<http://farragofiction.com/AdventureSimWest/?nostalgia=yongki_intermission.txt>
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Yongiki[sic] Makes New Friends

> DM: Start Intermission

INTERMISSION START!!

> be Yongiki

Oh, so that's your name?

Okay. That makes sense. You can use that. Well, you are YONGIKI [sic]. You are currently sitting in a dark room, and you can't see anything. There is something broken near you, you think. More importantly, you have absolutely no idea who you are, except for the fact that you appear to have little voices in your head.

What will you do?

> say hi to the little voices

Ah. You'd love to! Hi, little voices!

You sit there beaming as you wait for an answer.

> wave to the little voices

You wave to the voices telling you to wave to them. You think that's normal!

> its definitely normal

> would the voices lie to you

> you've always been like this

You ponder if the voices inside your head would lie... and then are immediately reassured! You feel at ease knowing your little friends habe always been here with you, even though your arm keeps reeling up in self defense. Something about it all feels... wrong... but perhaps it's just that it's dark.

> there must be a light switch or a flashlight nearby

A what?

Oh... right. You think you've seen one of those before, vaguely. You reach out around you, feeling for something flashlight-shaped... and you do! You find one item that feels tough and round, and one item that feels soft but firm. Which one should you try first?

> tough and round

You grab the tough and round thing in your hands, fiddling for anything on it. You hear a soft click as you flip some kind of switch--

Ah! There. You can see in front of you, now. There appears to be someone dead in front of you. The soft and firm thing you were holding was their leg. Good to know!

There also appear to be SHARDS OF GLASS around you, as well as a LOT OF BLOOD.

> does the body have any identifiable features

Nope! Well, you could think of one-- the body appears intact, except for the huge hole in their throat. It looks like someone bit into it. At least you know it wasn't you, as you lick some of the blood-- yeah, you would know if you had *that* in your mouth.

>poke the body

You poke the body. It feels really cold, but in a kind of pleasing way. You touch around some more, deciding how you feel about it: some parts are cold, some are wet-- you don't like those ones. You conclude, from the fact that you feel pretty warm inside despite of the room's temperature, that they've been dead for a while.

> What things do you remember?

Hmm... you remember... words, obviously. You're thinking right now. You think you're supposed to be... somewhere... right now? With someone? Not here.

Something about the body in front of you makes you feel odd as you hold it in your hands. You feel like you were doing something with this... but you can't for the life of you remember what. Those glass shards give you this terrible pit in your stomach, too.

> hopefully no one thinks YOU killed this body

That's the one thing you're sure of! It feels like you'd know if you were the one to kill them, but you feel like you were pulling. Pulling and pushing.

> make sure to take the body with you when you leave, maybr someone will recognize them

Good idea. That way whoever needs to know about it, knows! You stand as you lift the body up with little resistance and toss it onto your shoulder. Now you just have to leave.

> Look around before you leave

You scan your surroundings: you're in a room with tiles and shelves, you think a lot of items get stored here. It's all filled with cobwebs and dirt, and it's very, very dark. There's a door not too far nearby, which looks big, so it probably leads... somewhere!

You take some steps to the door and are about to leave, but.... then the body you're carrying... starts... speaking.

*"It's a brand new day at Upstate Farms... can I... take your order... a brand new day at... Farms..."*

> Are they alive or possessed? Can you give first aid just in case?

You aren't sure. You also aren't sure what first aid is.

> give your new best friend a name

You aren't sure if this is your best friend. Not like you have a solid idea, but you know it's not... that. But you aren't against it! You can't come up with anything, though.

What should your new **best friend's** name be?

> Their name will be Daniel

You're kind of entranced by the voice in your brain that sounds the most confident. Done! This strange corpse's name will be Daniel.

It is still talking, though. Something about the breakfast options?

> Do you remember anyone you know who could help?

Mmm... no, nothing. You *feel* like you should know someone, though... just not coming to mind right about now.

> Maybe you can find someone else who knows First Aid to help this person.

Yeah. Yeah, that sounds good. You haul off the delirious Daniel out the door as you move on to the next room.

This one is a huge one- you can barely see the ceiling when you point the light up. You can tell you aren't outside because there's no wind. The floor is just as dirty, and there are some rotten plants; it looks like they died from the lack of sunlight. You aren't sure if there's a way out, but there has to be, right?

> Go to the direction of the less rotten parts

You let your legs guide you, trying to keep an eye out for anything that doesn't look like it's long dead. Thankfully, the plants don't look like they can speak, and they don't.

It takes a bit. You go through a set of stairs, logically walking upwards as you'll be more likely to see the sky if you go up. It's around three flights of stairs until you open a door onto...

Some place with a lot of people! They are chattering and walking around with bags, and they are hanging with their friends, and some are screaming and pointing at you in abject horror.

How strange!

> Look distressed and ask if anyone near you knows first aid. Tell them you found him in the mall and need help

You make the best distressed face you can as you ask if anyone knows how to do 'first' 'aid'. No one really seems to be listening to you, screaming incoherently about how scary you look and how there's blood in your mouth and oh my gods he tore that person's neck out.

Oh. Maybe licking Daniel's blood off the floor wasn't a great idea? Sorry.

> show everyone daniel's face to see if they recognize them

You twist Daniel's face around an ask if anyone's seen them-- they only scream more as you tear their head off due to the existing injury around their neck, their body dropping limp onto the ground.

Despite it all, Daniel is still droning on about the amazing sales they have at Upstate Farms. Their eyes are rolling to the back of their head.

People are *definitely* screaming now. Maybe you should, uh, run?

> why did they think you tore his throat out? how did you even get that much blood on your face from tasting it

You were more thorough than you let on... sorry about that, too. You get carried away trying to figure things out sometimes. Besides, you did actually just tear their throat out just now. You didn't mean it! But. It's... not a pretty sight.

> run towards the people, you still need help

On it!

You dart off towards a young man right in front of you, begging him for help as you shove Daniel onto his face. He starts screaming as well, pulling his friend with him as he darts off away from you.

Hm... you think they might not like Daniel very much, not at all because they're dead and speaking, somehow? It could be anyone's guess.

> Ok, any input our presence is having is making it worse. Gently place the corpse on the ground and return down the stairs you came up from

Sorry, Daniel, but this is goodbye. You slowly put their head on the ground, abandoning your friend to the wolves as you retreat into the depths back again.

You don't know. You feel kind of bad.

> I know. I'm sorry. I suggested that because people are more likely to approach the corpse to help if the suspected killer isn't holding it. Can you examine your surroundings a little more? Maybe when before your amnesia you came down here with some people who might be looking for you.

There's no need to apologize! It was a mistake, that's all. You don't know what's going on either, so at least you're in the same position.

Looking around, you find yourself in that huge part of the building again. You find a blood trail from where you came from to where you're standing, but no blood trail back. You also note the stairs can go downwards. When you look down into them, you can't see how deep down they go.

> hey if theres a blood trail...was daniel still bleeding?

> or are you bleeding

You are bleeding some, yes- there's cuts on your legs, probably from that broken glass- but not NEARLY as much as Daniel was, it looks like. Poor Daniel. They just wanted to advertise some place's breakfast options.

You feel... sad, but you find it hard to want to cry about it. The feeling turns into a sort of numbness soon after.

> Ok, let's take some time to self reflect. How are you feeling about the situation? What kind of action do you want to take?

Currently, you feel fine. You felt bad for a bit there, but clenching your fists appears to calm you down. Besides, it was satisfying to un-head Daniel-- kind of like snapping a twig. But you also worry about why Daniel was still speaking, and another weird gut pain about leaving them behind after calling them your friend.

You can't really seem to think of anything on 'actions'. If it was up to you, you'd stand around. Somewhere with a bit more plants might be nice, though? All the ones here are dead. You know there are little creatures in them sometimes. You'd like to see some.

> examine dead plants for presence of creatures

You stick your hand around some of the rotten flora of this place, seeing if there's anything...

And you do! You find a large, brown, oval-looking insect crawling around on the leaves. You also find some fast, small flying ones; they have big eyes, and they move their feetsies really fast.

> name it skippy

Got it! You now have 37 new creatures, all of them named Skippy. What you have learned from this is that you know how to count!

> catch them

You reach over to catch one of the flying ones, but your hands move too quickly. You snatch them with all your force out of the air, but when you open your palms they're all squished, their wings weakly fluttering as some morbid last hurrah.

> try to catch the non flying one

You go to pick up the brown oval one, but once again you snatch it too greedily and too hard. Its little bug liquid splatters messily over your hand.

Admittedly, you are both enjoying squashing them and hating the fact that they die after you squash them. Can't have everything in life, you guess.

> Does the names Viktor, Khana, Devona, Neville, or Witherby seem familiar to you?

They ring a bell... but you're not sure why. Maybe they're just popular names. The idea of naming the bugs with those makes your shoulders tense.

> imagine bugs that squish but never die

You close your eyes.

You can't... imagine much, actually. No pictures appear in your brain. But you get what they mean, and it makes you smile.

> maybe if you arent covered in blood and bug liquid you can go back upstairs and no one will scream?

Maybe! But how are you supposed to clean up? You guess you could take your clothes off, but... then MORE parts of your body can get dirty. That doesn't seem efficient.

> look for water somewhere

Looking around, you find a puddle of water dripping down from somewhere above... and about nothing else in this room.

> It took 3 flights of stairs to get to where the people are. Which means you should be able to go up just one floor here to see if you can find where the water is dripping from without running into any of them.

That... is smart! Yes. Yes, this is a good idea. You'd lift up your brain-friend if you could.

You climb those stairs all the way up and begin a THOROUGH INVESTIGATION of the premises. In the floor over the one you were in before, you find an extremely long bathroom, all the sinks and urinals unnaturally wide, as if someone had taken the room and stretched it out. Several toilets are on the ceiling, dripping ominously onto the ground and into some buckets.

Similarly, this room is full of BROKEN GLASS. There's no blood in these, so whoever broke them didn't use their hands.

You hear whistling from further inside.

> Approach one of the buckets, being careful not to walk on the broken glass. Does the water look clean?

The water looks clean enough. It doesn't seem to have anything weird in it, at least...

> find out where the whistling is coming from (try not to walk in on someone taking a piss though)

Your gaze wanders off from the water and focuses instead on the faint whistling. Yeah, you can do that.

The further you go in, the more your perception changes of this bathroom. Stalls start getting longer and longer, stretched out as if to fit more and more people. Some other features start showing, as well; the wallpaper from that previous room appears to be leaking in where the wall tiles break, showing a dirty dead-beige wallpaper that clashes with the rest of the room.

You finally make it to the stall with the whistling-- one as long as your arm six times over-- and you knock.

The whistling stops. They don't respond.

> ask them if they know about breakfast options

You open your mouth to ask about what a breakfast option is to begin with. You are halfway through talking about bacon croissants before they answer back:

"Shit! Okay, it's just *you.* Fuck, Yongki, don't scare me like that." The voice is of a guy, and it sounds familiar. "I'm trying to piss here, big guy. Give me a moment."

> tell him your name is Yongiki[sic]

The toilet person sounds quite unimpressed with your shenanigans, but he still laughs at you anyway. "Nah, I'm pretty sure it's Yongki. Without the extra 'i'. Do you even *know* what [sic] means?"

> clean yourself up while you wait

You go to the water buckets and toss one of them over your head. You are now wet! It is arguable if you're any cleaner, but at least you don't have blood in your mouth anymore.

> celebrate your lack of blood

You fail to celebrate your lack of blood, as you believe you are currently filled with it.

> update your new name

You update your name to Yongki! It feels about the same as the previous one, really. Just missing an i.

You could wait until the man is done peeing, you guess.

> ponder how appropriate it is to be missing an "I" when you seem to have very few memories, very few "you" inside there

Your heart has one of those moments where you feel a sharp pain, like if you're holding your breath and didn't know it, and then it dissipates.

You don't think that's very funny.

> check in the mirror to see if you need to clean up more

No.

> whoa okay

Huh? What were you talking about?

> not checking how you look and instead quietly waiting for the pissing whistler to come out

You wait patiently as instructed, letting yourself dry in the stale air as whoever is in that stall finishes up.

Sure enough, it's not long before you hear a perturbingly loud flush-- presumably from how much water is needed to operate a toilet that wide. When the door opens, a guy that reaches to about the base of you neck comes out. He has three antennae-strands of hair, none of which twitch like a bug would. He's staring at you expectantly.

"Huh. You look like shit. You get the body out yet?"

> ask him if he means Daniel

"Who, now? No, the rando." He squints at you. "Wait a second. Did you *name* the rando?"

You nod. You tell him that they were your best friend and you left them to die forever.

"Uh-huh." He puts a hand on his wrench. "And... that means you got rid of it. Right?"

> Say that you ripped Daniel's head off and threw him at some screaming people.

Oh, that seems to do it. His brow furrows at that, a hand reflexively going to the wrench on his belt. Maybe he works here, and that's why you know him? "Ah, shit. The HOLE, Yongki. You had to go put the body in the hole. What part of--"

He cuts himself short as he begins to pace in place somewhat, slow and steady after you drowned the near vicinity in stale water from your 'shower'. "Motherfucker, Vik's gonna kill me... "

> tell him about all the blood and the glass

"I don't want to know," he cuts you off. "It's cool. The glass is fine. I broke all the mirrors here, nothing's gonna happen. You can thank me later. Or now, actually. Both is good."

> ask him who vik is

His face immediately falls from his previously proud state, a hand going to his head. "Oh, fuck." A nervous laughter escapes him. "Okay. Now I *know* we're fucked for real."

"Listen." He clasps his hands together. "If you don't say those words to them-- or ever again, to anyone-- we can salvage this. Okay? They aren't gonna give a shit that the body's on the surface, just-- let's not talk about this. I'll make it worth your while. I'll even get you a slug, huh? You'd like that? You'd like a slug?"

> ask what a slug is

He sighs. "It's like a slime creature. But small. You love those. Snails have the houses on them, that's the premium shit."

Oh. That sounds alright. You'd like a slug.

"See? We're already understanding each other. I scratch your back, you scratch mine."

>tell him you've already forgotten it

A thumbs up. "Atta boy. Now just pretend you know ANYONE called by the name of Vik and just... run with it. Forever."

>Also ask this guy what his name is.

"Name's Khana-- call me K." He grins. "I keep an eye on you. You listen to me, alright? When Vik's not around, I'm head honcho. And you need that. ESPECIALLY when you get like *this.*"

> agree that k is in charge

>thank k for explaining what a slug is and a snail is and also how things work

Yeah, you can get down with that. You pledge your allegiance to this K guy you met in the bathroom, and who also bribed you with snails.

K's smile only grows wider at that, flashing with unconcealed pride, his chest all puffed up. "Any time, big guy. Glad that you know where we stand. So... listen, maybe we don't have to go to Vik right away. We can hang around, right? Student to master." He elbows you. You nearly punch him in the face. The conversation continues as normal. "How about we go check up the mall? I know where to go to get you in something that *isn't* soaking wet and covered in... that."

> dm sleep

DM NOTE: On Pause for now, Intermission will extend till tomorrow.

> tell K that someone will inevitably figure out what happened and that trying to hide it is just going to make everything so much worse when they do

Okay, let's resume.

Your blatant disrespect to authority as you bluntly tell him that someone will figure it out makes him edge a little, hairs on his arm rising up in goosebumps. "You *doubting* me, big guy? You heard me before-- I call the shots when no one else's around. Are we gonna have a problem?"

You're pretty sure you could crush this K guy with your bare hands if you really wanted to, and it'd feel just as good as beheading Daniel, but that sounds kind of mean... and you really want that slug.

> or if you're REALLY lucky, a snail

Yes. You really want a snail one day. Apparently those get little houses. What would happen if you have a slug a house? Would it turn into a slug?

> tell him hes the boss

"That's the spirit." He grins again, like if nothing ever happened. "Come on. Let's get you out of those clothes." He starts walking off... deeper into the bathroom, if you'd like to follow.

> ask him if its bathroom clothes

"Nah, they're people clothes! Work clothes. You'll dry your pair while you wear those instead.

> follow him into the looong bathroom

You walk along with him for a worryingly long time, careful not to topple over any of the buckets. As you do, the stalls progressively become too long to be anything resembling a door, morphing into that ugly wallpaper that's been creeping in from behind the walls. The floor changes as well into bigger and bigger tiles, becoming ever more polished, until...

You no longer seem to be in a bathroom? You're in a deep, dark hallway where the sun don't shine. It seems like at some point this was near the surface, because there's a glass wall where the outside would be, but... it's instead facing directly into pure rock, some pipes running through here and there.

K doesn't seem to have noticed yet, but something's shining in the distance-- and it retreats as soon as you mentally note its presence.

> Ask him if he knows what happened to your memories.

K makes a flushing sound with his mouth, his pointer finger drawing a swirl. "Down the drain," he says. "Every time you look at a mirror your brain capsizes and we have to start you up from scratch. So don't look at any of those. That's lesson one of being you, bud.

You don't know why, but you feel the deepest chill run down your spine, your body tensing up. You **know** you're being watched, but... by who?

> ask k what lesson 2 is

"Don't kill people unless we tell you to."

> ask k if he knows who is watching you

That does seem to bring him to attention, perking up as he looks around. "Haven't seen shit. You think there's someone nearby?" he whispers, lightening his footsteps quite a bit to match.

> Tell K that you think so, but to not act suspicious about it.

He takes the news well enough as he sticks his hands into his pockets. "Okay, got you. Where to? Let's see where they are."

> say you saw a weird light

"Ah. Okay." K straightens himself out, gazing forward. "Okay. Just follow me, alright? Hush-hush. No sudden movements."

You do as instructed, right behind him as he walks forward, wrench in hand. The feeling of being watched does not subside as you walk forward-- in fact, it only gets worse, a dreadful buildup of adrenaline coursing through your blood as you try to find something you cannot see.

You see a figure from the corner of your eye.

> say hi to the figure

You turn around to say hello! Surely it's--

*Whack!* The stranger knocks you in the head, tossing you to the ground as a spray of blood arcs from the wound. K flinches as you fall and hit the ground with a thunk. He winds back the wrench and jumps onto them, nearly choking them back with its handle.

You don't get it. Neither of you were doing anything. Why would someone attack you? Was it about Daniel? You didn't mean to behead them. The adrenaline only spikes inside you, your whole body white-hot... as the realization *hits* you. This is a **threat.** And you don't know a lot, but this, deep in your heart, you know better than anything else in the world. Like some ancient written code of conduct carved into your skin long ago.

You *know* what to do with threats.

When you come to, K is standing in front of you, sweating bullets. Whatever attacked you in on the ground, beaten to near-death. For some reason, you are certain beyond reasonable doubt that they're still breathing.

"Okay. Thanks for the backup," K wheezes- his body isn't sagging as he does, but his legs are trembling somewhat. He must not have exerted much physical force at all.

Curiously, neither his wrench or your hands seem to be covered in much blood at all. Maybe you didn't hurt them?

> You probably did hurt them, but maybe this attacker just doesn't have blood.

Maybe. Curiosity strikes you, and you lean down to examine them a bit more: they are covered in black cloth from head to toe, leaving no part of it exposed to the elements. It's all super clean, too-- not like your still-wet clothes.

When you pull down their mask to see if they're okay, it seems...

It seems they are made of... wood?

> breathing wood...

You are *certain* of this.

> Ask K if this wood person is normal. You may have forgotten about these kind of people existing.

> pick the wood person up to show k

> ask k if wood people are a thing

You grab them by the scruff with little effort, their body going limp as soon as you do so. They're kinda heavy, but nothing you can't handle.

K ponders the question. Then, he sighs. "No. Never seen this before, actually. What the fuck?" He takes off the other glove to reveal, unsurprisingly, another wooden hand.

> Do you see anything that could have been the source of that light you saw? If not, that light could have been from something else to look out for.

No, not really. In fact, that weird feeling of being watched is completely gone.

> Ask K if you should carry the wooden figure along

"Nnnnno. We're not carrying anything weird around. We should-- I don't know." He kicks its leg. "Let's break its legs for good measure, and then we can just leave it here."

> Does it have a face?

No idea. You lift up its mask and take off the glasses as well.

What is staring back at you is neither mannequin nor man. The answer is somewhere in the middle: its face is all wooden and mouthless, its nose merely a protrusion. Its eyes, however, are very real. They are stuck wide open with no eyelids to give them peace, looking into yours with what you can only describe as a cry for help.

Huh! You didn't know that could happen!

> Break the thing's legs as asked.

Say no more! You crack both its wooden legs like twigs; the eyes bulge out in pain, frantically looking around.

>Ask if we should tell Vik about this.

"Uh-huh. Yep. Definitely." He kicks it again, making its eyes go wild once more. "This is NOT normal. Well. Normal for here, I think. Weird shit always happens already."

> name the terrified mannequin

Okay! What should you name it?

> archibald, grand high duke of the woodworks

You like that one! This mannequin is now **ARCHIBALD (grand duke of the woodworks)!**

K furrows his brow at you, but then he just shrugs. "Yeah, sure. Why not." He grabs the sunglasses off its face. "Let's just loot the freak and get Vik on the ball."

> proceed to loot the freak

You look the absolute fuck out of Archibald. You don't take its wood because you can't.

Your BORROWING HAUL from this helpless MANnequin includes the following:

* A black **balaclava**;
* A pair of **sunglasses** (K took them);
* A pair of **leather gloves**;
* A **wallet** containing a card with a number and name (of someone not named Archibald), a card with a license, and sixteen whole moneys;
* A **walkie-talkie** (you're surprised you recognized this one);
* And a **flashlight** (like yours!)

K gets a little excited with the monetary carnage and he drives his wrench into its arm, tearing it off. You now also have a **wooden arm.**

> What's the name and number on the card?

Uh... someone by the name of ALEKI WEATHERS. The numbers are 234-422-1023. It might be a business card?

> yeah yeah, but what's the inside of that wooden arm look like

Oh! That's easy. You look on the inside of the arm, and it's filled with flesh and bones. Neat!

> no blood?

None! Which is weird.

> Do you know how to operate the walkie-talkie?

You press the buttons and turn the handle a few times, and all you get is this weird static.

> say the name Aleki outloud and see if Archibald responds

You call out the name Aleki, and Archibald's eyes focus even more onto you. That might be Archibald's true name... kind of a bad name, though.

> tell Archibald thst their previous name was kind of bad

You let Archibald know of its terrible name. Fear quickly turns to hatred... not like it can do anything.

Almost as if reacting in turn, the talkie in your hands turns on:

"NATHANAEL. DO YOU COPY?"

> Say "yes" in a deep voice and ask what the problem is

> press and hold the button on the side of the walkie talkie and say that "you copy"

"DID YOU SURVIVE THE INITIAL ENCOUNTER? JAMES SAYS THEY SAW YOU MAKE CONTACT. WHAT'S YOUR STATUS?"

You can't seem to make out the voice on the other side-- it's either unnaturally deep, or masked out, somehow.

> say "managed to avoid an encounter for now. Still in pursuit. What's the status there?"

"PHEW, OKAY. WE'RE PULLING UP WITH THE CARGO, WE'RE MINCEMEAT IF WE GET CAUGHT THIS FAR DOWN. YOU THINK YOU CAN MAKE IT TO THE MEET POINT?"

> say "I don't think I can. The guys I'm tailing blocked the way I came from. You know an alternate path to get back to the meet point?"

"AH, SHIT. REALLY? LISTEN, JUST TAKE THE LEFT--"

Someone seems to interrupt them in the background. You can't quite make out what they're saying, except for a *'don't worry, I'll take care of it'* at the very end. Then, it tunes back in, a different voice this time.

"Nathanael. You may let off on pursuit, please advise your location... remember to give out the password in your license at the end. We'll be arriving shortly to take care of this predicament."

Even while weird and masked, the voice seems to have some presence to it. K, previously silent at your suddenly enhanced lexicon and improv skills, is making AGGRESSIVE 'cut it off' motions, repeatedly dragging his finger across his throat.

> say "right, I'm -" and drop the walkie talkie while you are still speaking

You TOSS the walkie talkie halfway across the empty hallway. You can hear the voice reprimanding you as you do.

"What the-- Yongki! Fucking **SCATTER!**" K pulls you-- as much as anyone can pull you-- further down the hallway, Archibald in toe. You break into a sprint as well, mostly just from the thrill of it all. You like running; the wind against your hair tosses some off the water off you. This helps, since K has completely forgotten *why* you came down here in the first place, silly billy.

You make it right to yet another set of stairs. "What kind of fucking fitness instructor built this damn place?!" K shouts. "What was the way back? Fucking..."

Which way will it be? Up, or down?

> down, up is where all those screaming people are

Down it is! You grab K by the wrist as you--

> go up, maybe those screaming people can help

Uh. Up, then? What about down?

> go up, maybe you'll get to fight more

...you *would* like to fight more, but you're not supposed to pick fights, you think. Guess you'll go... you'll go...

You just freeze. You can't just go up because you want to fight people. Yeah, you want to-- but you also don't. But also there's people upstairs... but also there's *people* there, and they scream, and they might've wanted something with you? It doesn't sit right with you, not at all. Your shoulders lock up and teeth clench as you spend a rough minute thinking about it.

You don't even notice. K, who you now recognize was screaming at you the whole time, gnawing at your arm so you'll let him go, has gone completely stiff. When you notice his gaze is somewhere else, you look off in that direction.

Caught up to you is a man in a nice suit, somewhat sweating after running to catch up to you. He has a flashlight in one hand and a similar looking walkie on the other, and he has a really pretty earring in the shape of a cross.

"Ah. It's just *you.*"

> assume this is that "vik" k said you had to pretend to know

> Greet the fellow.

Without too much aid from the voices in your head on what exactly to say, you fumble something out about how he sure is a human you seem to recognize. You try to shake his hand, but your hands are full with an Archibald and a K.

The man's expression does not change. His eyes are focused on Archibald, limp as a doll over your shoulder.

*"Witherby?!"* K calls out. He's no longer trying to bite his way out of your grasp. "What the fuck is *this?!"*

"I could ask you the same thing, hm?" So that's his name! Cool. It's not Vik. "We're civilized people. Put that man down, won't you, Yongki? No way to treat a guest, let alone a person."

> tell this witherby guy all about how snails have little houses and thus are better than slugs

You infodump about snails. Strangely enough, he listens the whole way through, nodding along at parts as you talk about your dream of having a snail friend someday. You wonder if slugs could become snails if you gave them houses, and then wonder what kind of cruel god rules this world if some types of slimy creature are less deserving of a house than others. You may have independently figured out the inherent inequalities of the modern housing system?

Witherby chuckles demurely all that, but not too much. Every bit of reaction he gives you is carefully packaged and restrained. "I'm sure snails are very good, Yongki. We can talk more about those later, yes? I need him down now, though."

> explain that Archibald is some kind of mannequin

"I can see that. This place has a strange influence over others, yes... but this specific change is quite common. Put him down, please?

"Don't listen to him!" K whispers in your ear like a devil on your shoulder that tells you to eat that four-week box of milk. "Let's get out of here!"

> ask for a hostage exchange: Archibald for a snail

"Ah... I don't believe I have a snail right now. But if you let him go now... I'll double your payload later. Two snails. Final offer."

> accept the offer, score!

Hell yeah! Commerce!

You happily drop both Archibald (and K) as you think about your future as a double snail owner. K looks defeated-- and *angry,* fists clenched, as you forsake his offers for someone else. "Fine! You two have fun. Let it be known you *chose wrong,* big guy." K scatters off to the stairs above without another word.

This Witherby doesn't seem to care at all about that. Instead, he crouches to get a better look at Archibald.

"Tch... this is what happens when you don't follow orders." He closes his eyes, laying a hand over the mannequin's chest. When he opens them again, there's some sort of profound sadness, too far away for you to grasp.

"It's gone too far, now. I couldn't do anything even if I tried. My apologies, Aleki. Perhaps in another life."

Witherby switches out his flashlight for a gun-- a weird one, with six bullet chambers instead of a slidey port-- and blasts the mannequin's head clean off. Shards fly off as the bullet hits it, dispersing into a fine mist when they hit the ground. The rest of Archibald's body follows, leaving only his few possessions.

"That was on me. I should know better than expect idiots to listen," he says, holstering his gun. "You're welcome to finish them off next time, if they hit you first. Saves me the clean up."

> say goodbye to archibald/aleki

You want to, you really do. But you can't help but feel a little bit numb seeing him disappear. You're not sure why.

> ask why archibald hit you

"He was an idiot, that's why." Witherby simply shook his head in disbelief. "You try to make some money around here, you tell them what the risks are, and they still won't listen... it's like herding cats."

> ask what a cat is

"Ah. I see." His lips tighten. "It's a creature, you see. Four legs, with a tail, very furry... you might like them. Not quite snails, though."

> do they have houses?

"People tend to give them shelter, yes. Most pets tend to."

> ask him if he's sad

"Me? Oh, no. I'm disappointed." He looks down to where Archibald used to be. "I expect *better* of my associates."

> Ask why Archibald was made of wood.

Witherby doesn't seem surprised you asked that. "Ah, that's simple, really. Something about this place... isn't safe to normal people. It eats you alive. If it's not us doing it, well... this. They turn into mannequins."

> ask if you're going to turn into a mannequin

"Oh, we're part of this place already. There's no need to."

> You sure know a lot about this place. K has never seen a person like Archibald before.

"That's because either he hasn't noticed, or he's a liar." He puts it rather bluntly. "Our base is full of those."

> dm: sleep

DM NOTE: On Pause for now, Intermission will wrap up tomorrow.

> ask why witherby knew about the wood people and k didn't

"We don't tell you everything, you know. Need to know basis. Thought this was mutual. Vik wanted 'confidentiality', didn't they?" Witherby turns around, preparing to leave. "Besides, we don't talk about the mannequins."

> wave goodbye

He returns the gesture, daintily raising his hand, restrained like a proper gentleman. "Don't get lost on your way back, Yongki. And-- make sure to keep an eye out on that K," he notes. "He stormed out quickly, there... that's rarely ever a good thing."

> assure witherby that k is one of your best friends and cannot hurt you

He chuckles at that-- it sounds a lot more serious than you think a chuckle could be. "You've said that before."

With that he disappears, further and further into the bowels of the mall.

> do a small victory dance

You don't really know how to dance, so you pump your fists into the air, do a little twirl, then give out a primal, animalistic yell. It reverberates in the emptiness of this area.

That felt good! You should do that more often.

> yell some more!

***WOOOOOOOOOOO!*** You yell a whole bunch more! Several rats scurry away, thinking you're a scary predator.

> go follow k, probably better to smooth feathers over early rather than later?

> try to follow K

> K headed to the stairs above, so if you want to follow him you should go up the stairs.

Yeah, okay! You go back up the stairs, trying to follow back to where K was...

But you don't find him. In fact, you don't find *anything.* It occurs to you that K was the one who led you here... and you have no idea where this leads. You try to look back to find the stairs you just came from, but there's nothing there. Effectively, you are lost. Your flashlight doesn't seem to do much here, either.

You spend a moment being confused about it all before you hear footsteps off to your right. "Yongki! Is that you?" K calls out.

> Seems K heard you while you were happily yelling.

Probably! You were having plenty of fun.

He calls out to you again. "Come on, big guy, where are you? Get over here already!"

> Yell "Over Here"

"Yeah, you're getting closer! Come on, this way! I can almost see you!"

You squint. You're... pretty sure you're not moving at all.

"Yongki! Is that you?" it repeats itself. "Come on, big guy, where are you? Get over here already!"

> Head over to K. You two need to at least tell Vik about the mannequin people.

You... you don't think you want to, anymore.

> you could take him

Oh yeah. That's not something you doubt. You just... don't. Want to do that.

> morbid curiosity. whatever that is, if not k, you could probably beat its ass if necessary. probably best to Not Go That Way though

Oh. Okay. You... don't know what else to do, though.

You hear footsteps approaching.

> maybe yell, but this time try really hard to be scary. maybe you could scare it off.

You start yelling.

As always, it's quite carnal. Your whole body goes into it, each muscle and bone reverbating through your throat and all around you, whatever beast has possessed you taking the reins. You scream, and you yell, and you howl, and...

Nothing. K's voice repeats in the background. Over, and over, and over. The same three lines. What is wrong with him? Is he okay? This is a bad way to lose your mentor.

You barely react when a wrench hits you in the head from behind.

"You think you can disrespect me, huh? Think I'm less than Witherby? That I'm not worth listening to." K is behind you, speaking between gritted teeth. "I warned you. You chose wrong, big guy. So if Vik's gonna kill us anyway... let's set you back to square zero, hm?"

Oh, no. What is that? What is that in his hand? Paralysis shocks your body, your eardrums lost between K's voice and the cacophony of himself he has concocted. You feel the mirror in his hands. You see yourself in it. You see nothing at all. Only your screams, all absorbed into it like a black hole.

What did you do wrong? You didn't do anything. You didn't mean to. You beg to him to stop, to do something, as the rest of your memory withers, down, deep downx until

You forget. But your body remembers. Your body always remembers. You will squish this ant back to its rightful place in no time. For now, all you can do is echo between these hollow bones, bite your ossified jail bars. Bide your time.

And when your memory resurfaces, you will teach him to kneel.

> dm: end intermission

Reloading previous save file...