

Chapter 93 - Golden Epiphany

Sifting through the code turned out to be way more intricate than I'd expected.

I knew it was going to take a while, but I hadn't fully realised just how massive a task "locate the code that governs your avatar's visual appearance" really was.

Two hours in, and my brain was fried—I'd barely managed to wrap my head around a few key sections, and I was positively *miles* away from understanding how any of it actually worked.

The first thing I figured out? This wasn't the whole code—far from it, actually.

My instinct, thanks to [Programming], was to find the core of the code, like locating the heart of a maze before worrying about the side paths.

It took me all of ten minutes to realise... yeah, no, that wasn't happening.

There was no "core" to be found.

When I mentioned it to Kill Joy, he casually confirmed my suspicions.

"Oh, I've only given you the 'relevant' bits," he'd said with that smug grin of his.

Apparently, around 96% of the avatar's code had been stripped out, because loading the entire thing would've straight-up nuked the shard's processing power. To really dig into the full code, I'd need access to an actual Cyberspace network, off-loading most of the work onto the millions and billions of servers and micro-servers scattered across the city.

And yet, even these "relevant" parts seemed never-ending.

You know that little scrollbar on the side of a window that shows how far you've scrolled?

Yeah, this whole interface didn't even have a visible one—there was just that much stuff to sift through. I couldn't even see a single-pixel line indicating how far down I really was, which didn't exactly boost my motivation.

'This is impossible... There's no way people actually read through all of this, right?' I leaned back in the chair, rubbing my digital eyes, which, weirdly enough, actually felt kind of nice.

The shard was meant to last for months, maybe even a year if you were thorough, but surely the majority of that time wasn't supposed to be spent on this final test, trying to find which parts of it Kill Joy wanted you to actually edit?

At the pace I was going, though, I could easily see it taking months to finish; time I definitely didn't have. It was painfully clear—I needed a different approach.

I sat there for a minute, trying to think.

There *had* to be a better way. Maybe something I was overlooking, or something Kill Joy hadn't spelled out but expected me to figure out on my own; just as he always did.

The endless scrolling and sheer bulk of the code—it all felt like busywork, like some kind of cruel prank designed to drive me nuts. I could easily see someone getting stuck here for weeks, or even months, banging their head against the digital wall, slowly going insane.

I replayed Kill Joy's words in my mind: *"Visualise the change, locate the code, inject your modifications, and will the change into existence."*

Easier said than done.

*'How am I supposed to do **any** of that if I can't even figure out what part needs changing...?'*

Desperate for a breakthrough, I started throwing everything I had at the problem.

I applied [Programming], [Netrunning], [Quick-Hacks] to my entire thought-process, like a side-loaded wiki, of sorts—basically all the obvious choices, hoping one of them would suddenly spark the "Aha!" moment I needed.

But nothing clicked.

The code remained a dense jungle of meaningless symbols and lines.

I tried branching out to more off-the-wall approaches, even throwing [Accounting] into the mix like some kind of desperate last-ditch search algorithm.

I thought maybe, just maybe, it could help me sort through the noise, but without any idea what the relevant code actually looked like, I was basically fishing blind.

Frustration started to creep in.

I was half a second from quitting out of the shard for the day and shifting my focus elsewhere, but when I thought about it, there wasn't much else I could realistically tackle right now that needed doing before my meeting with the Operator.

Finishing this shard was by far *the* most pressing task on my list.

Think, Sera, think! Kill Joy wouldn't give you an impossible task... So what's the deal?

I ran through everything I knew about [Programming], mentally fine-tuning my focus, looking for any breadcrumb that could guide me. I didn't need to fully understand the entire code; I just needed one small fragment to get me started, something to use as a foothold.

Another twenty minutes later, my brain felt like it had been wrung dry.

I glanced at Kill Joy, who hadn't moved from his floating position at my side.

He looked as smug and unbothered as ever, his expression practically begging me to crack.

I shot him a murderous glare, imagining him popping like a balloon of digital fragments if I stared hard enough. But, unfortunately for everyone involved, I had no luck on this either—he just hovered there, watching with that same irritating smirk.

‘Alright, this clearly isn’t working... Let’s take the rational approach and work through this step-by-step: What do I need? The part of the code that determines the visual appearance of my avatar. Where would I put this code if I was creating an avatar?’ I thought, feeling the frustration building.

Then, a few moments later, came the inevitable realization, *‘Well... fuck, I don’t know! That’s the whole goddamn issue in the first place!’*

I was so pissed off that I couldn’t sit still anymore.

Without thinking, I dropped to the floor and started banging out push-ups, trying to burn off the frustration.

Exercise had always helped me think clearer—or at least, I hoped it would this time.

I had already burned through all my usual Skills and Attributes, hoping one of them would click into place, but they’d all come up empty.

Time for a different approach.

Mid-push-up, I slowed down and started dissecting the problem bit by bit. Breaking down problems into smaller, manageable chunks was the fundamental nature, the true bread and butter, of [Programming], right?

Kill Joy’s words echoed in my mind again, but this time, I dissected them even further than before, “Visualise, locate the code...”

I went on to apply my resources again, throwing everything—including the kitchen sink—at it to try and find a way out.

Body and Reflex? Yeah, no, those weren’t going to help me here. But I ran through them anyway, just in case—nothing.

Ego and Edge? Similarly low-chance rolls, but I figured that getting more dice was always a good shot—nothing again.

When I got to Intellect, though, which I had kept for last out of fear that I would be disappointed once again, something *finally* shifted.

It wasn’t a massive breakthrough, but it was a first nudge in the right direction. Enough to make me freeze mid-push-up, hovering just above the ground, as an idea took shape.

My Intellect finally kicked in, applying its logical reasoning to the bite-sized part of Kill Joy’s instructions, and suddenly, it hit me.

Like a sledgehammer of blindingly obvious truth. And immediately I felt like an absolute idiot.

I'd been tackling this like a typical programming problem—brute-forcing my way through, line by line, hoping to spot the code that controlled my avatar.

But this wasn't one of Kill Joy's usual tests. He wasn't expecting me to find the code first and then make changes.

The work had to come *before* finding the code.

This was about [Manifestation], after all.

It wasn't just programming or technical know-how—it was about *intent*. Willpower. Visualisation.

I had been approaching it like a machine when the real task was to inject *intent* into the digital space. I hadn't been following his instructions properly this *whole* time, simply skipping over the first part entirely, figuring that it was only necessary in combination with the third and fourth parts; rather than all of them.

The first step was visualising the change I wanted; the rest worked off of that visualisation—it *had* to.

*“Visualise the change, **then** locate the code,”* was what Kill Joy had intended to say.

Taking a deep breath, I let go of the technical side of things for a moment. I stopped treating this as a debugging puzzle to solve and instead focused on the result I wanted to achieve first. I needed to truly see the change in my mind before I could make it real.

I pictured my avatar, letting the image slowly take shape in my mind.

Darker, longer hair; sharper, more mature features—something that felt more like *me* and not just the default Sera template I'd been rolling with all this time.

I let my imagination take the reins, figuring that if I gave [Manifestation] enough to work with, it would have to give me *something* back.

I started layering details, an entire look: A long, sturdy and overly stylish, black cloak that billowed behind me; bandoliers filled with gadgets and weapons—pistols, knives, throwing knives, and, of course, a full-on energy blade strapped to my side; Cyan-coloured, because that's just how I rolled.

Then came the oversized hood, big enough to completely mask my face, adding that perfect “mysterious stranger” type touch that I was all about.

As I envisioned it, I could practically see the avatar materialise in front of me, even though I was still frozen in my push-up. My mind was locked-the-fuck-in, fully immersed in the process, and it felt like everything else had faded away.

When it was nearly complete, I realised something was missing.

Something that felt essential—*me*.

It was all well and good to design a cool new look, but I couldn't leave out a key part of who I was either. While Kill Joy had said this was all about visuals, there was no way I could skip this detail.

A single, cyan-feathered wing broke through the cloak at my avatar's back, adding an extra layer of asymmetry and flair.

Because let's be real: A-symmetric details? They were always sick as hell; and who wouldn't want wings—or a wing—if given the chance?

This wasn't just any old avatar anymore; no longer.

It was now a reflection of who I truly was, deep down—the edgy 13-year-old still hanging out somewhere inside me that would never truly grow up.

And honestly? I was okay with that.

Once I had the image locked down, I carefully got up from my push-up, holding onto the visualisation as if it might slip away—but surprisingly, it didn't. It was almost like [Manifestation] had my back, gently cradling the image I'd crafted, ensuring I didn't lose it, regardless of my actions going forward.

I knew I was doing something right, too, because the moment I'd started the process, the System chimed in with the notification I'd been waiting for:

[System]: *100xp gained for [Manifestation] Skill.*

[System]: *[Manifestation] Skill has reached Level 1. Muscle Memory and Knowledge Download available.*

There was no way I was about to push forward without that sweet, sweet System-sanctioned upgrade. So, learning from my past blunders for once and not wanting to get knocked off my feet by another download, I quickly took a seat on the chair I'd manifested earlier—just in case—and confirmed the prompt.

The second I accepted the [Manifestation] download, my mind buzzed with the familiar sensation of data pouring in.

But this time, it was a slightly different feeling entirely. Subtler.

The rush wasn't as overwhelming as some of the other Skills I'd downloaded before—it was more of a gentle nudge rather than a full-blown flood. Almost like the System was easing me into the basics of what [Manifestation] actually entailed on an instinctual level, rather than an intellectual one.

The first thing I felt was an awareness of my surroundings, like the very fabric of the digital space I was in was now more... real, at least on some surface level.

I couldn't see any form of code or anything like that outright, but I could now tell that it was there—waiting for me to interact with it.

The download broke it down in the simplest terms, echoing what Kill Joy had already said: [Manifestation] was all about intent and willpower. But it wasn't just that—it was also deeply tied to the core principles of [Programming] and [Quick-Hacks], only applied in far more abstract, almost esoteric, ways, rather than the literal, logical ones that I'd initially expected.

The world's code wasn't something you fought or forced—it was something you *convinced*, something you guided toward a desired outcome. It was about making the world bend *just* enough to fit your mental image of reality; of what you wanted reality to become.

Step one, as Kill Joy had impressed, was the visualisation process.

That part I had already started to get the hang of with my avatar just now.

I needed to form a clear image of what I wanted to bring into existence—whether that was a physical object, a change in the environment, or even a modification to my avatar. The download reinforced that visual clarity was the absolute key.

The more vivid and *precise*, down to the very smallest parts and understanding of what I wanted to create my mental picture was, the easier it would be to manifest the change.

Step two was a bit more technical.

It involved locating the relevant “code”, that I now realised wasn't necessarily *code* in the programming sense, but rather the very laws of creation itself, that governed the object or effect I wanted to alter.

[Manifestation] wasn't about manually picking through these endless lines of “code”, though.

It was far, far more instinctual than that. More instinctual than I had ever anticipated.

It required a true balance of trust and intuition—like running a hand through water and feeling for the currents beneath the surface.

Step three was where my prior knowledge of quick-hacks came into play—or rather, its basic principles.

I wasn't rewriting the “code” from scratch—I was instead injecting my own modifications, nudging the pre-existing lines to more align with, or maybe even match, my will.

The download made it clear that this was where precision mattered most. It wasn't brute-forcing the change but aligning the code with my intent as closely as possible.

If I tried to overwrite the existing code instead, [Manifestation] would simply fail.

Finally, step four was the simplest yet simultaneously hardest to truly grasp of all: Will the change into existence.

No hesitation. No second-guessing.

It required full commitment and focus, like flipping a switch in my mind and letting the changes become reality in whatever way they would, based on what I had initially put as the parameters.

It was about embracing the idea that, in this instance, I was asking the universe for a specific favour—my will paying the fare for the changes I wanted to enact.

By the time the download finished, I felt a strange, otherworldly sense of calm wash over me.

The fundamentals of [Manifestation] had clicked into place and they felt truly... alien.

This whole Skill was not something I had ever experienced nor thought possible; yet felt intrinsically right and proper in this world; like I had glimpsed a very foundational part of what made up this strange place I had been transported into after my death.

My mind instinctively latched onto the only other time that I had felt a similar sense of profound connection: The Anima Attribute download.

The moment it did, I felt an infinitely brief, yet sharp pain inside my head, before a series of Notifications rattled in.

[System]: *Insight gained for [Manifestation] Skill. Altering Skill to reflect new understanding...*

[System]: *[Manifestation] Skill has been altered. Skill Attribute links have been changed to: (>Intellect/Intuition/Anima<)*

[System]: *500xp gained for [Manifestation] Skill.*

[System]: *200xp gained for Intellect Attribute.*

[System]: *200xp gained for Intuition Attribute.*

[System]: *200xp gained for Anima Attribute.*

The sudden rush of notifications rattled through my mind, and I couldn't help but feel a strange mix of shock and inevitability. The System's ability to alter Skills on the fly, to literally shift the core structure of how things worked based on my own revelations, was incredible.

But at the same time, it didn't really surprise me; not anymore.

The System had already proven highly adaptable and willing to change things around based on how I interacted with it and the world around me as a whole. While it was surprising to see that what was essentially listed originally as an Uncommon Skill could upgrade to a Rare one, it wasn't exactly a mind-shattering revelation to me; not anymore.

[Manifestation] being an Anima Skill as well, made far too much sense.

Everything I had been learning—especially with Mr. Shori and Miss K's guidance recently—had secretly pointed toward this, if subtly.

Anima wasn't just an Attribute or some vague concept; it was tied to the very essence of bending reality, both physical and digital, with nothing but sheer force of will and intent—just like how [{Anima Blade}] managed to create a strange blade from absolutely nothing but those two aspects.

That fundamental connection between will and resulting power was at the very core of Anima, and now it had bled into the mechanics of [Manifestation] itself as well.

It brought me back to that moment with the Anima Attribute download: The eerie, yet exhilarating feeling of connecting with something far larger than myself; something beyond my current levels of understanding.

Back then, it had felt like stepping into a whole new realm of understanding—a gateway into a more profound knowledge of how this world functioned beyond the obvious game-like structures I had initially been thrown into.

And now, the same thing was happening with [Manifestation] too.

The knowledge download had shown me that it wasn't just a mere Skill; it was a bridge. A connection to something that seemed far more expansive than I'd first realised.

The boost to my Attributes I had received wasn't just some random bonus either, I realised—it was the System's way of confirming that this change wasn't surface-level.

This was fundamental, instead.

Otherwise, the three Attributes receiving the same exact amount of experience would be impossible; given that they were all at different ranks, and thus, required different breakpoints to get experience drops in general.

I let out a deep breath, mentally scrolling through the notifications one more time to make sure I hadn't missed anything.

I took another moment to recenter my thoughts and focus back on the actual task at hand; re-visualising the image of the avatar I had created inside my head.

Immediately, I found a few spots that could be improved as my new understanding of [Manifestation] provided the necessary building blocks to refine the previous ideas further.

I spend around ten minutes working on getting things just right, before turning back towards the code that Kill Joy had spliced out of the avatar for me.

I started to mentally sift through the code with more purpose this time around, focusing entirely on only sections that I felt intuitively connected to my intention.

I was no longer hunting for a specific line or block of code anymore, but guiding my search with the image of what I wanted to achieve exclusively. It was more about *feeling* the right pieces fall into place, rather than meticulously finding and trying to understand them outright.

Almost instantly, I noticed that the scrollbar shifted—just a hair, ever so slightly, but it moved.

Finally, real progress. I was on the right track.

“Ah, there you go,” Kill Joy said, his tone approving as he watched me work. “Starting to figure out the real trick, aren’t you? It’s not about brute force—it’s about flow. Intent. Will. *Manifestation*, girl. Now, keep going. Show me what your true self looks like.”

I nodded enthusiastically, feeling a rush of euphoria as I locked in even more, letting my intent take full control of the process. It was like nothing I’d ever experienced before—part coding, part hacking, but also something entirely more instinctual, almost primal in nature.

Piece by piece, the code responded to me, bending and shaping as though it had been waiting for my command all along. Like a perfect search function had locked onto the exact lines I needed, pulling them out from the dense sea of code effortlessly.

Finally, after who-knows-how-long, I had it in front of me—the code that governed my avatar’s visual appearance. I knew it instinctively, even before fully comprehending what I was even looking at.

The lines stretched out in front of me, detailed and intricate beyond anything I could have imagined. It was truly complex, absurdly so, but this time, I wasn’t overwhelmed. I knew that I didn’t need to understand every little piece; I just needed to work with what was directly in front of me at any given point.

Channelling my [Programming] know-how, my grasp of [Quick-Hacks], and the strange, intuitive magic of [Manifestation], I manifested a keyboard—just as instinctively as the rest—and my fingers began flying across it.

Each keystroke was linked directly to the codebase Kill Joy had laid out, and with every change I made, the code shifted, morphed, and adapted.

Line by line, things changed, altered and morphed.

Programming concepts came to me at rapid speeds, [Programming Maestro] offering me workarounds that I never could have imagined coming up with myself and making sure I never got stumped at trying to rewrite existing code into something that worked with what I had in mind; for I could not simply delete and rewrite existing sections, otherwise the [Manifestation] would fail.

For the more unique and creative parts—like the asymmetrical wing I wanted to add—my [Quick-Hacks] knowledge jumped in.

I used it to fill gaps in the code that didn’t exist yet, creating new sections where there had been none; like injecting code-snippets into an existing system to break into it or grant myself access.

Even though it wasn’t flawless code by any stretch, I knew in my gut that it would work.

[Manifestation] confirmed it, like a silent partner guiding me along the entire way.

Every time I made a mistake, I knew immediately, the image of my visualised avatar acting like a blueprint, held up against each line of code; each individual variable, each function and each nested loop.

If the code I wrote didn't manage to match the vision, I adjusted, tweaked, and refined until it did. No subtractions to the original code—only additions, only moving forward.

This process, this blending of Skills, felt like I was tapping into something far deeper than just the digital world. I wasn't just coding; I was shaping the very reality of this space with my will, bit by bit, until my avatar would become *exactly* as I imagined.

I had no idea how long I'd been lost in the coding frenzy, driven by the single, unified image of my [Manifestation] avatar.

Time seemed to slip away, but finally, my hands came to a stop, and my mind started to clear. I didn't even need to check over the code—I already knew it was done.

I had been double-checking and refining it in real-time while working, so there was no reason to doubt it now. It wasn't perfect—*far* from it, given my limited experience with [Manifestation], [Programming], and [Quick-Hacks]—but it would work.

And that's what mattered.

I pushed myself up from the chair for the first time in what felt like forever, my digital bones creaking, joints popping. It was strange, feeling those sensations in Cyberspace, but it reminded me that even here, I was still tethered to my physical self in some ways.

Taking a few steps away from the chair, I focused.

I needed a mirror to see what I had created.

'A mirror... I need a mirror,' I repeated over and over in my mind, willing it into existence through sheer force of will.

And... Nothing.

[Manifestation] kept failing, no matter how hard I tried to conjure one up.

The euphoria that had carried me through the coding process began to dry up as the weight of my limitations settled back in. I was still at the beginning of this journey, barely grasping the fundamentals.

The reality check stung, but it was a reminder of how much further I had to go.

Swallowing my pride, I turned towards Kill Joy, "Can... Can you make me a mirror, please?"

His smug expression almost made me want to jump at him and strangle his golden throat, but the full-sized mirror popping into existence next to me was enough appeasement to prevent me from doing so—for now.

'Alright, here goes nothing,' I thought, turning my attention back to my avatar. I focused on the code I had altered and the visualisation of what I wanted to manifest.

'Full trust, Sera. You've done everything you can—now it's time to will it into existence.'

I took a deep breath and focused harder, pushing my intent forward, letting it flow into the code that I had painstakingly altered.

For a brief second, nothing happened.

Then, like a ripple in a pond, I felt the code begin to shift, aligning itself with the vision I had manifested. It was subtle at first—a flicker here, a slight shimmer there—but I could feel it taking hold, like pieces of a puzzle slowly falling into place.

Lines of the old code started dissolving, being replaced bit by bit with the new sections I had crafted. It was an almost tangible sensation, like watching the scaffolding of my own body crumble and be rebuilt before my very eyes.

The edges of my avatar's form blurred, warping and changing as the transformation took root.

First, my hair—darker, longer, cascading down my shoulders like the midnight-black strands speckled with stars, galaxies and nebulae I had visualised.

Then, the features of my face began to shift, sharpening slightly, taking on a more mature, defined look. It wasn't a dramatic change, but it was enough to feel more like the person I wanted to be, more in line with the image of myself I had carried with me all this time.

Next came the outfit.

The simple, default avatar clothing I had worn until now started to dissolve, replaced by the cloak I had imagined. It unfurled around me, a dark, sturdy material that seemed to ripple with a life of its own, the oversized hood draping over my head and fully covering my face in pure darkness save for my emerald eyes that looked like they glowed from the inside, just as I had envisioned.

The bandoliers, filled with gadgets and weapons, materialised across my chest, and I could feel the—strangely—familiar weight of a pistol at my side, the familiar handle of an energy-blade hanging off my belt.

Then came the final touch—the cyan-feathered wing. It emerged from beneath the cloak, breaking through it seamlessly, without ripping the fabric itself, adding an element of mystery to the entire look. As it appeared, I felt a strange sense of completion wash over me.

I stared at the mirror, barely recognizing the person standing in front of me.

Yet, at the same time, it felt right. It felt like *me*.

Or rather: The me that I needed to become in this world.

Kill Joy floated around me, arms crossed, his golden form shimmering in the dim digital light. He eyed my avatar with an expression that was hard to place—part pride, part begrudging respect, and, of course, a *heavy* dose of straight up irritation.

“Well, well, well,” he drawled, his voice dripping with that familiar mix of sarcasm and smugness. “Looks like the girl managed to crack the code after all. Colour me surprised. And here I was, expecting you to be banging your head against that wall for at least another week or two... Perhaps there *is* more to you than I initially thought...? Though let’s not get too carried away here.”

He circled me slowly, inspecting every detail of the avatar I had manifested.

His eyes lingered on my hair and the lone, cyan wing for a moment longer than the rest, before he finally gave a short nod of approval—an acknowledgment that, coming from him, felt almost monumental.

“You know,” he continued, his tone still smug but with a hint of genuine respect, “this shard *wasn’t* designed for people to speed-run it. You’ve blazed through it in what? A couple of weeks? Most take months—if not longer—to reach this stage; much less clear it in a single day. Granted, few of them get this much of an involved and spectacular version of myself,” he added quickly, waving a dismissive hand as if to downplay my success with his mere presence.

“But still, credit where it’s due, I guess. You’ve managed to do what most can’t, girl. In record time, no less. Well... not *actual* record time, obviously—let’s not get ahead of ourselves here. But fast enough that I might consider you... *half-decent*. For now, at least.”

He floated in front of me, looking me square in the eye. “I’ll admit, girl, you’ve got potential. Maybe not as much as me—obviously—but you’re not as hopeless as I first thought. And that avatar you’ve pieced together? It’s a half-way decent start. To be honest, it’s one of the best I’ve seen when it comes to a first try. But there’s a *lot* more you can do, a *lot* further you can push it, but... it’s not bad. Not bad at all.”

He gave a mock bow, as if to say, *Congratulations, you’ve passed my little test.*

Then he straightened up, his expression shifting back to that familiar, slightly-annoyed smirk.

“But don’t think this makes you some kind of prodigy. You’ve barely scratched the surface of what manifestation can do; not to mention the other aspects of the shard that you *definitely* did not take the time to properly learn and internalise, no matter how good your test results were. Don’t let your ego get too big now, alright, girl? Leave that to the experts—like me.”

I couldn’t help but grin despite myself. Coming from Kill Joy, that was about as close to a glowing review as I’d ever get. “Thanks... I *think*,” I replied, shaking my head at his theatrics, but feeling genuinely happy with his words.

“Now, now, don’t get all emotional on me,” he shot back, waving off my gratitude like it was something distasteful. “You’ve done well enough here, I’ll admit that much. But don’t get comfortable. There’s a *lot* more to learn, and it only gets harder from here. Still...” He floated back a bit, his eyes glinting with a rare, genuine spark of approval. “For someone who showed up not knowing a damn thing, you’ve definitely exceeded expectations, girl.”

With an exaggeratedly lazy wave of his hand, a golden-coated data-shard appeared, drifting down toward me with the kind of slow, deliberate pace that only Kill Joy could pull off.

"Well, well, well... I guess this is it for now," he said, drawing out each word like he was bored with the whole affair.

"The promised segments, the subroutines—they're all in there," he added, pointing lazily at the shard, which finally landed in my hands. "They're yours for the taking, girl. Study them, analyse them, learn from them. Hell, maybe even *try* to understand them, if you've got the brainpower."

He floated in circles around me, throwing up a hand with a dramatic flourish. "These little bits of code? They'll be your building blocks, your key to cracking the surface of what Cyberspace and the digital world have to offer. But don't get too cocky, girl," he added with a smug grin. "The world's not nearly as generous as I am. It won't hesitate to chew you up and spit you out the moment you slip up."

Kill Joy paused for effect, floating closer with a mock-serious expression. "If, however, you feel the need for further enlightenment—or just want to bask in my radiant brilliance again—you're always welcome back. My door's always open. After all, who wouldn't want more of *this*?" He gestured to himself in a way that would've made anyone else seem insufferable, but coming from him, it almost felt... normal, in a strange way.

"But," he continued, his voice lowering in what could only be described as a poor attempt at mystery, "if you're looking to explore what the digital world *really* has in store for you, well, you'll need to find your way to an SPG-02 shard. I'll be there, of course—waiting. Just... Try not to embarrass yourself when you show up, alright? Learn at least a few things before showing your face again? Please? I'm good; but I'm not a damn miracle worker."

With that, he leaned back, arms crossed, smirking like he'd just bestowed the greatest wisdom the world had ever seen. "Go on, then. Take it, girl. Don't say I never gave you anything..."