serious yandere girlfriend vibes during their brief confrontations too. Admittedly that might be me projecting a little, the dumptruck on the deadly hacker was one of the thickest in this universe, and I had a preference in that direction.

Of course, I explained none of this to Ruby, because while she WAS onboard, she was also unstable and needed to be guided until I could whittle away at all that Hydra programming. Luckily I got her out of there before she’d hit any of the milestones. I was pretty sure her dog was even still alive.

Pouting cutely, Ruby crossed her arms over her chest. “Fine, I guess it would be stupid not to use every resource. But I’m not joining shield. They’re soft.”

Grinning I reached out, triggering Earth Armor as I grabbed her wrist and pulled her against me. “Prefer it hard, do you?” I saw a flare of defiant enjoyment in her eyes as she stomped on my instep, failing to do any actual damage but not hurting her booted feet.

“Is this how Checkmate does things then?” she teased with a wicked grin. “Big strong kings manhandling helpless little teens?”

I smacked her bubbly ass sharply, and smiled as she bit back a squeak. “You are not a teen,” I said mildly. “You’re a viper. You’re gorgeous, and deadly, and if I don’t treat you with respect, you’ll rip out my throat.” I layered Sing into my voice, not really manipulating as much as guiding her attention. “I like my throat where it is. Though I might have a few ideas about what to do with yours.”

My hand wrapped gently around her neck, squeezing enough for her to feel the stony density of my flesh. Ruby shuddered, pupils dilating with enjoyment, and I didn’t bother to hold back my grin. My little pit viper really was the BEST kind of crazy.

I’d always had a thing for crazy girls. I’d slept with Karen after she went rogue and almost got herself killed, and Ruby hit every button I had. Probably not the healthiest thing to be attracted to, but I didn’t eat kale and drink protein shakes either. Life was more fun with a little indulgence, and Ruby was definitely a sometimes snack.

“As amusing as this is, master,” Lilith said with a sigh from behind us. “Perhaps the dominance games could wait for a time when we are NOT standing less than a mile from an enemy stronghold full of deadly cyborgs?”

Ruby’s head snapped up with a glare. “Bitch, don’t interrupt,” she hissed. Then she sighed poutily, knocking away my hand (which I allowed so she didn’t break her wrist). “Lame. The mood is ruined.” She glared at Lilith, hands drifting to her chakram. “You better watch your fat ass gothy. I don’t like when people derail my fun and games.”

Lilith giggled charmingly, covering her mouth in classic ara ara fashion. “Fat? Darling, this is called having a figure. Don’t worry, I’m sure you’ll grow into yours eventually.”

My hand snapped out, Speed and Awareness allowing me to catch the chakram before it beheaded Lilith. I slapped Ruby’s ass again lightly. “Behave,” I said sternly to both of them. “We’re a team. Squabble all you want back at the base, but this is the field. I don’t want bickering on an op where one of you might get distracted and killed.”

Ruby’s pout smoothed over as soon as I challenged her professionalism. “Fine,” she said flatly. “But I want a sparring match when we get back. I’m going to crush that fat bitch under my heel.”

“Oh my,” Lilith giggled breathily. “How forward. At least buy me dinner first.”

Adorably, Ruby actually blushed at that, sputtering slightly at the insinuation. Right. Bisexuality confirmed. Lilith being bi wasn't shocking, she was a demon of lust. As pretty as she was though, I didn't really feel any compulsion to fuck the digimon. Something about our relationship just didn't really feel like that. That said, if Ruby wanted to lewd the digigoth, she had my blessing. Especially back at base where it would be caught on the comprehensive security cameras.

I groaned, stretching to try to restore some of my energy. I was feeling a bit better, but not enough to make this op viable. Luckily, I knew a way to easily fix that. Closing my eyes, I accessed the full power of my bull form. I also slotted Carapace. Combined with Speed, Earth Armor, and Focused Strikes, it made up a comprehensive build that would carry me through most situations.

Ruby gaped as I grew to eight feet tall and my body was coated with ultra durable carapace. Carapace scaled with physical ability, and that included toughness, so between the power of the Minotaur and durability of the Earth Armor, it was easily bulletproof. "Holy shit," she whispered in awe. "What even are you?"

I winked at her. "I'm bullshit," I told her seriously. "Now, I'm going to play can opener. I want you to hand back with Lilith and the bots. They'll keep you safe so you can throw those scare fucking chakram. Remember we're playing nice for Shield. So aim for the limbs and not the neck."

She bristled a bit at the beginning, but by the time I finished she was grinning wickedly. "I can do limbs," she said almost gleefully. "Most people find me very disarming."

I snickered internally at the unintentional reference to one of her canon feats. Nodding to Lilith, I turned toward Cybertek, staring down the hill we were on at the surprisingly fortified building. Kneeling down, I took up a crouched running stance, head lowered. Then I took off.

Speed was a useful ability, it scaled with energy use, and while I had drained myself nearly dry on the trip, the transformation into a bull flooded my body with vitality, giving me lots to work with. I poured on the speed, relying on my absurd durability to carry my forward through the chain link fence as past the guards, and I didn't bother to slow down as my horns hit the wall of the building, followed by my head, shoulders, and the rest of my body.

There was a colossal crash as I tore through the side of the building like a freight train, exploding into the hallway with a bellowing cry of "OH YEAH!" (because the old jokes were always the best).

I'll give this to Cybertek, they were quick to react. Within moments a wave of bullets pinged off my armored hide, flying around like angry bees. Triggering Focused Fire on the furthest member of the defense force, one who was outside the room we were in, and then I hauled off and hit the floor with a devastating downward punch. Whirlwind Iron Cutting Fist, enhanced by Mythril

fist and scaled off my current power, tore the floor into chunks, sending the whole force plummeting into the lower levels.

As I fell, completely safe in my armor, I couldn't help but chuckle as I considered Focused Fire's effects. When we landed, none of them would be hurt, but they would definitely have dropped those guns. And then we'd see what their numbers would do for them. I had a feeling the answer was not much.