



SYNOPSIS:

The Adventurers' Tournament has finally begun, and I excitedly drew our lot. The first battle is against... *Perfect Princess Team? Don't tell me it's a team completely made up of girls! This is bad! Won't it be like putting a sheep (me) among wolves?*

What is this? I'm a gay and my dearest beloved is Gui? Since when did that happen? Why am I the only one out of the loop?

As the fun-filled summer holidays finally came to an end, I raced for the public bus piteously. Suddenly I discovered that there's a new professor – *and h-h-he's ACTUALLY...!*

After school, I once again raced after the public bus. *Waaah! Why are the two people on the bus people who I know from the game! How am I supposed to keep my real gender a secret with things like this?!*

OH MY GOD! Now it's the doctor from the health room?! Don't come over; I don't know you, I swear (with fingers crossed)! I am absolutely not related to Prince... Waaah, waaah! How long will it take before this karma cycle will be OVER...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Yu Wo:

Who am I? Sometimes I am like a warrior, wielding a sword on the battlefield with limitless passion and energy. At other times, I resemble a mage, with a mind devoted to research, completely absorbed in the things I like. Or I might be like a thief, leading a free and easy life, letting fate lead me to distant and unfamiliar lands. Occasionally, however I am similar to a priest, with a gentle heart, filled with compassion towards the living things of this world. Ultimately, I am a kindly Fantastical world.

Reality and Fantasy

½ PRINCE VOL. 2

Original novel in Chinese by: 御我 (Yu Wo)

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Chapter 1: Tournament, Begin

Wearing the Blood Tiara that the team had given me, my heart was overwhelmed with emotion and I hardened my resolve. *We will create a legend together, a legend that belongs to us.* I closed my eyes and gathered my focus, calming down before I gradually reopened them. With self-confidence and determination etched in my expression, I gave the rest of Odd Squad a smile and took the first step in the journey to creating our legend, the first step onto the stage where we would perform, the first step into...the tournament arena.

Within the arena, the announcer loudly introduced himself. “Hello everyone, I’m your commentator for today, Xiao Li. Let us begin by introducing the two teams who will be fighting in this match! First, coming out from the west entrance is the Perfect Princess Team! The Perfect Princess Team is led by Perfect Princess, a mage of the elf race. Their five other members are a beastman warrior, a human warrior, an elf archer, a human archer and an angel priest.”

I walked over to stand at the very front of our squad. Judging by the thunderous cheers filling the stadium, it seemed that our opponents had already stepped out into the arena. *Don’t tell me that the Perfect Princess Team is that famous? Looks like I’m really out of the loop, seeing as I’ve never even heard of them. It doesn’t matter anyway, since Odd Squad will definitely defeat them and become renowned throughout the whole of ‘Second Life’!*

Mic in hand, the tournament’s commentator loudly introduced the next team to enter the arena. “Now, coming in from the east entrance is Odd Squad! Odd Squad has an extremely peculiar team composition consisting of an elf warrior, an elf thief, a beastman priest, an angel necromancer, a demon bard and a human mage!”

Murmurs began to run through the crowd immediately. “What a weird team!”, “Extreme Squad?”¹ What a weird name!”, and other similar comments could clearly be heard.

“If this team isn’t the lousiest team around, then they’ll have to be one of the best...” Perfect Princess Team’s strategist, the angel priest, muttered quietly to himself.

“It doesn’t matter what kind of team they are. You guys will obtain victory for me, right?” the eye-catching beauty, Perfect Princess, asked sweetly as she addressed her team members – though to me, it seemed more like she was cajoling her suitors! The five guys immediately nodded fervently.

Amidst the murmurs of the crowd, I slowly stepped into the tournament arena. As usual, wherever I went I was met with a stunned silence. My looks usually possessed a lot of

¹ **Extreme Squad:** In case you’ve forgotten about our earlier footnote about Odd Squad’s name, Odd Squad’s name (in Chinese) can also be read as “Extreme Squad”.

devastating power, but now, coupled with a tiara that could only greatly increase my attractiveness, that destructive power immediately jumped from 100% to 200%! I ignored the crowd's stares (*Sigh, after being stared at for so long, I've already become accustomed to it...*) and instead looked directly at our opponents for today: the Perfect Princess Team.

Initially, I'd thought that this team would be made up of six girls. To my surprise, it was made up of only one girl and five guys! In my heart I kept thinking, *That girl is acting as though she's bringing her own Inner Court² to participate in this tournament and yet her looks aren't even nearly a match for Lolidragon's. I'm so envious...! Ah, no...I'm a guy right now; there's nothing to be envious about!*

Setting my envy aside, the other five team members and I each took our places and struck the pose that Lolidragon had spent three days teaching us. I obediently followed her instructions – I was to drop the attitude of an elegant Prince and instead maintain a suave, arrogant, undefeatable image during battle. That way, we could undermine our opponents' confidence... Although, personally, I felt that guys would only be infuriated by my handsome looks, causing their battle spirits to blaze even more fiercely.

“How can someone be this handsome...?” Perfect Princess stared at my face, mesmerized, while her five team members glared at me, their expressions clearly showing their desire to skin me, rip the flesh off my bones for meat, and then boil my bones to make a stock for soup.

“Prince, Lolidragon, the other team has two archers and two warriors, so prolonging the battle would be nothing but a disadvantage to us. I have a plan though, so listen up...” Wolf-dàgē then proceeded to meticulously explain his plan to us.

After Wolf-dàgē finished giving us our instructions, our squad strode forward, brimming with confidence. There was even a faintly sadistic smile on my face. Lolidragon was the one who taught it to me. (*Lolidragon, the nickname “Blood Elf” must have been all because of you...*) I looked at the Perfect Princess Team and said coolly, “Shall we begin?”

The huge beastman warrior immediately gave his enormous axe a couple of swings. Unfortunately for him, he was shorter than Wolf-dàgē by a couple of hand spans, plus he lacked the intimidating and powerful aura that Dàgē possessed. The human warrior walked up toward us and replied coldly, “No problem. Let's begin then!”

² **Inner Court:** This is an area within the Forbidden City itself. The Inner Court was the private quarters of the Emperor and his family, and it was also where his concubines resided. As such, Prince is implying that Perfect Princess is bringing along her personal harem.

The referee standing on one side saw that we were prepared and, with a wave of his flag, the battle commenced.

Normally, battles would begin with both teams' priests casting buffs and bolstering their teammates' defense. Only after this was done would the competition truly begin. However, Lolidragon and I went against this norm and, making use of our high agility, we charged forward the moment the judge announced the start of the battle. Before the enemy team's warriors could even react, I had already darted past them, my targets being the two archers... Next, with a swift movement, I grabbed Meatbun and used my sword to bat it with all of my strength.

"Meatbun, *Double Kill*." Meatbun immediately flew towards those two archers, who had yet to figure out what was going on, and began smacking back and forth between them like a ball in a pinball machine.

Given that archers tended to have low HP, this attack was more than enough to keep them both occupied. With my Black Dao in hand, I rushed towards the human archer, whose health was probably higher than the elf archer's. Reaching him, I called out, "One of the Five Ultimate Techniques, *Dragon Whirlwind Strike*!"³

I lifted my sword over my head as my legs pushed, propelling my body off the ground. Twisting my body in mid air so that I was flying parallel to the earth, my Black Dao cleanly stabbed into the human archer's abdomen. The speed of my attack left even the agility-oriented archer unable to dodge in time. Although it wasn't a fatal attack, the move *Dragon Whirlwind Strike* could severely injure enemies with just the surrounding air pressure alone, even if it didn't land a direct hit. The unlucky human archer's left arm was immediately broken by my twisting attack. The moment my feet touched the ground, I executed a reverse sweep of my blade, sending him flying back to the rebirth point to contemplate his mistakes in his "past" life.

While everyone's eyes were glued on me, Lolidragon, whose agility was so high that her every action seemed to come out of nowhere, had long since crept up behind the elf archer with a dagger in each hand. Now she pressed one of them against the elf's neck and gave a savage slash across his throat. It would have been a fatal blow if not for the fact that Lolidragon's strength was too low and thus was unable to directly kill the elf archer.

Just when it seemed that the opposing priest – who had started to chant a healing spell – would be able to heal the archer, Lolidragon's lips curled into a cruel smile. Unseen by everyone else, the dagger in her other hand was already placed against the elf's back,

³ **Dragon Whirlwind Strike:** This is yet another move from Rurouni Kenshin – this is written as “龍巻閃” in kanji and pronounced as “ryūkansen”. The original move is pretty different from Prince's version, and is essentially an extremely fast counterattack aimed at the back of the opponent's neck. The move is also called “Dragon Windup Slash” by some fans.

pointing directly at his heart. Now she gave a vicious stab and the priest could only watch helplessly as the archer died.

At this point in time, Perfect Princess Team's warriors were being kept busy by Doll's super scary Hell's Inferno Armored Skeletons. In addition, their agility had been lowered by Gui's *Sheng-ge Entrancement Technique*. The skeletons alone were nearly enough to KO them; there was no possibility of them helping the rest of their team!

Perfect Princess, who'd been busy admiring my face initially, finally realized that something was wrong and immediately cast a spell to destroy one of Doll's skeletons. However, Lolidragon and I had already finished off the two archers by this time, so I charged straight at the warriors, providing support for Doll's skeletons. Lolidragon, on the other hand, employed an ability that she had created after studying Japan's ninjutsu: Burrowing. (This technique had not come easy to anyone, because whenever she failed, the entire squad had to organize an excavation, in order to dig Lolidragon out from the earth that she was trapped in.) Using it, she stealthily snuck up behind the mage, Perfect Princess...

"Princess, be careful!" The priest hurriedly shoved Perfect Princess – who was about to have her throat slit by Lolidragon – to one side.

As for Lolidragon, she simply took in the change in situation and immediately changed her target. Two fatally dangerous daggers flashed through the air as she slashed at the priest. His face quickly paled as he tried his best to replenish his health even as he yelled for the warriors to come over and help.

Warriors? I scoffed; the supposedly nimble human could barely land a hit on me, let alone the muscle-for-brains beastman whose goal seemed to be imitating a tortoise's speed. They mouthed off angrily at the priest, yelling at him for not healing their health. It'd be a shock if they could find the time to go and save their teammates!

In fact, the moment the two archers – who had posed the greatest threat to our plan – died, the opposing team's fate had been sealed. At this thought, the corners of my mouth rose to form an evil grin, scaring the opposing warriors into thinking that I was about to use that move *Dragon Whirlwind Strike* again. I smiled coldly and used... ten continuous strikes to finish off the human warrior instead. *What a joke; you think Dragon Whirlwind Strike can be used so many times in a row? Using it that often will leave me dizzy, okay?*

In this fashion, Lolidragon and Gui kept the priest and the mage at bay while the skeletons and I gave the remaining beastman warrior a free ride back to the rebirth point. Moments later, the priest was dead as well.

The six of us converged upon the mage, Perfect Princess, who had backed away into a corner. Walking at the head of the group, I smiled coldly at her and asked, "Surrender?"

Perfect Princess lifted her head slowly. As she looked at my face, the fear written all over her face melted away and was replaced by a coquettish expression, and she even dared to sweet-talk me. “Surrender, I surrender! Since I lost to you, I’ll be your girlfriend, okay?”

I gazed icily at this girl, whose beauty lost to Lolidragon, who was not as cute as Doll, who was not as elegant as Yu Lian-dàsão, and felt extremely put off. *And she has the audacity to plaster herself all over me like some sort of invertebrate now?! Catching a whiff of her disgustingly over-powering perfume, I thought, I am still a woman—just because I look like a guy doesn’t mean I need to be like one and appreciate feminine beauty, do I?!*

I slowly raised my Black Dao and, still smiling faintly, drove it through the body of the woman in front of me. *It’s your fault for being prettier than the female “me”! Not to mention stringing along five somewhat handsome guys... Clearly you are trying to trigger my envy! To enrage me into killing you!*

I watched with satisfaction as Perfect Princess flew away with a look of resentment and disbelief on her face. I swung my Black Dao lightly a few times, trying to shake off the nauseating blood on it, but suddenly I realized that the entire arena was silent and everyone was staring at me with an odd look in their eyes.

“Lolidragon, is something wrong?” My countenance remained serene, but secretly I was PMing Lolidragon with some trepidation.

“...It’s probably because you were covered in blood and smiling as you stabbed a beautiful woman to death, before nonchalantly flinging away the blood. It’s just too handsome, too cool, and too bloody! That’s why everyone is stunned!” Lolidragon said with a helpless shrug.

I just got slightly carried away with my jealousy, I thought, feeling misunderstood.

“Odd Squad, victory,” the judge, who had finally snapped out of his shocked stupor, announced belatedly.



Emitting a frosty aura, I stood on the bloody arena, a glacial look in my eyes as my sword rose and fell. As I cut down the last enemy, I could hear the crowd beginning to cheer. However, I turned and scrutinized the entire audience with emotionless, icy eyes, until the last person fell silent. It was only when I was satisfied that I smiled an evil, bloodthirsty smile, and then led Odd Squad out of the arena as the judge declared our victory.

Why had I become like this? It wasn't like I was a willing party to this. I had no idea when it began, but recently, the area outside the stadium would always be packed with my fans after each match. Initially, this was a problem that plagued only me. However, on one occasion, I was walking behind my team members when we were leaving the arena. My fans, who were standing outside the stadium, trampled over my teammates in order to get to me. After that incident, the matter became a squad-wide issue.

After that, Lolidragon came up with the "Blood Elf" strategy. With five votes to one, I was forced into the terrifying role of a remorseless, cold-blooded killer, just to discourage those fans from getting too close. Unfortunately, the strategy was an unexpected success, for while my fans continued to admire me, they no longer dared to even come within ten meters of me... After all, I was the one who had mercilessly cut down the beautiful Perfect Princess, so anyone who had eyes could see that I did not know what the words "feminine" and "charm" meant.

Taking the point guard, I walked at the very front of the squad (*no one dares to walk ahead of me anymore...*) with an impassive look on my face. My left hand rested on the hilt of my Black Dao out of habit, as though I was ready to kill someone at a moment's notice. However, what I was actually thinking was, *Sigh, I'm so hungry! Why haven't we reached the restaurant yet?*

"Prince!" a delighted voice cried out from not too far away.

Who was it? I furrowed my brows. *To think that there is still a girl who dares to call me by my name in this crowd,* I thought irritably as I glanced around. The surrounding girls were all silently gloating, thinking, *Who is the suicidal person who actually dares to call Prince by his name?*

"Prince? What's wrong?" Upon meeting my frigid gaze, Rose revealed a startled expression, tears nearly leaking from the corners of her eyes.

Rose? Seeing that familiar face, my facial muscles relaxed; it had been a long time since I last saw her.

"It's been a while, Rose, and everyone in the Rose Team," I greeted and gave them a brief smile as I looked at Li'l Strong, Legolas, For Healing Only, and Broken Sword, whom I'd only met briefly previously.

"Prince, it's not good to stay standing here for too long. You can catch up with them over a meal instead!" Lolidragon PMed me, cautioning me about the surrounding fans. Seeing how some of the fans were beginning to move in, Lolidragon thought, *if we stay here any longer, the lives of Odd Squad and Rose Team's members might all be at stake...*

“Why don’t we have a meal together? Rose, let’s meet up at the usual restaurant—and make sure you come!” I too was beginning to feel the threat from our surroundings, and so I hurriedly PMed Rose... and fled!

The moment we reached the restaurant and secured a booth on the second floor I dropped my act. As I massaged my face, I apologized to Rose, saying, “I’m really sorry about just now, Rose. About what happened outside – treating you so coldly just now, I didn’t mean it. Actually...”

I proceeded to explain the entire situation to the Rose Team, so as to prevent a misunderstanding from occurring again, the next time we met. After all, I had no intention of losing such good friends.

“Hahaha! To think that being too handsome could cause this much trouble.” Li’l Strong broke into laughter – at my expense – upon hearing the entire story.

“It’s not like I asked for this...” I mumbled under my breath as I scratched my face. Li’l Strong gave me a hearty slap on my back and the lot of them began to laugh.

Apart from Fairsky, whose head had been hanging low all this while, the rest of the party were all chatting happily. Broken Sword and I were particularly lively, since we’d been getting along very well. He told me that he had attended every single one of Odd Squad’s matches and was really interested in the unusual and even bizarre techniques I had executed. Apparently, he too often tried out the moves that he’d come across in *wuxia* novels. *It seems like I’m not the only weird person around here after all!* Thus, the two of us found ourselves chatting enthusiastically about my *Nine-Headed Dragon Slash* and *Dragon Whirlwind Strike* and his *Taichi Strike* and *Nine Swords of Du Gu*.⁴

“Prince, Lolidragon, about what happened the previous time we met... Well, Fairsky has been feeling really guilty about it...” Rose trailed off and glanced worriedly at Fairsky, who had held her head low and kept silent the entire time.

“Oh, that. I’ve forgotten about that—it was such a long time ago. Don’t fret over it, Fairsky,” I said and turned to look at Lolidragon, “You don’t blame her either, right? Lolidragon?”

“Huh? What happened the previous time?” Lolidragon’s face was covered in confusion. (*Your memory really sucks... *sweat**)

⁴ **Taichi Strike and Nine Swords of Du Gu:** Tai Chi Quan (太极拳, *lit.* the ultimate fist) is a type of martial art frequently practised for health reasons; its execution is usually quite slow and it has some grounding in Chinese philosophy, such as in the concept of ying and yang. Here, it seems that Broken Sword has incorporated elements of Taichi into his swordplay to create the Taichi Strike. As for the Nine Swords of Du Gu (独孤九剑, *prn.* dú gū jiǔ jiàn), this is from Jin Yong’s *The Laughing, Proud Wanderer* – Du Gu is the name of the person who came up with the skill.

“In any case, Lolidragon and I have already put that incident behind us!” I said, but saw Fairsky’s shoulders had suddenly begun trembling. *Crap! She’s crying! Waaah, what did I do wrong this time?!*

“I’m sorry...” Fairsky darted towards me and started sobbing in my embrace. I patted her on the back comfortingly, thinking, *Sigh! Having a sister feels pretty good. A sister would definitely be way cuter than that idiotic brother of mine; nowadays, all he does is brag about Dark Emperor having cleared round X of the tournament. If not for fear of angering my ancestors by killing the only successor of the Feng family, I would have long since used my chopping knife and turned him into a charsiew bun!*⁵

“It’s okay, you’re a good girl, don’t cry...” I said in a gentle voice, trying to console Fairsky.

Fairsky hiccupped, lifted her face, and looked at me with an incomparably pitiable gaze. “May I ask you a question?”

“... Sure!” *Why do I suddenly have a bad feeling about this?* Noticing that remaining members of Rose Team were standing on the sidelines as though they were waiting for the show to begin, my sense of foreboding intensified.

“Can I be your second wife? I’m willing to acknowledge Lolidragon as my Dàjiě!”⁶ Fairsky looked at me with an expression of utmost yearning as she uttered that shocking, headline-worthy sentence.

As one, the members of Odd Squad spurted out the mouthful of drink that they had just taken before stealing a glance at me, laughing silently...

And still more shocking was...

“Me too.” My good sister, Rose, actually tugged at my shirt, her gaze determined.

When two beauties have offered to become your second and third wives, yet you are a girl... Can anyone tell me what a person is supposed to do in such a situation? I couldn’t think of an answer myself, so I could only look pleadingly at Lolidragon, who was snickering silently. The two girls then turned to stare at Lolidragon and the latter gulped down her drink before hurrying to clarify our relationship.

⁵ **Charsiew bun:** A type of bun with charsiew filling. Charsiew (叉烧, *prn. chā shào*) is basically roasted pork; it’s a bit sweet and is usually bright red.

⁶ **Dàjiě:** This literally means “big sister”, but it can also refer to a woman who is your senior in terms of age, rank, et cetera. Hence, Fairsky and Rose (as second and third wives) mentioned calling Lolidragon (the first wife) “dàjiě”, since she would be their senior in terms of rank

“The relationship between Prince and I is only that of siblings. I only pretended to be his wife in order to scare off those other girls. This entire thing is none of my business, so don’t look at me,” she said.

That damnable Lolidragon! I thought, cursing that treacherous “sister” of mine from the bottom of my heart. *Now what reason am I to use to discourage them?*

I was stunned and at wit’s end when Gui suddenly pulled me into his embrace. Holding me tightly, he stared at the others, his frosty gaze even more terrifying than my Blood Elf act. In a tone that sent shivers up the spines of all the listeners, he said slowly, “Prince is mine.”

Everyone was shocked by his actions, and I was no exception. It wasn’t his hug that shocked me (that sort of thing happened often), but rather the coldness of his tone; it was very difficult to reconcile this Gui with the one who rarely raised his voice and constantly fooled around. As a result, my heart pounded wildly for a while...

ROAR! I’m going to kill that freaking homo, I thought, but just as I was about to go in for the kill...

“Sigh! Actually, the relationship between the two of them is like that!” Lolidragon suddenly dropped the bomb on Rose Team, leaving them staring in shock at Gui and me.

“Rose-mèimei,⁷ Fairsky-mèimei, actually, I too have feelings for Prince (*Prince: The feeling between sisters...*), but it just can’t be helped! Prince h-he... the ones he likes aren’t women, but. MEN! (*Prince: She isn’t actually lying there...*) So I would advise you wake up from this infatuation and look for love elsewhere!” Lolidragon said, glancing at me with sorrow and disappointment from time to time.

“Prince, don’t deny it; otherwise you’ll really have to accept the two of them as your wives!” Lolidragon warned me over party chat. I sighed and cast a helpless look at the ceiling. *Ahhh, two choices! One is to accept the feelings of a homosexual fellow and the other is to become a homosexual and accept the feelings of two women? Who was the person who said there is no path in life without hope? I’m on one right now!*

Having received such an intense shock from the revelation, the members of Rose Team were now looking as though they had each swallowed three broiled eggs. *Is it just my imagination or has Broken Sword – who was just sitting next to me a moment ago – moved away by a few seats?*

The corners of my mouth twitched and veins started popping on my forehead, but still I fought the urge to deny it... Unwilling to open my mouth and admit that Lolidragon’s words were true, I could only bow my head as though it was a silent admission.

⁷ **Mèimei:** A suffix which literally means “younger sister”, but can also be used on younger women.

At first, Rose and Fairsky were shocked. Then they bit their lips, looking as though they were on the verge of tears. Finally, seeing my head bowed in silent admission, they couldn't take the shock anymore. The two of them got up from their seats and fled, running out of the door in a storm of tears.

“Oh! I think w-we should be going after our teammates now. Let's chat again some o-other time!” With that, the remaining members of the Rose Team almost flew out the door and, within the blink of an eye, had disappeared.

In the booth, my squad members and I silently bade Rose Team farewell as they made their escape.

After a few quiet minutes Wolf-dàgě said calmly, “Let's take a look at who our opponents are for the next round. According to the data, this team's combat strength probably greatly outstrips our seven previous opponents. Also, Prince you cannot allow Gui to lose a level. If he's about to die, call me over so that I can heal him before you continue to fight!”

“Don't worry. His death alone is no longer able to satisfy my anger,” I said, and grabbed Gui by the collar, my lips curling into a slight grin.



Two hours later...

“We have already won seven matches; another three more and we'll clear the preliminaries and officially enter the finals. But our opponents are getting stronger and stronger, as everyone here may have already realized. Hence, we need to think through each move and come up with an accurate analysis of our opponents. Only then will we emerge victorious from each of the upcoming battles,” Wolf-dàgě advised as he flipped open the booklet in his hand. “This is the “Adventurers' Tournament Analysis of Competing Teams” that I've just bought. Let's take a look at the next team's data.”

[Team name: Team Phoenix | Team members: Six]

Obviously, I thought.

Odd Squad looked below the heading, but... There was nothing else.

Wolf-dàgě coughed a couple of times and said, “Very well, our opponent is Team Phoenix. Everyone got it?”

In the end, Yu Lian-dàsão grabbed her husband by his fur, warning him to not buy things on impulse again.

“Team Phoenix! Might it be a team completely made up of girls?” I asked, worried. *I’m really close to developing gynophobia...*⁸

Lolidragon shrugged. “I’ll help you ask!” She then burrowed underground, left for the main street, and grabbed hold of a random passerby.

I led the squad through the tunnel as per usual, preparing to step into the arena. Odd Squad’s fame now was no longer what it used to be. Our unusual team composition, odd team name, and unorthodox combat strategies and moves had already achieved some level of fame within ‘Second Life’. Add to that the notoriety of the Beautiful Blood Elf, our team’s fame had increase exponentially. *Listen! These cheers sure are loud and they’re all shouting*, “Go Team Phoenix!”, “Defeat Odd Squad...”, “Odd Squad’s nothing! Long live Team Phoenix!”

I stopped in my tracks, my ire rising as I thought, *What is this?* During the previous seven battles, even if the spectators didn’t yell out Odd Squad’s name when our team was announced, they would at least call out my name or nickname... *But how is it that I don’t hear that at all now? Even if you look down on us, there should be a limit!*

“There’s nothing we can do. After all, this is Sun City – it’s Team Phoenix’s territory,” Lolidragon said lazily. “And from what I hear, Team Phoenix is made up of six beautiful men.”

“Six beautiful men?” I asked with some enthusiasm, thinking, *There’s going to be eye candy!*

Hearing my words, Gui looked at me with a hurt expression. “I’m a beautiful man too!”

“Does Prince-gēge like beautiful men? Just like Doll; Doll likes beautiful men too!” Doll said, looking delighted, but the others’ faces were filled with suspicion. *Crap...*

“No way, I don’t like beautiful men, I was only thinking about how much I will enjoy beating them into the ground. Let’s hurry up and go, hahaha,” I said and gave a false laugh before quickly continuing forward. *Whew... That was close; I almost let it slip.*

But I walked away too quickly and missed hearing my teammates’ discussion at the back, saying...

“To think that what Lolidragon said was true.”

“Prince has that kind of inclination and so does Gui. It’s such a loss for women all over the Earth...”

⁸ **Gynophobia:** A fear of women. There is also a fictional phobia called *venustraphobia* which supposedly means a fear of beautiful women.

“Then why does he like beating Gui up?”

“Didn’t you hear how excited he was about beating up the six beautiful men? Maybe Prince is a closet sadist!”

“‘To hit is to care, to scold is to love’?”⁹

“Then I should allow Prince to hit me more often...?” Gui questioned.

In unison, the rest of the team said, “Yes! So long as you don’t lose any levels.”

Listening to their conversation, Lolidragon broke out in cold sweat and muttered under her breath, “This has nothing to do with me, this has nothing to do with me.”

We were about to step out of the passageway. I adjusted my facial muscles, adopted a cold expression, and then prepared to look at the beautiful men... Ah, no! What I meant was, prepared to step onto the arena floor.

I was about to step out of the tunnel when my eyes landed on the six so-called beautiful men. In one glance, the image of six guys whose bodies were contorted into strange poses entered my view...

GROSS! My stomach....!

Honestly, they didn’t look too bad — their eyes looked like eyes, their noses looked like noses (*Otherwise what?*)... However, according to my standards, apart from myself, my brother, and Gui, I’ve not yet met anyone else who was handsome enough to sigh over. *They merely look passable, yet the six of them dared to wear pure white outfits, complete with matching weapons, cloaks, and stand there in that sort of pose? And what’s with the roses in their mouths?* I should also mention that their members belonged only to two races – they were all either elves or holymen.

I immediately made up my mind to teach these six guys, who thought far too highly of themselves, a lesson. *They will face the consequences of not living up to my expectations and then learn what a truly beautiful man is! Wahahaha!*

“Gui, come here!” I said, and Gui nearly went crazy with joy upon hearing that sentence. “Let us acquaint these brainless flirts with what makes up a *real* beautiful man.”

⁹ **To hit is to care, to scold is to love:** This is a common saying. In Chinese, it’s “打是情、骂是爱” (*prn. dǎ shì qíng, mà shì ài*).

Chapter 2: Food is Invincible!

Icy expression? *Check!*

Blood Tiara? *Check!*

Hairstyle? *Check!*

Clothes? *Check!*

All checked! Wahaha, everything's perfect and in place! After a short three second deliberation, I'd decided to use the "icy bad boy" strategy, as per usual. After all, isn't it widely known that girls dig bad boys?

I looked at Gui and thought, *Not bad, not bad at all!* Under my coercion, (*Weird; when I threatened to beat him up, he refused to cooperate, but when I threatened not to beat him up, he agreed... Is he a masochist?*) he too adopted the attitude of an aloof bad boy — and he seemed to be even better at it than I was!

So handsome... Whoops! I shook my head, flinging off the two hearts that had replaced my eyes, and resumed my cold and impassive appearance.

"Let's go, Gui." I walked out into the arena at a stately pace, looking like the epitome of style.

"Hello everyone, I am Xiao Li, your commentator for this match! Emerging from the left entrance of the arena right now is Team Phoenix, consisting of four elf warriors, a holyman priest, and a holyman mage. They're a very strong team specializing in offense; up to this point, no team has managed to stand against their attacks," reported Xiao Li excitedly. "These six beautiful men have made all the ladies go wild — just listen to them cheer! It sure looks like this team has got quite a few supporters here in their home city!

"And coming in from the right is..." Xiao Li's voice trailed off as he flipped through his log book, his heart skipping a beat at the unusual name. *Odd Squad? If I remember correctly, their team members are...*

As Gui and I stepped out of the tunnel and into the arena, the crowd's cheers gradually subsided into a dead silence as their gazes slowly came to center entirely on the two of us. Gui gave the other team an indifferent glance, as though he didn't see them as threat at all, thus intentionally provoking our opponents. I, on the other hand, tilted my head to one side and gave Team Phoenix a faintly sadistic smile, silently picking a fight with them.

“And here we have Odd Squad! Their team consists of an elf warrior, an elf thief, a beastman priest, an angel necromancer, a demon bard, and a human mage. With their unique team makeup and unpredictable and diverse combat strategies and tactics, they have been the victors in every match until now,” Xiao Li announced. However, as a commentator, he was clearly aware that what the spectators really wanted to know was...

“The only warrior in Odd Squad, Prince, has been dubbed by many as the ‘Blood Elf’ due to his cold-blooded and merciless fighting style. Of course, even more people have taken to calling him ‘The Ultra-Gorgeous Prince’! In addition, there is also another, equally rare, beautiful man on their team: Guiliastes, whose devilish and unearthly beauty has also earned its share of attention. In Odd Squad’s home city, Star City, the two of them have been gained reputations as “extremely hot guys”... In any case, ladies, you’re in for some serious eye candy!”

“What is he, a commentator for a beauty pageant?” Lolidragon murmured to herself.

“*Aiyah!* It’d be great if this really were a beauty pageant; then we wouldn’t have to put so much effort into fighting. We’d probably emerge as the champions right away,” Yu Lian-dàsão said confidently.

Lolidragon and I looked suspiciously at Yu Lian-dàsão. *Has her extraordinary sense of beauty been cured?*

Yu Lian looked lovingly at her husband, Ugly Wolf. “With Wolf here, we would definitely win.”

...Nope, not cured yet.

“Dàgē, they have four warriors. How are we going to fight them? What’s our strategy for this round?”

On the surface, my expression remained as aloof as ever, but in secret, I was hurriedly PMing Wolf-dàgē. The four warriors across from me were so furious that their faces looked awfully twisted. I suspected that there was a high possibility that the instant the referee shouted “Begin!”, they would come charging directly at me to skin me alive and swallow me whole... *I have no interest in becoming pieces of human sashimi!*

“Hmm... This’ll be a bit tricky. This team is mostly made up of warriors and although their team composition might not be effective against monsters, it works pretty well in this tournament. The best method now is for you and Doll to stall them and then have Yu Lian cast a powerful spell to finish them off in one go.” Wolf-dàgē paused and considered the situation for a moment longer before continuing, “Lolidragon, your job is to assassinate their mage. Gui will support both the defenders and Lolidragon.”

“Stall four warriors?” I laughed weakly and put on my most innocent and pitiful look. “Dàgē, don’t you think that you’re overestimating my ability? Even Superman faces only one adversary per episode!”

Wolf-dàgē replied calmly, “Unfortunately, you’re not Superman, so you’ll have to handle four enemies. Remember! Even if it means dying, you must stall them. Of course, if you can avoid losing a level, then all the better.”

Waaah! How heartless! I thought, mentally crying. *This is warrior abuse...* Crying aside, I resigned myself to my fate, unsheathed Black Dao, took out Meatbun, and began contemplating which technique to use in this situation. *Ah!* I suddenly recollected that Meatbun had a move that seemed quite appropriate for this sort of situation.

“Haha, why are you taking out a bun here in the arena? Don’t tell me that you have to eat buns to get your strength to fight? That’s right, eat up! You don’t look like you weigh much. When the wind blows, you’ll probably just get blown away!” the elf warrior standing at the very front jeered while looking contemptuously at Meatbun.

“That meat bun has eyes. Don’t tell me it’s a pet? A pet *bun*? Ahahahaha!” The elf warriors opposite me all broke out into laughter.

“Let me show you what a real pet is like!” said the holyman priest, and a ball of flames seemed to emerge above his head, unfurling into...

“A fire phoenix?” Wolf-dàgē exclaimed in shock upon seeing it.

“It’s so beautiful!” Doll cried out in admiration.

“This is bad; the odds are heavily stacked against us in this situation,” Wolf-dàgē said worriedly. *As should be expected of Wolf-dàgē, to be able to immediately recover from his initial shock and begin analyzing the situation,* I thought. “Yu Lian specializes in fire magic, so it’ll be futile for her to attack the fire phoenix. Doll’s skeletons will be occupied with stalling the warriors. This means that the best solution left to us is a pet VS pet fight...”

As soon as he said those words, we turned and looked at Meatbun, who was bouncing excitedly on my palm, squealing “Whee! Whee!”. We then lifted our heads and looked at the fire phoenix soaring majestically in the sky.

“The odds are definitely against us,” I remarked.

“Battle, begin!” shouted the referee.

What? It's already begun? I haven't thought of a way for a meat bun to defeat a fire phoenix yet! ...Never mind, I doubt I'll be able to come up with a way in this lifetime anyway.

"Meatbun, *Machine Gun Meat Attack*," I ordered. Holding Meatbun in my left hand, I fired continuously at the four warriors, sweeping from side to side. While the damage from the meat bullets wasn't very high, the hits were still painful, plus...

"My god, what is this? It's so sticky and gross!"

As expected, the opposing team began to wail and complain. *Heh heh, this is Meatbun's still-raw-and-dripping-blood Machine Gun Meat Attack, with a grossness level that's beyond the tolerance of a person who has not cooked before.*

"Fire Phoenix, stop that meat bun's attack." The priest of the opposing team hurriedly ordered the phoenix forward in order to aid the warriors on the frontline.

A surge of flames shot from Fire Phoenix's open beak, countering Meatbun's meat bullets. Instantaneously a delicious smell wafted towards me and I thought, *The raw meat from Meatbun has been roasted...?*

I caught a piece, and with some skepticism, I ate it... and was duly astonished. *It's sooooo delicious! God, why did you let me eat such delicious roasted meat? What will I do if I never have the opportunity to taste it again?*

"Unbelievable! If we add a fire phoenix to my Meatbun, then we would never have to worry about not having any meat to eat in the future," I said. Then I smiled coldly as I made up my mind. Lifting my Black Dao, I leveled it challengingly at the priest of the opposing team and said, "Hey, you, owner of the fire phoenix! Let's make a bet, a bet on which team will win this match!"

Team Phoenix was stunned at first, then all of its members began guffawing.

With some difficulty, the priest managed to stop laughing and said in a tone of utmost contempt, "You think your team will win? How? Using a meat bun to beat a fire phoenix?"

I didn't answer and merely continued to smile tauntingly at him.

As I expected, there wasn't any guy alive who could stay calm when taunted by a beautiful fellow like me. Enraged, the priest snapped, "Fine. What are the stakes?"

"Your fire phoenix – if Team Phoenix loses, you'll give us your fire phoenix. If Odd Squad loses, I'll commit suicide over and over again until I hit level one."

The priest smiled darkly. “No problem! Just you wait; you’ll be retraining from level one all over again.”

“Prince, aren’t you acting too rashly?” Lolidragon asked concernedly over the team channel.

I didn’t answer right away. Instead, I tossed some roasted meat to each of my teammates. They looked dazedly at the roasted meat in their hands, and gave me uncomprehending looks. Finally, with some hesitation, Lolidragon took a bite of the roasted meat...

“Ahhh, it’s just *too* delicious! My god, I’ve never eaten such heavenly roasted meat before! The fresh and juicy meat, together with the searing heat of the fire phoenix’s flame, creating a tender roast that’s been cooked to perfection, with every bite filled with such goodness... It’s definitely a delicacy that can’t be created using ordinary meat and an ordinary oven. It’s so divine that I’m moved to tears! Prince, even if you die till you reach the negative hundredth level, you have to find a way to get that fire phoenix, you hear me?!” Lolidragon roared.

“*ROAR!* Even if I have to kick them to death, Fire Phoenix is ours!” Wolf-dàgē bellowed.

“We can save lots on food money!” Yu Lian-dàsǎo’s smile was serene, but the shadow behind her smiling face was way more hair-raising than Wolf-dàgē’s bellowing.

“Undead creature bone dragon from the remotest depths of hell, abandon your slumber and answer the call of the necromancer, Doll. Come and help Doll snatch roasted meat to eat!” After swallowing the roasted meat, Doll actually summoned the terrifying undead creature – an undead bone dragon – which she had originally refused to ever summon again.

“If Prince wants something then I will help him get it, using whatever means possible!” Gui said, emitting a frosty aura once again.

All six members of Odd Squad broke into bloodcurdling grins, all the while mumbling, “I want to eat roasted meat” and “Fire Phoenix is ours”.

“W-why do t-they suddenly seem so fired up?” the priest stammered. His face was pale as a sheet as he looked at the six hungry wolves in front of him.

“N-no worries; even if they have a bone dragon, it’s no problem. Fire Phoenix is the nemesis of all undead creatures,” one of the warriors said shakily, attempting to reassure his teammates.

“Gui- Berserk! Doll- the bone dragon, over here,” I shouted.

“Got it. *Berserk Melody*.” Gui began to play, casting *Berserk Melody* on Lolidragon and I, increasing our strength and agility to 150%. The buff would last for ten minutes.

“Bone dragon, go!” Not a trace of fear could be seen in Doll’s demeanor as she calmly directed the undead creature.

I leapt onto the bone dragon and we charged at the elf warriors directly in front of us. At the same time, Fire Phoenix came rushing towards us under its owner’s orders, and it looked as though we were about to crash. *Hmph!*, I sneered coldly. *Don’t assume that my Meatbun can only spit meat. Maybe it can’t win directly against a fire phoenix, but... Heh heh! “Ensnaring” it is a simple matter.*

“Meatbun, use *QQ Dough Wrap* and bind Fire Phoenix,” I said, throwing the meat bun in my hand at the fire phoenix. It immediately began to stretch like soft dough and pinned itself to the fire phoenix’s wings. The fire phoenix gave a loud wail and plummeted to the ground, struggling furiously.

Without any more obstacles in front of us, the bone dragon and I were about to crash into the four pale-faced elf warriors. Just then, the enemy mage managed to finish casting the spell for a barrier, catching the bone dragon and I off guard. We slammed into it, receiving quite a bit of damage.

I pressed on, ignoring the pain, and asked Doll to make the bone dragon fly higher, over the barrier. However, just when I planned to attack, the enemy mage began to fire a continuous stream of small-scale magical projectiles at us to impede my advance. The bone dragon and I flew around dodging the projectiles while keeping an eye on the four warriors, making sure that they did not dare to step outside the mage’s barrier.

After a few minutes of this impasse...

“Urgh!” The holyman mage couldn’t believe his eyes when he saw the dagger sticking out of his chest. He quickly turned into a pillar of white light and flew off while Lolidragon gave an evil chuckle from behind, right where the mage had been standing. Then, before the warriors in front even sensed her presence, she used her *Burrowing* skill again to get back to where the rest of Odd Squad was.

The end was in sight.

“Hahahahaha!” Perched atop the bone dragon, I laughed manically. My wild and arrogant demeanor sent several girls into a dead faint, unable to take the sight anymore.

“...*Meteor Shower*,” Yu Lian-dàsão recited the last line of the spell with a smile and instantaneously nearly a dozen meteors rained down from the skies, crashing onto the arena floor with earth-shaking booms. Finally, four columns of white light flew off, leaving only a warrior – the one who had laughed at Meatbun – collapsed on the ground.

As per usual, I maintained the air of a conqueror as I hopped off the bone dragon. For a moment I stared at my opponent, a merciless look in my eyes, and then I drove Black Dao through his weak and unresisting body, sending him to the rebirth point to relive his life as an elf.

“Odd Squad, victory!” The judge shouted a line that I had heard seven times before.



After that, I picked my invincible Meatbun up from the floor.

<System notice: Meatbun has reached level 40, Meatbun has learned a new ability: Roasted Meatbun>

We successfully received the fire phoenix, which had reverted to the form of an egg. (When the ownership of a pet changes hands, the pet will revert to the form of an egg, go through the ownership ceremony again, be demoted a level as though it has died once, and its loyalty will decrease to 50/100.) We then began discussing who the fire phoenix should be given to.

“First, take Doll and me off the list. I already have Meatbun, and Doll can summon many undead minions, so neither of us needs this pet egg,” I said after some thought.

“Mm, I don’t need it either. I don’t believe that I need a pet to protect me,” Wolf-dàgē said, flexing his impressive muscles.

“Neither do I; Wolf will protect me.” Yulian-dàsão and Wolf-dàgē stared at each other ardently.

“I don’t want it. I can’t rear pets...”

I recollected Lolidragon’s bloody, tear-filled history with pets. *That might be for the best. Otherwise, Lolidragon will be setting a new record by killing an immortal fire phoenix, and adding yet another chapter to that bloody history.*

“So we’re left with...Gui?”

“Me? Yay, then I can roast meat together with His Highness!” Anticipation was written all over Gui’s face.

“It’s roasting meat with Meat-bunbun!”

The whole of Odd Squad laughed long and loud.

“Oh, come on, Prince, sometimes you’ve got to reward Gui as well! Roasting meat with him isn’t that big a deal, right?” Wolf-dàgē said, patting me on the back heartily.

“Huh? I wasn’t the one who said that!” I replied.

However, I found myself wondering, *Did I really not say that...?*

“That voice was so adorable, so it was probably Doll who said it, right?” Lolidragon guessed.

“Eh?” Doll raised her small face. Her mouth was stuffed with food, making it impossible for her to speak.

Then who on earth was it?

“Here! Mama.”

Mama? I could feel Meatbun struggling in my hand.

No way! A meat bun with eyes is already unbelievable enough, but a talking meat bun?! I slowly lowered my head to look at Meatbun, but only saw its watery eyes looking at me as usual.

“Mama.” Meatbun’s little mouth suddenly opened, saying that word, and I froze in shock. *Mama? Is it referring to me?*

The other members of Odd Squad realized that an event as incomprehensible as aliens invading Earth, Stephen Chow¹⁰ acting in a tearjerker, or A-mei¹¹ doing a strip dance had taken place. All of them were now staring with wide eyes at the talking meat bun.

“Everyone, don’t stare at Meat-bunbun like that. Meat-bunbun is shy...” At this, two red spots slowly appeared on Meatbun’s ‘cheeks’.

...It’s a girl? I mean, a female meat bun?

“Why did you call me ‘Mama’?” *Don’t tell me that my real gender has been discovered by a meat bun? It’s possible, since my Meatbun had a wisdom level of ten when it was only level one!*

“Mama is Mama...” Meatbun said as it lowered its ‘head’, an endearingly innocent look on its face. It was even rubbing against my palm, seeking affection.

¹⁰ **Stephen Chow:** Famous Hong Kong actor, comedian, and film director. He has acted in tons of comedies over the decades, such as Kung Fu Hustle.

¹¹ **A-mei:** Famous Taiwanese pop singer and often called a diva of the Mandarin pop scene.

It's so adorable! But, waaah! I'm not even married yet and already I'm a mom! Plus, my child is a meat bun... I wonder if it's a boy or a girl?

"Lolidragon, do pets have genders in 'Second Life'?" I asked calmly.

"Yes... And if you have two pets, they can even have babies! The chances are slim, though," Lolidragon replied. She stared at Meatbun, the cogs in her brain turning quickly.

"But Meatbun..." Lolidragon observed Meatbun with suspicion in her eyes, while I flipped Meatbun over, studying it from every angle, trying to find a clue as to its gender.

"Wouldn't it be faster if you just asked?" suggested Yu Lian-dàsão.

"Meatbun..." After such a long examination, all we saw was a bun's white and fluffy covering, so I had to ask calmly, "...Are you a male or a female?"

Meatbun's eyes were wide and filled with confusion. It asked, "Mama, what's 'male' and 'female'? Meat-bunbun doesn't understand."

... *Definitely a female*, we thought.

"I think the fact that she's talking is more important than her gender," Wolf-dàgē said gravely.

"It's because she's reached level forty," Lolidragon said as she suddenly remembered why. "When the pets in 'Second Life' reach a certain level, they gain artificial intelligence. At level forty, they begin to speak, and their artificial intelligence improves continuously according to their level."

"I see. So it's normal for pets to know how to talk?" I asked, seeing the light at last.

"Mmhmm." Lolidragon smiled weakly, embarrassed. "I forgot all about it until now."

My daughter, ah, no! My PET can talk! I happily pinched Meatbun here, there, and all over. As I pinched...

"It hurts, it hurts, Meat-bunbun is hurt, it hurts!" Meatbun squealed. Her watery-looking eyes became REALLY watery. One teardrop, two teardrops... HUGE teardrops began to fall from Meatbun's eyes, which finally became two faucets that were completely out of control.

"Waaah, waaah, wuuuaah... waaah...!"

“Ah! Meatbun’s crying, what should I do?” I asked. I felt at a complete loss as to what to do as I watched the meat bun that was crying uncontrollably in my hand. *How does one comfort a meat bun?*

“It’s like a faucet.” Lolidragon looked at the floor, which was beginning to show signs of a potential flood.

“That’s great; we don’t even need to bring water along in the future!” Yu Lian-dàsǎo said, beaming.

After ten minutes...

“Prince, I should warn you in advance that I don’t know how to swim!” Lolidragon was looking at the water, which had already risen to her waistline, clearly wanting to cry.

Holding the two faucets in my hand, I smiled stupidly, completely in a daze...

“Let’s get out of here! This is such a high class restaurant. Now that we’ve flooded their booth, the compensation will definitely cost quite a bit.”

Wolf-dàgē didn’t look very concerned about the flood. It wasn’t surprising, since he was so tall; he would definitely have been the last person to drown, anyway.



“Our reputation level has gone down again.”

We had successfully used the ruckus caused by opening the booth door and letting the water flow out to escape, but we couldn’t prevent our reputation level from going down again. Yu Lian-dàsǎo looked at the team’s reputation level and then turned to look at me, wearing that terrifying shadowy smile.

“Prince, take good care of your daughter Meatbun. Don’t let her cause any more trouble, okay?”

“Okay.” *Waaaaah! Dàsǎo’s terrifying shadowy-yet-gentle smile is simply spine-chilling! I’m scared...*

I looked angrily at my daughter Meatbun. Grabbing her in one swoop, I wanted to give her a good spanking. However, just as I was about to swing my hand down, Meatbun looked at me in confusion with those incredibly large, innocent, and guileless eyes.

“Mama?”

Waaah, now how am I supposed to spank her?

Lolidragon patted me on the back and said, “Forget it. What’s the point of spanking a meat bun? It would be better to just ask her to spit out more meat for us to eat!”

“You’re right. Gui, quick – get Fire Phoenix to hatch,” I urged, drooling at the thought of roasted meat.

“Okay.” Gui bit his finger, breaking the skin, and dripped some blood onto the fire phoenix egg. Wide-eyed, we waited for the fire phoenix to emerge.

We didn’t have to wait for long before the familiar form of Fire Phoenix appeared before our eyes. The members of the Odd Squad hugged each other joyfully. *Now there’ll be roasted meat to eat!*

<Pet name: Fire Phoenix | Level: 41 | Abilities: Heaven’s Blazing Flame | Loyalty: 50/100>

Heaven’s Blazing Flame, *that’s the ability! That’s the incredible ability that roasted the meat in an instant!*

I hurriedly held Meatbun out. Lolidragon immediately took out a foldable table. Yu Lian-dàsǎo rushed to set the table with plates and chopsticks. Wolf-dàgē nervously held a huge pot, worried that he would miss catching even a single piece of meat, and Doll... was already sitting at the table, a napkin around her neck, ready to eat.

“Gui.” I signaled, my gaze determined. “Come on!”

“Yes.” Gui looked at the fire phoenix flying in the sky.

Gui and I shouted in unison:

“Meatbun, *Machine Gun Meat Attack.*”

“Fire Phoenix, *Heaven’s Blazing Flame.*”

There was only silence. The highly-anticipated aromatic roasted meat was nowhere in sight.

“Mama, that’s Gui. Does Mama want to fight Gui?” Meatbun turned its head to look at me in concern. *I...*

“Hmph, who do you think you are to order the immortal Fire Phoenix around?” An unfamiliar and proud voice came from the sky.

However, this time, none of us were surprised. We merely lifted our heads to look at the sky.

“Fire Phoenix is already level forty-one,” Lolidragon said stiffly. “Moreover, its loyalty is too low, so it’s not very obedient,” she added.

“Crap, then what about our roasted meat?” I asked, looking stonily at the recalcitrant Fire Phoenix.

“Little children must be spanked in order for them to listen,” Yu Lian-dàsǎo smiled.

“You’ll scald your hands if you spank Fire Phoenix...” I said. *I want to smack it, but I’m scared of getting hurt!*

In the end, since the rebellious Fire Phoenix refused to obey, Odd Squad could only return dejectedly to the city to purchase some meat buns to eat. We were unable to beat up Fire Phoenix despite our hunger – so we could only vent our anger on Gui and order him to raise Fire Phoenix’s loyalty as quickly as possible.

However, from Gui’s grievous howls of pain after being scalded by the phoenix’s flames, we realized that it would be a long time before we could have any roasted meat to eat...

Waaah...I’m so hungry!

Wolf-dàgē bellowed half-heartedly, “Listen up, guys! Although we’re all really hungry, the next battle must still be fought. Just hang in there for another two rounds and we’ll be able to enter the finals.”

“Our opponent for the next battle is ‘Hell’s Murderers’,” Wolf-dàgē said. His tone suddenly became serious. “According to the information Lolidragon obtained from interrogating Passerby A, this team’s combat strength is considerable. Moreover, their fighting style is quite violent and cruel. The battlefield never failed to become a river of blood after every battle, and some of the spectators would definitely faint at the sight of all that blood. I’m afraid that they’ll prove to be difficult opponents.”

Are they really that scary? I furrowed my brows and asked, “What’s their team’s line-up?”

“They’re all humans. A priest, a mage, a warrior, a necromancer, a thief, and a bard.”

I was astonished. “Their classes are exactly the same as ours?”

“And they have two pet dragons.” Wolf-dàgē heaved a sigh.

While we have a meat bun and a disobedient fire phoenix, I added mentally. “This is going to be really tricky. Will they disembowel me?” I asked, worried.

“Very likely, yes,” Wolf- dàgē answered heavily.

I'm scared! I want to cry...



At that moment, Passerby A was talking to his friend B.

“Do you know what happened? I was kidnapped by Odd Squad just now.” Passerby A looked close to tears.

“Are you serious? My god, you were actually captured by the terrifying Odd Squad?” asked Friend B.

“Yeah, they wanted me to give them information about Hell’s Murderers. After I finished, they seemed very anxious!”

“Anxious? Hell’s Murderers may be scary, but they can’t compare to the scary-beyond-comprehension Odd Squad... The very sight of that beautiful fellow who smiles so evilly even as he hacks people to pieces can give people nightmares.”

“And that spirit-like beauty who keeps appearing behind people’s backs... After she kills someone, she never fails to laugh callously!”

“And that scary bone dragon, plus those skeletons burning with a black fire...”

“And also that fortress-like wolfman... plus that mage who seems so gentle and yet uses *Meteor Shower* to annihilate her opponents.”

“Odd Squad is just *tooooo* SCARY!” both Passerby A and Friend B exclaimed in unison.



Meanwhile, with Hell’s Murderers...

“Has everyone heard about our opponents for this coming match?” their elected leader, Blood-soaked Demon King – a mage – asked with a grim expression.

“We’ve heard...”

“How can we, Hell’s Murderers, allow someone else to be more terrifying than we are?” Blood-soaked Demon King demanded furiously. “We swore that we’d become the ones whose names would make children cry upon hearing them, the ones whom adults would have nightmares about... The demon kings of ‘Second Life’! How can we let that Odd

Squad become OUR nightmares? This is just too pathetic... We have to defeat them in as terrifying and violent a manner as possible and become THEIR nightmare!"

"BECOME NIGHTMARES!" After the team gave a mighty shout in unison, one of the members suddenly shivered.

"But Odd Squad is really scary!" he added.

Chapter 3: Odd Squad Strikes Back

“Ahahaha...” I laughed callously. “Hahahaha, I’m not scared. I’m not scared! Hahaha!”

“Looks like Prince is really scared...” Ugly Wolf looked helplessly at me, who had been laughing maniacally in a corner for a while now.

“Well, he’s always been the one who slaughters everyone in his path. Now that the time for retribution has arrived, obviously he’d be scared!” Lolidragon responded indifferently.

“What do we do, then? With things like this, how are we going to compete?” Yu Lian asked, her voice filled with anxiety. “Don’t tell me we’re going to have to forfeit!”

“Haha, it’s okay; don’t worry about him. Prince has always been like this! He’s routinely scared half to death before the fight, but once the battle actually commences, he’ll become their most enthusiastic opponent by far. Don’t worry, don’t worry!” Lolidragon replied, laughing heartily.

“Is that so...?”

“It’s time,” Wolf-dàgē said calmly.

Hearing that, I stood up and turned, holding Black Dao in my left hand. “It’s time to kill people,” I said emotionlessly.

I’m not really sure why, but no matter how scared I am before a fight, somehow, I always manage to calm down the moment I step in the arena and feel the weight of the spectators’ gaze on me. Although I still can’t think of a way to defeat the two dragons using a meat bun and a disobedient fire phoenix...didn’t we still win even though I couldn’t think of a way to defeat a fire phoenix with a meat bun? Wahaha, this is called “Heaven watches over the good guys”... (Actually, it’s more like “God looks out for fools, drunks, and little children”!)¹²

As usual, I was the first to enter the arena. Hell’s Murderers had only just emerged from the tunnel, led by a person garbed in a blood-red mage’s robe.

¹² **Heaven watches over the good guys... God looks out for fools, drunks, and little children:** What Prince actually says here are two separate proverbs. The first is “吉人自有天相” (*prn. jī rén zì yǒu tiān xiàng*), which means that the heavens will ensure that no harm comes to good people (like heroes). The second is “傻人有傻福” (*prn. shǎ rén yǒu shǎ fú*), which means that “even fools have a fool’s luck”, implying that heaven grants an extra dose of luck to fools.

“That’s the Blood-soaked Demon King, a frost-type mage. He loves to skewer his opponents using giant icicles. He’s the most terrifying figure in Hell’s Murderers,” Lolidragon explained.

“Skewer? So the worst that could happen is that I’d get a hole through my stomach? That’s not too bad... You guys nearly scared me to death! I thought he would XXX out my intestines and stuff them into my mouth, Then XXX my heart from my chest as it dripped with blood. After that, he would crack my skull wide open, splattering the ground with the soft white brain XXX as it spews from the wound...” I heaved a sigh of relief. *All that talk about them being the scariest team ever; I was terrified for nothing!*

“Your Highness! I beg of you, please don’t say any more!” Gui’s face had grown frightfully pale as he listened to my XXX-filled commentary. With a hand covering her mouth, Lolidragon growled from between gritted teeth, “If you say anymore, I’m going to puke up even my breakfast!”

“Heheh, sorry about that! It’s just that I’ve been watching too many horror movies lately...” Thinking back to the horror movie I had watched last night, I realized that I’d gotten those ideas from the homicidal psychopath who had slaughtered his victims using similar methods. I laughed, embarrassed and feeling somewhat foolish.

Just then, Blood-soaked Demon King – who was standing across from me – suddenly spoke. In an ominous voice, he said slowly, “Today, I am going to turn Odd Squad into a barbecued meat kabob. I’m going to skewer each of you one by one and then let my pet dragon slowly burn you all alive. I am going to acquaint you with REAL TERROR!”

I merely smiled impassively. “Shall we begin?”

My indifferent attitude seemed to have driven my opponent into an inarticulate rage, and several veins popped on his forehead...

“What’s there to be mad about right now?” I asked, chuckling. “Wait until after I XXX open your stomach, XXX out your intestines, and then use them as a rope to tie you up with. Then I’ll XXX up your skull, extract your brain, and get Fire Phoenix to roast it into a crisp using *Heaven’s Blazing Flame*. I’ll XXX it in your mouth and, finally, drench you in a sauce made of your own fresh blood! It won’t be too late for you to be mad then!”

Wahaha, it would be just like the movie I watched the day before yesterday. That day, after watching it with my brother, I even deliberately created some new recipes. Using high quality tofu that was as white as brain XXX and fresh red beans that were as vibrant as fresh blood, I made red bean tofu soup for him. That was the first time in his life my brother skipped dinner...

Was I too evil? Well, who asked him to keep repeating in my ear for three days straight that Dark Emperor had already made it past the preliminaries, and were now in the finals? Stupid brother, do you know how much pressure this puts on me?!

The throbbing veins on Blood-soaked Demon King's face disappeared without a trace. Instead, his face had become white as a sheet and his hands were trembling slightly. He was probably imagining himself being tied up in his intestines, watching helplessly as his own brain was sliced up and roasted to a crisp then XXX down his throat, before finally being drenched in his own blood... *(I don't think you'd still be alive by that time...)*

But won't I be plagiarizing the movie? I pondered for a while. Would I be charged for theft of intellectual property? Or why don't we....

"Gouge out his eyeballs and stuff them up his ass?" Nope, can't do that; that was from the horror movie three days ago.

"Bury him alive and then flay his skin?" If I recall correctly, this was one of the ten major torture methods of the Qing Dynasty!

"Cut off all four limbs and throw them into a cesspit?" Where am I going to find a cesspit?

"Carve his flesh slowly off him, slice by slice?" Don't they call this "rending flesh from bone"?

"Castration?" ...I don't think he can die from that. According to the game's design, that area isn't a weak spot for attacks...right?

"Stuff my blade up his ass? No, that'd be filthy." How can I sully my darling Black Dao like that!

I let out a sigh. "I never realized that coming up with new methods of torture and execution would be so difficult. Forget it, I'll just pick one of those methods and use it. Let's start! Referee...eh? Where did everyone go?" I looked everywhere around me, but... *Strange, I'm the only person left in the whole arena?*

"Where's Blood-soaked Demon King?" I looked at the deserted arena in front of me. *Our opponents have disappeared?* I turned to ask my teammates where our opponents had gone, but... "Lolidragon? Wolf-dàgē? Gui? Dàsǎo? Doll? Where have they all disappeared to?"

Just then, an announcement came over the broadcasting system, accompanied by the sound of vomiting. "Everyone...this is your commentator, Xiao Li. As the competitor Prince's descriptions were simply excessively violent and gruesome— **BARF** ...It has caused all of the competitors to flee from the arena. I presume they are in the

restrooms...vomiting. There are still five more minutes before the match must start. If not a single member from Hell's Murderers has returned before the five minutes are up, the victory will be awarded to the team that still has a member in the arena, Odd Squad...
BARF

At this moment, in the restrooms...

The members of Odd Squad were shouting loudly as one. "Prince, you're dead meat!"
BARF

The members of Hell's Murderers next to them were sobbing from fear. "No matter what, there's no way we're going back there! *BARF*

"*BARF* Odd Squad, victory!" the referee announced.

Standing alone in the middle of the arena, I twiddled my fingers, muttering in a small voice, "I didn't do it on purpose..."



I had only just left the arena when Lolidragon approached me with a dangerous glint in her eyes. "Prince, you're DEAD MEAT!"

"You caused me to puke up even last night's dinner!" Yu Lian-dàsǎo said, and her terrifying shadowy smile appeared again.

"Prince-gēge, Doll is very scared!"

Scared? If you're truly frightened, why is the expression on your face reminiscent of the time you summoned the bone dragon to try to get that delicious roasted meat, Doll?

"Sigh. Prince, you know that I have always thought of you as a younger brother..." said Wolf-dàgē.

Then please don't wave your two meter-long staff around... You're even doing warm up exercises? Wolf-dàgē, don't you know how humiliating it'll be for a warrior to be slaughtered by a priest using sheer brute force?

"Your Highness..." Gui looked worried.

Seeing that a dagger, two magic staves, and a skeletal hand were about to come crashing down on my head, I could only throw Gui a pitiful look and tragically cry out, "Gui, *save meeeee!*"

Unable to bear the sight of me getting hurt, Gui immediately flew forward to shield me. “Don’t beat up his Highness!”

A small brawl ensued, in which fists and feet were not the only things used — even slippers, forks, and knives came flying my way. I hid beneath Gui, protected securely by his body, narrowly escaping the storm of attacks.

I gazed gratefully at Gui, whose body no longer bore any resemblance to a human’s. *Strange, why isn’t he dead yet? Actually, come to think of it, Wolf-dàgē’s healing spells have been leveling up largely because of Gui’s “assistance”.* In my heart, I silently vowed not to beat Gui up too badly next time.

“Prince! You really are despicable,” Lolidragon panted, worn out from the fight.

“How is that true? You had an enjoyable time beating someone into a pulp, I didn’t have to endure any pain, and Gui’s masochism has been satisfied. We’ve killed multiple birds with a single stone, so why not? Hahaha.” *I really am coolly calculating, heh heh!*



“I wonder why the tournament committee was looking for Dàgē? I’m starving, I want to eat.”

A moment before, the system had broadcasted out of the blue that the tournament committee wanted our team leader to go see them. They said that they needed to discuss something with us...

Don’t tell me that they’re not going to count our victory just now? Do we have to fight again? I don’t want to... I’ve already been dealt with so harshly by my team members. If they nullify our victory, I will really use the ten major torture methods of the Qing dynasty on the tournament committee members.

“You really love to eat. It makes me wonder if you really are a girl...”

Lolidragon suddenly realized that she had made a blunder. My face paled as I looked at Dàsǎo and Doll.

“...A girl’s dream guy.”

“...” *Great save, Lolidragon!* I let out a relieved sigh.

“Wolf is back!” Yu Lian-dàsǎo had spotted him from afar.

“*Sigh*. Everyone, I have some not-very-bad-but-still-bad news.” Wolf-dàgē furrowed his brows together. “We still have to fight one more match.”

“Now? Right now?” *But I’m hungry...*

“To be precise, we have twenty more minutes.”

“Gui...” We all looked worriedly at Gui, who was lying on the ground like a misshapen lump of mud.

“I’ll heal him up, don’t worry.” Wolf-dàgē said, before adding, “These injuries are nothing compared to the ones he receives when Prince beats him up.”

...I pretended not to hear that.

“Spirit Spirit Team is our next opponent. Also, the reason why we are fighting twice in a row is because we’re one of the last remaining teams in the preliminaries. The tournament committee wishes to conclude the preliminaries today,” Wolf-dàgē said, his voice troubled.

“The damn thing is, there’s no time for us to wring information about our opponents out of random passersbys. However, our opponents know exactly what they’re up against, since they probably saw everything that transpired in our previous match. The situation is clearly very unfavorable for us.”

“Bat’s beri unhayeraber hor arshe,” I said indistinctly through a mouthful of *mantou*.

“That might not be true. Luckily for us, there was no fighting at all during the match just now, so at most, they would know our classes,” Yu Lian-dàsǎo said with a comforting smile.

“I hope that’s true...”



In the arena...

“Those are...our opponents?” I forced myself to ask. **SWEAT**

“Looks like it.” Wolf-dàgē’s brows were knitted even more tightly together than before.

“Are you serious? You’re saying that flower, that blade of grass, that tree, that rock, that pool of water, plus something that we can’t see – they’re our opponents?” The corner of my mouth twitched as I thought, *Isn’t this a bit over-the-top?*

“No wonder they’re called Spirit Spirit Team¹³ — they’re actually made up of a flower spirit, a grass spirit, a tree spirit, a rock spirit, a water spirit, and a wind spirit. This is bad; spirits have many sub-categories and their abilities vary widely. Plus, very few players choose to play as spirits. We have never encountered a player of the spirit race before, so our knowledge of them is simply too superficial. This will be a tough battle,” Lolidragon explained worriedly.

“*Sigh!* And here I was, thinking I could try repeating the horrifying descriptions I used during the last fight, but now...” I sighed. “Lolidragon, do you think it/he/she/they will have intestines for me to yank out?”

“...No idea.”

“It doesn’t matter, I guess. After all, we still have to fight anyway,” I said. I didn’t really care who my opponent was. Instead, I moved into a fighting position, readying myself for battle.

“Prince is right. Let’s wipe the floor with them!” roared Wolf-dàgē maniacally.

I began to laugh wildly and unsheathed my Black Dao. *The last match in the preliminary rounds — begin!*

The moment the match started, I immediately rushed forward, thinking to get rid of one or two of the opponents first. However, I suddenly discovered that something seemed to have twined around my foot, sending me sprawling onto the ground. Hastily, I glanced at my foot...

Grass? The arena actually has grass for me to trip over? I quickly hacked at the grass with my *dao*, but just as I was about to climb to my feet, numerous long strands of grass suddenly sprouted all around me...

“Urgh.” The grass had twined about my entire body, leaving me immobilized.

“Prince!” Odd Squad’s members were shocked. Wolf-dàgē rushed forward to where I was and began to yank at the hindering grass while Doll directed her skeletons to cover us. Lolidragon — who had been about to burrow towards the opponents — ran over as well, desperately hacking away at the grass with her dagger.

As I struggled, I saw that the rock spirit was charging at us from the corner of my eye. My princely countenance turned ashen and yelled, “Forget about me — quick, defend yourselves!”

¹³ **Spirit Spirit Team:** The character for “spirit”, “妖” (*pm. yāo*), is actually quite ambiguous – depending on its usage, its meaning ranges from “spirit” to “demon” to “monster”. In essence, it suggests a supernatural being – and not necessarily an agent for evil either, such as the fox spirit/demon in Japanese myths.

“Skeletons, hurry forward to shield them!” Doll hastily dispatched her skeletons to bar the rock spirit’s path. However, with each sweep of its thick branches, the tree spirit next to it easily sent a skeleton flying. Although it wasn’t enough to destroy the skeletons, the attack hindered their movements, wasting precious time as they struggled to crawl back on their feet.

Seeing the hefty tree spirit surge forward, Yu Lian immediately cast a fireball, which sent it scurrying back to the Spirit Spirit Team. The rock spirit was unaffected, however, and instead threw a punch at Doll. Intent on pushing Doll out of harm’s way, Wolf-dàgē was struck by the heavy blow. Even with his large frame and towering height of over two meters, Wolf-dàgē was sent flying.

“Wolf...!” Yu Lian-dàsǎo cried out in alarm.

“Flaming Skeletons! Quick! Fall back to defend everyone!” Doll urgently commanded her skeletons to defend against the rock spirit’s onslaught.

“Gui! *Berserk Melody*! Hurry up and cast *Berserk Melody*!” I bellowed.

“Right,” Gui replied, immediately casting *Berserk Melody* on me.

I felt my strength increase. With a heroic effort, I struggled and finally managed to free my right arm. “*Bat Catching Sword*!” I sliced, hewed, cleaved, stabbed, slashed – in mere moments I had executed all sorts of sword moves to chop up the grass ensaring my body. After freeing myself, I jumped to my feet and ran urgently towards the rock spirit...

Suddenly, a pillar of water came gushing up in front of me. Surprised, I took a hurried step back. Unfortunately, having no eyes in the back of my head, I did not see the second pillar of water behind me. To make matters worse, the strength of the current in the one behind me was even stronger than the one in front. I was trapped.

“*AHHH!*” I was immediately swept away by the currents. Just as I was about to be washed right out of the arena, I stabbed my Black Dao into the ground. Hanging on for dear life, I managed to avoid getting flushed out of the arena. However, as soon as the water receded, I found myself once again bound by the grass.

This is damn irritating! I thought. I would hack away at the grass, only to be washed away to the edge of the arena; when the torrent of water finally stopped, I’d once more be tangled in the grass...

In the midst of all this, I threw a glance in Doll’s direction, worried about how the others were faring. Luckily, Doll and Yu Lian-dàsǎo were stalling the rock spirit together. Gui was playing his *guqin* and casting *Supersonic Soul-chasing Arrow* to interfere with the enemy’s attacks, but... *Wolf-dàgē seems to be fighting an imaginary opponent?!*

Abruptly, I recalled the presence of an invisible opponent – *the wind spirit! The wind spirit has forced Wolf-dàgē into a one-on-one fight. This is bad! Where's Lolidragon?*

I turned around to look at the other members of Spirit Spirit Team. As expected, I saw Lolidragon crouching stealthily behind the water spirit. She was planning to take it down by surprise, but...

"Lolidragon, RUN!"

Having returned to its teammates' side, the tree spirit had already raised its guard against this thief who could burrow through the ground to assassinate her opponents. As soon as it noticed her presence, it immediately swung its large tree branches at her.

"Urgh...!" Unable to evade in time, Lolidragon was struck squarely by the attack, and her HP dropped drastically. She got to her feet immediately and burrowed her way back to Odd Squad. On her way back, however, she noticed that Wolf-dàgē was in peril and instantly rushed to his aid.

Although it's really hard to see an invisible person with the naked eye, even an invisible person would have trouble hiding from the trained eyes of a thief. Gui's supporting fire added to that, and soon the wind spirit was clearly on the brink of defeat...

At that moment, the flower spirit that had remained motionless all this time unexpectedly started to chant a healing spell. Flower petals drifted slowly down onto the wind spirit's head, and we watched as its injuries healed up substantially.

"So the flower spirit is a priest!" Wolf-dàgē uttered in surprise.

Just then, the tree spirit ran over to help the wind spirit. With the addition of the incredibly strong tree spirit, it became an even match between the enemy and Lolidragon, Dàgē, and Gui. Doll and Yu Lian could only stop the rock spirit's offensive as their attacks had no effect against the granite-like skin and thick body of the rock spirit. As for me, I was still trapped by the grass spirit and the water spirit...

We can't go on like this! Once again, I struggled free of the grass, and then whipped Meatbun out.

"Mama? Are you playing with water? Meat-bunbun also wants to play!" Meatbun said as it looked at my water-battered appearance with an innocent wide-eyed gaze.

After this match, I will never play with water again! Having little strength to resist, I was once again bound up by the grass spirit. "Meatbun – later, use that XXX skill to lift me out of the water while I'm being washed away by the current, you understand?"

"Oookay!"

I hacked my way free of the grass for the Nth time and then leapt to my feet. Immediately, the stream of water began to surge towards me again.

“Meatbun, use *Take-copter*!” I cried out.¹⁴

A Take-copter suddenly grew out of the top of Meatbun’s head. It began to twirl, slowly lifting Meatbun into the air, and I hung onto Meatbun for dear life. “Stay away from that water current, Meatbun,” I ordered, and Meatbun immediately dodged to the left, evading the pillar of water that was spinning towards us like a hurricane.

Helpless, I had no choice but to rely on a meat bun to weave left and right while I analyzed the situation. I decided to first get rid of the grass spirit and the water spirit, both of whom would hamper my movements. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t be able to move on ground at all.

“Meatbun, carefully approach the enemy.”

“What’s an ‘enemy’?”

I nearly fainted upon hearing that. Instead, I said, “Go towards the people gathered over there.” I leveled my Black Dao in the direction of Spirit Spirit Team.

“Oookay, Mama!” Meatbun obediently began to advance on Spirit Spirit Team.

“*Dragon Whirlwind Strike!*” I darted past a pillar of water and, like a whirlwind, I charged at the water spirit. A large gaping hole immediately appeared in that hateful water spirit’s stomach, but just as I was about to send it to heaven with another thrust of my sword, my body was bound up by grass again. Worse still...

“*Icicle Spears.*” Although seriously hurt, the water spirit smiled sinisterly, nearly ten icicles held in its grasp...

“*Bat Catching Sword!*” I hurriedly cut myself free of the grass, but I was still unable to dodge in time. Five icicles pierced my body.

My face turned white... *Urgh!* It was extremely painful, but the worst injury was on my left thigh – it had been pierced by an icicle, which remained lodged there. The rest of my wounds ranged from deep gashes to light cuts. Though I still had more than half of my health left, I was once again bound and immobilized by the grass spirit...

Waaah! In front of me, another N number of icicles suddenly appeared! *Looks like Spirit Spirit Team is about to fulfill Blood-soaked Demon King’s will of turning me into a kebab.*

¹⁴ **Take-copter:** A reference to Doraemon. Go <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doraemon> for more information.

“Even if I have to die, I’m taking one of them with me... Meatbun, *Dog Beating Technique!*” I lobbed Meatbun at the water spirit with all my strength.

“Urgh!” One after another, spears of ice struck me piercing my left hand, waist, and shoulder – one even scraped past my forehead. Across from me, the water spirit was unable to dodge Meatbun’s attack in time, but alas the flower spirit quickly healed it. I lay on the ground and watching the remnants of my HP drain away bit by bit. *Looks like I can’t even bring one of them down with me, damn it!*

“Prince, let’s go!” Lolidragon suddenly appeared behind me and began dragging me back towards the rest of the team with all her strength. Seeing that, the grass spirit was about to use its grass to prevent us from escaping when a translucent arrow stopped it. Gui – now infuriated – began to rain a spray of arrows down on the grass spirit, forcing it to hastily use grass to protect himself, the flower spirit, and the water spirit.

“We’re almost there, Prince!” Lolidragon was pulling me along as hard as she could, trying to get me close enough to Wolf-dàgē so that he could heal me. Wolf-dàgē would have come forward himself, but without Lolidragon and Gui’s help, it was all he could do not to be killed by the wind spirit and the tree spirit. There was no way he could get himself out of his fix and come heal me.

Grasping at once the severity of Wolf-dàgē’s situation, I bellowed urgently at Lolidragon, “Go help Wolf-dàgē! He— he can’t hold them off by himself!”

Lolidragon looked at Wolf-dàgē, and then looked at me. “God damn it – if I don’t help Wolf-dàgē get rid of those two, we won’t be able to save Prince at all!”

Lolidragon gritted her teeth, then let go of me and rushed over to help Wolf-dàgē fight back against his two opponents. “You have to hang in there, Prince. You hear me?!” Lolidragon roared over her shoulder as she ran.

Helpless, I could only nod my head weakly even as I thought, *Hang in there? Damn this 99% realism level. How am I supposed to hang in there with my HP steadily draining away thanks to my open wounds? We’re not allowed to bring health potions to a match either... Crap! My consciousness is starting to become fuzzy...* I hastily shook my head, trying to clear my mind.

By this time, the water spirit’s wounds were completely healed. Enraged, it sent a tidal wave towards me, but I was still lost in my hazy consciousness...

“*PRIIIINCE!*” Gui, Lolidragon, Ugly Wolf, Yu Lian, and Doll cried out in despair.

“Prince!” Gui cried out again. With a heroic effort, he leaped over and held me – now nearly unconscious – in his arms, futilely trying to shield me with his body as the tidal

wave hit us. What little blood that was left in my body was still sufficient to stain the water red...

Suddenly my head cleared. In my heart, I understood that I was just an inch away from death. “Fight hard, Gui!”

Gui looked at me with fear starkly visible in his eyes. “Prince... No, you can’t die!”

I smiled gently as my corporeal form gradually turned translucent and indistinct, before dissolving into bits of sparkling stardust. Under Gui’s devastated gaze, I turned into a pillar of light and shot into the sky.



“Prince...” Gui whispered in a choked voice, clenching his hands – hands that had held Prince just moments earlier – and pounded on the ground...

“Prince...” The blood had drained from Lolidragon’s face.

“How could...” Yu Lian covered her mouth, her eyes glittering with tears.

“NOOO! PRINCE!” Wolf-dàgē howled.

“Waaaah...waaaaah, Prince-gēge!” Doll wailed and began to cry...

“Mama? Where is Mama? Waaah, waaaaah...” Meatbun’s two super-ultra faucets had made a comeback.

The atmosphere throughout the entire stadium seemed to have frozen/solidified. The feeling of grief began to permeate throughout the spectators, and even the members of Spirit Spirit Team seemed to be at a loss for what to do. The minutes ticked away, one by one.

Just as Spirit Spirit Team finally decided to continue the fight, the flames of fury ignited – blazing – with Gui at the heart of the inferno...

“Fire Phoenix, as your master I command you: Burn! Send all those ignorant fools who dared to hurt my true love into the fiery depths of hell.” Gui’s eyes smoldered with the thirst for revenge, and even the recalcitrant Fire Phoenix knew that it wasn’t a good time to disobey. He gave a long cry before he flew high up into the sky and breathed a surge of flames at Spirit Spirit Team.

The grass spirit had thought to set up a barricade, but what could grass do to impede fire? The water spirit immediately took over, using a screen of water to block the fatal flames.

Sensing that the situation had somehow turned ominous for them, the grass spirit immediately thought of using its *Grass Weaving Technique* against Gui. Long strands of grass suddenly sprouted from beneath Gui's feet...

"*Earthquake!*" Yu Lian casted a spell as she crouched on the ground, her right hand touching it lightly. A huge crevice instantly appeared beneath the grass spirit as the ground split in two. The grass spirit lost its footing and nearly fell into the rift, but luckily for it, the tree spirit was nearby and managed to catch it in time. However, Yu Lian only smiled lightly as she finished reciting the incantation a second time. Yet another crack ran towards both the grass spirit and the tree spirit...

"You used this move to kill Prince – do you really think I'm going to let you kill Gui too? In your dreams!" Yu Lian lightly spat out these words.

"Inferno from the darkest depths of hell, blaze upon the mighty undead creature, bone dragon! Incarnate as Hell's Inferno Dragon, prideful and haughty creature, and descend upon the human realm to aid your master in destroying all that stands in her way!" Fury was evident on Doll's stubborn face, and even having to summon the incomparably terrifying Hell's Inferno Dragon couldn't make her give up her desire to avenge Prince.

Thus, aside from Fire Phoenix with its divine flames, Spirit Spirit Team now had to contend with an additional airborne enemy – a bone dragon belching flames of darkness. Undoubtedly, for Spirit Spirit Team, it was like having hail on top of a snowstorm...no, it was like adding fuel to the fire.

The wind spirit and the rock spirit saw what was happening and immediately charged towards Odd Squad, planning to get rid of these three dangerous individuals quickly. Lolidragon darted in front of the wind spirit, however, barring its way.

"Someone once said it is a foolish endeavor to compare speeds with the wind, but I will now show you that it is even more foolish to compete against me," Lolidragon said menacingly. As she uttered those words, she flipped the two daggers in her hands and began hacking, chopping, and stabbing swiftly, forcing the wind spirit into a hasty retreat.

Ugly Wolf swung his Light of Glory, having begun to fight the rock spirit one-on-one. Technically speaking, Ugly Wolf's strength and physique clearly couldn't compare to the rock spirit's. Ugly Wolf scoffed, however, remarking silently in his heart: *Even a three-year-old kid knows how to defeat a rock; don't you just let the heat and cold deal with it?*

"Gui! Get Fire Phoenix to breathe fire at this rock spirit!" Ugly Wolf told Gui over the team channel and Gui immediately did as he was asked.

"You think fire will have an effect on me?" The rock spirit was engulfed in flames, but was unconcerned.

Ugly Wolf grinned icily. *Oh? And what if we add water? Fine, just watch as I shatter you to pieces using water... Should I ask Yu Lian for water? No, Yu Lian only has fire and earth-type spells. Not Doll, and Gui doesn't have water either, while Lolidragon is a thief.*

Crap! No water, Ugly Wolf thought, freezing where he stood. What should I do now? There's no way I can go up to the water spirit and say, "Hey! Can you lend me some water so I can kill the rock spirit?"...right?

"Waaah, waaah, Mama!" Meatbun cried unceasingly at one side even as signs of imminent flooding began to present themselves.

Ugly Wolf's ugly face broke out into a hideous smile. *How unexpected, Prince. You're already dead, but you didn't forget to leave such a useful "orphan" behind,* Ugly Wolf thought. He quickly scooped Meatbun up and began to negotiate with it.

"Meatbun, that rock over there caused your Mama to die. Do you want revenge?"

"Waaah... What's 'revenge'?" Meatbun asked, its huge innocent eyes widening.

Ugly Wolf scratched the fur on his head. "Just... go over to the rock spirit and cry, and your Mama will be very happy!" Ugly Wolf said, doing his best to use a cajoling tone of voice, just as one would use on children.

"Then Mama will come back? Meat-bunbun misses Mama."

"Hmm...probably!"

"Okay!" Meatbun's little face filled with resolve, and it bounced and bopped its way towards the rock spirit.

Ugly Wolf wiped cold sweat away, thinking, *It's a good thing that buns don't have brains...*

The rock spirit initially stared, dumbfounded at the meat bun which hopped towards him before jumping onto its shoulder. As two pillars of water gushed forth, the rock spirit seemed to hear the sound of himself cracking. It paled in alarm and frantically began to try to grab Meatbun. "What are you doing? Get off!"

However, Meatbun's body was small, and it was quite nimble. One moment, Meatbun was on its head, the next moment, it had hopped to its shoulder, and then its arms... The two faucets began to fulfil their purpose and began to destroy the rock spirit's body.

The situation had begun to turn around...



I left the rebirth point, experienced the after-death nausea, and then found myself somewhat rooted to the spot.

“Now what shall I do?” I mumbled to myself. Then, suddenly, I remembered. “That right! I should go and watch the match.”

Worried that I would not get to the stadium in time to watch the match, I hastily grabbed a bag of *guazi*, bought a plate of fried rice, and got a can of Coke before hurrying to the stadium. I got there just in time to see Gui going berserk. Then, I found a seat and began to watch my teammates go crazy as a result of my death.

“Woow! If I’d known that Gui could control Fire Phoenix just like that, then I would have committed suicide. That way, wouldn’t we have roasted meat to eat?”

“What a scary Inferno Bone Dragon...”

“Yu Lian-dàsǎo is seriously impressive...”

I emitted sigh after sigh of admiration as I watched my teammates do their best to go berserk. By the time I finished eating my fried rice, the whole arena was in a state of “deep waters and hot fires”, “fallen skies and cracked earth”...¹⁵

Deep waters.

“Wuuuuuaaaaah! Wuaah! Mama didn’t come back! Mamaaaaa!” Meatbun’s two faucets had evolved into two very impressive waterfalls. As a follow-up to the restaurant-booth-flooding incident, Meatbun once again set a new record for flooding a stadium...

Hot fires.

“Fire Phoenix, quickly! Burn all of the damnable spirits to ashes! AHAHAHA!” Gui was already half-insane, and Fire Phoenix was starting to turn into a pyromaniac. Aside from the small area where the members of Odd Squad stood, Fire Phoenix breathed streams of flame all over the place whenever and however it pleased.

Fallen skies.

¹⁵ “**Deep waters and hot fires**”, “**fallen skies and cracked earth**”: The two are both sayings in Chinese. The first means “in deep trouble” and the second basically means a very extreme scene of destruction along the lines of Armageddon.

With a huge, earth-shattering “WHAM!”, Doll’s terrifying Hell’s Inferno Dragon once again “accidentally” rammed into the pillars on the edge of the arena. Blocks of debris the size of human heads went flying all over the arena. Even the spectators in the stands were not spared the misfortune of this assault. *Dodge! Whew, that almost hit me.* As for the one responsible for the catastrophe... Doll just stood to one side of the arena with her head tilted, wearing an innocent expression on her face...

Cracked earth.

By the time Yu Lian-dàsǎo’s terrifying *Earthquake* spell was cast for the eleventh time, the floor of the arena had already fragmented into six slabs of rock of different sizes, and showed signs that they would be fractured into even more pieces...

In short, the immediate surroundings is one of airborne rocks and pillars of white light shooting into the sky together, while the seas of flames and floodwater surge as one. Wonderful! What a wonderful hell on earth! The spectators around me had long since fled for their lives. The referee was clinging on for dear life to the only pillar that the bone dragon hadn’t KOed. Listening to the broadcast by the commentator Xiao Li would have given anyone the impression that Armageddon had arrived, and as for Spirit Spirit Team... I really couldn’t tell if any of Spirit Spirit Team’s spirits had survived. *Someone should have, right? Otherwise, the match should have ended already.*

In the end, Wolf-dàgē – who still had a little bit of reason left in him – finally stopped. He surveyed the surroundings and then howled, “Enough, that’s enough! Everyone stop right now! We have already avenged Prince. I think Prince’s soul in heaven will rest easy now.”

Hearing her husband’s roar, Yu Lian-dàsǎo also stopped. She looked at the ruined arena and said in a choked voice, “Prince, you can rest in peace now...”

“Prince-gēge... Waaah!” Tears welled up in Doll’s eyes again.

“Prince! I have avenged your death!” Gui howled at the sky, tears glimmering on his lashes. “Do you hear me, Prince? *We’ve AVENGED YOU!*”

I swallowed a mouthful of *guazi*, took a swig of my Coke, and dodged another surge of flames. “Okay, okay, I heard you.” *Although you’re yelling in the wrong direction, Gui. I’m not in the sky, I’m here, by your left hand side!*

In the arena, Wolf-dàgē lifted his head to look at the referee, who was perched on top the pillar. He asked, “Referee, aren’t you going to hurry and declare us as the victors? Unless you want us to continue wreaking havoc? You should know that my team members aren’t very patient people.”

Hearing that, the referee almost began to cry as he hurried to explain. “But there’s still a survivor in the Spirit Spirit Team. According to the tournament rules, all members of the opposing team must either be dead or have surrendered. Only then can I declare the victors...”

“Surrender! We surrender!” Wolf-dàgē didn’t even have the chance to open his mouth before a shrill voice cried out from under the rubble of rocks. Wolf-dàgē walked over and shifted the rocks away, only to see a flower with a single petal left lying in a pathetic state under it.

The referee looked as relieved as a man who had just been saved from certain death. “Victory goes to Odd Squad! Victory goes to Odd Squad! They have successfully cleared the preliminaries and entered the finals!”

I ran down to the arena floor happily and hugged my teammates. *That’s great! We’ve cleared the preliminaries!*

Sometime later, I heard a strange rumor about me. Someone said that I was even more terrifying dead than alive. *What’s that supposed to mean?* Like Meatbun, I could only listen uncomprehendingly with wide, innocent eyes.

Chapter 4: Fate

“Listen up, guys!” Wolf-dàgē’s tone was serious as he addressed us before the start of our first round in the finals. “We will need to work harder than ever now that we’re in the finals. The opponents that we are going to face will definitely be worthy foes. We must not take them lightly.”

All of us nodded earnestly.

“Lolidragon, do you know who we’re fighting next?” I asked. Lolidragon nodded, and I took another bite of bread before pressing her for details about the enemy.

Lolidragon wrinkled her brow and said, “They’re called ‘Ascendant Dragons’. I haven’t heard any special rumors about them, but their team’s combat strength seems to be pretty average. They only managed to get into the finals because they haven’t met any strong opponents thus far, so they *should* be pretty easy to handle.”

I let out a sigh of relief. “That’s great, then. It seems like our first match will be a cinch.”



I stepped into the arena, looking the epitome of cool as usual, but... Although it was normal to be nervous during the first match of the finals, my legs felt like jelly. My eyes were listless, my mind was completely blank, and my lips drew into a tight line as I stared dumbly at the opposing team.

At the center of that team, a very conspicuous couple was engaged in an extremely cloying and disgusting public display of affection...but that wasn’t the reason for my sudden loss of composure. The reason I was so shocked was because...

They were my *parents* – the same parents who had left my brother and me to fend for ourselves for months at a time as they went on their Nth honeymoon!

My god, Dad and Mom! You guys went on a honeymoon – how did you guys end up in Second Life?! How am I supposed to fight? If I beat up my parents, will I be considered an unfilial daughter? Worse yet, if I’m found out, MY ALLOWANCE WILL BE HISTORY.

“Prince, what’s the matter? Is something wrong?” Lolidragon asked, looking slightly concerned.

“Uh...everything’s fine!” I answered, willing myself to calm down. *It won’t happen! Even my own twin brother – who sticks to me from dawn to dusk – doesn’t realize that I’m his sister, the lovely Feng Lan. If that’s the case, there’s no way that my parents –*

who go on honeymoons two hundred days a year – would recognize me! My allowance won't be reduced for beating up my parents...



“Hubby, don’t you think that hottie over there looks a bit familiar?” remarked Ascendant Dragons’ mage, the lovey-dovey wife. The more she looked at him, the more she felt like she had seen Prince before...

The lovey-dovey husband looked fondly at his wife and, upon hearing her words, reluctantly raised his head to look. He replied, “Eh! He does look a tad familiar. Could he be one of our neighbors?”

“No idea!”



I rolled my eyes. *Dad, Mom, can't you talk more softly? Even my teammates can hear you!* Helplessly, I met the probing eyes of my teammates and shrugged innocently.

“Battle, begin!” the referee mercilessly shouted.

Ah, it started, it started! What do I do? My thoughts were in disarray as I looked at my teammates and then at my parents, my mind a battlefield of conflicting emotions.



“Honey, the fight’s started. Let’s finish this quickly so we can get on the plane and head home.”

“Oh...but if we go home, it won’t be just the two of us anymore! Plus, you’ll have to cook and do the chores, and you won’t be able to spend time with me. It’ll be so bothersome!” the lovey-dovey wife said, her face clearly revealing her desire not to return home.

“Haha, don’t worry! I’ve trained Feng Lan well! We’ll tell her to do the chores and cook. That way, I’ll be able to spend all my time with you, okay?” replied the lovely-dovey

husband. *Hahaha*, he thought. *As the saying goes, 'Care for a daughter a thousand days, and she will take care of you for the rest of your life'!*¹⁶



Mom! Dad! I've changed my mind! A vein popped on my forehead as I clenched my fists till my knuckles cracked. *Even if it means that I will lose every cent of my allowance for the rest of my life, I will beat both of you to a pulp!* “Prince...?” The members of Odd Squad looked at me in astonishment, as my entire body seemed to blaze with an unseen fury.

“I. Will. Obliterate. Them!” The words were ground out from between clenched teeth.



In the real world...

Briiiiing! Briiiiing!

I stretched my hand out to turn off the noisily ringing alarm, and removed my game helmet.

Pinched by guilt, I wondered, *Was I too brutal to my parents? Hmph! Forget it, they were the ones who betrayed me first, so they can't blame me for getting back at them. Besides, all I did was punch my dad about a few hundred times. And I was really merciful to my mother; I killed her in one hit!*

I stretched, crawled out of bed, and went to prepare breakfast. *Today's the first day of school; it'll be bad if I'm late.* I decided to quickly wash up, and then do battle with the mess of eggs, toast, and coffee.

Striding out of the kitchen with the aromatic plate of breakfast, I saw my brother lazily sprawled out on the dining table.

“What's for breakfast, sis?”

¹⁶ **Care for a daughter a thousand days, and she will take care of you for the rest of your life:** In Chinese, this is “养女千日用在一生” (*prn. yǎng nǚ qiān rì yòng zài yì shēng*), which literally means “take care (as in feed and clothe) a daughter for a thousand days and she will be useful for the rest of your life.” This is a pun on “养兵千日用在一时” (*prn. yǎng bīng qiān rì yòng zài yì shí*), which means “take care of a soldier for a thousand days and he will be useful for a short moment.”

“One specially cultivated energy-boosting egg, high class French toast, and a cup of thick and creamy Turkish coffee.”

“Oh... So it’s an egg sandwich with a cup of coffee!” my stupid brother said, before boorishly grabbing the plate and beginning to wolf it down. *Waaah! That’s the breakfast that I poured my heart and soul into making! Can’t you eat it in a more gentlemanly manner?*

I suddenly remembered something. “By the way, we’ll need to buy groceries after breakfast. Mom and Dad are coming back.”

“Eh? How do you know?” my brother asked, giving me a suspicious look.

My heart nearly stopped. “Uhhh...they called.”

“Really...? Since when did they learn to call and check up on their children?” Disbelief was clearly written all over my brother’s face.

“Just eat your toast, all right? If you keep pestering me, I’ll see to it that you don’t get dinner tonight,” I bellowed, pushing my guilty conscience aside.

“Okay, okay! ...You’re always threatening me with food,” whined Yang Ming.

“What can I say? Food’s the only thing that works on you,” I said with a shrug. *In this respect, we are clearly siblings.*

Food is not our only common ground. Let me make it clear here that this unfortunate bond between my stupid brother and I goes a LONG way back. In both elementary and middle school, we were in the same class. We went to the same high school (although we were in different classes, as the school separated boys and girls), and now, we have the same classes in university. There’s only one way to explain this situation: fate.

I seriously suspect, however, that the REAL reason we have the same classes in university is because my lazy brother secretly copied my career planning form as he was too lazy to even fill out his own! (Not that he’s admitting to it!) In any case, we now attend the same university and even have the same classes. (Just as a side note, the university is very close to home, so we live at home and go to school via public transport.)

“Hurry up, sis! The bus is about to leave!” Yang Ming roared furiously.

“Okay, okay!” I yelled as I began sprinting madly, swearing silently, *Stupid Yang Ming! You think my agility and the length of my legs in real life are the same as they are in ‘Second Life’?*

Out of breath and panting hard, my brother and I entered the classroom a minute after the bell rang, where I discovered that the teacher was already at the podium! I hurriedly bowed and apologized to the teacher. “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t worry, just quickly find a seat and sit down.”

The teacher’s deep, gentle voice soothed me, but somehow it felt weird...

Why is this voice so incredibly familiar? An alarm sounded in my brain, and with some reluctance, I slowly raised my head to look at the teacher.

Wow...what a handsome face... GUI! I stared at him, slack-jawed and bug-eyed, and thought, *Am I still playing?*

“Sis? If you want to stare at hot guys, at least do it *after* you get to your seat.” My brother’s infuriating voice rang out in the classroom, and my classmates erupted in laughter.

I could only stagger to my usual seat in a stupor. My two best friends sat next to me: Gu Yun Fei (he’s male, but he’s a gossip queen so Jing and I treat him as a female) on my left and Lü Jing (she’s a cute girl) on my right.

“Who’s he?” I asked Yun and Jing, pointing at the familiar face at the podium.

“Seems like he’s a new professor,” Jing replied as she stared at the “new professor”, clearly mesmerized.

“He’s too young to be one!” I looked at “Gui” in disbelief. *He can’t possibly even be thirty years old. He’s definitely not a day over twenty-five, at most twenty-six! He’s only a few years older than the students, but he’s already a professor?*

“I heard that he’s a genius with an IQ of 200, that he entered university at the age of fifteen, graduated at eighteen, received a doctorate at twenty-two before furthering his studies overseas, and returned with another doctorate at twenty-five. And, at twenty-six years old, top universities in the country were all vying to employ him as a professor,” Yun said, envious.

...Then he might not be Gui after all! Whether or not Gui actually has anything inside that head of his is something I’ve been deeply suspicious about to this day. Still...he looks too much like Gui. He looks exactly as Gui does in Second Life, without any beautification whatsoever.

Professor “Looks-Like-Gui” smiled and said, “Good morning, students. I am your new Professor for History of Chinese Literature, Min Gui Wen; you can just call me Gui. I’m actually not that much older than you, so I hope we can get along like friends.”

I collapsed onto my desk. *If I said he isn't Gui, who would actually believe me? Gui is my professor? My god, I DON'T BELIEVE IT!*

"Jing, can you help me ask him – Professor Min – if he plays *Second Life*?" I asked, having gathered up my courage. I decided to ascertain once and for all whether my luck really was that rotten.

Jing regarded me with suspicion. "Why don't you ask him yourself?"

"Uhhh, I... I'm shy!" I replied with a weak laugh.

"..." Jing and Yun looked at me incredulously and my face burned with embarrassment.

"I have no idea what you're trying to pull... Fine, whatever, I'll help you ask! I'm interested, since I play *Second Life* as well," Yun muttered. He then raised his hand and asked, "Professor Min, may I ask you something unrelated to class?"

Professor Min replied with an easygoing smile, "You may."

"Do you play *Second Life*?"

Professor Min paused for a moment, surprised, and then replied enthusiastically, "Of course! I'm taking part in the Adventurers' Tournament. My team has already cleared the first round of the finals!"

Four out of every five students present gave a surprised exclamation, such as "Really?", "That's incredible!", or "What team are you in?"

As the atmosphere in class livened up, Professor Min also dropped his professor-like demeanor and answered all the questions happily. "I'm a bard of the demon race. I'm a member of Odd Squad."

"Odd Squad? That's a very famous and weird team. I heard that their main fighter, the warrior Prince, is extremely strong and incredibly handsome!" Yun exclaimed.

Professor Min... Gui enthused, "Yeah! Prince is really very strong, and he's also extremely handsome."

"Are you serious? Even more handsome than you, Professor?" Jing asked, astonished.

"He's much better looking than me," Gui replied, his expression serious.

"Oh my god, Lan, did you hear that? Aren't you playing *Second Life*? Have you ever seen Prince?" Jing suddenly grabbed me by the shoulders and began shaking me, causing me to snap out of my zombie-like trance.

“I guess... you could say so!” I replied weakly, all my strength drained away now that the truth had been confirmed.

“Ohhh...so you must have seen Professor Min in *Second Life*! That’s why you wanted us to ask him, right, Lan?” Yun said, his bright voice attracting Gui’s attention.

Oh my god, Gui is looking at me! I avoided his glance and casually raised a hand to cover my face even as I mumbled, “Nah. I went to watch the Adventurers’ Tournament, so I saw him from afar, that’s all.”

Out of the blue, a disgruntled voice rang out in the classroom.

“Prince? Hmph!” Feng Yang Ming’s scorn was clearly written all over his face.

“Do you have something against Prince?” Gui asked. His expression had become frosty, and the atmosphere in the class cooled rapidly as well.

Yang Ming’s head was tilted to one side, his posture a clear display of arrogance as he replied, “I just had a run-in with him before, that’s all.”

I regarded the tense atmosphere between my brother and Gui nervously, but for some reason, Gui seemed to have frozen. The look in his eyes was too complicated for me to figure out. The chilly atmosphere lasted for a while before...

“Stand up,” Gui said in a stern voice.

Everyone in the class emitted an apprehensive gasp. I, too, glanced anxiously at my brother, deeply worried that he would offend the professor on the first day of classes. Yang Ming’s expression stiffened, and then he slowly got to his feet. Although he was doing as he was told, the look in his eyes said that he had no intention of backing down.

Gui seemed shaken at first. Then, as though he could hardly believe his eyes, he spoke at long last. “Prince...?”

Yang Ming looked at the professor uncomprehendingly.

“...” My eyes widened. *What is this scene that I’m seeing?*

Gui seemed to have realized that he was behaving oddly in front of his class, because he immediately calmed down and smiled. “You may sit down now! Let’s do a roll call so that I can get to know everyone.”

I sat there uneasily with a heap of unanswered questions until the dismissal bell finally rang. As soon as Gui walked out the classroom, I immediately collapsed onto my table. I thought, *Just how exactly am I going to get through this semester? And Gui exclaimed*

“Prince” when he was looking at my brother earlier on – what on earth could that mean? Could Gui have mistaken my brother for me? That’s impossible...

CRAP! I thought, having suddenly remembered that Gui was GAY! ...*If he mistook my brother for me, then... Oh god!* My blood seemed to freeze within my veins.

“Lan, Lan! Professor Min said that if we play *Second Life*, he’ll take us to meet the members of Odd Squad. I *sooo* wanna meet Prince!” Jing said with a longing face, “So I’ve decided to play, can you help me level?”

“...” **SWEAT**

“Lan, tell me your username. I’ll PM you once I’m online and we can power-level Jing together! After that, we can all go and meet Prince. I want to ask him how he managed to become that strong,” said Yun, his expression similarly anticipatory.

“I...” *What should I do...? I want to cry...*

“What’s the matter? Or could it be that your level’s too low and you’re too embarrassed to tell us?” Yun asked, laughing.

“Err, yeah, that’s it! I didn’t train much, so I can’t help power-level Jing. You can take care of her,” I said hastily.

Puzzled, Jing said, “So what? We’ll just ask Yun to power-level the two of us in that case!”

I cast about for an excuse, any excuse. “I...uh, my hubby will power-level me!”

“*Ohhh* – so you just don’t want anyone barging into your private world, huh! You traitor, ditching your friends for a guy,” said Jing and Yun, poking fun at me.

“I...” *Waaah... I really want to cry now...*



In the school clinic...

Gui stepped into the school clinic. Leaning against a wall, he watched the tall, broad-shouldered doctor inside, who was busy putting away the medical equipment. After a long while, he finally said, “I met a student today who really resembles Prince.”

The doctor’s back seemed to freeze for a moment. Then he turned around. “What a coincidence! Prince is also here?”

“I’m not certain if it’s actually him. In terms of their looks, they’re not that alike, but their posture and attitude are almost identical,” Gui said, his brow creased with thought.

“Try asking him?”

“I wanted to ask at first, but he didn’t seem to recognize me. I don’t know if he’s just pretending not to know or if he really just isn’t Prince.” Gui raised his head and looked at the doctor. “Wolf-dàgē, should I ask him or not?”

“About that...hmmm!” Wolf-dàgē’s – Lee Tian Lang’s – rough-hewn and open face was filled with hesitation. “Your appearance is exactly the same in real life as it is in-game, so if he really is Prince, he must have just been pretending not to know you, since he could probably recognize you... Why don’t you just ask him tonight, when you’re online?”

“Hmm, all right,” Gui replied, deep in thought.



At this time, I had just dragged my exhausted self home, where I saw my dad and mom fuming in the living room.

“Dad, Mom, you’re back,” I greeted them cautiously.

“*XIAO LAAAAAN!*” my mom suddenly hugged me tightly and began sobbing incoherently.

Shocked, I didn’t know what to do, so I turned hurriedly to my dad and asked, “Dad, what on earth happened?”

“It’s all because of that Prince...” my dad said indignantly through gritted teeth. “It took us so much effort to get into the finals, only to be defeated in the first round by him. Damn him!”

“...” *It’s about my male alter-ego again*, I thought, breaking out in cold sweat.

“That damn Prince, I hate him,” said my mom as she looked up, her face contorted with hatred.

“Who said that they hated Prince?” Yang Ming asked as he came through the door. “I hate that punk too – he stole my chicks and caused me to get punished on the first day of school by my professor. I’ll kill him, even if it costs me my life!”

“That’s right! We will kill him, even if it costs us our lives!” echoed my parents.

“...” **Cries* I finally understand how you felt besieged by enemies on all fronts, Xiang Yu!*¹⁷



Online...

I met Lolidragon the moment I logged on to *Second Life* that night.

“Prince, you look rather pale,” said Lolidragon. She looked at me worriedly as I alternated between sitting down and pacing about uneasily.

“Is Gui here yet?” I asked, not really answering her question. Instead, I kept glancing left and right, unable to calm my heart down.

“Not yet... Since when did you care about him that much?” Lolidragon asked, looking at me with uncertainty.

“Quit having fun at my expense, Lolidragon! You have to save me!” I wailed as I hurtled into her arms.

Lolidragon clearly received a fright from my action. She quickly asked me what on earth had happened, so I tearfully recounted today’s tragic encounters. First, I told her about my meeting with Gui, and then about how he actually mistook my little brother for me. After that, I told her about my brother’s resentment towards me, and finally, about how even my parents vowed to kill me or die trying...

My god, this has to be my unluckiest day ever.

“Hmmm...” *He really is pitiable. It’s such a big world, yet Prince simply had to run into Gui – this must be fate!*

After three seconds of silently commiserating over Prince’s misfortune, Lolidragon began to feel that the whole incident was...very interesting!

¹⁷ **Xiang Yu:** Xiang Yu is one of the most prominent generals in Chinese history. Following the death of Qin Shi Huang, the Qin dynasty came to end (overthrown by Xiang Yu) and there emerged two groups – the Chu and the Han. Xiang Yu was of the Chu nobility, and thus he rose to assume the kingship of the Chu, but he was defeated ultimately by Liu Bang, leader of the Han and ancestor of Liu Bei (you know, that Three Kingdoms fellow).

According to legend, Xiang Yu was surrounded on a battlefield when he and his bodyguards made a final stand. Xiang Yu ultimately fell on his sword (some said he decapitated himself), preferring to die to on the battlefield and with his honor intact. After his death, the Han dynasty came into power. Go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiang_Yu for more information.

Unfortunately, with my head buried in her arms, I did not notice that Lolidragon – who delighted in chaos – was grinning evilly, her fox’s tail showing...

“You don’t need to be so worried, Prince. You don’t even need to rush to deny it; I suspect that Gui might not believe you anyway. It’s only a matter of time before we meet Feng Wu Qing, and when that happens, Gui will realize that he’s made a mistake,” said Lolidragon.

In her head, she was thinking, *Still, before we meet Feng Wu Qing... Heh heh, there’ll be a good show to watch!* Lolidragon’s grin grew even more cunning...

“Really?” I asked, my brows furrowing.

Lolidragon began to nod frantically.

“Then...okay, I guess!” I said. *I’m still a bit hesitant, but... Sigh! What will happen shall happen. What can I do about it, anyway?*

Lolidragon suddenly pointed behind me and said, “Gui’s here.”

I froze. As I turned slowly, Gui’s familiar face with its playful, cheerful smile came into view.

I forced my tense facial muscles to relax and smiled awkwardly. “Morning, Gui.”

“Good morning, your Highness is as beautiful and noble as always on this morning.” Gui gave a sweeping bow as per usual.

“Yeah... Ahahaha...” I laughed weakly.

Gui – who had already raised both hands to protect his head in preparation for a beating – froze for a moment, before raising his head and giving me a puzzled glance. The playful smile that was originally on his face had disappeared, and the brainless Gui was replaced by the Gui with an IQ of 200. He stared deeply into my eyes as though he was contemplating something.

“Prince, are you still a student?” he asked.

“Eh? Uh, yeah!” I replied, and my heart nearly leapt out of my chest.

He continued to stare intently at me as he asked, “Do you attend XXX University?” He finally mentioned the name of my university.

Breaking out in a cold sweat, I lied through my teeth and said, “No.”

“Oh.” The word “suspicion” was clearly written in Gui’s eyes as he looked at me thoughtfully.

My face paled, and I turned to look at Lolidragon, but all she did was give me an “OK” sign. *OK? Is there anything in the world less OK than this?*

Luckily enough, Gui suddenly changed the topic. “Oh yeah, I met Wolf-dàgē at my school. He’s the school clinic’s doctor!”

Hearing that, my eyes nearly fell out. “WHAT?”

Wolf-dàgē is at my school as well? Oh god, is this series of fated encounters going to continue for much longer? GIVE ME AN ANSWER, GOD!

Even as I was cursing the heavens, Lolidragon was reviewing the tournament’s elimination flow chart with indecision on her face. Unfortunately, I had no interest in hearing who our next opponent would be. *Doesn’t matter who it is, I’ll just vent all my anger on them!* I thought vehemently.

Just then, Wolf-dàgē’s voice rang out clearly, and I crawled unwillingly from my dark corner of despair to listen. “This time, our opponent is someone we know. It’s Rose Team.”

WHAT? This was yet another heavy blow to me. I crawled back into my dark corner to bewail Fate’s prejudice against me. *It’s bad enough that I can’t vent my anger, but why does it have to be Rose Team, whose members all think that I’m gay...? Waaaaaaaaaah!*

“This match might prove troublesome for Gui,” Yu Lian-dàsǎo said, looking at Gui with sympathy.

“Yeah, poor Gui.” Lolidragon, too, was looking at Gui as though he were someone who had already died.

However, Gui and I were both extremely confused. *What does this have to do with Gui? Aren’t I the one who deserves more sympathy?*

“I heard that Rose and Fairsky formed a support group for Prince, and that they’ve managed to get a lot of girls to join. Their group name seems to be... Rescue the Super Handsome Prince from the Demonic Clutches of the Gay Guiliastes and Help Prince Understand the Goodness of Women Once Again Support Group.” Lolidragon finished saying the name of the group in one breath, and almost choked in the process.

What sort of strangely named support group is that? I thought as I listened, flabbergasted. *A support group has actually formed because of me? My god, am I not in enough trouble as it is?*

“Moreover, in order to give Gui a huge thrashing, they’ve been undergoing a special training regimen recently. Fairisky has also spent a lot of money on all kinds of godly weapons, which have greatly boosted Rose Team’s combat strength,” Yu Lian-dàsão added with a frown and a sigh.

There’s finally someone with worse luck than me, I thought, heaving a sigh of relief. I then gave Gui a look of commiseration. Unfortunately, the grin on my face completely gave away the fact that I was actually rejoicing in his suffering.

Gui merely smiled.

“For Prince’s sake, I can handle anything,” he said. He looked at me, his feelings written clearly on his face. He was promptly taken aside for a beating ...

Right now, I can hardly be bothered with the fact that he is my professor. After all, he’s currently under the impression that I’m Feng Yang Ming! Even if Professor Min Gui Wen wants his revenge in real life, he won’t be looking for Feng Lan... Heh heh, Lolidragon’s advice is actually pretty good!

“While Prince is preoccupied with beating up Gui, let’s put our heads together and come up with a battle plan,” Wolf-dàgē said sternly. “Can anyone think of a way to deal with their godly weapons?”

“Hmph! I don’t believe that my Black Dao would suffer in comparison to a godly weapon!” I replied, even as I threw another punch at Gui.

“I also don’t feel that their godly weapons are that big a deal. I don’t believe they could beat us by using godly weapons alone,” Lolidragon added coldly. “Money isn’t all-powerful; money can buy godly weapons, but not the skill to use them.”

I lowered my fist for a moment and said slowly, “Lolidragon, you seem...rather pissed off?”

Lolidragon scowled, and shouted bitterly, “Of course I’m pissed off! Do you know how much money Fairisky spent on those godly weapons? Ten million real life dollars! She spent an entire ten freaking million dollars, just like that! If I had ten million, I wouldn’t have to work my ass off as a G– I WOULD HAVE RETIRED!”

So, basically, you’re jealous that she has so much money, I thought, looking helplessly at the resentful Lolidragon.

“Then first of all, let’s set aside the issue of the godly weapons. Now, Rose Team is comprised of two warriors, one archer, one priest, one mage, and one thief. It’s a pretty good team combination, but it shouldn’t pose much of a problem to us. Still, just to be on

the safe side, we should take them seriously and not underestimate them,” Wolf-dàgē said seriously.

All the members of Odd Squad nodded in agreement, except for Gui... It wasn’t his fault, however, since a person who has passed out on the floor couldn’t possibly nod.



As I led the way into the arena, the unmistakably familiar faces of the members of Rose Team came into view. Standing at their helm were Fairsky and Rose, their expressions aggrieved as they looked at me. Inwardly, I felt extremely awkward, but on the surface, my expression was as cold and distant as ever.

“Prince...” Rose called out to me hesitantly.

I raised my hand, cutting her off. “Say nothing now. A match is a match; if there’s anything you want to talk about, it can wait until after the match.”

Hearing my words, tears began to well up in Rose’s eyes. The sorrow and hurt in her gaze intensified...

Uncertainty suddenly assailed me. *Did I say something wrong?*

“Prince, how could you say something so heartless?” Fairsky was filled with resentment, and she cried out, “Do you know how much we think of you each day? We attend every single one of your matches to cheer you on, and we even formed a support group for you. Is all that still not enough to move you?”

I’m heartless? I just wanted to deal with the matter at hand first! I really don’t understand the way girls think...

Shit! Am I becoming less and less like a girl and more like a guy!?

“Let’s get started!” I had no choice but to continue speaking coldly. *Only after we’ve taken care of business can I openly discuss that support group with the super-hard-to-pronounce name with them.*

The familiar voice of the judge rang out. “Battle, begin!”

Doll immediately summoned her skeletons. According to my calculations, the skeletons and I would be more than enough to keep Li’l Strong and Broken Sword busy. I decided to take care of Broken Sword first and leave Li’l Strong for the skeletons to take care of. Our conversation in the restaurant booth had made me realize that Broken Sword was a foe to be reckoned with.

As expected, Broken Sword swept his blade towards me with a cry of “*Swaying Sword Style!*”.

I immediately blocked his attack with my Black Dao, thinking, *Hmph! My brother has described the contents of Jin Yong’s novel series to me so many times that I already know them like the back of my hand.* There was a shower of silver and golden sparks as our weapons met with a resounding sound of metal clashing against metal.

Broken Sword was a worthy adversary, as I had predicted. As we fought back and forth, my blood began to boil from excitement. After we exchanged a series of blows, we found ourselves locked hilt to hilt. Disengaging, we each retreated a few steps for a slight reprieve.

“You are indeed strong, Broken Sword,” I said, looking at him with respect.

“Quit talking trash.” Broken Sword’s eyes were vengeful and filled with hatred, shocking me to the core.

What’s wrong? There’s really no reason for him to hate me this much, even if he does believe me to be gay, right? After all, I didn’t XX or OO him, right?

“A match is just a match, Broken Sword. Is there really a need for you to hate me this much?” I roared even as I blocked his sword with my dao.

“If it wasn’t for you, our Rose Team would not have become like this!” Broken Sword cried out agitatedly.

“Become like this?” *Like what?* I thought, and froze... but, most unfortunately, freezing up on a battlefield was not a smart thing to do. Even though I managed to block his sword, I was punched square in the face by his left hook and fell to the ground.

Broken Sword immediately used his knee to pin me against the floor, and placed his sword against my throat. He had clenched his teeth together so tightly that he was grinding them as he stood over me.

Through gritted teeth, he spat, “It’s *you*. *You’re* the one who changed Rose and Fairsky. Rose can only stare at your picture all day long and cry. Meanwhile, Fairsky keeps spending thousands and thousands of dollars to buy godly weapons, or to bribe opposing teams to surrender, just in hopes of meeting you in one of the matches. This team... *T-this team!* If not for the fact that we don’t have the heart to abandon Rose and Fairsky, the four of us would’ve quit this team a long time ago.”

By now, both teams had stopped to listen to Broken Sword’s words. I was no different – I could only listen to his accusation dumbly, before turning to look at Li’l Strong, Legolas,

and For Healing Only. They were all glaring at me with a mixture of fury and indignation.

Rose had covered her face with her hands and begun to cry, while Fairsky shouted resentfully, “Can’t I like him? The person I like is Prince and Prince alone. No matter what, I will never give up. No matter what methods or strategies I have to use – even if I have to spend immeasurable amounts of money – I will never give up.”

“Without sparing a thought for the number of people you will hurt – people who are by your side, and care for you?” Doll asked, looking sorrowfully at Fairsky. A twinge of guilt flickered across the latter’s face.

I listened, feeling rather numb, as the usually childlike Doll actually said something so mature. *There’ve just been too many astonishing happenings today. My nerves have taken too many shocks; I can’t feel anything anymore.*

“I don’t care!” Fairsky yelled, covering her ears as though she could block out Doll’s words. “And Broken Sword, move your weapon away from Prince! Don’t you dare hurt Prince, or...or I’ll take back the godly weapon I gave you!”

The instant those words left Fairsky’s mouth, everyone realized that she had made a huge mistake. Broken Sword’s face first flushed. Then it turned pale, and then green...

He gave Fairsky a pain-filled look before wordlessly moving his sword away from my throat. With a loud clang, he tossed the sword to the ground. Then, he turned and left the arena.

“Broken Sword...” Fairsky watched him as he left, stunned.

There was another clang as a heavy object was dropped to the ground. Li’l Strong had discarded his large axe as well.

“That’s enough, Fairsky. I don’t want your money,” he said before following Broken Sword out of the arena. With a cold expression, Legolas threw down his bow and left without saying a word. Finally, For Healing Only heaved a deep sigh and let go of his staff, casting a sorrowful glance at Fairsky and Rose before leaving.

Rose looked at the backs of the departing Rose Team members, and the expression on her face betrayed her inner struggle and indecision. At long last, she walked towards me and said, “Prince, I will learn to forget you.”

Then she suddenly wrapped her arms around me and KISSED ME...

My mind was a sea of white. Feeling completely numb, I thought, *Great! Another event to add to my list of shocking events for the day... I've just given my first kiss away to a beautiful woman!*

“Good bye, Prince.” Rose said with a tearful smile – a smile that seemed to say that she had freed herself from something at long last. I watched as she gracefully turned and left. Although she may have stolen my first kiss, I still wished her well from the bottom of my heart, and I hoped that she would find her true Prince Charming next time.

“Rose, you’re leaving too?” Fairsky shouted. “Even you are leaving me?”

Rose paused in mid-step and took a deep breath before replying. “Yes, I’m leaving. I hope you too can snap out of it soon, Fairsky.” Then she continued to walk away.

“I don’t want to! I don’t want to give up! I won’t give up, Prince,” Fairsky shouted at me, her eyes full of tears. Then, she fled from the arena, sobbing into her hands...and for some unknown reason, Doll chased after her...

As the first team that I’d met when I had first started out in *Second Life* crumbled apart before my very eyes, there was an indescribable pain in my heart. However, what upset me even more was...

Is it my fault? I couldn’t help but wonder, After all, isn’t it me who caused Rose Team to become like this?

“Lolidragon, is my deception also hurting many people by my side who care for me?” I asked over team channel.

“Err... Well, I think Gui enjoys being hurt by you,” Lolidragon replied casually.

“Lolidragon...” I said reprovably, but she interrupted me immediately.

“You needn’t concern yourself with it, Prince. Trust me, it isn’t your fault,” she said firmly.

“Really?” I asked, still feeling doubtful.

Wolf-dàgē, Yu Lian, and Gui listened to the dialogue between Lolidragon and I, exchanging confused looks. However, they were very thoughtful and refrained from asking me any questions at the time.



“Fairsky, wait up!” Doll was already out of breath from running, but she was still unable to catch up to Fairsky, who was a thief.

Fairsky spun around. “What do you want? To make fun of me?” she demanded.

“It’s not that. It’s just... I understand Fairsky-jiějie’s way of thinking,” Doll said softly.

“You like Prince too?” Fairsky asked skeptically.

“No, it’s just that Doll’s family is also very rich...”

Fairsky seemed a little stunned. “You...? I couldn’t tell at all.”

“That’s not the main point, Fairsky-jiějie. Doll just wants to tell you that you can’t continue to be like this. Many things cannot be bought with money,” Doll said. Her tone relaxed. “Doll also used to think you could get everything you wanted with money... It was only later that I realized you couldn’t buy anything that truly mattered.”

“But... but I really like Prince. Aside from using money, I don’t know of any other way for me to obtain his heart,” Fairsky said dejectedly. *I’m not as pretty as Rose or Lolidragon, and my personality is too fiery. Without my wealth, how else could I outshine other women?*

Doll replied firmly, “If you really like Prince-gēge, then do as Doll says.”

“What should I do?”

“Apologize to everyone in Rose Team.”

Upon hearing that, Fairsky’s face immediately stiffened, and Doll quickly added, “If you had gotten along well with your team members and worked hard together to defeat our team, Prince-gēge wouldn’t have begrudged you. He might even have really respected you, or liked you a lot! Didn’t you see how much regard Prince-gēge had for Broken Sword-gēge?”

“Mm!” Fairsky agreed reluctantly after a moment of thought. After all, it wasn’t like she wanted such a rift between her and the other members of Rose Team, either.

“Doll, you really are an unusual person,” Fairsky said, looking at Doll curiously. “Who exactly *are* you...?”

Doll only smiled mysteriously.



As always, it was time to eat up and rest after a match. Gathered in the restaurant with a huge number of dishes on the table in front of them, the members of Odd Squad...watched helplessly as I heaved yet another sigh. I hadn't even picked up my chopsticks.

"To think that even food can't cheer Prince up; this is truly unprecedented!" Lolidragon said helplessly. She looked around the table, but everyone else just shook their heads, unable to think of a way to improve my mood.

"Sigh..." I had been mulling over what had happened to Rose Team; the guilt that weighed my heart down felt like a stone that had been picked up from a pile of dung – it was crushingly heavy and reeked disgustingly. Even if I wanted to, it was impossible to pretend that I didn't care...

In particular, Doll's words kept echoing in my head. *Should I just come clean with everyone?* I wondered. *But what will happen if I tell the truth? What if they can't accept it?* I was on the verge of pulling my hair out. *What should I do? What should I do?*

"Don't blame yourself for this, Prince. After all, there are too many girls out there who like you. There's just no way you could possibly return all of their feelings," Yu Lian-dàsão said gently.

"But..." *The problem is that I'm a girl, and it remains a fact that I lied to all those girls...*

"But what?" There was a slight note of coerciveness in Yu Lian-dàsão's gentle voice as she asked.

"Err..." My face became white as a sheet. *Do I really have to come clean with them? Is today the day that the truth gets revealed?*

"Prince, what is it that you've been lying to everyone about...?"

"I..." *I'll come clean with the truth then! I don't want to keep deceiving everyone, I thought unhappily. "I'm a gir—"...*

Yu Lian-dàsão interrupted me, saying, "I think the deception that you were talking about refers to something that you have been hiding from us, right? Prince, you don't have to fret over something like that. Everyone conducts themselves differently on the Internet than they do in real life. Take me, for example. I'm actually not nearly this gentle and easy-going in real life!" As she said that, Dàsão even attempted to demonstrate for us by assuming a stern, frowning look...

Dàsão, I think your "gentle and easy-going" shadow smile is far scarier...

Wolf-dàgē also tried to comfort me, saying, “That’s right, Prince. As long as the you in-game is still you, that’s enough for us. What sort of person you are in real life isn’t important.”

“That’s not exactly true, either. After all, what if Prince is one of the ten most wanted fugitives?” Lolidragon faked a terrified expression as she looked me...

You! Get this through your head, you stupid Lolidragon! Who’s the one who’s on the ten most wanted fugitives list? You’re the one who tops the list of “ten most wanted criminals” in Second Life!

“That’s impossible. His noble Highness cannot possibly be a wanted fugitive,” Gui said, looking at me with unwavering certainty. His eyes seemed to say that he trusted in me absolutely...so I began to beat him up. *Why, you ask? Because my hands were itching from not having beaten him up for so long!*

“Yay! Prince-gēge started beating up Gui-gēge! That’s great! It looks like Prince-gēge has recovered at last!” Doll exclaimed as she happily began to watch a certain person beat Gui up.

“Yep, yep, if he can beat up Gui, then it means that everything’s fine now.” The remaining members of Odd Squad nodded in relief.

Whew! That was a long and satisfying work out. It felt like I was using my fists to vent out all the negative feelings that had built up in my heart.

I looked down at the broken and tattered form of Gui. *Thank you for your sacrifice! I placed my palms together and prayed for his departed soul. May you rest in peace!*

It was about time for us to go offline. “See you, guys,” said each of my teammates in turn. I watched as everyone logged off one by one, but just as I myself was about to log off to cook breakfast, Gui suddenly grabbed my trouser leg.

He raised his head and looked up at me, his gaze as unwaveringly certain as before.

“I’m sorry, Prince...”

“Huh?” I was completely mystified. *Since when does a victim apologize to the person who beats him up?*

“I won’t try to pry into your affairs anymore,” Gui said, gazing at me tenderly. His expression was so captivatingly beautiful that it set my heart aflutter.

“No matter who you might be, I don’t mind,” Gui said, his voice intense.

Oh really? For some reason, I felt very displeased upon hearing that sentence. I thought, *You're gay, but I'm a girl. Are you sure you don't mind?*

“Even if the person I am in real life is drastically different from the person I am in-game?” I asked coldly.

“I firmly believe that who you are now is the true you, just as the person I am right now is the true me,” Gui said firmly. “Everything else is of no importance – be it gender, appearance, or even the facades we assume in real life... none of those are important.”

Gui's words made me very curious. *Does that mean that the brainless Gui is the real Gui?*

“So the Professor Min in real life is just a facade?”

As soon as those words left my mouth, Gui froze.

I froze as well. *Doesn't that sentence clearly imply that I know Gui in real life?* My face paled, but there was no way out of this now, so I looked at Gui sternly and said, “I am not Feng Yang Ming.”

I might as well say it. After all, the cat's already out of the bag. Besides, if it means preventing Gui from continuing to mistake my brother for me... See how nice I am to you, Yang Ming? Waaah...

Gui suddenly recovered his composure and, with a smiling face, replied simply, “Mm, you're not Feng Yang Ming, then... I'm not Min Gui Wen, I'm Guiliastes!”

Wait a... Oh my god, forget jumping into the Yellow River,¹⁸ I think even jumping into bleach won't clean this mess up! Bro, I didn't set you up on purpose. I've already tried to clear your name. This is heaven's will; I have no say in it!

¹⁸ **Forget jumping into the Yellow River:** Here, Feng Lan is referring to a Chinese saying, which goes, “Jumping into the Yellow River won't wash you clean of your transgressions/the stigma of suspicion”.

Chapter 5: Zhuo Lin Bin and Ou Yang Mei

From the time I woke up, cooked breakfast, chased after the bus, all the way until Gui's class ended, my mind was on only one thing: *Should I sneak into the school clinic and take a peek at Wolf-dàgē or not?*

Rationally speaking, it would be wiser for me not to go; after all, who knows if Wolf-dàgē will recognize me or not? However, emotionally speaking... Ohhh, I REALLY want to see what Wolf-dàgē actually looks like! There's just no way he resembles his in-game counterpart, is there!? That's obvious, since Wolf-dàgē isn't a werewolf.

Uncertain about what to do, I could only start plucking flower petals... "Go look, don't go look, go look, don't go look, go look..."

Suddenly, a deep voice spoke from behind me. "Miss, you can't pluck flowers here!"

"Sorry, sorry," I apologized, bowing to the groundskeeper uncle.

I think I'll go and take look after all! Having made up my mind, I turned around to go to the school clinic, but I suddenly thought, Shouldn't I get some small injury first before going? Otherwise, what would my excuse for going to the clinic be? But injuries hurt and this isn't like in the game, where I could just drink health potions to heal my injuries. A real injury will hurt for many days, plus it would also leave a scar! I don't want to get injured... But I won't get to see Wolf-dàgē otherwise. What should I do?

"Sis, what are you doing here?" Yang Ming suddenly appeared and gave me a slap on the back.

"AHHH! You scared me, pighead Yang Ming!" I said.

I'm in the midst of agonizing over something!

"What are you being so fierce for? Did *that* come?" Feng Yang gave me a knowing wink.

That? Ah, right, that! Now I've got an excuse.

I gently pushed the clinic's door open and poked my head in for a look. *It seems like there's no one around?*

"Is something the matter, little girl?" said a hearty voice behind me.

I turned around, startled. *Is this the human edition of Wolf-dàgē? Wooow! Even though he's not handsome, he's very stylish in his own right. How should I put it — he's like an*

authoritative, elder brother figure from an action manga, with a loud and commanding voice... Fine! I admit that my analogy is a pathetically poor one.

Wolf-dàgē looked at me as I scratched my head, then gently asked, “Female student, where are you hurt?”

I returned to my senses. “Uh, I— I have cramps...” I said. Even as I rubbed my stomach, pretending to be in pain, I continued to peek at him from the corner of my eye.

Wooow, Wolf-dàgē is really as tall in real life as he is in-game. My neck muscles are starting to feel sore from having to look so far up at him, since I’m only 165 centimeters tall.

“Oh, then quickly lie down on that bed over there. I’ll go and get you a hot water bottle now.”

I lay on the bed obediently, but my eyes continued to follow Wolf-dàgē as he moved around the room. *Heehee, is my staring making Wolf-dàgē a bit embarrassed? Somehow I get the impression that his back looks very, very stiff—I never expected Wolf-dàgē to be so shy!* Secretly, I was giggling inside.

Holding the hot water bottle, Doctor Li Tian Lang said as gently as possible, “Here, place this on your stomach. It’ll make you feel better.”

I accepted the hot water bottle gratefully. *Wolf-dàgē really is as gentle in real life as he is in-game.* “Thank you, Wolf-dàgē,” I said sincerely.

Wolf-dàgē and I both froze. *My god, I really must be an idiot!*

“My class’s Professor Min told everyone about you! I— I heard that you two are good buddies in-game? I’ve also watched your tournament matches before, so I actually went out of my way to catch a glimpse of you... Hahaha, I’m sorry, I’m not really having cramps,” I said, laughing weakly. *God, please let Wolf-dàgē believe my story!*

“Oh, so Gui told you about me!” Li Tian Lang recovered, laughing. “You gave me a shock, since usually only that fellow – Prince – calls me Wolf-dàgē. Everybody else calls me Wolf-gē, or just Wolf. What class do you play in-game? Are you in a team?”

I charged headlong into the rest of my cock-and-bull story. “Uh, I’m a mage. As for a team... Yes, but it’s not as famous as yours. Wolf-dàgē probably hasn’t heard of it!” *Waah, Wolf-dàgē, I didn’t intend to deceive you!*

“Oh. Do your best then!” Li Tian Lang reached out and patted me on the head and I giggled as always. “Write your name and student ID number on this patient log-sheet. Even though you were only pretending, it’s still better to fill it out.”

“Okay.” I took the sheet from him and filled in my name.

“Well, there aren’t many people around now, so you can lie here until you want to leave!” Wolf-dàgē said to me with a smile.

“Haha, I’m leaving,” I replied, getting off the bed. *Yeah right, continue to lie down? I haven’t even cooked dinner yet; I’m going to be cornered and killed by three people once I get home.* “Goodbye, Wolf-dàgē.”

“Good-bye.” Li Tian Lang gazed after me as I pushed the door open and left.



Li Tian Lang raised the log-sheet in his hand and carefully scrutinized it... “Feng Lan? Feng Yang Ming? Hmm...”

The door was pushed open a second time.

“Wolf-gē? Was that my student just now? Is she hurt?” Gui worriedly inquired.

“No, she came to see me. Who asked you to go around blabbing about me!” Li Tian Lang said reproachfully.

Gui was completely perplexed. “Me? Did I ever talk about you?”

Upon hearing that, Li Tian Lang pondered silently for a while before asking, “How is Feng Lan related to Feng Yang Ming?”

“They’re twins — why do you ask?” Gui asked, puzzled.

“No real reason.” However, Li Tian Lang still felt that Feng Lan and Prince’s actions were very similar. When he patted Prince’s head, Prince had also giggled in the same way. *Or is this resemblance simply due to the fact that Feng Lan and Feng Yang Min are twins and twins often behave alike?* “I’ll go see what Feng Yang Ming looks like some other day.”

“Hmm... But I promised Prince that I wouldn’t pry into his affairs anymore,” Gui said, sounding troubled.

“You may be right. Well, if Prince doesn’t want to tell us, then let’s forget it and let nature take its course! I won’t pry either,” said Li Tian Lang candidly.



At this time I was walking home, unaware that my identity had almost been exposed. I was just thinking about whether to cook spare rib soup or potato soup when Rose walked past me. I looked up, wondering, *Should I say hello to her? But the last time we met she said that she would forget about me. I wonder if she's still willing to be friends with me...*

Wait! I glanced down as I tugged my shirt collar wider – *I have breasts!* I looked around me. *It's a normal residential area. I'm in the real world, so how is it that I'm seeing Rose?*

I gathered my focus and looked at her again. Rose was now standing next to the bus stop sign post, waiting for the bus. *This is such a weird feeling... Wait a second! The guy standing about three steps away from Rose looks reeeally familiar... Wicked? MY GOD! Worse still, it seems like I'll be taking the same bus as them!*

Ahhh, Buddha! Ahhh, God! Ahhh, Allah! I began chanting a Buddhist scripture as I formed a cross in front of myself with my arms. *I beseech you all! This must be a hallucination... Or let it be a daydream! Waaaaaaaah...*

However, reality remained cruel as ever. I still ended up boarding the bus and standing side-by-side with the two of them... *Forget it, after all, they probably won't— No, they absolutely won't be able to recognize me!*

I stole a look at the hottie and the beauty standing next to me. *Rose is indeed very beautiful and Wicked is also very handsome! The two of them really are eye candy – is it possible that they're a couple?* I secretly wondered.

Still, even after many stops, neither of them seemed to have any intention of getting off the bus. My home was at the last stop.

Crap, it can't be anything as coincidental as them being my next-door neighbors, right? No, that's impossible. Our next door neighbors are my mom's older sister's husband's uncle and his family, aren't they?

Besides, if there was a hottie such as Wicked among my distant relatives, my mom would have dragged me to a matchmaking session a long time ago. That way, my mom could get this piece of male eye candy married into our family¹⁹ — I mean, get me married into his family, and then have me bring him home for her to feast her eyes upon.

As I speculated wildly, Rose alighted one stop before mine. I breathed a sigh of relief. *That's one less person for me to worry about now.*

¹⁹ **Married into our family:** Chinese society used to be (and in some ways, still is) patriarchal. Thus, when a woman gets married, she marries into her husband's family and moves in to live with them.

Finally, the bus reached my house. I stole one last glance at Wicked's handsome features before tearing my gaze away and stepping down from the bus...

Ehhh, someone seems to be following me!

Cold sweat poured down my neck as I turned my head back to look, only to see Wicked smiling faintly at me. *Huh? Just what exactly is going on here?!*

Although I was panicking inwardly, I forced myself to appear outwardly calm as I returned Wicked's smile. I then turned, ready to flee.

"Wait," Wicked suddenly called out to me.

I briefly considered the situation at hand. With my current height, leg length, physical strength, and stamina, I couldn't possibly hope to outrun Wicked. *Forget it then!* I thought, resigning myself to my fate as I turned around to face him. "Is something the matter?"

"Xiao Lan — you are Xiao Lan, right?" Unexpectedly, there was a warm expression on Wicked's face.

He knows me? He even knows my name? I was astounded.

"You've forgotten then... I'm Zhuo Ling Bin — Zhuo-gēge. Remember me?"

Zhuo-gēge? The one who used to live next door when I was a kid and eventually moved away — THAT Zhuo-gēge? I gaped at Wicked, trying to digest this mind-boggling revelation. *Is this for real? Such a huge coincidence? Wicked is Zhuo-gēge?!*

"Are you really Zhuo-gēge?"

"That's right! You finally remembered. I wasn't quite sure just now whether you were really Xiao Lan. Perfect timing, though — I was just getting worried that I'd forgotten how to get to your house." Wicked...no, Zhuo-gēge smiled as he looked at me.



After dinner, I carried a tray of freshly brewed tea to the living room where my bro and Zhuo-gēge were merrily chatting away. According to Zhuo-gēge's explanation, he had been at XXX University.

That's MY university too! I couldn't have guessed that he is actually conducting his graduate studies' experiments at my university's laboratories!

There, he had seen me by chance, so he had specially made the trip over to my house to see if it had really been me.

Just as I sat down quietly, I heard their conversation turn to *Second Life*...

“Incredible, so Yang Ming is Feng Wu Qing – does that mean that we have been in the same team all along?” Zhuo-gēge had a flabbergasted expression on his face.

Hearing that, I suddenly remembered as well. *Yeah, that’s right – my brother and Zhuo-gēge are both members of Dark Emperor, aren’t they?*

“So Zhuo-dàgē is Wicked-dàgē, and I didn’t even figure it out.” Astonishment was written all over my brother’s face.

What’s there to be so astonished about? You couldn’t even figure out the in-game identity of your own older twin sister, who was even born from the same womb as you were! Don’t even mention Zhuo-gēge, whom you haven’t seen in eight years, I thought scornfully.

“Then Ming Huang is Zhuo Ming Bin?” my brother suddenly exclaimed. “He’s quite different from how he used to be as a kid. He seems to have become much more bad-tempered.”

What? Ming Huang is Zhuo-dìdì?²⁰ It can’t be true – Zhuo-dìdì used to be so cute and affectionate, always following me around and calling me “Jiějie”... How could he be that violent not-male, not-female, Ming Huang? Don’t ruin my beautiful image of Zhuo-dìdì! I cried.

Zhuo Ling Bin smiled helplessly. “That kid is in his rebellious stage!”

Zhuo-gēge then suddenly turned to me and asked, “Do you also play, Xiao Lan?”

I hesitated for a moment before answering. “Uhhh, yeah.”

“She’s even trans there!” My brother – who simply couldn’t resist dropping the bomb on others – had actually blurted out my secret! I glared at him relentlessly, hatred and regret overflowing in my heart.

GOD... Why did I tell my secret to the biggest loudmouth in the Feng family?!

“Trans? That shouldn’t be possible in *Second Life*, right?” Zhuo-gēge looked at me in disbelief.

²⁰ **Didi:** This suffix means “younger brother” in Chinese, but can also refer to younger boys whom the speaker is close to.

This prompted my brother – who had a mouth bigger than the Three Gorges – to immediately begin to recount the entire story to Zhuo-gēge. I kept my head bowed low from the beginning to the end of his narrative, hoping that Zhuo-gēge would forget what I looked like... Or forget what Prince looked like.

“So that’s how it is?” Zhuo-gēge smiled at the jittery me and said, “Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone.”

But I’m not afraid of you exposing my secret, I’m afraid that you’ll recognize me...

Zhuo Ling Bin glanced at the clock and got to his feet, saying, “It’s getting late, I should get going. There’s still a match later tonight. I’ll see you later in *Second Life*, Yang Ming.” My brother gave Zhuo-gēge an OK hand signal.

“I’ll walk you to the door, Zhuo-gēge.” I walked him out conscientiously.

Zhuo-gēge halted as we reached the entrance. With a slight smile on his face, he said, “Xiao Lan, I hope that I can meet you in *Second Life* one day!”

“Yeah.” *We’ve already met!*

Hearing that, Zhuo-gēge’s smile broadened, and I suddenly felt that the smile was painful to look at. *Zhuo-gēge, please don’t put any more pressure on me!*

Just then, he asked, “I heard that your teacher is Gui from Odd Squad?”

“Yeah.” *Why have you turned the conversation to Gui now? Do you know that it makes me nervous?*

“I’m really interested in Odd Squad. Another day, I’ll go sit in on your class. Your professor will definitely be very surprised to see me.”

Yeah, that’s right! If he sees how close you are to my brother, he might think that you’re his love rival! I thought wickedly to myself, trying to imagine the situation. *It promises to be pretty interesting...?*

As soon as I thought of that entirely possible and very interesting scenario, I forgot all about the jeopardy my identity was in. I smiled cheerfully as I said, “Sure, sure. Just give me a heads up before coming and I’ll tell my brother to save a seat for you.”

“Oh? I’d much rather sit beside you instead,” said Wicked. Before I could react, he had already waved goodbye and left, leaving me frozen in place behind him.

Next to me, Yang Ming whistled loudly. “Looks like Zhuo-gēge is very interested in my big sis. Sis, you can take advantage of him in *Second Life*. Dark Emperor’s dark elf warrior, Wicked, is quite famous!”

Rely on Wicked in Second Life? I imagined the situation: *Two lovey-dovey men walking hand in hand with one another. Then, to that, add another guy – Gui – watching jealously from the side... Could anyone look at such a picture with a straight face?*

I shook my head impatiently, clearing it of that somewhat disgusting image. Paying no more heed to the whole mess of events and identities, I was about to return to my room and log on to train in *Second Life* when...

“Xiao Lan, have you guys finished chatting? Come and meet your cousin²¹ who has just come back from America,” said my mom with a broad smile as she beckoned me over to the living room.

“Cousin?” I asked uncomprehendingly.

“That’s right! While you guys were chatting with Ling Bin, your cousin dropped by for a visit. She’s the third daughter of my sister’s husband’s uncle who lives next door.” The smile on Mom’s face grew even more incandescent. With a face filled with questionable intentions, she pulled my brother to her and whispered, “Son, even though your cousin is older than you by two, three years, she is very beautiful. Plus, she’s a distant relative who isn’t related to you by blood, so if you have the chance...”

That brother of mine – who loves to flirt with girls – actually crudely replied, “I don’t have any interest in big sisters. I only like girls around my age.”

In any case, my brother and I still obediently went to greet our cousin. Upon walking into the living room, my brother adopted an innocent expression, wearing a smile that was specially meant for dealing with older relatives.

You fraud! I thought, even as I put on my most ladylike smile and looked at my cousin...

My brother and Rose simultaneously exclaimed out loud:

“Rose?”

“Wu Qing?”

“What rose? This is your cousin Ou Yang Mei,” my dad said, looking questioningly at the two of them.

²¹ **Cousin:** In this case, “cousin” actually means “older female cousin on the paternal side of the family” specifically.

My fingers were trembling. “How can this be? Didn’t you clearly alight at an earlier bus stop just now?”

Rose... Cousin Ou Yang Mei looked at me. “Bus? Oh, I got off a stop earlier because I wanted to buy some fruits as gift. Were you also on that bus, Cousin²²?”

“Forget the bus, are you really my cousin?” Yang Ming asked disbelievingly. “Aren’t you younger than me?”

“I’m twenty-three years old this year. I’m just baby-faced.” Ou Yang Mei smiled helplessly. “To think that you’re actually my cousin, Wu Qing.”

“Yeah...”

“Hold up – is anyone going to explain to the two of us *parents* what in the world is happening?” My dad and mom finally interjected, unable to watch silently anymore.

“It’s nothing much, just that Cousin and I were previously in the same team in *Second Life*,” Ou Yang Mei said with a weak smile.

“So that’s how it is...”

My dad, mom, brother, and cousin immediately started chatting cheerfully amongst themselves. I, however, just sat stiffly beside them, occasionally smiling. In my heart I was thinking, *Not only have I killed my dad and mom and snatched my brother’s women as Prince, but I’ve gone so far as to dump my cousin...and I even kissed her.*

Then...when Prince’s cover is blown – is that when I’ll be disowned by my family?

With those realizations, I wailed in my heart, *Who is Prince? I’m not Prince...*

²² **Cousin:** In this case, “cousin” actually means “younger female cousin on the paternal side of the family” specifically.

Chapter 6: The Truth, Revealed?

Online...

“Prince! Prince, are you online? Quick, come to our usual place. We’ve got a huge problem.”

The instant I got online, Lolidragon PMed me with such urgency in her voice that, before I even got a handle on the situation, I had already begun to run toward the meeting place.

“What happened?” I demanded, as I charged into the restaurant booth with an anxious expression.

“Right, now that everyone is here, I can start talking. The officials have announced that today’s match will be cancelled,” Lolidragon said calmly. Everyone in Odd Squad widened their eyes in surprise. “The competition is delayed until next week, when all teams will participate in the melee to decide the champion team.”

“What will the melee consist of? And why did they suddenly change the competition method?” Wolf inquired thoughtfully.

“The rumor is that they made the change because this competition had too many participating teams, which caused the competition to drag on for too long and has severely affected normal game play. So the officials decided to resolve everything in one go.

“A melee is where all teams are gathered on one arena at the same time to fight. The team the last person standing belongs to will be declared the winner. No pets will be allowed to help out in the fight.” Lolidragon paused, then drew in a deep breath and said, “In total, there will be one hundred teams, which means this will be a melee with six hundred participants.”

Everyone was left speechless for a while.

“Surviving amidst six hundred people?” I muttered to myself. “I think in all likelihood I’ll be the first one to be hacked to death.”

It can’t be helped, but...Is it my fate to be so handsome that every man who sees me will want to hack me to bits? Can’t I go into the competition wearing a mask?

“That’s right; seems like it’s impossible to hope for Prince’s survival,” Wolf sighed. “Since I’m such a huge target, it’s likely that I won’t be able to hold out for long. Our best hope will be Lolidragon, I guess. Her agility is so high and her build is quite slender and small.”

Lolidragon laughed dryly. “Don’t pin your hopes on me. I heard that there are already five teams saying that they would be willing to give up the chance for victory just to watch me die a horrible death.”

Man... Lolidragon, what exactly did you do that was so serious that even your beauty couldn't prevent trouble? The rest of Odd Squad stared disbelievingly at Lolidragon, but the person in question merely shrugged casually. “I’m just too bored when you guys aren’t here, so I used the Steal ability... I only wanted to help earn some team money.”

I leveled a trembling finger at Lolidragon and asked, “How much exactly did you steal?”

“One million, six hundred and fifty-five thousand, seven hundred and twenty dollars²³... Plus a *Soul-Heaven Royal Sword* and a Taoist robe that she hasn’t sold yet,” Yu Lian-dàsão meticulously reported. After a pause she added, “That’s just the portion that Lolidragon gave us to be used on team expenses.”

“Lolidragon, how much did you steal for yourself?” Both my menacing gaze and the blade of my menacing Black Dao were drifting between Lolidragon’s neck and heart.

“Not much...” Lolidragon’s face was artless and innocent. Hearing her words, I relaxed a bit. *If it isn't much, maybe we can just return all the money to the people that she stole from...*

“I only bought two suitcases from LV and three evening gowns from Chanel...”

“Two suitcases and three evening gowns? That’s not too bad. We can just pool the money from all six of us to cover the cost,” Wolf and Gui, neither of whom knew the difference between life and death, commented lightly.

“You guys don’t understand!” four terrifying women roared simultaneously... and then everyone gave me a weird look. (Except for Lolidragon, who seemed happy... *Grrr!*)

I coughed fiercely in an attempt to cover my mistake. “*Ahem*, I’m somewhat familiar with popular brands...”

“So just how much does all that cost then?” Gui asked uncomprehendingly.

Yu Lian-dàsão’s eyebrows furrowed as she calculated. “Two suitcases...? One suitcase costs approximately two hundred thousand dollars, so that’s about four hundred thousand... and if the three gowns are the latest season’s...” She rested her palm against

²³ **Dollars:** It’s not very clear just what currency we’re talking about here (that is, whether this is in-game currency or real-world currency). If this is in-game currency, then this would be 1,655 crystals, 7 g (gold) and 2 s (silver). If this is real-world currency, then the dollars here would refer to the New Taiwan Dollar (TWD), and the sum here would be approximately 50,112 USD.

her forehead and looked as if she was going to faint. Wolf quickly placed a hand on his wife's shoulder to support her.

“*LOLIDRAGON...*” I growled, resting my Black Dao against her neck again. “How much is it exactly?”

“I guess it's roughly one and a half million for the suitcases and the latest season's gowns,” Lolidragon said, blinking her eyes innocently.

Everyone's expressions turned blank.

“Let's give up on Lolidragon then. We should try to think of a way to ensure the survival of the rest of the team; there's a much better chance of that happening,” I said in defeat after a moment. The others nodded weakly in agreement.

“That leaves only Yu Lian, Doll, and Gui?” Wolf asked as he scratched the fur on his head. “Yu Lian and Gui both belong to physically weak classes – mage and bard respectively – so it would be kind of hard for them to survive, too. Doll has the best chances; she'll have a lot of skeletons to protect her.”

Therefore, our chances for victory rest on Doll? We looked as one at the innocently smiling Doll. Yes! Our chances do look pretty good after all. Doll is so adorable... Surely no one would have the heart to bully her, right?

“It's decided then. Everyone protect Doll!” Wolf said decisively.

“There is still another way, you know,” Lolidragon said, waving her forefinger. “Wicked from Dark Emperor just PMed me and asked if we want to form an alliance with them.”

“Alliance?” I asked uncertainly.

With a mysterious expression, Lolidragon explained, “Actually, it's an open secret that a lot of teams have formed various large and small alliances in order to win. Once the competition starts, the alliances will fight each other first, after which the alliances will break up into their teams and face off. Finally, the surviving remnants of the team will fight to the last man in order to determine the winner.

“Hence, if we form an alliance with Dark Emperor, then we will start the competition by fighting against other teams first. If both our teams can survive until the end, then the final confrontation will be between our teams.”

“But the allied teams may end up being a hindrance to their allies,” Wolf remarked in a worried voice.

“That’s why we all need to decide whether we can trust Dark Emperor Team or not,” Lolidragon said as though that was the obvious answer.

“If my memory serves me correctly, our teams are sworn enemies,” Gui replied coolly. 100% disapproval was written all over his face.

“One vote against, one vote in favor, so it’s a tie for now. What about other people?” Lolidragon had begun to keep count of the votes with considerable enthusiasm.

The furrow between Wolf-dàgē’s brows grew deeper, and deeper, and deeper, until at last he said in a troubled voice, “I also vote in favor. We don’t know any other teams and surviving alone is too hard.”

“I’m with Wolf.” Yu Lian-dàśǎ looked at Wolf lovingly. She always followed her husband’s opinions.

“Wow, that’s already half of us in favor of it. Prince, Doll, how about you two?”

“Doll doesn’t mind either way,” said Doll, an especially pure and ethereal smile on her face.

“Prince.” Everyone stared at me. *But I... I really don’t want to see Wicked now, and who knows if he’ll suddenly see the light and recognize me as Feng Lan? My stupid brother already told him I’m trans... However, more than that, I don’t want to be mashed into a meat paste during the melee.*

“In favor.”

“Then it’s decided!” Lolidragon said happily. “We will undergo special training with Dark Emperor every day this week.”

“Lolidragon, what are you so happy about?” I asked Lolidragon with suspicion in my eyes.

Lolidragon winked at me, then PMed me her reply. “Feng Wu Qing will be there. When Wolf-gē and Gui see your brother, the misunderstanding will clear up. Haven’t you always wanted to resolve that misunderstanding? See how nice I am to you?”

The problem is, after solving the problem with my brother there’ll be a new problem, this time involving Zhuo-gēge... God, why are you so unwilling to go easy on me? Sigh, I don’t care anymore. After all, Wicked shouldn’t be able to recognize me...right? I tried to console myself uneasily.



“It’s been a while, Prince.” Zhuo-gēge... no, *Wicked’s* distant smile appeared before my eyes once again. At his back was a clearly annoyed Ming Huang, whom I used to call Zhuo-xiǎodidi, and at his side was the charming and suave Feng Wu Qing, who was fanning himself with a feather fan. *My stupid brother...*

No wonder they are my sworn enemies!

“Feng Yang Ming?” Gui looked at Feng Wu Qing, dumbfounded, before turning back to look at me.

“Hello, professor,” Feng Wu Qing said, grinning. “It didn’t cross your mind that I might be a member of Dark Emperor, did it?”

Judging by Gui’s disbelieving expression, I think the thing that he didn’t expect was you being a member of Dark Emperor instead of Prince in Odd Squad.

“You— Are you really Feng Yang Ming?” Gui still looked flabbergasted, as though he could not bring himself to believe that he had actually gotten the wrong person.

“Yes?” Feng Wu Qing queried, looking oddly at the professor who seemed to be a tad *too* shocked.

As for me, I realized I had thwarted my own plans, since I’d wanted to entertain myself with the scene of Gui and Wicked fighting over my brother and getting all jealous. *What a pity!* Still, looking at Gui’s astonished expression and my brother’s apparent confusion, I found a different entertainment...

With a considerable effort, I suppressed my laughter and said seriously, “We are very happy to be able to work with Dark Emperor. I hope that both teams can support each other till the end.”

“Let’s hope that is the case.” Wicked smiled faintly.

“When the time comes, don’t blame us for defeating you lot and winning the competition,” Ming Huang said with a face filled with malice. It was obvious that he hadn’t desired an alliance with Odd Squad in the least.

On the surface, I merely looked silently at Ming Huang, but in my heart I sighed, feeling infinitely regretful. *Why has the cute Ming Bin from before become so bratty now? Should I help Zhuo-gēge teach his wayward brother some manners?*

Wolf-dàgē suddenly clapped his hands. “Okay, that’s it for everything that is unrelated to the competition! The thing that is most important for us now is the battle next week.”

Hearing that, Gui, Feng Wu Qing, Ming Huang, and I – who were all either staring or glaring daggers at each other – reluctantly withdrew our gazes and paid attention to Wolf-dàgē as he spoke.

“It is my opinion that we should try to practice surviving in a situation where we are surrounded by enemies on all sides. Hence, I suggest that we find a training place that is filled with mobs,” Wolf-dàgē said.

“Dàgē, it’ll be very easy to become pillars of white light if we do that,” I said apprehensively, breaking out into cold sweat. The others also swallowed nervously, looking somewhat petrified by the thought.

“To win, one must always make sacrifices,” Wolf-dàgē said ruthlessly. “Of course, it’s also best not to lower our team’s level whenever possible.”

Sigh! Ever since I first met Wolf-dàgē, I had come to understand the phrase “To resign oneself to one’s fate”. Since Wolf-dàgē had determined that I had the lowest chances of survival in the team, he ordered me (*Yes, that’s right! It was definitely an order!*) to use my final moments to kill as many mobs as possible, so as to buy time for my other team mates to escape. This way, our team’s level wouldn’t be lowered by unnecessary deaths.

And that’s how I’ve ended up running for my life with a huge bunch of mobs hot on my heels right now...

Time really seemed to drag on forever, with every second feeling like a year... After a few thousand years, I finally accomplished my impossible mission and pulled²⁴ dozens of monsters away from my team without lighting any fireworks (*that is to say, turning into a pillar of white light*).

I was so tired that I crawled back to my team on all fours like a dog. But just when I was about to sit down comfortably on the sidelines to watch Wicked’s Flawless Frenzied Sword-Dance and Feng Wu Qing’s Flexible Sword Technique...

“Prince, there are too many monsters again. Hurry up and pull them away,” Wolf-dàgē shouted at me from the other side of the Great Wall of Monsters.

My eyes glazed over like those of a dead fish and I was left speechless...

“Hurry up and pull them away! I’ve already cast Wrath of the Nine Heavens twice and we still can’t clear them!” Ming Huang shouted, his face clearly showing his annoyance.

²⁴ **To pull a mob:** Gamer lingo for luring a mob (or multiple mobs). This is usually done by either the meat shield (a.k.a. the tank) or a ranged attacker. As most mobs in MMOs tend to attack the first fellow who provokes it – either by stepping into its “aggro” range or by attacking it – this will ensure that the mob does *not* attack the other members of the group.

I shot Ming Huang a savage glare, but took out Meatbun resignedly. “Meatbun, use *Machine Gun Meat Attack*.”

“Are we roasting meat again Mama? But I don’t see Fire Bird.” Meatbun said, eagerly hopping here and there, looking for Fire Phoenix.

“HURRY UP AND FIRE!” both teams — twelve people in total — roared together.



I boarded the “number 11 bus”²⁵ once again and started running, and running, and running... *Bloody hell!* A devastated expression crossed my face and I mentally wailed in a tragic voice: *There. Is. A. Cliff. Ahead!*

For the first time in my life, I truly felt that my abysmal sense of direction was criminal.

What am I supposed to do about the horde of mobs that were eyeing my back with a predatory gaze? I stared at the cliff — *it looks high enough that a fall would lead to certain death...* — then turned back and stared at the huge number of mobs behind me.

They could probably just trample me dead... Plummet to my death? Or be trampled to death? This...seems like a difficult choice?

Hanging onto my final shred of hope, I switched to the team channel and asked, “Wolf-dàgē, how many monsters are there left at your side?” *Do you have the time to come and save me?*

“The monsters’ numbers are just fine; I think we can clear them in half an hour.” After Wolf finished replying to me, there was no further news from his end.

Half an hour? There might not even be ashes left of me by then...

I clutched my beloved Black Dao tightly and muttered under my breath, “Come and get me! You stupid monsters, even if I die I will drag some of you to the grave with me.” The first ones to rush at me were a Bosilimi²⁶, a spider monster with a human head, a huge slime monster, the very aggressive leader of a tribe of pygmies, and—

²⁵ **Number 11 bus:** This is a very commonplace joke... Just think, what do your legs look like?

²⁶ **Bosilimi:** Spider-bodied, human-headed monsters are in no short supply in most fantasy novels, although their names vary from book to book (alternative names include Spidrens and Dryders). An interesting side note: this is probably the very first hint in ½ Prince that the author is a fan of R.A. Salvatore. (Yes, Yu Wo loves Drizzt. She loves him so much that she even created a drow character similar to Drizzt in a later novel.)

There's just too many of them! I gulped and retreated a few steps, but I hadn't noticed that I was already next to the cliff's ledge, and in a moment of inattention...



"Done at last!" Lolidragon groaned as she sprawled beside the road. She was panting heavily; the distance she'd covered wasn't any less than Prince! Due to her higher agility but lower attack power when compared to the idiotic Playboy Lord, Lolidragon ended up having to be the bait that lured the mobs to run in circles.

On the other side of the road, however, Wicked and Feng Wu Qing were even worse off. Not only had they had to chase the mobs, they'd had to fight mobs too until their arms had turned to jelly. Both of them were panting heavily and their faces were pale.

"Ok, is anyone dead or injured?" Wolf asked as he stood up and looked over everyone. "Report!"

"1," said Human warrior Feng Wu Qing.

"2," said Dark elf warrior Wicked.

"3," said Human mage Ming Huang.

"4," said Human thief Playboy Lord.

"5," said Elf archer Ambusher.

"6," said Angel priest Black Lily.

"Mm...all members of Dark Emperor Team are here." Wolf turned to look at his own teammates. "Five people? Isn't Prince back yet?"

"Prince, where are you? We're done fighting!! Stop lazing around and come back quickly," Lolidragon shouted through the team channel, but there was no response even after a long time.

"What happened? Don't tell me Prince is dead?" Gui's face became anxious.

"It's possible," Lolidragon said, recalling the huge amount of mobs that Prince had pulled away the last time... *He might really have died.*

"I'll PM him to see whether he is online or not."

"Well?" Wolf asked, concerned.

“Weird, he is online but he isn’t replying.” Lolidragon furrowed her brows.

“Perhaps he’s angry?” Wicked opined impassively. “We did force him to lure a ton of mobs away... Perhaps that was a bit too mean?”

Everyone in Odd Squad gave Wicked an odd look and said in unison, “That fellow has already resigned himself to fate!”

“Plus he won’t get angry at us; he’ll just vent all his anger on Gui,” Lolidragon added.

“Then what had happened to Prince-gēge?” Doll worriedly asked.

“Who knows? But he probably isn’t in any big trouble,” Lolidragon replied. *It’s an online game, the worst thing that can happen is dying, right?* Lolidragon tried to reassure herself, but at the same time she was slightly uneasy.



Ouch...Did I faint? I tried to raise my right hand to touch my head, which was hurting from a splitting headache, only to find... *Why can’t I move my right arm?*

Of course I can’t, I thought as I glanced at my right hand. It was covered in so much blood that it could pass for a hot dog covered in ketchup.

As for my left hand... I tried to move it, but the pain nearly drove the tears from my eyes. I glanced at my left hand and thought, *Oh, fantastic! My white bones are already outdoors, shopping.*

Next, I weakly opened my mouth to shout, but blood gushed out from my mouth like water from a tap. I no longer dared to verify whether my legs were capable of walking ... *God! Lying here half-dead is more painful than simply dying...*

It hurts, it really hurts! I looked at the cliff that I had fallen off, trying hard to imprint on my memory the knowledge that a fall from this height isn’t enough to kill, and that I should remember not to fall off random cliffs anymore...

No! What am I thinking! I should be hurrying to PM other people to come and rescue me, before I faint again.

“Guys... save... save me...” *The blood in my mouth...how salty...*

“Prince?” Everyone in Odd Squad blanched. “Where are you?! Did you die?”

“Urgh... It hurts... Come and save me soon, or you can just come to kill me off!” The pain had made me delirious and I was starting to spout nonsense.

Gui was so worried that he shouted, “Prince, where are you?!”

“Cliff... Don’t jump off one for fun... It hurts...!” My head spun and I saw stars.

“Hang in there, Prince! Don’t go offline yet; we’ll come find you right away.” *Is that Wolf-dàgē’s voice? It sounds like it’s so far away.*

Pain... P... My consciousness no longer registered any word but “pain”.



All the members of Odd Squad looked as white as a sheet.

“I think Prince has probably fallen off some cliff. Everyone split up to find him, quick! Inform me once you’ve found him so that I can heal him,” Wolf-dàgē bellowed urgently. As soon as he’d finished speaking, everyone dashed off in separate directions.

“We’ll help you with your search,” Wicked offered, concerned.

“Prince, where are you?” Gui was in such a state that he seemed almost like a man possessed. Yelling frantically, he ran helter-skelter as he searched.

After instructing his team members to help with the search, Wicked surveyed his surroundings carefully. *Given Prince’s speed and the direction in which he was headed last, where could he have fallen off?*



In the meantime, I was mentally lamenting my situation.

Why can’t I just die? Could this be considered a miscalculation by the game developers? I have to keep lying here, in such pain and agony, just so that everyone can find me? I’m absolutely going to complain to Lolidragon – the hidden GM – when I see her later...

To divert my attention from the pain, I came up with all sorts of nonsensical thoughts and ideas, but... *Why hasn’t anyone come to save me yet? Wuuuh, it really hurts! Someone save me! Please! Gui, where are you? Let me punch you to vent my feelings, waaah! ...*

Wait, who? Who is that? As the sound of footsteps reached me, I felt so touched that I wanted to see for myself who was approaching...

"I finally found you," the person said as he kneeled down beside me. He took out a health potion and tried to feed it to me, but I barely managed to swallow two mouthfuls.

"Is it Gui?" My vision was so blurry that I couldn't make out the person in front of me... *Who is it?*

"No, it's Wicked. I've run out of health potions, so I'll have to bring you back to the priests for healing," Wicked said as he scooped me up from the ground.

"Oh... So it's... It's Zhuo-gēge!" I muttered to myself in relief.

Zhuo. Gē. Ge?! Wicked thought, stunned. He lowered his head to look at me closely, but I didn't notice because I'd been rendered delirious from the pain.

After peering carefully at my features, he whispered, "The exact same pair of eyes... and last time Yang Ming had told me that she was playing a male character in Second Life. Plus he called me Zhuo-gēge... Don't tell me you're... Xiao Lan?!"

Wicked stared at my pain-riddled countenance with mounting alarm.

"Xiao Lan, is that you?" Wicked asked loudly, his voice filled with distress.

"Prince! We've found Prince!" Gui called as he sprinted towards us. "Thanks, Wicked."

Gui reached out, thinking to take me from Wicked's hold, but Wicked just gripped me closer to him. He ignored Gui and instead walked over to meet Ugly Wolf, who was running over.

"..." Gui could only stare in bewilderment as Wicked stoically strode past him, carefully cradling me in his arms.

Once Wolf-dàgē had finished casting a number of powerful healing spells on me, I finally revived and returned to my usual self – *and boy was I pissed!*

"Why did it take you guys so long to find me? I was in a lot of pain!" I snapped, remembering my earlier miserable situation with a shudder.

"Hey, you were the one who fell off the cliff on your own! We had to exert a ton of effort just to look all over the place for you. How dare you complain still!" Lolidragon retorted, brutally pointing out the facts.

“I...” I was feeling rather sorry for myself. *It’s not like I fell off the cliff deliberately*, I thought, pouting crossly. “Gui, Gui! Explain to me why you were slower than Wicked in finding me.”

“I...” Gui managed a weak, confused smile, but his eyes were filled with guilt.

Not bothering to waste any more time on pointless conversation... *I’ll just start beating Gui up!*

“Xiao Lan?” Wicked suddenly PMed me, his tone indecipherable.

I stopped dead in my tracks and then slowly turned my head back to look at Wicked. *My identity’s been revealed? So in the end...* With no other choice, I dropped Gui and PMed Wicked in reply, “You found out then?”

“Mhmm.” Zhuo-gēge had a strange look in his eyes, leaving me uncertain about what he was planning to do.

“Could you not reveal the truth to anyone else, Zhuo-gēge?” I pleaded, and then added, “Especially that brother of mine, Feng Wu Qing. He’s got a mouth like a broadcasting station.”

Zhuo-gēge stared at me, silently considering my request.

Seeing the situation, I found myself forced to use my tried-and-tested, near-godly cajoling technique. “*Pleeease*, Zhuo-gēge! Don’t tell anyone, *okayyy?*” *Ewww... even I find it disgusting to hear myself sweet-talk someone else with Prince’s masculine voice.*

“Mm.” Zhuo Ling Bin helplessly nodded his head. Obviously he couldn’t stand being cajoled by a guy either.

“Why are the two of them gazing ardently into one another’s eyes?” Lolidragon remarked slyly. “Not to mention that Prince has such a bizarre expression... Looks like your love rival has finally appeared, Gui!”

I gave Lolidragon the evil eye for the nonsense she was spouting and then turned to Gui. The bard was looking at Wicked and me expressionlessly. To be honest, his blank face actually alarmed me far more than any other expression would have.



The next day our teams decided to train separately. As usual, we waited for everyone to arrive before starting. I glanced over at Gui – he had been in a state of depression ever

since the day before, and was just stopping short of having two demon fires²⁷ floating next to him.

Unable to resist the urge, I smacked him on the head and exclaimed, “What are you thinking about? You look terrible.”

Gui looked at me with a searching expression for a while, before replying in a heavy voice. “Nothing much...”

I thought about it for a moment, and understanding dawned. “Are you nervous about the competition? Don’t worry about it; as long as we give it all we have, the result is of no importance. All we can do now is work hard, anyway,” I said as I patted Gui’s back cheerfully.

I’m actually nervous too, but winning or losing isn’t really such a big deal to me. Of course, it’d still be nice to win!

Lolidragon rolled her eyes and shot me a look that clearly said that she thought I was a lost cause. “Prince, your brain is really missing a tendon!”

Hearing her comment, I replied seriously. “Lolidragon, don’t think that I’m completely clueless!”

“Oh? Then you *do* know?” Curiosity was written all over her face.

“I may not be a medical student, but I still know that there aren’t any tendons in the human brain. Don’t try to trick me!” I said crossly.

“You thick-headed moron!” A vein popped on Lolidragon’s forehead.

“Prince.” Just as I was about to retort, Gui suddenly grabbed me by the shoulders and looked at me apprehensively. “Tell me, just *who* is more important to you: me, or Wicked?” he asked.

“You’re more important to me, obviously,” I replied firmly.

Once I answered, Gui’s entire body seemed to glow brightly. Standing to one side, he blissfully replayed my answer over and over again in his head, even as I continued to mutter to myself.

“After all, you are my teammate! And while Wicked might be an ally, we’ll still need to fight him in the end.”

²⁷ **Demon fires:** You’d definitely have seen these hanging next to Gui if you’ve read the manhua version of this scene, or if you’ve ever watched the anime “Ghost Hunt”. They’re called “鬼火” (guǐ huǒ) in Chinese, “onibi” in Japanese, and they’re basically spirits.

As I finished speaking, I suddenly noticed something. *Eh? Why has the atmosphere around Gui gone all dark and heavy again?* I scratched my head, and asked uncertainly, “Lolidragon, did I say something wrong?”

Lolidragon cast Gui a sympathetic look. “No, but it’ll be better if you don’t say anything else.”

“Oh...let’s not bother about Gui then. Wolf-dàgē, what should we do next for our training?” I asked anxiously. “Even Dark Emperor has gone for their secret training, so what about us?”

“*Heh heh...*” Wolf-dàgē’s sly laugh gave me goosebumps. “We’ll also be conducting our own secret training!”

Everyone went “*ohhh*” apprehensively and began to listen attentively.

“If the opponent team only consists of six people, then we would just need to train for higher levels, better teamwork, et cetera. However, when we’re squaring off against six *hundred* people, the most important thing is...” Wolf-dàgē drew a deep breath. “Escaping.”

I collapsed onto the floor... *No, everyone collapsed onto the floor.*

Escaping? We actually need secret training for ESCAPING?

“Don’t look down on the art of escaping. Even the *Thirty-six Stratagems*²⁸ states that escaping is the best strategy, so you can see that escaping can be a really profound area of study. Not only must you possess leg strength so that you can outrun your enemies, you also must have keen eyesight, in order to spot the best direction to escape. In addition, you need to have good judgment to efficiently use every possible trick in your book in the process of fleeing, and to decrease the numbers of enemies that are chasing you.

“Lastly, and most importantly, you need to be good at stealth and be capable of blending into a crowd, so that others won’t think of killing you first.” Wolf-dàgē paused for breath before pointing at Gui, Lolidragon, and me.

“However,” he continued, “Our team has the misfortune of having three individuals who stand out so much that nobody could forget them, even if they wanted to... and one of them even stirred up trouble right before the competition and made herself stand out more.”

²⁸ **Thirty-Six Stratagems:** A famous set of Chinese writings relating to military strategy. The word “stratagems” actually means “ruses”, so you can see why escaping plays such a huge role in it. The writings were often attributed to Sun Tzu (of Art of War fame) or Zhuge Liang (of Three Kingdoms fame), but recent historians believe that the origins of the Thirty-Six Stratagems are not rooted in any particular era or writer.

“Then what should we do, Wolf-dàgē?” I asked anxiously. At the same time, I thought to myself darkly, *Actually, our team has FOUR individuals who stand out, including someone who’s two meters tall.*

“I have already thought of a solution,” Wolf-dàgē replied. As he took out a sack filled with masks, I began to cheer mentally. *Yaaaaay*, I thought, *I can go masked!* I took out a mask and promptly put it on, feeling overjoyed that I wouldn’t have to be hacked to death by those jealous, sword-swinging living creatures.

“Does it look good, Lolidragon?” I turned and asked her.

“If you were planning to stage a robbery, then this black cloth mask that covers your whole head with only three exposed holes would truly be suitable.”

I took out another mask and put it on.

“If you thought you could blend into the crowd during the competition while wearing a safety helmet, then this one would be all right as well.”

Next!

“Right, the quality of this silk stocking is pretty good.”

And next!

“Even I had no idea that they sold Pikachu masks in Second Life...”

Wearing a Pikachu face, I watched speechlessly as Yu Lian-dàsǎo grabbed and twisted her husband’s ear and warned him not to buy objects at random anymore. *Wait a minute; I seem to remember that I have...*

I rooted around in my pouch, finally found my first mask in my life — a masquerade mask. I took off the Pikachu mask and instead put on the old one that covered the upper half of my face.

“How about this?” I turned to face everyone.

“Much better,” Everyone said in unison — except for Wolf-dàgē, who kept muttering insistently that the masks he’d bought were better, since the people on TV always wore those kinds of masks.

“I have a question. Are we escaping separately or as a team?” Gui asked. He began to analyze the situation with a severe expression. “If we all escape together, it will probably have the reverse effect from what we want, right? However, the risks are higher if we

escape separately... So how about we separate into three groups, with two people in each group? That way, we can keep a low profile and still have back-up.”

To think that Gui could actually say something that made sense, I thought, and had no choice but to give him a serious response. “How should we split ourselves up then?”

Gui deliberated for a moment, then said, “Prince with Yu Lian-dàsǎo, Doll with Lolidragon, and Wolf-gē with me.”

I considered his words, but quickly realized that I couldn’t think of any reason for this particular arrangement. “The rationale being...?”

“You and Yu Lian-dàsǎo can be considered a pretty strong combination, so you both shouldn’t have any trouble if it’s just a matter of escaping. In contrast, for our two groups, Doll can sacrifice Lolidragon in order to escape if necessary, while Wolf can sacrifice me.” Gui said impassively. “A warrior’s strength, a mage’s powerful AoE spells,²⁹ a necromancer’s horde of skeletons, and the must-have Priest will all be very useful for our team. A Thief and a Bard are more secondary in importance.”

“I see... then between Yu Lian-dàsǎo and me, who should be sacrificed?” I thought that I should ask first. *Otherwise, what if the wrong person dies?*

Gui’s brow wrinkled for a moment, then he looked at me and said firmly, “I believe that you’ll definitely protect Yu Lian-dàsǎo and at the same time protect yourself. Is that all right?”

I smiled. “No problem.”

After that, Odd Squad began to practice the art of escaping — the recommended strategy of the Thirty-Six Stratagems.

To train our leg strength, everyone tried to come up with an ability similar to Qing Gong³⁰. Of course, Lolidragon and I didn’t need to learn it, since our agility was already extremely high. Then, everyone took turns being chased by Lolidragon, who was holding a torch, trying to scorch us... *Lolidragon, was it just me or were you rather fixated on*

²⁹ **AoE spells:** AoE stand for “Area of Effect”, so AoE spells are basically spells that deal damage within a certain area or radius. Such spells tend to be more destructive, but also require more time to cast, hence are easily interrupted. An example of this is Ming Huang’s favorite spell, “Wrath of the Nine Heavens”.

³⁰ **Qing Gong:** The two characters in “轻功” (qīng gōng) literally means “light” (as opposed to “heavy”) and “skill”. This is a special type of ability that only the top martial arts practitioners in *wuxia* novels are able to execute. To learn it, characters often have to go through some fairly harsh and unusual training, during which they must learn to channel their “qi”, a form of energy, through the proper channels. One example is Little Dragon Girl from *Return of the Condor Heroes*, who is able to sleep by lying on a single length of rope, as though it is a hammock. Qing Gong also allows its user to “fly” by stepping on the air itself or move very rapidly.

singeing my ass? Basically, we were trying in every way possible to make ourselves swifter.

Next, to train our eyesight, we went to a jam-packed street in the most crowded market in Sun City, the largest city in Second Life. There, we tried to seek out the best route that would allow us to worm our way through the street as quickly as possible.

The final winner was the petite Doll. I came to the conclusion that having a big body wasn't always an advantage, because Wolf-dàgē never won. In fact, he never reached the end point, not even once.

To train our judgment, we first considered robbing a bank; that way we could improve our judgment and also increase our team's funds, killing two birds with one stone. The infamy we would gain when committing the crime didn't matter to us – after all, even Yu Lian-dàsão didn't look at our team's fame level anymore. (*We all knew that anyone who saw it would feel heartbroken...*)

Our plan was to rob the bank, split into groups, and then – using various means and methods – we would hinder the guards in the course of escaping... However, after realizing that we might be jailed until long after the competition was over if we failed, we gave up this portion of our training.

Lastly, training the ability to conceal oneself was the easiest. Everyone just walked into the shop, paid one gold coin for a masquerade mask, and it was done.

The rest of our training consisted of killing mobs to grind levels³¹. After some discussion with Dark Emperor, they too decided to employ our strategy. Since the latest rumors said that all of the remaining ninety-eight teams had formed alliances, with each alliance having five or so teams, it seemed like a smart idea...

In such a situation, what else can we do except to escape? Fight them head-on? We'd get decimated!

Although Ming Huang kept bellowing about how we should just slaughter them all with *Wrath of the Nine Heavens*, Wicked, Feng Wu Qing, and I all agreed that we didn't have the ability to fend off tons of opponents at once while protecting our mages. Thus, Ming Huang's "suggestion" was rejected.

Dark Emperor had split themselves up into three groups – Wicked with Ming Huang, Feng Wu Qing with Black Lily, and Ambusher with Playboy Lord. If necessary, the teams would cover for each other.

³¹ **Grind levels:** Gamer lingo which basically means to keep killing mobs, doing quests, or doing any activity that yields experience points in order to level up.

After finding out that Wicked was Zhuo-gēge, I had more trust in Dark Emperor. If Zhuo-gēge dared to go back on his promise, I would certainly give him hell.

There's only one more day until the melee battle...



Real life...

“Xiao Lan...” Zhuo-gēge said hesitantly.

I paused in the act of eating my noodles and looked questioningly up at him. Although I had known that Zhuo-gēge would come to find me to discuss my other identity, I never would have thought that he would ask me out for lunch the day before the competition.

“Mmff?”

“The competition will be very dangerous, so you should be careful,” Zhuo Ling Bin said. There was indecision in his voice and his eyes were filled with worry.

“I will; dying doesn’t feel good at all!” I replied.

What I didn’t tell Zhuo-gēge was that I had decided I would protect Yu Lian-dàsǎo with my very life if necessary, even though I’d told Gui that staying alive would be “no problem”. While I didn’t know whether it was the right decision, at least without me they would still have Doll’s skeletons as a meat shield.

“Mm...”

I smiled at Zhuo-gēge. “I’m going to use the restroom for a bit.”

As I stepped out of the washroom a few minutes later, I smiled happily. The main reason for my joy was that this restaurant’s food was delicious and, for once, I wouldn’t have to pay.

However, as I turned the corner to walk to my seat, Professor Min Gui Wen’s face suddenly entered my view. Alarmed, I immediately hid behind the wall and then stealthily poked my head out from behind it. To my surprise, I found that Gui and Zhuo-gēge were staring intensely at each other.

They sustained this standoff for what felt like five minutes, until even the surrounding customers were starting to look curiously at them. Still, they stared, without uttering a word. I grew so tired just from watching that I had to massage my neck.

“What’s going on? Did they fall in love at first sight?” I muttered to myself.

“Just you wait, I will defeat you,” Gui finally said.

“Oh? And just how will you defeat me? By playing your guqin?” Zhuo Ling Bin retorted disdainfully.

Gui smiled faintly, not backing down an inch. “Prince and I will defeat you together.”

I quickly poked my head out to eavesdrop after I heard their voices.



At Gui’s words, Zhuo Ling Bin’s expression changed and he said scathingly, “What do you know? You don’t understand her³² at all.”

“Although I’ve only known him for a short time, I understand his personality, his likes, and his tendencies,” Gui replied seriously.

“*You* understand her? Do you understand her as well as I do? I have loved her for eight years!” Agitated, Zhuo Ling Bin stood up abruptly, looming over Gui.

Eight years? A brief flash of white, hot pain stabbed through Gui’s chest, gone as quickly as it had come. He shoved the sensation aside and managed to retort, “Eight years and you have yet to win his heart... and you still believe that you have hope?”

His words wedged themselves into a crack in Zhuo Ling Bin’s heart. They’d found their mark, his weakness, with unerring accuracy.

The two men glared fiercely at each other, neither willing to back down first.



Meanwhile, I stood confusedly at one side, thinking, *So they are love rivals? Who is that lucky girl?*

Wait a moment, Gui is gay! That must mean they’re fighting over a man! Eh? Zhuo-gēge is gay too?! This is too complicated; I don’t understand it at all!

³² **Her/ Him:** In Chinese, the character “她” (tā) is used when saying “she” or “her”, while the character “他” (tā) is used when saying “he”, “him” or “his”. The two characters have the same pronunciation. As such, Gui does not realize that Prince is actually a girl.

Eventually, Gui heaved a deep sigh. “Forget it,” he said. “We can continue this conversation after the competition. At the very least, I don’t want this to affect the competition, since it’s so important to Prince.”

Zhuo Ling Bin glanced at Gui briefly. “Yeah.”

After getting Zhuo Ling Bin’s agreement, Gui swiftly left while Zhuo-gēge sat down again.

Looks like it’s time for me to go out? I hurried back to my seat, trying to act casual, but Zhuo-gēge was just smiling as usual.

“Umm, I’m going to be late for my class, so I’ll leave first. Bye, Zhuo-gēge!”



After I got home, following the end of my classes for the day, I couldn’t help but keep thinking about the contents of their conversation. It was on my mind even as I cooked dinner that night.

Firstly, it’s someone Zhuo-gēge has known for eight years. Secondly, it has to be a guy... right? Gui is gay, so it’s impossible that he’d be fighting with Zhuo-gēge over a girl. I must say, though, that finding out that Zhuo-gēge is a gay gave me quite a shock; I hadn’t thought that this world had so many gays before. Thirdly, it’s someone Gui hasn’t known for a long time, but understands very well...

Who could it possibly be? I’m soooooo curious! Who could actually be so attractive that he charmed both Gui and Zhuo-gēge? Thanks to him, whoever he is, I’m feeling a tad sour and maybe even slightly pissed.

“Sis, I’m going out to buy drinks; what drink do you want?” Yang Ming asked as he suddenly poked his head out from behind the door.

I stared at Yang Ming, and immediately thought of their conversation—

A guy Zhuo-gēge has known for eight years, and whom Gui hasn’t known for long but understands very well. All of that adds up to... my brother, Yang Ming?

God, I should have thought of it earlier! It’s no surprise, then, that Zhuo-gēge suddenly came to our house. Maybe he knew from the start that Wu Qing was Yang Ming, and that’s why he invited him to be a team member?

And Gui... he must have fallen in love with Yang Ming during the period of time when he thought I was Yang Ming! That's why he said he hasn't known him for long, but understands him... was that how it happened?

Something felt out of place, but at the same time it all seemed to fit. I tilted my head to one side, trying to get my thoughts straightened out and figure out whether my deduction was right or wrong.

"Sis, do you have to think so hard about your choice of drink?" Yang Ming looked impatiently at me, even as my head felt like it would burst from all that thinking.

Arghhh, I don't care anymore, it would be faster just to ask.

"Yang Ming, tell me, does Zhuo-gēge like..." I trailed off, finding it hard to actually say the words. *After all, isn't this like asking about what's going on between Zhuo-gēge and my brother in a roundabout way?* I thought, hesitating.

Yang Ming seemed overjoyed. "You finally get it? Sis, I thought you were so slow that you would never realize it!" At the same time, he thought, *Poor Zhuo-gēge has liked you for a long time. Now his unrequited love can finally have a happy ending.*

My head spun at the revelation his words brought. *I guessed correctly? God! And my brother is so glad about it... Don't tell me he's interested in Zhuo-gēge too?! But wasn't he hitting on girls all the time? Was that a cover? Even my brother is gay?*

I stared at Yang Ming, torn. "Bro... Let me ask you then, what do you think of Zhuo-gēge?"

"Zhuo-gēge is a very nice guy, and he's very loyal and gentle. He's definitely someone you can entrust your future to," Yang Ming answered, grinning.

"You like him?" I asked, clinging onto my last shred of hope.

"Yep, I like him very much." With a sure expression, he added, "Don't worry, Dad and Mom like Zhuo-gēge very much too, they approve of him."

God! My mouth fell open. To think that my brother really is gay, and that two guys I know are fighting over him? In addition, my parents have given their approval? What kind of world is this?! "Be honest, sis, are you okay with this turn of events?" my brother asked seriously.

"I... what if I cannot accept it?" I replied timidly. *But... can I choose not to accept the fact that my brother is a gay?*

"Then someone will be heartbroken." He shook his head with a morose look.

I looked at the sorrowful face of Yang Ming, and reluctantly thought, *Sigh! My brother has grown up already. At any rate, the choice of the person he likes cannot be decided by his sister. It's better to give him my blessing rather than telling him "no," and making him unhappy. And besides, Dad and Mum aren't against it, anyway.*

"Sigh. So long as you're truly happy with it..." I decided at long last.

I left my room sadly, mourning over the sister in law and cute nieces and nephews that I would never have.

Yang Ming watched me depart with a bewildered expression. Scratching his head, he mused aloud, "Odd, what did I come into Sis's room for again?"

Chapter 7: A Battle Without Regrets

Online

Despite having completed our final training session the previous night, I continued to be plagued by a feeling of guilt – a feeling that I still wasn't strong enough. Thus, I decided to apply for medical leave and stay home to train in secret.

To be honest, although we'd fought so many rounds in the tournament, I'd never given a thought to the possibility of us losing a particular match. However, I hadn't expected that we would come this far in the tournament, either.

Am I really that strong? I couldn't help but feel a little worried. All I could think of was fighting more mobs and gaining more levels. *Will I be able to survive in the midst of six hundred people with my current level of sixty-two? I have no idea!* However, the thought "I will lose" still did not cross my mind.

With a horizontal slash, I defeated the last monster and brushed my sweat-soaked hair back from my forehead. It was only then that I noticed that someone had approached.

"Gui?"

"Yeah." Gui approached me, and there was a melancholic air about him.

"You're able to come online this early today?" I asked. In my head I wondered, *did the professor skip classes too?*

"Yeah. I usually have more time on Fridays. On the other hand, this seems to be the first time you're online on a Friday morning," said Gui, a faint smile on his lips.

Huh... Well, that's because I have other classes to attend! I retorted acerbically in my head. "Yeah, that's right, haha."

Gui continued to smile, but he could not conceal the forlorn look in the depths of his eyes.

That forlorn look shouldn't be appearing on Gui's face. This isn't the Gui I know; I don't want to see him like this!

"I don't like to see you like this, Gui. I much prefer you the way you were before, always cheekily calling me 'Noble Lord Prince'." As I finished speaking, I raised my *dao* and stalked towards a freshly-spawned batch of mobs.

“Really? But I...” Gui’s eyebrows creased together as he exclaimed in an emotional voice, “I need your answer. Only then can I carry on!”

“Huh? Don’t I always answer you by beating you up?” I replied. I was immersed in the thrill of swinging my blade to kill monsters – sprinting, leaping, and dodging.

“What sort of answer is that...”

Gui watched me intently, clearly mesmerized. His eyes followed my ceaselessly moving form, noting the light dancing off my blade, and that exhilarated and slightly bloodthirsty smile of mine.

“You really do like fighting very much, Prince,” Gui observed.

I laughed heartily as I continued to fight. “Yep, I like it more than anything else. Swinging my *dao*, kicking, dodging... Don’t you find it exhilarating?”

“I find it far more exhilarating to see your smile,” Gui murmured. Then he said, “Do you really like me the way I was before?”

“Yeah!” I ducked to evade an attack, but just as I raised my head, a translucent arrow whizzed by my ear. Turning my head to look at the arrow, I saw it protruding from the forehead of a random mob that was about to land a sneak attack on me. I gave a low whistle and offered Gui a thumbs up.

Gui brushed back his hair with one hand and deliberately struck a graceful pose. “In order to rescue Noble Lord Prince, Gui is a one-hundred-percent-accurate shot!”

As soon as he finished speaking, Gui was sent sprawling by the Meatbun that I’d lobbed at him. With a smug smile, I retorted, “I told you, don’t call me ‘Lord Prince’! Also, in order to beat you up, I am also a one-hundred-percent-accurate shot!”

Just then, Lolidragon’s voice came over the team channel. “Wah! Who’s online? You’re even earlier than me.”

“It’s me and Lord Prince,” Gui replied.

I, on the other hand, remarked doubtfully, “Is anyone on this earth *not* more diligent than you?”

“Whoa! Prince-gēge is also online?” Doll’s startled voice came over the channel as well.

“Looks like everyone’s arrived,” Yu Lian-dàsǎo added, sounding amused. “Right now, I’m breakfasting with a wolf that skipped work!”

“Yu Lian...” Wolf-dàgē’s voice carried a hint of embarrassment as it came over the channel.

A playful notion struck me, and I exclaimed, “Quick, quick! Everyone assemble at the breakfast shop, so that we can be a five-hundred watt light bulb!”³³ With that, I set off at lightning speed for the city, dragging Gui along behind me.



“Prince,” said Wolf-dàgē to me helplessly, “I know you’re here to be a light bulb, but do you have to stare so at me and Yu Lian?”

In a stern voice, I replied, “Wolf-dàgē, I’m afraid that I will fail to fulfill my duties as a light bulb if I don’t.”

“...”

“Prince, do you have the confidence that we will win?” Yu Lian-dàsǎo asked in her gentle voice.

“None whatsoever,” I replied honestly, but seeing how the members of Odd Squad immediately became a little nervous, I added, “But I have no intention of losing, either.”

“No confidence that we will win, but no intention of losing, either? As expected, that’s something you would say,” Lolidragon said, and then broke out laughing.

I stretched out my right hand and gave everyone a confident smile. They smiled back at me and then stacked their hands on top of mine.

“Odd Squad, win!” I bellowed.

“Odd Squad, WIN!” the members of Odd Squad roared in unison.



“Let’s go, everybody! The final round’s about to start,” I said. As always, I walked towards the tunnel leading to the arena. As always, I felt no fear. As always, I did not think about whether I would lose. As always, my beloved teammates followed silently behind me.

³³ **A five-hundred watt light bulb:** In Chinese, to be a light bulb means to be a fifth wheel or a gooseberry. Here Prince is basically saying that they need to be a SUPER big light bulb.

In the instant I stepped into the arena, I hesitated, and then took off my mask and tossed it onto the floor. Turning around to look at my teammates, I saw that they were stunned for a moment. However, upon seeing the unshakeable resolve in my gaze, they smiled before also removing their masks and tossing them to one side.

“It doesn’t matter what the results are, so long as our prowess in battle and our unyielding attitude are engraved into the minds of all those present,” I said, my tone somber as one making a vow.

The teams had gathered at the center of the colosseum-styled arena, standing in loose groups here and there.

“Everyone, a hundred of Second Life’s most outstanding teams will soon be participating in an intense battle for survival. Don’t look away, or you’ll miss seeing this exciting scene. Don’t close your mouths – cheer your hearts out for your favorite team! I am Xiao Li, the commentator who will be reporting this entire life-and-death battle for you all today,” Xiao Li roared, and he went so far as to hop around in a crazed manner as he clutched the microphone.

The atmosphere in the stadium was wild. Banners with the names of various teams hung all around the audience, while the spectators themselves hollered the names of the teams they were supporting.

I stared wide-eyed, noting that the sight of six hundred people was really something out of the ordinary. Worse still, these six hundred people very clearly formed three large camps.

Courageously, confidently, and proudly, I...snuck to a random corner to wait. *Don’t kid me! The strength of one’s fighting spirit or the amount of one’s courage doesn’t matter; if you smash an egg against a rock, the result will never change!*

I looked at the frontlines of the three camps. There, at the forefront of the three camps, stood their leaders: a tigerman warrior, a human warrior, and a holyman warrior. Each one of them had the presence of a king.

“Hmph. Standing at such an obvious spot, the king should take care not to become the deceased.”³⁴ *Who? Who was it who said that this is a case of sour grapes?*

At that moment, the members of Dark Emperor filed over to stand next to us.

“What do you think our chances of victory are?” Wicked asked me calmly.

“Hmph, it’s as big as can be, about as big as my chest!” *(An A-cup...it hurts to admit!)*

³⁴ **The king...the deceased:** This is a pun. In Chinese, the words for “the king” and “the deceased” are both pronounced as “wáng zě”.

I even wounded my own ego when making the analogy. Looks like that abusive streak in me is growing with each passing day, and I'm not even sparing myself.

Ming Huang looked at my chest with derision and said, "That's one lousy analogy. You're so flat that you don't even have any chest muscles to speak of."

You damn kid; I'm still an A-cup at the very least, okay?

"Be careful, this battle will be very dangerous," Wicked said. His brow was creased with worry as he looked at me.

"Don't worry about me; you should watch over Feng Wu Qing carefully instead!" Sigh! I'd originally intended not to think anymore about that heartrending issue, but now that I've said it, I guess it's all right. I hope that Wicked will take good care of my brother.

I turned my head back and glanced worriedly at Wu Qing, but he and Wicked both pretended to look at me uncomprehendingly.

Perhaps they don't want to let others know? After all, this kind of thing isn't that common, and not everyone is as open-minded as I am and able to accept this kind of BL relationship.

Good luck, brother! Sister will always be supporting you silently, I thought as I looked at my little brother with tears in my eyes. I threw a sympathetic look Gui's way as well. *It can't be helped, who asked my brother to fall in love with Wicked! Poor Gui.*

Without waiting for the three of them to respond, I beckoned to Yu Lian-dàsǎo. "Dàsǎo, you should come over here! It looks like the battle's about to start. As soon as it begins, we'll have to pay attention to the situation and look for a new spot where we can avoid trouble accordingly." Yu Lian-dàsǎo nodded in acknowledgment.

"Prince, both you and Yu Lian must be careful. Remember, you are both very important, so both of you must survive to the last." Wolf-dàgē looked at me, and after I gave him the "OK" sign, he turned towards Lolidragon and Doll. "Lolidragon, you must make sure that your enemies are not nearby. If possible, avoid having to sacrifice yourself. Also, Doll will be depending on you, although somehow it seems to me that you're the one depending on Doll..."

Lolidragon smiled, embarrassed.

"Wolf-dàgē, Gui will be in your care," said Gui. He looked at Wolf-dàgē, a fragile, gentle, and submissive expression on his face...before one of Yu Lian-dàsǎo's shadow smiles scared him into a corner to repent his actions.

"Battle, begin." The referee once again shouted those familiar words.

Although the battle had begun, everyone stood stock-still and remained quiet. The audience ceased their cheering as well. The atmosphere was such that no one dared to exhale, and a silence had fallen over the entire battleground – the type of silence that came before a storm.

I, too, moved nothing except for my eyes. My gaze darted from the left where the mighty tigerman stood – *not bad, his muscles are so oversized that they look kind of disgusting* – to the right, where the super cool-looking human warrior was – *very good, that cold expression really pisses me off* – and lastly to the holyman warrior in the middle. I admired the holyman’s girly beauty for a moment. *This guy probably is a gay...right?* I speculated.

In the end, it seemed like the beastman warrior couldn’t stand the silence anymore. He stretched both his hands out and made a rude gesture at the human and holyman. The human warrior fixed him with a cold look in reply, while the holyman merely gave an unconcerned smile. The beastman warrior roared, pointing a finger at the human warrior.

“AT THEM!” He roared, shattering the silence in the entire arena. The members of the tigerman’s alliance began to charge.

In contrast, “Kill!” was all that the human warrior said before charging towards the oncoming enemies.

The holyman warrior, however, maintained his relaxed pose. He stretched out a hand to stop the members of his alliance behind him from moving forward to join in the fray. “The clam and the crane quarrel; the fisherman prevails,” he said simply.³⁵

I’ve got to hand it to this guy; he really is a sneaky bastard.

I made my mind up then. After pulling Yu Lian-dàsǎo to where I was, I took advantage of the chaos to stealthily slip through the battle zone from behind. While everyone’s attention was on the battle between the humans and beastmen, I snuck up and hid behind the holymen’s alliance. *This place should be a safe spot for the time being*, I thought.

There was a tap on my shoulder, and I turned my head to look. *One, two, three... Ten people. Excellent, the members of Odd Squad and Dark Emperor have all come over to avoid the conflict.* Once again, I looked forward at the scene of the grand melee.

³⁵ **The clam and the crane quarrel; the fisherman prevails:** Some Chinese sayings actually originate from stories. This one goes like this: a clam was sunning itself when a crane came by and tried to eat it. The clam snapped its shell shut, and the crane refused to let go of the tender clam meat inside. As a result of the weight, the crane could not fly, and the clam could not move. Neither refused to back down; as a result, both were caught by the fisherman. The saying basically means that if neither will give way, then only others will profit.

*It really is a chaotic battle!*³⁶ The situation before us could only be described as one completely lacking in technique. Often, individuals couldn't tell who they were attacking, nor did they know who attacked them. Still, the players couldn't be blamed for the lack of technique in their fighting. After all, since they were being squeezed together like the meatballs I make, it was already a miracle that they could find the space to swing their weapons around. *Technique? Forget it.*

Before long, there were already dozens of beams of white light shooting into the sky.

Suddenly, the human warrior discovered that something was wrong. He began to bellow desperately, and it seemed that he was directing members of his alliance to come over and do battle with the members of the holymen's alliance. I understood what he was shouting about when I saw the battle grew closer and closer to where the holymen were. At the same time, the human warrior led a group of particularly outstanding fighters to charge directly at the holymen warrior leading the alliance. They began to fight!

Finally, now even this side of the arena is no longer safe. I looked over my shoulder at everyone, and said in a low voice, "Each group, take care! Don't go head-to-head with them; no one is allowed to fly away, you understand me?"

"Understood." All of them met my gaze steadily.

"Scatter," I then commanded.

Holding Yu Lian-dàsǎo's hands tightly, I spotted an area behind the main fray which nobody paid much notice to, and we began to make our way over. Although we attracted unwanted attention a number of times along the way, I never retaliated. Instead, I relied on my agility to dodge like mad, or used my *dao* to block attacks before continuing to run for my life. Luckily for us, the situation on the battlefield was truly chaotic, and I only needed to flee. There wasn't really anyone who was free to pursue me and Yu Lian-dàsǎo, although occasionally there would be someone shouting stuff like "coward" or "lackey" after us. *Hmph! This is called "preserve a green mountain and one will not have to fear for lack of firewood to burn", understand?*³⁷

What I don't get is why all these people are eagerly rushing into the midst of the human meatball as though they are contented just to be able to hack at others a few times? Look, of the three alliance leaders, is any one of them in that crowd?

³⁶ **Grand melee/ chaotic battle:** In Chinese, a grand melee is called a "混战" (hùn zhàn). The meaning of the first character is "chaotic" and the second character means "battle".

³⁷ **Preserve a green mountain and one will not have to fear for lack of firewood to burn:** This saying means that if you cut down all the trees on a mountain at one go, then you will run out of firewood ultimately. On the other hand, if you only take what you need, then you will never run out. As such, it is prudent to not overdo things and one should always plan ahead. This saying is actually not very appropriate to Prince's situation, but what he's trying to say is that he is preserving his life so that he can live to fight another time – i.e. this is strategy!

Ah, can't talk now, there are blades and swords every which way and fists and legs flying everywhere; I'd best focus on dodging them.

“Members of the audience, look at this chaotic battlefield where all of the participants are busy fighting. According to the latest data, already a hundred and thirty-one...a hundred thirty-five participants have been eliminated, and eleven teams have been completely wiped. Right now, the ones who are garnering the most attention are the three alliance leaders, not one of whom has been eliminated so far. Will one of the teams that they belong to emerge victorious? Or will it be a case of mutual destruction?”

“Whoa, whoa, the beastman's giant axe has once again met with the cold steel of the human warrior's sword. Which one of them will be defeated in this fight?” Xiao Li was so agitated that he was practically showering saliva everywhere, but thanks to his report I was able to stay on top of the current situation.

Over a hundred people have been eliminated already? No wonder it looks like the sky has been lit with fireworks. If we weren't so busy fleeing for our lives, I would definitely stop to admire the view, I thought.

“Yu Lian-dàsǎo, can you still carry on?” I asked worriedly, as she had been dragged along by me as we dashed frantically through the fighting the whole time.

“I'm fine, and it seems like everyone else is fine as well,” said Yu Lian-dàsǎo. However, she then added, “What I meant was, all the members of Odd Squad are fine – but it seems like Wicked and Ming Huang are in trouble!”

“What?” My brows furrowed together. “Where are they?”

“To our left. It seems like it was because Ming Huang was unwilling to flee obediently.”

“Damn it!” I should have thought of it. With Ming Huang's personality, if someone called him a coward or other similar stuff, he would definitely not let the insult slide. There's an eighty percent chance that he would drag Wicked along into a fight with the other party.

To save or not to save? Isn't that obvious! I gave my own cheeks a hard pinch, thinking, *if I don't save them, how could we be called allies?* Even as I used my *dao* to deflect the blades of nearby weapons, I asked, “Dàsǎo, which group is the closest to us?”

“Wolf and Gui are just behind us.”

“Good.” I abruptly changed directions and immediately spotted Wolf-dàgē and Gui standing not too far away from us. I rushed over to where they were.

“Wolf-dàgē, Gui, you guys protect Dàsǎo for a while. I have to go save people,” I said.

Looking in Ming Huang and Wicked's direction, I saw that they had been surrounded by four players. Wicked was having difficulty defending against three of them by himself.

First, I snuck up behind the enemy. Like a ghost appearing out of nowhere, I slit the throat of the nearest mage, who had been standing at their back. He did not even have the time to cry out before he flew away. Wicked saw me then, and I gave him a look warning him not to say anything. I then proceeded to single out the strongest of the three warriors, and brutally hacked off his arm. Shocked, he spun around to look at me, and with a single thrust I drove my blade through his heart, making him my second kill for today's battle.

Of the two remaining warriors, one had already turned around to face me. I turned about and retreated, leading him in the direction of Gui and the others. I made a gesture at my forehead to Gui, and Gui gestured back at me to say that it was no problem.

I watched as Gui strummed his *guqin*, sending a single *Supersonic Soul-chasing Arrow* in my direction, and then I ducked and rolled forward to avoid the arrow. When I looked back, I saw that Gui had upheld his claim of being a hundred percent accurate shot; the translucent arrow was planted solidly in the forehead of the warrior who had been chasing me.

Wicked had also finished off the remaining warrior by then, and he was looking my way. I gave him a smile and he gave me thumbs up in appreciation.

Returning to Gui and Wolf-dàgē's side, I grabbed Yu Lian-dàsǎo's hand and, before pulling her away, said, "Guys, continue to work hard and flee for your lives!"

"Prince, you have to be careful of that holyman warrior. I have a feeling that he will be your opponent in the end," Yu Lian-dàsǎo cautioned me thoughtfully.

Yu Lian-dàsǎo really isn't an ordinary person, I thought. She's being dragged after me as we sprint, yet she can still speak in a stern voice. I'm impressed!

"Right. I'll be careful, Dàsǎo." *But first, we must survive in this remaining crowd.* With only two hundred plus players remaining (according to Xiao Li's report), I was finding it harder and harder to make use of the chaos to run away. Moreover, many of the enemies we encountered would chase us for a long time before they were willing to give up.

"Prince, the beastman warrior has flown away. The alliances of the human and holyman warriors have now surrounded the remainders of the beastman warrior's allies. It looks like the beastmen's alliance is about to be completely wiped out. I think the holyman warrior's alliance will probably be the last one standing out of the three. If you have the chance, you should kill some of the members of the holymen's alliance; otherwise, they'll have too many members left at the end. If that happens, it'll be difficult for us to win even if we combine forces with Dark Emperor," Yu Lian-dàsǎo said, her tone betraying her anxiety.

“Huh... But I have my hands full, with one hand holding Dàsǎo’s, and the other hand holding my sword,” I replied helplessly. *And my two legs are busy running, so they’re not free to kick anyone either.*

“Prince, you can leave me with Lolidragon and Doll!” Yu Lian-dàsǎo smiled gently at me. “I think Lolidragon’s enemies probably don’t have the time to hunt her down, plus most male players usually aren’t too keen on attacking girls, so the two of them are pretty relaxed.”

“But our strategy...” I looked at Yu Lian-dàsǎo in askance.

“This is a tactic to deceive our enemies.” A broad smile lit up Yu Lian-dàsǎo’s face, but...*how odd, why am I covered in goosebumps?* “Go and help the human warrior right away – and make sure you even the odds between his alliance and the holyman’s. Then, when both of them are heavily injured, it would be best if you could make use of the opportunity to stab them in the back...hehe.”

Yu Lian-dàsǎo, you really aren’t an ordinary character. I’m starting to be curious about what Yu Lian-dàsǎo’s job in the real world is, I thought even as I dashed towards Lolidragon. Luckily for us, she and Doll weren’t too far away.

“So I’ll be leaving you with Lolidragon? Be careful, you all,” I said worriedly.

Yu Lian-dàsǎo gave a light knock on my head with her fist. “You’re the one who needs to be careful,” she chided.

I grinned as I jogged off, preparing to execute Yu Lian-dàsǎo’s terrifying strategy.



“Play to your heart’s content, Prince. If we made you hide like a turtle throughout the entire battle, then there would be no meaning in participating in this tournament,” Yu Lian-dàsǎo murmured to herself.



As I looked at furiously battling form of the human warrior and the relaxed, laid-back holyman warrior, I thought, *Help the humans? This will be a bit challenging...but interesting!*

I smiled faintly, and in my chest there was a slight twinge of excitement. With the human warrior tightly surrounded by enemies, it was the perfect opportunity for me to pretend to

be a member of his alliance. The moment I saw a gap in the human wall that surrounded him, I charged. In a single move, I lunged forward and rolled inside the bounds of the ring, and then began to stab savagely at the feet of those who had gathered around. In an instant, many of them fell to their knees and began to howl in pain.

“You are?” The attacks on the human warrior had eased and he looked me in surprise.

“A friend!” *At least for the present moment*, I thought, giving him a friendly pat on the back.

“You’re not from my alliance; I don’t remember you,” said the human warrior doubtfully as he tried to recall, but it was impossible for him to have overlooked such an outstanding person.

“It’s true that your alliance doesn’t include me, but I just want to help you. Can’t I?” As I spoke, I swung my sword up to fend off a player who was about to land a sneak attack on him. I gave the little sneak a kick, causing him to lose his balance, and then drew my blade across his throat. *Problem solved*, I thought, and before I realized it, a bloodthirsty smile had once again surfaced on my lips.

“Nan Gong Zui.” He offered me his name calmly, but his eyes couldn’t conceal his wonder.

“Prince.” My eyes continued to scan our surroundings alertly, and I kept my guard up against the enemies surrounding us even as I answered.

“*The Blood Elf?*” Nan Gong Zui could not suppress a soft exclamation.

Huh! It’s that nickname I hate the most again. Am I really that bloodthirsty and terrifying? Am I? I just –

I jumped and, with a flying kick, separated the top half of a player’s head from the rest of his skull.

– tend to use methods that make people slightly mindful of horror movies. Plus, I always like to –

I then split some random player into two with a sideways slash at his waist.

– get myself soaked in blood, and I’m also very polite –

Covered in blood, I smiled at those stunned-looking enemy players standing in front of me.

– and like to smile at people. Just like that, they gave me such a scary nickname. Blood Elf? That’s too unreasonable! No matter what, I’m still just a lovely and delicate young lady!

“Zui, quit zoning out, let’s enjoy the exhilaration of battle together!” I said, laughing heartily at the spaced out-looking Zui.

Nan Gong Zui took a deep breath and said, “The Blood Elf’s reputation isn’t an empty rumor...”

Disgruntled, I retorted, “Call me ‘Prince’.”

A slight smile finally appeared on Nan Gong Zui’s somber face. “All right, Prince.”



“Who is that person?” Fan³⁸, who had originally been standing to one side in a fairly relaxed manner, watched with dissatisfaction as the situation ahead slowly turned around. *Who exactly is that elf with the evil aura? To actually be able to turn a completely unfavorable situation around, single-handedly... He’s a threat!* An alarm went off in Fan’s mind.

His face, with its serene smile, suddenly grew harsh and murderous. To the members of his alliance standing next to him, he commanded, “Kill that elf; kill him and Nan Gong Zui, and the battle will be as good as over.”



“Damn it, why have the number of enemies suddenly increased?” With this many enemies, I was busy enough just defending myself.

It seems like most of the members of the holyman warrior’s alliance are specifically attacking me and Zui? I glanced over my shoulder and saw Zui similarly engaged in parrying and blocking.

“Prince, retreat to the rear with me,” Zui roared, before hauling me along to where his allies stood. Finally, we stopped in the middle of a crowd of Zui’s allies, and Zui suddenly lifted his sword and leveled it directly at the holyman warrior. “Fan, if you have the guts, then quit hiding and sulking around in the back. Come out and face me in a duel!”

³⁸ **Fan:** The pronunciation for this is closer to “fun”, but “fan” is how it is written in *pinyin*.

I looked at Zui, who was livid with rage, and then at Fan, the holyman warrior across from us, but the latter's expression was one of indifference... *Don't tell me they know each other from before? I'm afraid it's not an ordinary grudge between them either, I speculated.*

"Nan Gong Zui, aren't you too naïve? I'm really curious as to how a person like you, who doesn't care about the big picture, managed to find yourself so many allies."

Fan gave him a seemingly peaceable and good-natured smile, but a shiver ran down my spine. I felt as though I had just witnessed Yu Lian-dàsǎo's shadowy smile, or seen the innocent smile Lolidragon had on her face when she was actually sharpening her claws in secret.

This Fan really isn't a regular character! Yu Lian-dàsǎo's observation was right on the mark.

"You..." Zui's expression had grown even more infuriated by now, completely losing its earlier calm. "Do you really not give a damn about Ice Phoenix?"

"Ice Phoenix? Who?" The smile on Fan's face was irritatingly smug, and clearly revealed that he was feigning ignorance.

"You..." Zui clenched his fist and it seemed that he was about to charge at Fan. Those allies of his standing nearby hurriedly grabbed him and refused to let go, but Zui howled maniacally, "Let me go! I'm going to kill that bastard! Fan, get your ass over here!"

It was apparent that the situation was on the verge of going out of control. *If it continues like this, Nan Gong Zui will definitely be trashed to kingdom come.* I schooled my expression and, with a cold look on my face, reached out and grabbed Nan Gong Zui by the collar. In a cool and distant voice, I said, "I misjudged you. I thought you were the type of person with a passionate heart but a cool head when it comes to doing things. Fan was right; you really are the type of person who doesn't care about the big picture. No matter what sort of grudge there is between you and Fan, you are the leader of an alliance right now, with the hopes of so many people resting in your hands. And you're just going to charge out there and get yourself killed?"

Nan Gong Zui slowly relaxed. He shook his head as if to clear his mind and calmed down at last. "You're right, Prince."

After that, he hurriedly gathered his alliance together. After a while, they began to resemble an army being mobilized...

They're really well trained; I'm a bit taken aback. Have I gone and done something foolish now? If Zui manages to defeat Fan easily, how am I going to defeat Zui? Haha... I'll think about it when the time comes! Although it seems like my teammates in Odd

Squad and the members of Dark Emperor are glaring at me from that corner over there...

“Thank you, Prince.” Zui gave me an unaffected smile...

Why do I suddenly feel so guilty?



“Damn it, knew that elf would mess things up,” Fan said, glaring at me with hate-filled eyes. “Doesn’t matter; I won’t lose to him even if it’s just a matter of ability. Everyone, form up, this will end things once and for all.”



I was lost in thought, my head tilted to one side as I walked back to where the members of Odd Squad and Dark Emperor were. As I watched the showdown between the two alliances, I asked, “Lolidragon, this entire business has nothing to do with me right?”

“If this was a chemical reaction, then you are the biggest catalyst in it,” replied Lolidragon helplessly. The two teams, a total of eleven people, had watched helplessly from the sidelines as I incited the entire situation to its climax.

Under my breath I said, “Lolidragon, I’m a literature student, so I don’t understand the chemistry stuff you’re talking about.”

“Do we know who will win?” I asked. Watching the exchange between Zui and Fan’s forces, I thought, *they’re probably utilizing some warfare tactics right?* Unfortunately, just like the chemical reaction thing that Lolidragon was talking about, I had no knowledge about warfare tactics to speak of, so I had to ask that question.

“In terms of ability, both sides are at about the same level. I think Fan will win, however,” Yu Lian-dàsǎo analyzed coolly. “After all, Nan Gong Zui expended too much of his forces when he went up against the beastmen at the start.”

“Really? But I like Nan Gong Zui better.” I tilted my head to one side, feeling a little dissatisfied with the analysis that Zui will lose.

“Then all the more reason for you to pray that Nan Gong Zui will lose, otherwise if he wins, we will have to fight him. If that time comes, will you be able to kill him?” Wicked gave me a stern look.

“I don’t know. I’ll think about it if the time comes,” I replied breezily. *Why worry? After all, Yu Lian-dàsǎo already said that the odds of Zui winning were smaller.*

Once again, Xiao Li’s agitated voice rang out. “Right now the situation is critical, very critical. According to the data, there are finally less than a hundred people left. We can clearly see the showdown between the two alliances, and it is almost like two armies fighting on a battlefield. From the headcount we can see that the number of players left under the command of Nan Gong Zui is less than that of the alliance led by Fan, the holyman warrior. The situation looks very unfavorable for Nan Gong Zui; has the conclusion already been determined? Or will there be a change?

“We can see the Blood Elf – who had slaughtered so many players earlier – and his teammates watching from one side. Will they just keep watching? Or will they join in the fray, changing the situation once more?”

That was the first time I really felt like beating up Xiao Li. Thanks to him, everyone’s attention focused on where we were standing, and even Nan Gong Zui and Fan couldn’t help but look our way. After all, each of their alliances had less than fifty members left. Between our two teams we had twelve players, and if we chose to join a particular faction, it was very likely that we would be able to help that side to attain victory.

“Prince, help me,” Zui yelled at me across the empty expanse between us.

My expression became troubled. I knew full well that this wasn’t the time for us to intervene, and that we should wait until both of their factions were heavily injured and weakened from fighting one another. That would be the opportune moment for our two teams to get in there and clean up those who remained. Thus, I only looked helplessly at Zui, my new friend.

“Haha, you really are still naïve, Nan Gong Zui. Did you think he really wanted to help you?” Fan said with a malicious grin on his face.

“He was just worried that we might not be able to perish together in mutual destruction, so he came to intervene. You really thought he did it for the sake of your so-called ‘friendship’? I must say, though, I really have to hand it to them. Their grasp of the concept behind the saying ‘the clam and the crane quarrel, the fisherman prevails’ surpasses even my own, and they’re even sneakier bastards than I am,” Fan said spitefully.

Zui looked at me silently, his disappointment clear in his gaze. At long last, he turned away coldly and did not look at me again.

I was filled with guilt and more importantly, the sorrow of losing a newfound friend. *Which is more important, victory or friendship?*

“Victory is for but a fleeting moment, while friendship is eternal.” It was a difficult decision to make, but just as I was about to turn around and explain to everyone, I suddenly remembered: I was carrying the hopes of all the members of Odd Squad as well.

We’d said that we would create a legend together and win together...

What should I do?

“Prince...” The members of Odd Squad looked at me, as I faced such a difficult decision, with a mix of uncertainty and compassion.

“Go, Prince. I will go with you,” said Wicked as he stepped forward.

We looked at Wicked with astonishment. In addition, I was furious. *Even though Wicked is Zhuo-gēge, this is a competition. He cannot help me like this,* I thought.

“You saved me and Ming Huang earlier, Prince. Plus, if I go with you, then at least the final fight between Odd Squad and my team will be a fair one, with five against five.” Wicked’s tone was firm.

“What you’re really saying is, the two of us will be dead for sure,” I replied, scratching my head in uncertainty.

“... *Meteor Shower.*”

All of a sudden, a thunderous roar sounded, and we looked up, startled, as shooting stars rained down from the sky one after another...

Quick, make a wish! Oh, oops, sorry!

I noticed that most of the meteors were landing on the side of Fan’s forces. Of course, with such a large-scale spell, it was impossible for the spell to only hit Fan’s people, so a number of Nan Gong Zui’s people also lost their lives beneath this beautiful spell.

As for who cast it...the only fire-type mage who hasn’t died yet, and who has lots of free time to chant the incantation for a large-scale spell who comes to mind is none other than our noble Yu Lian-dàsǎo.

“... *Wrath of the Nine Heavens!*”³⁹ Even as the meteors continued to rain down, I heard a familiar and irritating voice. Even without using my brain and just using my tiara to think, it was certain that the spell had been cast by the other (lightning-type) mage with lots of time to kill: that pain in the ass kid, Ming Huang.

³⁹ **Wrath of the Nine Heavens:** This was originally translated as Heaven’s Nine Wrath, but after a bit of thought I realized that Wrath of the Nine Heavens is actually more accurate (and in my opinion it sounds a bit better).

It was very evident that that damn kid's objective was very different from Yu Lian-dàsǎo's, however, as he had cast his spell right over the center of the arena, having not spared a single a thought to the safety of my friend Nan Gong Zui. *He just wants to be at the center of things*, I thought.

"Will we become their common enemy?" I asked. I felt a little worried at the sight of players on both sides scurrying away from the scene of destruction and beams of white light shooting into the skies.

"Hmm, that's possible, but after being caught in two such large-scale spells, I think there probably isn't anyone left with more than a third of their health out there to fight us." Yu Lian-dàsǎo watched as fiery rocks and lightning continued to rain down with a smile on her face.

At that moment, I thought, *Who gives a damn about Fan? He's not even half as terrifying as our Yu Lian-dàsǎo.*

"Nan Gong Zui!" I watched helplessly as Zui was struck by a bolt of lightning and collapsed to the ground, where he lay motionless...

He hasn't flown away, so he's probably not dead yet!

Seeing as the spells were almost over, I immediately sprinted forward, dodging left and right in order to evade bolts of lightning. Occasionally I even had to cut down those who dared to block my way, or those people who grabbed my leg and begged for help.

Finally I reached Nan Gong Zui's side. In a single move, I swept him up into my arms and began sprinting back. The instant I moved away, a last meteor landed on the spot where Nan Gong Zui had been lying a moment before...

"I really don't know if I should describe Prince as evil or kind. He goes to such lengths to save Nan Gong Zui, and yet along the way hacked a whole bunch of people to death..." Yu Lian-dàsǎo murmured.

"He's not kind and he's not evil either. He just really cherishes his friends," said Ugly Wolf, grinning broadly as he watched me carry Nan Gong Zui in my arms and sprint back like mad.

"Huff...huff." Back at last, I placed Nan Gong Zui on the ground, panting furiously.

"Why save me?" Nan Gong Zui's expression was cold, but also tinged with stubbornness as he looked at me.

"Because I don't wish to see a friend die without understanding the situation," I replied coolly.

I turned to Wolf-dàgē and asked, “Wolf-dàgē, could you please heal him?”

Wolf-dàgē gave me a nod.

I charged onto the battlefield for a second time. This time, I walked up to Fan, who also looked like he was on the verge of collapse. He glared at me non-stop, as though he wanted to skin me alive. I gave him a single punch to the stomach, and then picked him up and carried him back to where Odd Squad stood. “Wolf-dàgē, please heal him as well. I think there’s some grudge between him and Zui that needs to be settled.”

I watched with a sense of satisfaction as Zui and Fan were healed by Wolf-dàgē, and the two men appeared to be preparing for a duel to the death. Then I turned to look at the members of Odd Squad and Dark Emperor, and simply said, “Let’s go. It’s time for us to clean up the field.”

There were still twenty-odd players left on the field. However, there was a confident smile on my face that revealed that I did not even think of these twenty-odd players as opponents for two teams. I gave an experimental swing of my Black Dao and said, “Game, start!”

Once again, Xiao Li was wild with excitement as he said, “Look, everyone! The situation is now truly astonishing as the two teams that have been standing quietly to one side suddenly unleashed two super large-scale spells, *Meteor Shower* and *Wrath of the Nine Heavens*. The two groups that had been trying to kill each other are now either dead or dying. The Blood Elf saved Nan Gong Zui in the nick of time, and then hauled Fan away as well. However, now the two have once again gotten to their feet in order to fight one another to the death! Just what exactly is going on?

“Next, let’s see...whoa, whoa, whoa, Odd Squad and Dark Emperor have begun to move! They have only twelve people as opposed to the twenty-odd survivors on the field, but the situation’s totally going their way. It’s a massacre! It’s simply a one-sided massacre; these two teams have three uninjured warriors, two extremely stealthy thieves skilled in assassination, two long distance attackers – an archer and a bard, numerous skeletons, and finally, extremely powerful and deadly mages! This outcome of this tournament is almost determined. What we’re all dying to know is, which of these two teams will manage to clinch victory?”

Even as I dealt with the wounded survivors on the battlefield, I watched the showdown between Zui and Fan. In my heart I thought excitedly, *finally I can fight Wicked and see which of us is stronger. Our fight last time was inconclusive, but this time we can settle it for good. Fighting really is an interesting thing.*

Wicked finished off the last remaining enemy, and then said, “Prince, will you really battle me and Zui? Won’t you find it difficult to fight us because we’re your friends?”

I turned my head to look at Wicked, leveling the Black Dao I held in hand at him as I said, “Because we are friends, I will fight you fair and square to decide who wins and who loses. I won’t hesitate or hold back, and I hope you won’t hold back either, Wicked. This is a battle, and I enjoy battles. I am standing on the field of the arena right now, in front of so many people. This is my battle, my legend, and no matter how things turn out, I will have no regrets!”

With that, I lifted my *dao*...

Extra Chapter: Diary

Guiliastes:

A genius with an IQ of 200, he entered university at the age of fifteen. He graduated at eighteen, received a doctorate at twenty-two. Then, furthering his studies overseas, he returned with another doctorate at twenty-five.

At twenty-six, top universities in the country were vying to employ him as a professor.



I looked at the pile of recruitment letters on the table. *Which university should I go to?* I thought, shaking my head at the ridiculousness of the situation.

I don't even need ten minutes to calculate which university would be the most advantageous for me, so what is there to feel troubled about? Right – there's nothing to worry about!

Still, in a fit of irritation, I gathered up all of the recruitment letters and savagely thrust them at the ceiling. The sheaves of paper fell, scattering all over the floor, except for one letter that landed on the table.

“It’s you then!” I picked up the recruitment letter, and barely glanced at the university’s name before putting my signature on the paper. Grabbing my helmet, I headed out to mail the document.



I dealt with the post-office clerk’s smitten gaze by faking a warm smile. After that, I went to a street filled with vendors selling electronics, with the thought of getting upgrades for my computer.

The shop owner, who had just made a fortune off me, grinned and asked, “With such good upgrades for your computer, are you planning to get started on playing ‘Second Life’ and beating everyone else?”

“‘Second Life’?” My eyebrows furrowed. *What’s that?*

“You don’t know about ‘Second Life’? It’s a virtual reality game that was just released two days ago! The game’s realism level is 99%, the highest ever attained!”



I glared at the game helmet that the shop owner had insisted on giving me, thinking, *what's so fun about virtual reality games? Isn't it just wielding a sword to hack, and hack, and hack?*

Still, I had already finished reading the instruction manual...

I really hate my tendency to read anything with words on it out of habit. Now my brain is full of information on how to play the game... Oh, forget it – I might as well try it out! I have nothing better to do anyway.

First, I need to decide on a race and class...where's that die I used last time?



Once online, I was at somewhat of a loss for what to do.

I stood at the birth point, wondering, *I decided on being a demon bard based on the roll of a die, but how exactly do bards train? There's only a shirt, pants and a wooden flute in the supply pouch – don't tell me I'm supposed to beat up mobs with a flute? Are all games these days so weird?*



After nearly a month of training, I found myself liking the carefree lifestyle of a bard more and more. I wandered everywhere with my beloved *gugin* in hand, mostly training, and occasionally entering the town and singing on the streets.

I ran my fingers through my hair. *Why do I keep feeling like something's incomplete? What is it that I'm missing? Oh, forget it – I'll just keep singing my songs.*

As I was singing, there seemed to be a slight disturbance in the crowd in front of me. My strumming ceased as I raised my head to find the source of the commotion.

An incredibly handsome young man – stunning enough to elicit breathy sighs – entered my view. He was...*gazing at me with a smitten expression? Is he a homosexual?*

Interesting! For some mysterious reason, I had an inexplicable urge to tease that beautiful youth. For a moment, the two of us stared at one another. Then, I walked over to him...and – behaving as if he were a princess – asked for permission to kiss his hand.

Unexpectedly, the young man actually accepted my kiss, blushing fiercely.

What am I supposed to do next? Shit, I didn't actually have a follow-up plan. How do I get out of this embarrassing situation? Why didn't I think things through before getting myself into such a situation?

The youth and I looked at each other awkwardly...

"Umm, you do know that I'm a guy, right?" The youth asked me suddenly, anxiety in his voice.

Another chance to toy with him!

I smiled and placed a finger beneath his chin, lifting up the young man's face. Striving to maintain a mesmerized expression as I looked at him, I said, "Of course I know. You exude such a spirited aura, how could I mistake you for a feeble little girl?"

Upon hearing my answer, the young man's face seemed to tense.

How odd... Why is the boy reacting this way? Still, his frozen expression certainly is entertaining, I thought, laughing mentally as an evil plan formed in my heart.

I enfolded the youth in my arms, and with a deliberate sigh, I added, "Men are the best. With muscles as firm as these...it feels *soooo* much better than hugging those soft, squishy girls."

The young man smiled at last. *As expected, he really is a homosexual,* I thought. *It's such a waste of that face of his, which can mesmerize any female between the ages of five and fifty.*

Within a second, however, I realized I had been wrong...

Unexpectedly, the youth was incredibly strong. With a "*Nine-headed Dragon Strike!*" he gave me my first taste of death in this game.

As I emerged from the rebirth point, I thought, *I don't get it. What was going on in that youth's head? His actions didn't have the least bit of logic behind them!*

With questions swirling in my mind, I attempted to come up with a satisfactory explanation for his actions. However, no matter how I thought about it, they just didn't make sense...

Oh, forget it. I'll just get back to training! After all, I doubt I'll ever see him again.

But why does that thought leave me feeling somewhat...crestfallen?



Because they moved slowly, zombies were my favorite mobs for training. This allowed me to leisurely stroll out of their range while casting my *Supersonic Soul-Chasing Arrow* and to slowly whittle away their HP.

“Hang in there, Lolidragon!” A shout broke my train of thought and I looked up...

It's that youth again!

I watched as he shouted to a thief, who was running further and further away. I understood the situation instantly, and decided to help them out.

“Supersonic Soul-Chasing Arrow!”



I looked at the youth, a feeling of insatiable curiosity in my heart.

“I would very much like to join your team.” For someone who had always been a loner, I marveled at the words that I had never thought I would say.

As it turned out, the youth's name was Prince – a name that suited him very well.

To make matters still more interesting, Prince seemed to be under the impression that I had designs on his virtue. *Hehe, mistaking me for a homosexual? Now that's a first! Interesting... then I shall act as one, just for you!*

From then on, my behavior towards Prince was such that even I found it disgusting. I even cooked dragon XX soup for him – which, unfortunately for me, also wound up being the first time I got beaten up and even stomped on...

Oddly enough, for some reason all I could remember was the livid expression on Prince's face.

The first time I saw Prince's tears was when he was kicked below by some damnable girl. I was enraged.

Nobody should ever be allowed to do such a thing to him, much less make him cry! Prince's face was suited for laughing, for acting brutally cool, for being furious, but definitely not for crying...

That was the first time I slapped a woman, although it was proven later that *he* wasn't a woman after all.



Today, Lolidragon asked me a question: she wanted to know exactly how I felt towards Prince, as she'd realized that I was only pretending to be gay.

I replied that I only thought that it was rather entertaining to watch his reactions... but damn it, the instant the words left my mouth, I began to doubt myself.

Is it really only because I find it fun that I let Prince beat me, punch me?

I couldn't figure it out.



Today, I met someone in school who greatly resembles Prince...

Is it him? I was very uncertain, since he was similar to Prince in some ways, but I couldn't help but feel slightly disappointed. *Could he really be Prince?*

In the end, I decided not to give a damn about Prince's real identity. After all, the Prince I know in the game is the one whom I like, anyway.

I like...? Damn it, what sort of thought is that?



Lolidragon came to me with the same question again.

Instead of answering her, I retorted – somewhat jealously – with a question on my own: just what was her relationship with Prince anyway? Why was she so concerned about Prince? Plus, Prince seemed to be pretty close to her, too.

Lolidragon didn't answer me; she just looked at me with a smile.

That smile...it seemed to say that she knew me better than I did myself, damn it!



Many things happened today. The first thing was that I discovered that I had gotten Wu Qing and Prince mixed up – so Feng Yang Ming wasn't Prince after all.

The second thing was that Prince got into trouble. As his pain-laced voice came over the team channel, I could feel my insides twisting as well.

I hate hearing his anguished voice, I thought, as I ran all over the place like a madman. However, I still failed to find any trace of him... That was, until I saw him cradled in Wicked's arms.

I reached out my arms to carry him, but Wicked just stalked past me, fury flashing in his eyes. It made me uneasy...

Why? Why must Prince wear that kind of expression as he and Wicked look at one another? I don't like this feeling, I really, really don't!

"Lolidragon, does Prince like Wicked?" I asked her frantically, as though I'd gone mad.

"Eh? I don't know, but I do know that Wicked likes Prince..." Lolidragon looked at me.

"But I like him too!" I roared, no longer giving a damn about the consequences.

Lolidragon replied, "You're at a disadvantage."

Disadvantage?

"Why? I've known Prince longer. Wicked... Wicked has only met him a few times." *So why am I the one at a disadvantage? Does Prince really like Wicked more?*

"Then do you really love Prince? Have you ever thought about his gender?"

A painful, forlorn smile crossed my face. "I did, but... compared to his smile, his gender is totally unimportant. I only want to protect his smile. I don't care about his gender."

"Your feelings for Prince really are deep."

"Yes. I will always watch over him, support him in all his endeavors, accept all his flaws, and share all his pain. This I swear."

I vow, with all my heart, to protect that smile, forever and ever. Prince, you are my one true love.



Wicked:

The first time I saw her, she was wearing a pink frock and her hair was tied up with a little bow. She had large, eloquent eyes, and it felt as though you could understand everything about her, just by looking into those eyes.

“Are you going to be our neighbour?” she asked, wide-eyed.

“Yep, that’s right. What’s your name?” I asked her curiously.

“Feng Lan, but Daddy and Mommy call me Xiao Lan.”

I smiled. *What an adorable name. It suits her very well.*

“I’m Zhuo Ling Bin, but you can just call me Zhuo-gēge. Xiao Lan, do you want to come in and have a glass of juice?”

“Yes!” Xiao Lan replied happily.



“Zhuo-gēge, will you marry me when I grow up?” Xiao Lan asked me expectantly.

I heaved a sigh. *Are all the twelve-year-old girls these days this mature?*

“Yes, of course I will.” *How can I say no to you, when you’re looking at me with such an expectant expression?*

I have watched over Xiao Lan since she was young, and now she is already twelve years old and at the age where she will ask people to marry her! I patted Xiao Lan on the head affectionately.

Marry Xiao Lan? It sounds like a pretty good idea.



“Zhuo-gēge, you’re moving away? Why?” Xiao Lan asked me, crying.

Don’t cry, crying doesn’t suit you.

“I... it’s because of my father’s work. Don’t worry, I will come back and find you for sure. I will, definitely.”

With an aching heart, I wiped Xiao Lan’s tears away. I silently vowed in my heart that I would definitely return, and that I would never ever make Xiao Lan cry again.



In ‘The World’ ONLINE...

Xiao Lan? I stared dazedly at the person in front of me, at those eyes that I’d seen countless times in my dreams – eyes that I could never forget. *It’s her, isn’t it? That silly girl who naively asked me to marry her...*

Could Xiao Lan have forgotten about her Zhuo-gēge? A Zhuo-gēge who had promised to marry her? My heart thumped wildly in my chest.

I walked up to her and asked, “Would you like to be my in-game wife?”

She looked at me with some surprise, and then asked me a silly question. “Will you take care of me?”

This silly girl, doesn’t she remember that she has a Zhuo-gēge? I was slightly worried that she had really forgotten about me, although I had never forgotten about her.

“Yep!”

“Okay then.” She gave a merry laugh, and then asked, “But why do you choose to play as a beastman?”

“Because beastmen are strong.”

“Ohhh. But they’re so ugly!”

She really is a silly girl...no wonder she didn’t stop to think before agreeing to be my in-game wife. I’d wager that she’s been too direct and scared off all the guys, so she couldn’t find a husband.

Although those were my thoughts, I was still secretly delighted.



I read the letter clutched in my hand, feeling helpless. *Xiao Lan, you're leaving to play 'Second Life'? Then what choice do I have?*

Thus, I switched to playing 'Second Life' as well...*but where are you, Xiao Lan?*

Relentlessly, I kept PM-ing Feng Xiao Xiao, Feng Xiao Xiao, but the system indicated that there was no such player.

Xiao Lan, where on earth are you? Don't you remember me at all?

Don't you care about me at all? The bitterness that I felt... I could almost taste it in my mouth.



I could hardly believe my eyes. *Isn't the girl who just walked by Xiao Lan? All this time, Xiao Lan has been studying in the same university as me?*

I schemed to place myself in her path, hoping she would recognize me, but... *She doesn't remember me at all*, I realized. The pain in my heart was overwhelming.

That night, I logged onto 'Second Life', my mood a wreck. Ming Bin was throwing a tantrum again. I was hardly in the mood to pay him any heed, but it seemed that he had pissed off this team in front of us. *Odd Squad? Weird name.*

Hmph! If you want a fight, then I will give you one. I'm in a lousy mood anyway.



Damn it, I can't take it anymore, I thought, deciding to go to Xiao Lan's place in person.

By some coincidence, I encountered Xiao Lan at the bus stop. This time, her expression changed as soon as she saw me, and she kept staring at me...

Has she finally recognized me? Is that it? I fought very hard to control my smile.

By the time we got off the bus, she still hadn't said anything to me, so I decided to talk to her myself.

"Xiao Lan... you are Xiao Lan, right?" I pretended to be surprised to see her.

Unexpectedly, she just stared at me, gaping. *So she really didn't recognize me.* My aching heart twisted painfully at the thought.

“Have you forgotten me? I’m Zhuo Ling Bin. Zhuo-gēge, remember?” I forced myself to smile.

At least she still remembers me... I can still take some small consolation in that fact, I thought, mentally mocking myself.

I followed Xiao Lan back to her place. To my astonishment, I found out that Feng Wu Qing was actually Feng Yang Ming.

So it's not just Xiao Lan who has trouble recognizing people, I thought with a wry smile.

“Trans?” I could hardly believe my ears. *Xiao Lan actually went and got gender swapped in-game? So that's why she didn't use the nickname Feng Xiao Xiao...*

However, she refused to tell me her character's name in ‘Second Life’, and even Yang Ming had no idea who she was.

I was slightly disappointed, but it wasn't important. After all, I could finally talk to her openly on campus, and even attend classes with her when I had spare time. Cheerfully, I envisioned attending classes with Xiao Lan.



To increase our chances of survival in the competition, I decided on behalf of the team to form an alliance with Odd Squad, despite Ming Bin's non-stop griping...

Odd Squad really is odd. They're actually sending their only warrior Prince as bait to lure away the mobs? Aren't they concerned that Prince might die?

Prince wasn't dead. However, from what I heard, he had fallen off a cliff – which really was a fate far worse than death.

As a matter of principle, we – Dark Emperor Team – should help them out. I tried to deduce which direction Prince would have gone in... and promptly found him lying half-dead in a pool of blood.

I walked over to him and fed him a bottle of health potion. He even asked me if I was Gui.

So Ming Bin wasn't just mouthing off when he said that Gui and Prince had a weird relationship, I thought, amused.

“Oh, so it’s Zhuo-gēge!” Prince muttered to himself.

Zhuo-gēge? I froze. Only Xiao Lan ever calls me that... and if I add to that the fact that Xiao Lan is playing a male character... I peered carefully at Prince’s face.

That pair of eyes... Xiao Lan! Damn it, how could I have been so stupid? Prince is Xiao Lan, and more importantly, she’s lying in a pool of blood and in pain!

Just then, Gui appeared at the scene, and I was filled with ire.

How could they let Xiao Lan experience such excruciating torment? She should be carefully watched over and protected. Furthermore, Gui actually dares to reach out his hands to take my Xiao Lan from me? And Ming Bin even said that they have some kind of weird relationship?

I glared at Gui and strode past him.

In the end, Xiao Lan asked me not to tell anyone else the truth about her.

I won’t, especially not that Professor Min! He doesn’t deserve to be with Xiao Lan, not when he’s completely incapable of protecting her.

“I will protect you with all my power. I will always stand before you, shielding you from harm. I will never let you experience any pain or sorrow, my Xiao Lan.”

I swear never to let sorrow fill those eyes again... Xiao Lan, my dearest and most beloved girl.