

Parker,
you have asked ?

You first.

Give me what you owe. Then you can have it.

well

[RUFFLES THROUGH A BAG, AS IF TRYING TO LOOK FOR SOMETHING AT THE BOTTOM OF IT.]

Number 586, Sells 10,000
food d i es

...

Give.

[TOSSES THE BAG TOWARDS PARKER. HE REACHES INSIDE, GOING STRAIGHT FOR THE FIGURINE.]

Gosh. Look at her features. So perfectly cutified for this one nendoroid. Her pink hair and her pigtails. Her precious smile. She is so happy to see you. All the expressions are here. She's even *still in the box*. This is...

I like this one.

the best Now...

Yes. Yours.

[PARKER EXTENDS HIS HAND, A COFFIN RISING FROM THE GROUND ITSELF. HE TOSSES IT FORWARD, AND IT OPENS: INSIDE IT, A MAN IS BOUND AND GAGGED, UNABLE TO MOVE. HIS SCREAMS ARE MUFFLED.]

Some guy. Sells for a load on the black market, probably.

A joke you?

Hrm.

It's getting worse. I'd just eat it if I were you.

aware of

Parker.

will you?

warning.

see this

Try me.

your choice.

**[REDACTED DESCRIPTION: SIGNS OF MENTAL CORRUPTION WHEN TRANSCRIPTING,
OPERATION ABORTED]**

That... that's done now.

Noted.

Didn't think you could **[CONTENT REDACTED.]**

[VIKTOR RETCHES.]

Don't... don't describe it. It makes it worse. And I... don't currently have the energy to not make it worse.

Quite fascinating, though... you don't seem to have any trouble recalling that.

He didn't matter to me. There's nothing to erase.

Fair enough.

...

So. How have you been?

Oh. Just finished Fushigi Yuugi yesterday. Had it in one sitting, now I'm figuring out what else to watch. I think I might start going at it chronologically. Every anime by release date. Maybe even rewatch some old ones. I could go for Lain again.

Your ability to tolerate watching that much media in one sitting continues to be impressive.

Thanks.

...

Oh. You're waiting for me to ask.

So. How are you.

How do you think I am doing, Parker?

Not good.

Observant, I see.

Sorry. I'm not as good at talking to people anymore.

You are forgiven. Although perhaps you should come out of the hole once in a while, if you are trying to practice.

Yeah, no. I don't think I want to.

Why do you say that, pray tell?

I can't touch your story. It'll ruin the isekai. You aren't supposed to know what's going on.

...

Parker... you are aware that you are talking to me right now, right? I'm afraid you have already involved yourself.

I haven't. You paid me to intervene. If I stopped showing up all that would happen is that you'd turn into a monster, and that's going to happen anyway.

I'm not a person here. I'm an object through which the person does something. So it doesn't count.

...

I suppose you have a point.

I know I do. But thanks for noticing.

...

It has been a shame not having you and your team around, you know. We would be able to get things in order here without much effort.

Don't know why you're thinking about them. They're all dead.

Ah. They didn't come with you?

Killed them myself back at the corporation. Gun made me.

...ah.

I am sorry for your loss.

Who cares. That was too long ago. Don't even remember them.

Well, I suppose that is one way to look at it.

Why are we even talking about that? You know I'm not part of your thing anymore.

Besides. You're like an egg to me.

...

...why that's a rather ugly insult, isn't it.

I don't mean it like that. I was the same way when I was at the corp. I was too full. Of my family,
of our world, my time in the outskirts, my coworkers...

Too many things tying me down. It's why I was stuck in that universe. I smelled of it too much,
like it was a musk on my soul, or something. But every time I left for a different place, something
else would leave me. My memory, my friends, my impulse control. Every new universe makes
me hatch a little bit more, like I'm becoming...

Becoming what?

I don't know. The perfect being, untethered from everything. A creature of the eternal present.

Not like you. You reek of context. There's so much of you tied to everything else. The others.
The company. It's like for every knot that exists you have to be on the other end of it.

That's where you're wrong, Parker. There is very little of me.

Very little of you, maybe, yeah. But you still have... you're filling that lack of you with other
things. If that makes sense.

Does it?

I don't know.

...

Crap. Okay, I'll weigh my hand in.

I feel like you're this close to getting it. Not like in a 'knowledge of the universe' way but in a... 'becoming untied from everything' way. Like the opposite of that chick with the pigtails. The moment she figures out how everything works, we might all actually die-die.

R5, you mean?

Whatever you call her.

Curious. Why would she kill us?

Because she cares. And she'll decide the world has to be different. Can't blame her for it. I would've done the same thing in her shoes back then. It would've been different, though. This world feels more... volatile.

I'm sorry. I shouldn't keep talking about it.

[VIKTOR CHUCKLES]

Not the same person as before, you say, but you still apologize for nothing.

Hm.

Besides, I understand. Things have been different to you, compared to the rest of us. I am not going to pretend I understand what has happened to you since we last saw you-- or even that I care to know the details. Those are yours to do as you wish.

Though it has been good to know you are around. We're not going to stop trying to restrain you, you know. But at least... Personally, I hope you find what you're looking for. Even if it's in this... novel.

That attitude is going to get you killed. But...

Thanks.

...

I'd ask for a hug. But I know I smell like shit.

And I **[CONTENT REDACTED.]** We are currently on the same filth wavelength. If I were you, I would get that out of the way now.

That's... that's fair.

Can I?

You *may*.

[PARKER WALKS FORWARD, PULLING VIKTOR INTO A HUG. THEY WRIGGLE SOMEWHAT IN HIS GRASP.]

Don't get used to it. I'd kill you if they paid me.

I'd do much worse to you if you got out of hand.

Fine. We're even.

Yes. We're even.

[TRANSMISSION END.]