

## Chapter 7: Nice to meet you.

"Nice to meet you."

Takumi Hino entered the meeting room and said this greeting as he bowed his head slightly.

A certain day in October 2018; a certain place, a certain city.

A man standing behind a desk with a unique face greeted Takumi. It was their first meeting, but he had seen this man's face in photographs before. Durga Fida Sharma, Indian-American, CC Corp management adviser. In this time he was still quite young, barely 20. Around Takumi's age, maybe a year or two older.

"Thank you for taking the time to see me today," said Takumi.

"How could I refuse a request from our largest shareholder?" replied Durga. There were no errors in his speech--his Japanese was perfect. They shook hands and then sat down across from each other at the desk.

"What exactly is this place? I don't think CC Corp owns any buildings like this."

"This is my personal office. I specifically use it for important meetings like this. There are many people in my position who are not fond of meetings like this within the company," said Durga. "Thus, today--what can I help you with, Mr. Hino?"

"I have something I must ask of you."

"Oh? Well, if it's something I'm capable of, then I will gladly do it."

"It is almost certain that you will be the next CEO, is it not?"

"I wonder." Durga let out a sly laugh, and then gave a friendly smile. However, Takumi knew he was simply acting, putting up a front. This man's true personality has to be more arrogant than this, he thought. This was a man who was used to working hard and using others to reach high places. Takumi was able to deduce all this from only their few exchanges.



After all, Takumi was the same as him.

"There is a strange power sleeping within one of your company's products, that is, The World. How much do you know about this?"

Durga's eyes sparkled.

"This is my first time hearing about such a thing. A strange power? What do you mean by 'strange,' exactly?"

"A power that exists outside the specifications of the programming." Takumi knew better than to explain in any more detail than that. Durga was pretending not to know what was being discussed, so there was no point in explaining more. He moved on to the main topic.

"I am asking you to treat them kindly."

"Them? Are we talking about a person?"

"Yes. Or, at least, something similar to a people. There is a possibility they would be quite beneficial to us in the future," said Takumi.

"Right now, they are only just beginning to flap their wings, like the Owl of Minerva. Instead of getting rid of them right away, I would prefer they be carefully watched over."

They both studied each other's faces.

Durga gave another wide smile and then adjusted his back in his chair.

"I see. I'm not sure you'll be pleased with this answer, but as it stands we have no interest in these existences outside of system specifications. Right now, we are in the middle of carrying out a large project--you can see how it would be difficult for me to lend any more manpower to you." He gave another big smile. "Will that be all for you today? Perfect. Thank you for coming, and be sure to be careful on your way out."

Takumi made his way to the door, then stopped in its frame.

"What exactly is this 'large project?' I haven't heard anything about it."

"Of course you haven't. It's highly classified, after all. At this stage nobody but those most closely involved would know anything about it."

"Is there anything at all you can tell me personally?"

"Of course. As a shareholder, you have that right. As soon as we've finalized the plans, I will make sure to tell you in detail."

In other words, Takumi would learn nothing about it today.

Durga saw Takumi out of the meeting room. It had only been a short time since he arrived in Japan, but he had made a huge impact as a management adviser. He was good at his job, that was certain.

This man, Durga, seemed to think of The World too lightly, too cheaply, like a product--this line of thinking was difficult to change. It would take having to encounter these non-spec existences Takumi spoke of head on to warrant that.

Takumi--once known as Wiseman, and then as Yata, two characters who had seen the deepest recesses of the world and all its profundities--thought this as he left.

The World R:2 would end service that winter. Plainly speaking, he thought it was a sad thing. But, for The World's sake, there was still a mountain of work he had left to do.

The next version of The World was coming soon, and he would continue to protect it.

All for *her*.

He muttered to himself:

"This is no time to be standing around."