



SYNOPSIS:

The Adventurers' Tournament is finally over, although the last survivor was someone rather unexpected. In any case, Odd Squad can be considered the victors. Unfortunately, now there's a rather pressing matter at hand – *that is, we're going to build a city!*

Looks like everyone has a field of expertise, except me, *waaah!* So I was sent on a “simple mission” and given the responsibility to rope in, rope in, and rope in all the people we knew well into helping out with the construction of the city. *Let me think for a moment about who I should look for... There's Dark Emperor, Nan Gong Zui, and Rose Team, whom I haven't met in a while...*

Unexpectedly, my first time drinking led to a huge problem – I actually drank until I got lost! *God, just tell me straight: Where on earth am I? Please don't torture this poor soul – who can reach the South Pole by following the North Star – any longer...*

Aiyah! To actually meet someone I whom I know from the real world, and it's not *one* but *two* persons. *Is this good luck or bad luck?*

Hmm... This NPC in front of my eyes looks rather... familiar?

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.

Records of a Vagabond Prince

HALF PRINCE VOL. 3

Original novel in Chinese by: 御我 (Yu Wo)

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Yu Wo's Blog

<http://www.wretch.cc/blog/kim1984429>

CREDITS

Translators:

Eilinel (chapters 3-4)

Erihppas (chapter 5)

Samuki (chapters 1-2 and 8)

Spence (chapter 6)

Desiree (chapter 7)

Proofreaders:

Bridget (chapters 4-5 and 7-8)

EvlNabiki (chapters 3-4 and 6-7)

Hopehime4 (chapters 5-6)

Iskeirka (chapters 3 and 8)

ShadowRebirth (chapters 1-3 and 5-8)

C/E Editors:

Erialis (chapters 1-8)

PDF and eBook Formatter

Katerina

Chapter 1: The Final Victor

“Let’s get started, Wicked. Don’t make me repeat myself,” my voice, laced with anger, rang out.

Wicked gazed at me solemnly, a trace of melancholy in his eyes. At long last he drew his sword and said, “Then, before that – I want to duel Zui. I can’t let you keep hogging the limelight.”

I scratched my cheek, wondering, *Had I really been hogging the limelight? Okay...maybe just a little.* “As you wish.”

I glanced over at Zui and Fan, just in time to see Fan being forced into a corner before being cut in half by Zui. *Seems like Fan isn’t Zui’s match in one-to-one combat, despite being his superior when it comes to strategy and tactics... (Or should I say Fan’s a sneakier bastard?) Could it be that it was very cruel of me to have forcibly hauled Fan back from the brink of death, only to let Zui beat him to death? ...Never mind! At the very least, it’s better for him this way than being beaten to death by me instead.*

After finishing Fan off, Nan Gong Zui walked slowly toward me. *It can’t be that he wants to challenge me to a duel, can it? Interesting!* I thought. With a faint smile I raised Black Dao, readying myself. I watched as Nan Gong Zui drew closer to me with each step. *He’s about to attack!* I tensed up...

“Thank you, Prince,” Zui said suddenly.

“...Huh?” I froze. *Thank me? I massacred all his allies and still the man wants to thank me?*

“You gave Fan and I the chance for a fair duel to the death,” Nan Gong Zui hastened to clarify as he eyed my unconvinced expression. “Besides, that was the main reason why I entered the tournament in the first place.”

“Oh... Ah, right, Wicked said that he wants to fight you first.” I pointed over at Wicked.

Nan Gong Zui simply smiled upon hearing that. “There’s no need; I’m the only one left in my alliance, so there’s no point in fighting on. Besides, I have more important matters to settle, so you might as well kill me now, Prince,” he said, a deep melancholy in his eyes.

His gloomy mood rubbed off on me, and I said softly, “All right then...”

Before I had even finished what I was saying, a sword's blade suddenly pierced through Zui's chest –and the owner of the sword was none other than Wicked. Wicked wore an irate expression as he looked at Zui.

I can overlook the fact that this fellow became friends with Xiao Lan, he thought, and it's no big deal if he had the opportunity to be carried by Xiao Lan in her arms. But now he actually dares to ask Xiao Lan to kill him? Why can't he just go and find some place to die quietly by himself?

“Wicked, what are you doing?” I exclaimed, deeply displeased. “Zui already said he wanted *me* to kill him!”

A flicker of realization darted across Nan Gong Zui's face as he looked at Wicked's resentful gaze. “Never mind, it doesn't matter, Prince,” Zui said. “After I've settled my business, I'll look you up for a drink...”

The conversation was once again interrupted as a translucent arrow was fired from behind me, on my right, landing squarely in the middle of Nan Gong Zui's forehead. The culprit, Gui, threw a cold glance at Nan Gong Zui. I thought, *I guess you could say that Gui was more chivalrous than Wicked; at least he waited for Nan Gong Zui to say that he would come back to look for me before he finished him off!*

Watching as Nan Gong Zui's pillar of white light shot off into the sky, Gui and Wicked both revealed sinister, satisfied smiles as they thought, *Who asked that slightly handsome bastard to get close to Prince!?*

“Since when were the two of you on such good terms?” *Even their smiles are identical*, I thought as I looked suspiciously at those two butchers. However, as soon as I said that they immediately stopped smiling, and even glared hatefully at each other.

“Two weirdoes...” I muttered to myself.

I hefted my Black Dao and leveled it at Wicked. “Whatever the case, it's now time for us to fight to the death once again, Wicked. I really missed your longsword – and your moves that seem to come out of nowhere!”



“Prince...” *Xiao Lan*...thought Wicked, pained. How could he possibly turn his blade on his beloved Xiao Lan? Originally, Wicked had planned to perish together with Nan Gong Zui, so that Xiao Lan would be spared from having to kill her friend, and also so that he wouldn't have to swing his sword at his own beloved girl — even though it would mean letting down his friends in Dark Emperor!

Wicked looked towards his teammates and they returned his gaze expectantly, waiting for him to draw his sword. As for Feng Wu Qing, he had long since drawn his own rapier...
Feng Wu Qing, if you knew that this was your own sister, would you still be able to attack her?

(Feng Lan: You don't have to worry about that, he'll be more than happy to thrash his sister – who stole his women from him – till kingdom come...)



I waited for Wicked to draw his sword, but for a long time he didn't move an inch...
Could it be that Zhuo-gēge wants to let me attack first? I frowned, feeling extremely ticked off. *I want to win, but not this way!* I roared, "Draw your sword!"

My fury only blazed more fiercely still as Wicked continued to look at me hesitantly.
What's this supposed to mean? That I can only win if people go easy on me? I—

Suddenly, Gui rested a hand on my shoulder and the look in his eyes seemed to be telling me to calm down. He walked up next to Wicked and murmured by the latter's ear, "If you don't want to lose Prince forever, then you'd better draw your sword. Any kind of concession on your part will only further agitate him. Do you still not understand what he's like, even though you've known him for eight years?"

The problem is, Wicked thought, Xiao Lan didn't use to be like this. In the game The World, she had always hidden behind him, and was always cajoling him to buy things for her. Wicked felt nostalgic as he recollected Xiao Lan's impish antics, but... Now she's really grown up. Now she's always at the front of her team, always laughing delightedly even as she fights, weapon in hand; now she knows how to work hard for what she wants. Prince isn't the old Xiao Lan anymore.

"I admire the current Prince..." *But I miss the Xiao Lan from before,* Wicked added silently in his heart.

Wicked looked steadily at Gui. "Watch your own back; even if you've just helped me, we're still love rivals. Just you wait; I'll still gut you like an animal later."

Gui's lips curled upwards slightly. "My words exactly."

Wicked finally drew his sword, and I gave a satisfied swing of my Black Dao. Both teams began to prepare for the battle ahead. Wolf-dàgē hurriedly told Doll to summon her skeletal minions and then directed us to take up our positions. When the members of both teams had taken up their positions, the skeletons and I stood in a fan-shaped formation in front to protect the rest of the team, while Dark Emperor had Wicked and Feng Wu Qing at the fore.

Wolf-dàgē reminded us, “Everyone, the outcome of the battle will be determined the moment the mages cast their large-scale spells. As such, we have to either cast our spell first, or take down Ming Huang. Lolidragon, you’ll go and distract Playboy Lord, and no matter what you must not let them kill Yu Lian. If you can, finish Ming Huang off. Gui, you’ll have to pay attention to the enemy archer. Doll, you hide at the back as much as you can and keep the number of skeletons up. Your job is to stay alive. Last of all, Prince, your duty is to protect all the team members.”

All of us gave Wolf-dàgē an “OK” sign.

Wolf-dàgē observed Dark Emperor for a moment, and after making sure that their preparations were ready, he tore a corner off the hem of his shirt and threw it into the air. Everyone watched as it slowly drifted to the ground – and landed!

Both sides went into action simultaneously.



After releasing his breath explosively, the commentator Xiao Li exclaimed, “The final battle has begun at last! It’s a showdown between Odd Squad and Dark Emperor — which team will be the victors of the Adventurers’ Tournament? Presently, we can see the Blood Elf Prince engaged in battle with the dark elf Wicked, as well as the human swordsman Feng Wu Qing. The movement of their weapons is so rapid that I, Xiao Li, can’t even begin describing their moves.

“Prince is now executing a series of attacks, following it up with a flying kick, then a low kick... Wicked isn’t backing down either, crouching and whirling around quickly to evade Prince’s attack. Now it’s Wicked’s turn on the offensive with a Z-shaped attack, almost hitting Prince... Has it appeared; is that Prince’s ultimate attack? Heavens, a series of blows, all laced with flames, what an amazing move! But did it hit Wicked at all? Pity... Only one attack landed and once again there is a clash of blades. How will this contest between longsword and *dao* end?

“Next, let’s take a look at how Feng Wu Qing is decimating the ranks of skeletons with his rapier —he seems to be holding his own against eight skeletons! The way he handles his rapier is simply incredible; all of his attacks are deadly. The speed with which the skeletons’ HP is going down has left the necromancer in a fluster... Wait a minute! Everyone quick, look at the battle between the thieves; it’s like a fight between wind and wind. Did you see that? The two shadows are darting about the stadium relentlessly, drawing close to Odd Squad at times, forced back toward Dark Emperor at others, so quickly that I, Xiao Li, cannot differentiate one from the other!

“As for the mages on both sides... Are they preparing to cast large-scale magic? No, they’re both now maintaining shielding spells over their teams. It looks like neither mage is able to execute such attacks for fear of the long-range attackers on the opposing team.

The mages and long-range attackers have come to a stalemate; it looks like they can only sit tight and hope that their warriors at the frontline will triumph, or that their thieves will be able to successfully assassinate members of the other team.”



I see, so it all depends on the warriors and thieves huh? I smiled. *I definitely cannot lose to Lolidragon; otherwise she'll use her piercingly shrill laughter to make jabs at me.* I decided to step up the pace, increasing the speed of my attacks.

I wonder if you can still manage to keep up so effortlessly, Wicked? I smiled slightly.

“Ugh...!” A sudden flare of pain in my knee – *Impossible! I'd clearly dodged all of Wicked's blows!* I looked down and saw that it was actually an arrow, its head buried in my knee. I raised my head to look at Ambusher and sure enough, he was smirking at me. Worse still, a whole volley of arrows was flying toward me. With an effort, I managed to roll away, but an arrow still found its mark in my left shoulder. Cold sweat poured down my back even as pain washed over me. Luckily, Wolf-dågē immediately restored a large amount of the HP that I'd lost, so I was able to get back to my feet, but only with considerable effort on my part.

I turned around hurriedly to face Wicked in case he was going to make use of the opportunity to attack me...but he was just standing there with a look of reluctance on his face. I glared furiously at him and even swung my Black Dao in front of his face a couple of times. *I think I must be the first person on Earth who's ever had to remind the enemy in the middle of a fight to not hesitate to attack, and even to take advantage of the opportunity to land a sneak attack!*

Wicked seemed to have finally decided to quit dawdling. “*Flawless Circle of Profundity – True Blade of the Solitary Man.*”

What a bizarre-sounding move... Of course, I'm not going to lose to you. “Watch me! *Ringling Blade, Frenzied Strike!*”

My Black Dao seemed to morph into a thousand copies, each blade striking Wicked from a different direction. Blood spurted as wounds appeared all over Wicked's body, but...

True Blade of the Solitary Man *indeed*, I thought. *I see. It's completely different from my Ringling Blade, Frenzied Strike. That move of Wicked's was designed to pierce just one time, but to hit a vital point in the process.*

Unfortunately, due my wounded knee, I was only just barely able to prevent the attack from piercing my heart by shifting slightly. My *dao* was around twenty centimeters away from Wicked's neck, whereas his longsword was buried deeply in the right side of my

chest. Moreover, the point of the blade was angled towards the left side of my chest, at my heart. *No matter how you look at it, it seems that I'll be dead before him...*



Back to main fight, neither Yu Lian, who was maintaining the protective shield, nor Gui, who was waiting for the opportunity to strike, had expected the enemy archer to leave the safety of his team's shield to spring an attack on Prince. It was clearly a kamikaze strategy...but what was still more frustrating for them was that even though Yu Lian immediately dropped the protective shield, letting Gui rain a barrage of arrows on Ambusher, the archer continued to fire a number of shots at Prince before he died.

Gui quickly turned to check on Prince's condition. Upon seeing the situation, his heart almost stopped, but lucky his hand continued to reflexively fire arrows. Wicked, who had not noticed Gui, was hit squarely in the middle of his forehead by an arrow. He looked at Gui with astonishment in his eyes before turning into a pillar of white light and shooting away into the sky.



I breathed a sigh of relief, but instantly the pain in the right side of my chest nearly overwhelmed me. Gripping my chest tightly, I forced myself to endure the agony as I waited for Wolf-dàgē to finish the incantation for the healing spell. *I have to get rid of Ming Huang while he's still casting the spell for the large-scale magic...*

“Urgh!” I looked down disbelievably at the blade that had just emerged from between my ribs, and then turned my head to look at the owner of the rapier... *It's a really complicated feeling, dying at the hands of your own brother!* I thought. *Feng Wu Qing, you bastard, you sure chose a good time to kill your sister!*

“Prince...!” Gui gave an ear-shattering roar, but could only watch on helplessly as I followed in Wicked's footsteps and turned into a pillar of light.



Ugly Wolf, who wasn't able to cast the healing spell in time, could only direct the team to change tactics. “Doll, block Feng Wu Qing. Gui, get rid of the mage. Yu Lian...” Ugly Wolf turned toward Yu Lian, about to ask her to begin the incantation for her large-scale magic, but Yu Lian had already seen Ming Huang chanting the incantation and begun chanting her own.

Feng Wu Qing could see that the situation had turned against Dark Emperor. Should he hurry back and protect Ming Huang, or should he go up to Odd Squad and kill off their mage?

“Playboy, quit fooling around over there and come over here to help!” he roared, even as he backed up to Ming Huang, using his body to shield the latter and frantically deflecting Gui’s *Supersonic Soul-chasing Arrows* with his rapier.

Playboy Lord only smiled bitterly as he thought, *Does Wu Qing think that I actually want to fool around?* If he hadn’t been following that elf thief – who was fast as the wind and could burrow into the ground – closely, she would have assassinated heaven only knows how many members of Dark Emperor already. Still, as the situation seemed to call for a different strategy, Playboy Lord gave up on pursuing Lolidragon and turned his attention to the other members of Odd Squad.

Lolidragon and Playboy Lord were locked in a stalemate as they circled Yu Lian continuously. Playboy Lord knew that he would be unable to attack Yu Lian right in front of Lolidragon’s eyes. He smiled coldly, and with a light step, retreated several meters. He turned around at the same time and the dagger in his hand scored a line across Doll’s throat. Thus, adorable Doll was killed and the skeletons that had been about to pursue and attack Feng Wu Qing also crumbled into dust.

“Damn it!” With a single leap, Lolidragon jumped and landed right in front of Playboy Lord. Not caring that she was weaker than Playboy Lord in terms of physical strength, she attacked him in a flurry of dagger blows. Light danced and glinted off their daggers, and there was the sound of metal on metal as their blades met over and over again unrelentingly.

“... *Wrath of the Nine Heavens!*” Ming Huang spat out the final line of the incantation viciously.

“...*Meteor Shower!*” Yu Lian-dàsǎo was only slower by a heartbeat.

Instantly, the earth and the skies began to heave violently...

“Shit,” both teams thought at the same time.



As an aftereffect of death, I was a little fuzzy-headed when I stepped back into the stadium and stood next to Ambusher, who had arrived a long while ago. I’d returned just in time to witness an amazing sight – Ming Huang’s lightning had consolidated into pillars of electricity, and there were so many meteors descending in Yu Lian-dàsǎo’s meteor shower that you could lose track of the number of wishes you’d made on them. I searched the arena for signs of survivors...but unfortunately, I couldn’t see anyone.

“Don’t tell me it’s a draw again! Wicked and I survived the last time, but everyone perished this time around?” I remarked.

I waited silently for the spells to dissipate and for the outcome to be decided. Just then, Wicked too came to stand beside me quietly... and then came Doll, with two streaks of tears on her cheeks, and was whining about the pain as she came up to me. The seconds seemed to tick by slowly, and we grew tenser with each passing moment.

The commentator Xiao Li seemed to be just as eager as the audience to know the outcome. “Members of the audience, this is the moment of the tournament that we’ve been anticipating most. Which team will be the ultimate champions of the Adventurers’ Tournament, Dark Emperor or Odd Squad? Or were both teams annihilated? Ah... The spells have faded away. There seems to be figure in the midst of all that smoke; let’s see which side he or she belongs to. That’s, that’s... The person lying on the floor is Feng Wu Qing, the human swordsman from Dark Emperor! Although he’s close to death, he is still alive. The winning team has emerged!”

“Ah! It’s Wu Qing!” I couldn’t help feeling a little crestfallen, but it made sense that the sole survivor of the deadly storm of magic would be the warrior, with the highest HP and strongest defense. I turned to Wicked. “Congratulations on winning.”

The audience went into a frenzy of roars and cheers. Xiao Li’s voice was like the sound of pigs being butchered as he shrieked, “Dark Emperor! Dark Emperor has emerged victorious!”

A hand appeared! From the arena’s dirt floor, a hand abruptly shot out. At first only a few spectators stared at it in silence with mouths gaping wide open, but like a contagious disease, that silence soon spread across the rest of the audience as everyone stared at the hand sticking out of the ground... The entire stadium was engulfed in silence!

“What is that thing?” I went numb all over, thinking, *Don’t tell me it’s the fourteenth day of the seventh lunar month... Could it be a haunting? No way! Do those things also play online games?*¹

Following that, another hand shot up through the ground. More than a few members of the audience couldn’t take the terror and were already screaming...

“Whew... It’s a good thing I’d taken the pains to learn *Burrowing*,” Lolidragon muttered to herself as she clambered up from the ground and began dusting off the dirt from her clothes.

¹ **Fourteenth day of the seventh lunar month:** This is more commonly known as the “Ghost Festival”, a traditional Chinese festival that takes place on the fourteenth day of the seventh lunar month every year and is usually celebrated by Taoists and Buddhists. The seventh lunar month in general is known as the Ghost Month, during which the gates between the realm of the living and the realms of the dead are believed to be opened such that the dead may freely walk the earth. The fourteenth day is known as the Ghost Day and it is on that day in particular that deceased ancestors would visit their living relatives.

I paid no mind to my image as I gaped at the sight. However, my mouth wasn't gaping *that* widely compared to the members of Dark Emperor, the audience, and Xiao Li.

When Lolidragon had finally finished patting off the dirt, she sauntered over to Feng Wu Qing with an intolerably smug smirk on her face. “*Yooou* look like you're about to die!” The evil smile on her face was definitely Satan's own; it was a bewitchingly charming smile, but one which you would definitely *not* want to see twice!

Lolidragon raised her dagger, but lowered it after a moment as the smile on her face grew even smugger. She lifted her foot lightly and then stomped forcefully on Feng Wu Qing's solar plexus. As she grinded her foot into his chest, she remarked coyly, “As the saying goes, ‘dying under the peony, a gallant hero even as a ghost’.² Isn't that right, great hero Chu Liu Xiang?”

Finally, Feng Wu Qing vomited a huge mouthful of blood and then turned into a pillar of white light which shot into the sky... *I really can't tell, was he stomped to death, or infuriated to death?*

“Odd Squad, victory!” yelled the referee.

² **Dying under the peony, a gallant hero even as a ghost:** This is actually a line from a poem, which has also become a well-known saying. What “dying under the peony” actually means is “to be killed by a beautiful woman”. Thus, the saying's meaning is actually along the lines of “a gallant hero should act like a man and not mind dying at the hands of a beautiful woman”. (In case anyone's forgotten, Chu Liu Xiang is the fictional character that Wu Qing loves to emulate. He's supposedly a gallant hero but also a huge flirt as well.)

Chapter 2: Infinite City

“Why must I be the liege lord?” I grumbled, malcontented. *I don’t even have the foggiest notion of what to do as a liege lord; wouldn’t it be better if the position was given to Wolf-dàgē? Making me the liege lord! I’m not even sure what to do with our new territory. What are we going to do with it, farm?*

“Let me ask you, Prince,” said Lolidragon in an interrogative manner as she jabbed a finger at my nose, “Do you know how to devise strategies or command troops like Wolf-dàgē, and so be put in charge of the military department?”

I cocked my head to one side, thinking, *Me, handle military matters? I don’t even know what the difference between strategies and tactics is...* “I don’t know how to.”

“Or are you by some chance like Yulian-dàsão, with the talent to manage finances and accounts with incomparable skill, able to use money to generate more money, and so manage the finance department? Are you, in addition, a mage, and so able to take charge of the mages’ department as well?”

“No, I can’t.” *It’s already an achievement in itself if I don’t spend all of my money, and besides, I’m not a mage,* I thought, feeling sorry for myself.

“Then do you have a brain as good as Gui’s? Are you able to come up with the blueprints for the entire territory and even supervise the entire construction process?”

I went to a corner to be gloomy. “About drawing... People have always said that the dogs I draw looked more like cats.”

“Then do you have my technical knowledge, to be able to lay traps around the territory to prevent monsters or other players from attacking?”

“Not stepping on one of those traps myself, that can already be considered a blessing...” There were now two ghost fires floating next to me.

“Then are you by any chance able to summon skeletons like Doll, to help with the construction?” Lolidragon questioned, dealing me a final blow.

I didn’t expect...that even Doll’s more useful than I am! I want to weep... “If I’m so useless, why do you still want me to be the liege lord?” I pouted, sulking.

Lolidragon gave me a pat on my shoulder, her face the picture of kindness – *or was it faux kindness?* – as she looked at me. “That’s precisely why we want you to be the liege lord! After all, the only thing you can be is the liege lord, who doesn’t need to do

anything except be good-looking, be presentable, and not do anything to damage our territory's reputation!"

"So that's how it is! So it's because I don't know how to do anything that I can only be the liege lord..." My eyes filled with two large, glistening tears and I whimpered. "I must apply myself to learning some skills from now on, otherwise I'll never amount to anything more than a liege lord."

...Is being the liege lord really such a sad thing? wondered the remaining members of Odd Squad.

Backtracking a little, back on that day when Lolidragon used *Burrowing* to safely sit out the havoc wrought by the two large-scale AOE spells, stomped Feng Wu Qing to death, and then snatched victory back for Odd Squad in the Adventurers' Tournament, we went onstage happily to claim our prize as a team. We drank in the deafening cheers of the crowd and admired the remarkable sight of the members of Dark Emperor standing stock-still, mouths gaping in shock for an entire hour...until the headaches began.

Of all the prizes, the most significant one was a piece of land, which we were suddenly saddled with for no reason. According to hearsay, it could compare with Sun, Moon, and Star cities in terms of size, and so we had no choice but to start discussing how to manage this piece of trouble...

"This land of ours is really no small burden. Sun, Moon and Star cities are spread out along the fringes of this continent in a triangular formation; as the cities are quite far from one another, and as teleportation fees are expensive, most players will usually opt to make one of the three cities their base camp and then train in its vicinity. Our territory lies right smack in the middle of the entire continent, however, and the amount of time needed to travel from our land to any of the key areas on this continent is pretty much the same.

"As such, if we play our cards right, we'll definitely be able to lure most of the players away from Sun, Moon, and Star cities and get them to settle down here. However, for the same reason there will be many people eyeing this piece of land...and that will probably be much scarier than an attack by mobs," Lolidragon mused, frowning. "Although the developers have provided us with NPC guards for the moment, once the time's up, they will be removed, after which we will have to defend the city on our own. While we can hire NPC guards, they're overly expensive and, after all, they're not human players. They lack adaptability and thus cannot be the main pillar of our defense. We must organize our own defense force, create a vibrant economy, and design our city well..."

That was how we began to divide the work among us... *And, as you can see, because there's nothing special about me except my good looks, I ended up as an ornament – the liege lord!*

“Although the liege lord is supposedly nothing more than an ornament, Prince, I have an assignment for you, to keep you from dying of boredom.” Wolf-dàgē cleared his throat. “We have a serious shortage of manpower, so you have to recruit some help.”

“Who am I going to recruit...?” *My fan club? You’ve got to be kidding me!*

“Rose Team.” Lolidragon said as she tapped her chin with a finger thoughtfully. Upon seeing me flinch, she hurried to add, “Even though there was some unhappiness the last time we met, they’re good people. I don’t think they really felt that what happened was your fault. Besides, there are quite a few talented individuals in Rose Team.”

“The big brothers and sisters from Dark Emperor too!” Doll exclaimed delighted. “They’re all good people!”

“Nan Gong Zui!” Yulian-dàsāo added, even as Gui’s face hardened upon hearing that name. (His objections were overruled, however.) “To have been one of the head honchos of the three major alliances in the tournament, he must have considerable influence. If you can get him to join us, Prince, our force’s numbers will be greatly bolstered.”

“That’s right, it’s basically these people for now,” Wolf-dàgē said with a nod. “While we’re pouring our sweat and blood into constructing the city, Prince you should make use of the time to chat with them and do some networking, and then get them to join us while you’re at it. Oh, by the way, it’ll be great if you can find other talented individuals as well. What do you think? Isn’t your assignment quite simple?”

Biting my index finger, with my head tilted to one side, I thought, *It seems to be...quite easy?!*

“Okay, then I’ll get going. It’ll be tough on you guys!” I felt a little guilty. *Everyone else will be working hard on construction, whereas I’m running off to chit-chat... Sigh! It’s all because I don’t know how to do anything, that’s why I’m so useless.*

Everyone waved cheerfully at me as I left. I too waved back at them enthusiastically, and then embarked on my “chatting” journey...



It was not until they could no longer see Prince that the smiles, which had been plastered on the faces of the remaining Odd Squad members, finally came off.

“Hmm... I feel a little guilty. We’ve tricked Prince into carrying the toughest job; I wonder if he’ll be okay?” Wolf-dàgē remarked, looking slightly worried.

“Don’t worry about it; that fellow has extremely good luck with people in general. Besides, I don’t have a conscience to speak of, so I don’t feel the least bit guilty,” Lolidragon said with an evil smile.

“Prince is the liege lord after all, so one way or another he has to have a little responsibility!” Yu Lian-dàsǎo smiled, stretching her index finger and thumb as far apart as possible as she said “a little”.

In a troubled tone, Gui asked, “But will Prince lose his way?”

...That is the most worrying question indeed!



“Who should I look for first?” I agonized. “Oh well, I guess I’ll look for Dark Emperor first; since Zhuo-gēge is there, it shouldn’t be that difficult to recruit them, right?!”

I made up my mind and immediately PMed Wicked, saying, “Wicked, where are you guys? There’s something I’d like to talk over with you all!”

“... We’re in Star City, but it’s better if you don’t come over now.” Upon receiving her message, Wicked was initially delighted at the prospect of being able to see Xiao Lan. However, after he took one long look at his drunken teammates sprawled about in the restaurant booth and thought of how they had been talking about hacking the members of Odd Squad into a million pieces just a moment ago while drinking, Wicked thought the better of letting Xiao Lan come over. “What’s up?”

“I want to rope you guys into managing the territory!” I went straight to the point.

“Hmm... I’ll talk things over with my teammates, but they’re too angry to think straight right now, so it’ll be better if you don’t come over first.”

“Oh, then I guess I’ll look for Nan Gong Zui first,” I replied, even as I thought, *Rose Team... I guess I’ll look for them last.* I still felt a little guilty about what happened, so I wasn’t ready to meet them yet.

Unbeknownst to Prince, Wicked’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “You’re going to look for Nan Gong Zui?! That fellow Gui actually didn’t try to stop you?”

“Yeah, he did. I have no idea why he was objecting, but after Lolidragon got him in a chokehold, he didn’t object anymore.” (*Or perhaps it was because he had no way to voice his objections?*) *Seriously, Gui gets jealous over just about anything. Are all gays this troublesome? He gets agitated if anyone approaches me, never mind whether they’re male or female... He’s such a poor thing!*

“Don’t look for Nan Gong Zui! I guarantee you that Dark Emperor will join you guys!” Wicked looked menacingly at his teammates on the floor; woe betide any naysayers!

“I knew you’re the best, Zhuo-gēge! It’s a done deal then; you have to join us!” I said happily, thinking, *One team down already, looks like I’ll be back with my Odd Squad teammates in no time!* “I’ll go look for Nan Gong Zui now then.”

“Hey—!”

I closed my private channel with Wicked and PMed Nan Gong Zui for the first time ever. “Nan Gong Zui, paging for Nan Gong Zui!”

“Who is it?”

“Prince,” I reported my name cheerfully.

“...The Blood Elf?” Nan Gong Zui sounded somewhat startled.

“Just call me Prince.” *Why does Nan Gong Zui like calling me “the Blood Elf” so much?*

“Oh, Prince. Is something the matter?” Nan Gong Zui asked enthusiastically. “Looking for me to go drinking together?”

“Erm...something like that, and there’s some other stuff I want to discuss with you.”

“No problem; come over first! I’m in Moon City, just let me know before you arrive,” Nan Gong Zui replied, and his voice became tinged with frustration. “I still have to settle that problem with my godsister Ice Phoenix first.”

“Sure. It might take me a few days to reach, as I’m still pretty far from Moon City, so take your time to settle things,” I replied.

So, my destination is Moon City? I unfolded the map and saw that Moon City was on the west side of the continent. *Which way is west?* I looked blankly at the huge moon and the sky full of stars, thinking, *Gui told me before that if I can find the North Star, I’ll be able to tell which way’s north...but what did he say about finding the North Star again? First I have to locate the Big Dipper...but what is the Big Dipper?* My head slumped to one side, uncomprehending. (Gui: I couldn’t get you to understand in the end, but didn’t I give you a compass?)



“Phoenix, do you mean to infuriate me to death?” Nan Gong Zui was on the verge of exploding with anger as he looked at his godsister. “Fan is clearly deceiving you; can you still not see that? Why did you foolishly send him yet another present?”

Ice Phoenix smiled sorrowfully. “Dàgē, is it really so wrong to love a person, to want to make sacrifices for his sake, to want to dedicate yourself to him? I believe that his heart will be truly moved by me one day.”

“You, you...!” Nan Gong Zui gave an exasperated sigh as he wondered, *How is it that women can be this foolish?*

“I have loved Fan deeply since the moment I first laid eyes on him,” Phoenix said. There was an intoxicated expression on her face as she recollected, “He is just like a perfect god. Back then, when he walked towards me, I even thought that I was looking at the most handsome Sun God, Apollo! I believe that there is no other person in the world who can rival his perfection.”

Goose pimples broke out all over Nan Gong Zui’s body. *Fan certainly is quite good-looking... I wonder, between him and Prince, which one of them would Phoenix prefer?*

“Ah... Fan’s PMing me, I’ve got to hurry over,” Phoenix said, almost beside herself with joy upon receiving Fan’s message.

“I forbid you to go—” Before he could finish speaking, his godsister was already gone, and so Nan Gong Zui had no choice but to hurriedly chase after his godsister’s disappearing figure.



In the end, I still took the wrong path. I inadvertently walked to the East instead, and thus wound up in Star City...after which I chose to simply travel to Moon City via the teleportation station. As it turns out, Moon City was actually a Chinese-styled city. As I wandered through the city, I happily admired the bamboo buildings, red lanterns, and the streets full of fan-waving swordsmen.

Talk about how the culture of a city influences the character of the people living in it... That’s odd, why did my brother, that Chu Liu Xiang-wannabe, end up in Star City instead? I mused as I gnawed on a stick of candied haws that I had just bought.

“Stop right there, Phoenix!” Nan Gong Zui grabbed Phoenix’s hand angrily.

“Let go of me, Dàgē; let me look for Fan!” Phoenix wailed.

I chewed another candied haw as I watched the scene unfold before my eyes, thinking, *Looks like my luck’s pretty good; I found Nan Gong Zui without even having to PM him!*

Fan sauntered over slowly towards the duo from the other end of the street with a smile on his face. “Nan Gong Zui, don’t you think that your behavior’s rather unsightly? You couldn’t win your godsister’s heart, so you’re resorting to brute force now?”

“What did you say? Don’t spout nonsense, I just don’t want her to be deceived by a bastard like you,” Nan Gong Zui roared, enraged.

“Nan Gong Zui, you should be more careful about what you’re saying. Who’s deceiving her? Phoenix, have I ever tried to deceive you?” Fan asked, and his expression was one of confidence. “I made everything clear to you, including the fact that you’re only one of the women I’m seeing.”

“I know. It’s okay, I don’t mind at all,” Phoenix replied, mesmerized by Fan’s handsome side profile.

Fan shrugged and gave Nan Gong Zui a helpless look.

“You...” Nan Gong Zui was so furious that he had drawn his sword and was about to charge forward and duel Fan.

Terrified for her beloved, Phoenix hurried forward to bar Nan Gong Zui’s path. “Stop it, Gēge! I won’t allow you to harm Fan!”

Nan Gong Zui’s expression revealed how wounded he was by her action. “Phoenix, you...”

“Dàgē, I...” Phoenix was wracked with guilt, but also unwilling to budge.

The atmosphere grew heavy as the situation stalemated. I swallowed the last candied haw, licked my lips, and tossed the remaining bamboo skewer into the trash bin.

...An infatuated woman, a worried brother, and a heartless and dissolute playboy; this is quite the detestable soap opera. Allow me to break up this meaningless drama! I thought with a devilish smirk.

I straightened my posture, affixed a slight smile to my face, elegance oozing from every pore. *Right now I am...the most perfect Lord Prince!* In a low and warm voice, I said, “Nan Gong Zui, is that you?”

All those present turned to gaze at me – or more accurately, stared at me, blushing fiercely, their hearts thumping furiously – and I saw with satisfaction that even Ice Phoenix was looking at me infatuatedly. With elegant steps, I walked up to Nan Gong Zui, remarking, “My apologies, I arrived early. I’d meant to take a look around first and then pay you a visit. I hope it’s not too much trouble?”

“It’s not...” Nan Gong Zui looked at me with uncertainty. In his head, Nan Gong Zui was thinking, *The Prince here today seems...quite different from before?*

“Hmm, this lady here... She must be your godsister, Ice Phoenix, correct?” I turned towards the stunned-looking Phoenix and flashed my most brilliant and peerless smile – one which could mesmerize both women *and* men – at her. “Nan Gong Zui often mentions you!”

“Re- really?” Phoenix stammered as she stared fixedly at my face, enraptured.

“You’re just as adorable as he described!” Inching my face closer and closer towards her as I spoke, I could almost hear her heart as it thumped wildly in her chest. Finally I took her hand lightly in mine, raised it to my lips, and brushed the back of her hand with a kiss.

Phoenix breathed in sharply, and then actually *fainted*... *Now I know that I’m hot enough to make people faint*, I thought, as I carried the unconscious girl in my arms, mildly exasperated. “Nan Gong Zui, come and claim your sister!”

“...” Nan Gong Zui came over and took Ice Phoenix from me wordlessly.

“It’s you again, Prince!” Fan snarled. The mask of serenity that he had been wearing was starting to crumble away.

I grinned maliciously at him. “What? You wanted to see me *that* badly?”

“Who would want to see you?” Fan’s face had become twisted with hatred.

“Aiyah! Still trying to act tough?” I walked up to Fan with slow, deliberate steps, not forgetting to give him an ambiguous smile. “If you wanted to see me you just have to say so. I *guarantee* you that I’ll look you up whenever I’m free.”

“Get away from me,” Fan said, backing up three paces, and he even remembered to draw his sword and point it at me.

I laughed coldly. Placing my hands on my hip in a show of magnificent unconcern, I said, “You sure you want to fight me?”

Hearing that, Fan hesitated. He hadn’t forgotten the Blood Elf’s prowess on the battlefield, but there was no way for him to back out when his own reputation was at stake, and so his sword remained leveled at me unwaveringly.

My expression changed, growing severe within an instant. “Don’t ever come near Ice Phoenix again. You should know that from this day on, her heart no longer belongs to you.”

Fan's face became almost mottled with rage, and he laughed mockingly before saying, "Blood Elf, aren't you a little too nosy? What happens between Phoenix and I is really none of your business."

"Hmph, Nan Gong Zui is my friend, his sister is my sister, so how can I stand by idly and watch as Phoenix gets played by a beast like you?" I drew my Black Dao and watched with considerable satisfaction as Fan paled, which made me decide to challenge him further. "If you want to fight, cut the crap and come at me!"

Fan looked at me with a sick expression, and then deliberately glanced at Nan Gong Zui, who was standing nearby. "Planning to fight me two on one, is it?"

I replied coldly, "Quit looking for excuses, you know very well that Nan Gong Zui won't interfere."

"That's hard to say!" Fan retorted nastily, sheathing his sword. "I've no interest in being ganged up on by two people!"

I said no more and only looked coldly at Fan. After all, I didn't really intend to fight him here on the streets, especially not for a reason like competing for a woman's heart...

Fan shot me an icy look before he turned to leave. "One day, I will exact from you everything you owe me, Blood Elf."

I lifted an eyebrow. "I'll be waiting."

Sigh, this visit to Nan Gong Zui has left me with yet another beauty for a suitor and earned me the enmity of a formidable rival... If he still refuses to join us, even if he's a friend, I will definitely turn him into mincemeat. With that thought, I turned to look at Nan Gong Zui menacingly, but he continued to look at me with innocent confusion.

"Nan Gong Zui, are you going to join me or not?" I demanded, grabbing his collar.

"Huh?"



In Nan Gong Zui's house...

"I see, so it's about the territory you won!" Nan Gong Zui smiled. "Have you decided on the name for your city yet?"

I was taking a long sip of my bubble tea, but I immediately froze upon hearing Zui's question. "My city's...name?"

“What? You guys haven’t decided on it yet?” Nan Gong Zui’s astonishment was evident.

I cocked my head to one side, thinking, *Maybe they have already decided on it but forgot to tell me?* “Wait a minute, let me ask them.”

“Wolf-dàgē, does our city have a name yet?”

“...Oh no, we clean forgot about that. Prince, since you’re the liege lord, you think of one!” was Wolf-dàgē’s irresponsible reply. “After you’ve come up with a name, you might as well go and register it with the Office of Land Development in the city. That’s all.”

Why is it like this... I frowned. “They asked me to think of name myself! Nan Gong Zui, help me come up with a name.”

“...This kind of heavy responsibility is best left to you, the liege lord!”

I thought and thought, turning my head inside out and back again as I racked my brain for an idea, any idea...but I collapsed on the floor in tears in the end. *Uwaaaah, I just can’t think of anything!* I turned my tearful gaze to Nan Gong Zui in a silent plea...

“...Why not call it Infinite City, to represent the limitless potential of the future?” Nan Gong Zui pronounced after mulling over it briefly.

“Excellent name!” I dashed up to Nan Gong Zui and clasped his hands. Looking at him with gratitude-filled eyes, I said cajolingly, “Since you’ve already helped with the founding of Infinite City, you can’t run away now! You *have* to join us, okay? Please, *Zuiiiii...*”

“...I think we should be able to join you guys. I’ve no problem with it, and our team’s Phoenix is definitely going to follow you, which means that her older sister will too. Her sister’s husband is our team’s priest, and his younger brother is our team’s thief, and the remaining person in the team will probably come along as well.”

“...It’s agreed then, I- I have other people to look for still, so I’ll leave it to you to meet up with my teammates in Infinite City.” The smile on my face had stiffened. *What Zui just said...did he mean that if I don’t take responsibility for Phoenix, her sister and two brothers-in-law will definitely hunt me down? Sigh, how am I going to survive in the future?* I considered getting Gui to design a secret room for me to hide in.

“Sure! No problem at all.”

“Thanks, Zui,” I smiled cheerfully, thinking, *That’s another assignment completed!*

Nan Gong Zui gave me a friendly knock on my chest and said, “Don’t sweat it, what are friends for! Come on, let’s go register your city’s name and then go for a drink.”

I smiled foolishly... *Will I actually be able hold my liquor?*



“This is the only thief in my group, Kong Kong,” Nan Gong Zui introduced the drinking companion that he’d invited along, the petite thief Kong Kong.

“Hello, I’m Prince,” I introduced myself politely.

“Don’t be fooled by how thin and small Kong Kong is; he can handle even a thousand drinks. You should watch out, Prince,” Nan Gong Zui said with a hearty laugh.

I joined in and laughed heartily as well...but inwardly I felt really helpless! *I’ve never gone drinking before and I’ll be in a drinking competition with two men the first time I go drinking? Dear heavens! Isn’t that asking a little too much from me? Waaah... I don’t care anymore! It’s not my problem no matter how things pan out!*

“Let us first toast to Prince for successfully clinching victory! Cheers!” Nan Gong Zui yelled.

“Cheers!” Kong Kong too, lifted his cup and yelled.

“Cheers!” I could only follow their lead. I stared at the liquid in my cup for three seconds, gritted my teeth, and then gulped down the contents of my cup... *It burns!* I fought to hold back the tears. *Don’t tell me I’m going to have to guzzle down a whole lot more of this in a moment? It can’t be, right? I want to cry...*



After three hours...

“Another round!” I bellowed, swaying unsteadily as I held up my cup.

“Urgh... I can’t, Prince. You’re just too strong, let’s stop drinking...” Kong Kong groaned from where he sat, half-sprawled out on the table. “If we keep drinking, I’ll really die...”

“Hahahahaha, you can’t out-drink me!” I laughed wildly, but my body was swaying uncontrollably. “And you still say you can handle a thousand, a thousand drinks?!”

“That’s because you, you won’t collapse even after ten thousand drinks, Prince.” Zui, who had passed out earlier, suddenly woke up and said. He massaged his temples. “Let’s stop drinking and go back!”

“Okay...” I replied, feeling a little sullen.

The three of us staggered along the moonlight-flooded street. A faint feeling of melancholy wrapped about my heart and I suddenly felt the urge to draw my weapon and vent my feelings. Without sparing another thought, I drew my Black Dao and, like a person possessed, I swung and hacked and slashed, leaping and dodging furiously, roaring...until I was too exhausted to continue my rampage. I stood still, panting, all the moves that I’d executed up until now in the game flashing through my mind.

Eventually, I began to dance, the techniques melding together into a seamless flow, a dance. Bathed in the clear, icy moonlight, hearing only the delightful sound of my Black Dao whistling through the air, I felt euphoric and a smile crept onto my face, growing wider and wider. The moonlight, the blade, the slender, flitting figure, and the arrogant yet refined laugh – which only an elf could be capable of – wove together into an achingly beautiful melody which echoed throughout the rustic Moon City.

“Hahahaha...haha!” I laughed wildly.

“Excellent! An excellently proud swordsman,” Nan Gong Zui roared approvingly. “Let’s test how good you are, Prince!” With that, he drew his sword and leapt in front of me. Our blades met with a resounding clang, like a song of steel crashing down on the silence of the night.

“Here I come as well!” Kong Kong couldn’t resist drawing his dagger and joining the fray, swift as a wind.

I aimed a kick at Kong Kong even as my *dao* continued to fend off Nan Gong Zui’s sword, and then followed up with a twist in mid-air, evading their combined attack. The three of us were like children fooling about on the street, dodging here and darting there, striking out at one another with our weapons from time to time. We fooled about in this fashion and had a whale of a time...until we reached Nan Gong Zui’s place.

After waving goodbye to Zui, I looked up at the star-studded sky, suddenly filled with the desire to explore the ends of the earth! And so my legs carried me toward an unknown street...

Chapter 3: Everyone has Assembled

“Sheesh, Prince hasn’t been replying to my PMs for a few days now,” Lolidragon complained.

“Well, you know that he’s a really careless person. He probably just didn’t notice the messages,” Ugly Wolf replied absently. “How’s the trap-setting coming along?”

“We’ve only covered one-quarter of the perimeter. Honestly, this city is too large,” Lolidragon answered, her brow furrowing.

Ugly Wolf turned toward his wife. “Yu Lian, do we still have sufficient funds?”

Yu Lian’s brow was also deeply furrowed. She replied, “If we build according to Gui’s blueprint, we won’t be able to complete the construction of the city just by depending on the tournament’s prize money. I plan to build half the city first and open that part of the city to the public, and then continue to build the rest of the city with the tax income.”

“Can’t we just ask Gui to amend the blueprint?” Ugly Wolf asked with some anxiety.

“We can do that, but in my opinion, if we want to operate this city for a long period of time, or even make this city the largest city on the Central Continent, then Gui’s blueprint is perfect.” Yu Lian eyes shone as she spoke. She added, “I’m certain that we will not regret it in the future, even if we have to work harder now.”

“You’re probably right. As expected, you are more farsighted than I am,” Ugly Wolf said with an affectionate look at his beloved wife.

“Wolf...” said Yu Lian bashfully, and the two of them gazed at each other with eyes full of love...

“I’ll go and check up on Doll and Gui!” Lolidragon said quickly and walked away, looking rather embarrassed.

Lolidragon left the building, which was still under construction, and strode towards Doll, who was working hard to direct her skeletal minions to build a wall, and Gui, who was supervising the remaining NPCs and player workers.

“How’s the situation? Is everything coming along alright?” Lolidragon asked.

“We’re slightly behind schedule,” Gui replied, not looking altogether pleased. “*Sigh*... It can’t be helped since we simply don’t have enough funds, so we can’t hire more workers. If not for Doll’s skeletons, the construction would probably go on for months.”

“*Sigh*... It would be nice if Prince could quickly find us some recruits and hurry back. Every little bit of help counts,” Lolidragon said as she sat down, propping her chin on her hands in worry.

Doll suddenly came dashing over with a delighted expression on her face. “Wicked-gēge is here and all the big brothers and sisters from Dark Emperor have arrived as well.”

As usual, Wicked was at the fore of his team. They walked up to Gui and Lolidragon and stopped.

“You’re finally here,” Gui said, raising his eyebrows and looking as though he wasn’t in the least bit surprised to see Wicked.

“Where’s Prince?” Wicked asked, frowning.

“Not back yet...” Gui replied, troubled.

“He’s still at Nan Gong Zui’s?” Wicked demanded as a vein popped on his temple. “And you didn’t do anything to stop him?”

“Prince isn’t my prisoner; on what grounds am I supposed to stop him?” Gui retorted acidly, and then added, “Besides, we really do need Nan Gong Zui’s help.” Although what Gui had said was the truth, Wicked still continued to glare fiercely at Gui.

As for Doll, she was happily holding both Ming Huang’s – whose face was black as a thundercloud – and Wu Qing’s hands. “Yay! Doll missed all of you big brothers and sisters very much! Did Ming Huang-gēge and Wu Qing-gēge miss me too?”

Feng Wu Qing’s face softened, his disgruntled expression slowly replaced by a smile as he patted Doll’s head and said, “Yes, I missed you very much! It’s just that there was a certain someone whom I really didn’t want to see.” When he mentioned “a certain someone”, Wu Qing fixed a glare at the female thief who was busy feigning innocence.

Ming Huang’s expression of annoyance had started to slip as well, and when Doll turned to peer at him with her large, guileless eyes, he instantly surrendered. “Yes, yes, I did miss you,” he said reluctantly.

“Playboy-gēge, Black Lily-jiějie,” Doll greeted the two smiling individuals and gave them each a peck on the cheek.

Just then, Ugly Wolf and Yu Lian emerged from the temporary headquarters and approached Dark Emperor with evident delight. “You guys are here, that’s great! I was really worried at first that Dark Emperor might not be willing to help us.” Ugly Wolf shook hands with Wicked.

“We would not be so churlish. So long as we lost the showdown in a fair and square way, why should there be any resentment from us?” Feng Wu Qing said as he gently fanned himself, sounding for all the world like a perfect gentleman... *Then who was that person who got drunk and said that he wanted to kill everyone from Odd Squad, especially Lolidragon?* The remaining members of Dark Emperor looked at Feng Wu Qing helplessly.

“Nevertheless, thank you all very much for your willingness to come and help out. It’ll really help to lighten our workload,” Ugly Wolf said with a broad smile.

Yu Lian mumbled to herself, frowning, “It’s still not enough people. I wonder if Prince will be able to convince Rose Team and Nan Gong Zui to help out.”

“Of course he can!” A voice roared from the city gate, which was still under construction, causing the members of Odd Squad and Dark Emperor to look sharply in that direction. A cloud of dust, accompanied by hoof beats, approached them swiftly and the person in the lead was none other than Nan Gong Zui himself. He rode up to Odd Squad, then abruptly stopped and dismounted. The one hundred and fifty riders at his back dismounted as well. “Prince isn’t back yet?”

“Not yet...” The two teams answered in unison and stared dazedly at the ranks of a hundred and fifty riders and a hundred and fifty horses.

“I see. Then I’ll have to wait until he returns to introduce our liege lord to my fellows. Here, let me introduce you all. This is my adventurers’ group – The Righteous Blades. It consists almost entirely of warriors, plus a handful of priests and mages. As you can see, it’s an adventurers’ group with very high offensive power.” Nan Gong Zui could not conceal a look of pride as he regarded the group which he had founded.

“An adventurers’ group!” Lolidragon exclaimed, moved by the impressive sight of The Righteous Blades. She added, “I knew that the strength of Prince’s dumb luck and popularity is nothing common. To think that he even managed to recruit an entire adventurers’ group!”

The members of Odd Squad and Dark Emperor nodded in agreement unconsciously... *Prince is definitely unusually popular.*

Nan Gong Zui only gave a small smile when he heard what Lolidragon said. He said, “The sole reason that I came here is because Prince is truly a person worthy of respect. My adventurers’ group and I deeply admire the way he treats his friends and his martial prowess. All of us are very pleased to become a part of Infinite City.”

“‘Infinite City’?” Ugly Wolf asked, feeling slightly bewildered.

“Huh? Hasn’t Prince told you guys yet? I helped him to decide on ‘Infinite City’ as the name for the city. We’ve already registered it,” Nan Gong Zui asked, puzzled.

“Infinite City! I can’t believe that the last people to know the name of the city are us, the ones who own it! Where on earth did Prince run off to?” Lolidragon exclaimed totally losing her cool.

Yu Lian rubbed her temple and said, “Could it be that he didn’t dare to look for Rose Team and was afraid of getting scolded by us, and so he decided to simply go missing instead?”

“I don’t think he would go that far; shouldn’t he already be accustomed to getting scolded by us?” Ugly Wolf said, sounding a tad worried. “Maybe he was rejected by Rose Team and felt so hurt that he decided to hide somewhere?”

“Don’t tell me he lost his way and fell from some cliff again!” Gui said, his face white as a sheet, and even Wicked looked worried upon hearing that.

“What? Did he really fall from a cliff?” Ice Phoenix – who was standing next to Nan Gong Zui – demanded anxiously upon hearing Gui’s words.

“Who are *you*?” Gui and Wicked turned their heads in unison to look at Phoenix, their eyes narrowing dangerously.

Before Phoenix could answer, a person who looked like a thief suddenly interjected, “It’s not possible for Prince to do something as silly as falling off a cliff.”

“And who might *you* be?” Gui and Wicked once again turned to shoot a glare each at the speaker.

Nan Gong Zui immediately introduced them, “This is a mage in my adventurers’ group, Ice Phoenix, and the other is a thief, Kong Kong. Kong Kong has gone drinking together with Prince and I before. Additionally, this is Phoenix’s older sister, Madame White Bird. She is the strongest female warrior in my group and my second-in-command. Her husband, Chuang Wai, is one of the priests in the group.”

“From what I’ve just heard, why does it seem like Prince is a muddle-headed sort of person?” Madame White Bird remarked, not wholly pleased. She did not wish to see her sister, Phoenix, fall in love with yet another weird person. Turning to Kong Kong, she demanded, “Kong Kong, it was you who said that Prince is strong, proud, and possesses extraordinary martial skill. You said that he is gentlemanly in his attitude toward women and is both frank and loyal towards his friends, a veritable man amongst men, which was why I did not object to the decision to become part of Infinite City. So why does Prince’s character seem very different according to what they’ve just said?”

Kong Kong instantly retorted, “I don’t know why they spoke of Prince in such a way, but I’ve seen with my own eyes that Prince is exactly like how I’ve described him to be. After all, I’ve gone drinking with him and exchanged blows with him before. He is prideful and his martial prowess is at such a high level that even Captain Nan Gong and I couldn’t win against him together. He always treats girls with a tender smile on his face; you can ask Phoenix about this. As for friends, you have all seen it for yourselves that day on the battlefield. Did he not go to Captain’s rescue, even though they were opponents at the time?”

“Is that really the case?” Madame White Bird asked doubtfully as she looked at the members of Odd Squad.

“That’s right. Prince is indeed as all of you have described. We were just joking around to lighten the atmosphere, please don’t take it seriously,” Ugly Wolf answered with a serious face... Overall, it wasn’t a lie. Their description did fit Prince, and as for the other aspects of him, since they didn’t ask...then there was no reason to mention them!

“Nan Gong, is that really the case?” Madame White Bird looked at Nan Gong Zui sternly.

Nan Gong Zui nodded. “Yeah. Moreover, although he may appear proud, he is actually quite easy-going and is easy to get along with.” He hesitated for a moment and thought, *That’s how it is, right? Although Prince does do some pretty weird things at times! Still, that probably doesn’t need to be mentioned...*

Madame White Bird’s expression softened and she looked at Odd Squad apologetically, saying, “My apologies for having doubted your liege lord, but I had to be certain about this since the matter concerns the whole of The Righteous Blades.” *Besides, the happiness of my worrisome little sister is also at stake here. Phoenix always falls in love with some unsuitable person or another, making me worry. Still, this time it seems like she’s finally fallen in love with the right person,* White Bird thought, and felt a knot of worry undo in her chest.

“No problem at all, you should be vigilant indeed,” Ugly Wolf said even as he ignored the voice of his conscience.

“When will we be able to meet the liege lord?” Madame White Bird asked.

“With regard to that, our liege lord is currently travelling around in the hopes of recruiting more people to help us construct and manage the city. I’m afraid all of you will have to wait for a while before we can introduce him to everyone.” On the surface, Yu Lian answered Madame White Bird’s question calmly and unhesitatingly. Privately, however, Yu Lian said through clenched teeth over team channel, “PM Prince straight away and don’t stop PMing him until he replies. If they catch sight of Prince in his muddle-headed state, I’m afraid we’ll lose this hard-to-come-by adventurers’ group.”

She's right, thought the rest of Odd Squad. Their thoughts went to the sight of Prince biting his index finger and looking muddle-headed. *If the members of The Righteous Blades see that sight, things will definitely get real messy.* With that thought, everyone began to spam Prince with PMs.

“I see. It must be hard for our liege lord,” Madame White Bird said, nodding her head understandingly.

“Then let us discuss about the placement of everyone first, and about the personnel who will take up the key officers’ job.” Ugly Wolf voiced his opinion.

“Sure, no problem,” Madame White Bird replied unhesitatingly.

Just as they were all about to enter the temporary headquarters, Doll suddenly caught sight of some very familiar-looking people at the city gates. “Eh! It’s Rose-jīējie and the others,” she cried out.

The members of Odd Squad turned to look. Sure enough, loitering by the city gates was none other than Rose Team. All of them looked slightly embarrassed as soon as they realized that Odd Squad had spotted them.

Ugly Wolf promptly walked toward Rose Team, saying, “So Prince found you guys; that’s great!”

“Prince?” Broken Sword asked, looking a bit taken aback by Ugly Wolf’s words.

“Wasn’t it Prince who recruited you guys to help with the construction of Infinite City?” Ugly Wolf asked with uncertainty in his voice. His expression had also changed visibly.

Everyone from Rose Team looked at each other in bewilderment. Finally, Rose said apprehensively, “We didn’t encounter Prince... We heard that you guys had won the tournament, so we wanted to come and apologize for the incident that happened last time, and also to see if you needed any help.”

“So that’s how it is. Then where on earth has Prince run off to...?” Ugly Wolf said, feeling a headache come up. However, as soon as he remembered that at his back stood the members of The Righteous Blades, he immediately said loudly, “It looks like you came here before Prince could even find you guys! That’s great; we really need Rose Team’s help.”

“But, the last time, I vented my anger out on Prince. I’m really sorry about that,” Broken Sword said, remorse clear on his face. “It really wasn’t his fault at all.”

“And I shouldn’t have forced my feelings on Prince like that, and even...kissed him,” Rose said, lowering her head. Her cheeks were flushed.

Fairsky poked her head out from behind Li'l Strong's broad body, teary-eyed. "It's entirely my fault; I shouldn't have used those wrong ways to court Prince. I really know that I've behaved wrongly. I won't do it again."

Yu Lian patted Fairsky's head gently and enfolded the younger woman in her arms. Fairsky immediately began to sob softly. "Don't worry; Prince has never blamed you guys. He always wanted to reconcile with everyone from Rose Team. When he returns, I'm sure he'll be delighted to see all of you."

Upon hearing Yu Lian's gentle explanation, everyone from Rose Team heaved a sigh of relief, and smiles finally appeared on their face.

"Rose, Fairsky... Are the two of you still in love with Prince?" Lolidragon asked worriedly. These two girls had already suffered too much anguish over Prince, so much so that even Lolidragon felt sorry for them.

The members of Rose Team suddenly looked at Rose with uncertainty, while Rose merely lowered her head bashfully. Next to her, Broken Sword placed an arm around her shoulder and said with a smile, "Rose is my wife now, so of course she doesn't like Prince anymore."

"That's debatable, actually," For Healing Only jibed playfully, causing Broken Sword to give him the evil eye.

"I won't give up on Prince," Fairsky suddenly shouted loudly as she pulled away from Yu Lian's arms, two streaks of tears coursing down her face. Her loud announcement surprised everyone. "I know that my past methods were wrong, but I've improved since then. I'll definitely move Prince's heart with my patience and deep love."

Hearing her words, Ice Phoenix came forward and demanded, "You like Prince *too*?"

Fairsky looked at Phoenix doubtfully. "You said 'too'? Don't tell me that you are *also* in love with Prince?"

"That's right, and I will *never* give up either." Phoenix said firmly, pronouncing each word clearly. There was the crackle of electricity as lightning bolts appeared between Fairsky and Phoenix.

In an incomparably icy voice, Gui said, "Prince is *mine*!"

While everyone else was trying to wrap their shocked minds about Gui's sentence, Wicked had begun to glare at Gui fiercely. "Nonsense, Prince is *mine*!" There was another crackle of lightning...

All the people present gaped as they watched two men fight over another man, with the exception of Odd Squad and Dark Emperor's members. Most of them had knowing expressions on their face; in particular, Ming Huang had pursed his lips and was glaring at his brother, Wicked, with an indignant expression.

Seeing that her sister's face was turning pale, Madame White Bird turned to Odd Squad, and demanded fiercely, "Prince, he's...he's a..."

"Prince is definitely *not* a homo!" Lolidragon guaranteed with a stern look on her face. *It's the truth too!* "It's just that Prince is simply too handsome, so even guys want him for themselves," she explained. *This is simply too much fun!* Lolidragon thought, collapsing with laughter inwardly. She couldn't wait for Prince to come back and see this messy situation... *Hehehe!*

Both Phoenix and Fairsky heaved a sigh of relief, and then they glared at the two gays and said in unison, "I warn you, don't you dare lead Prince astray! He's *mine!*" Then the two girls turned to glare at one another again.

"No, he's *mine!*" Both men roared, and then they joined ranks of those glaring at one another.

"Not *baaad* at all; they have enough people for a game of mah-jong, and they even have a common topic to chat over," Lolidragon said nonchalantly.

Chapter 4: Jing and Yun

As soon as I opened my eyes, I couldn't help but exclaim admiringly, "Such a blue sky!"

I lay there lazily for a while, marveling at the sky blue expanse before my eyes. When I stood up reluctantly at long last, I peered around at my surroundings and bit my index finger, puzzled. "Where on earth is this place?"

Wow, there are seagulls here! Pleasantly surprised, I watched as an entire flock of seagulls flew by... Eh? Is that a sail? I've never seen such a large sail before... This thing underneath my feet, I think it's called a "deck"?

I walked up dazedly to the ship's railing and gazed into the distance.

What a blue sea, and there's a salty-tasting sea wind blowing this way. Hoho, it's so comfortable, I thought, grinning foolishly for a full ten seconds, and then realization hit me... Wait a moment! I looked left and then right. My god! It's a blue ocean as far as the eye can see. Where has my beloved land disappeared to? Why am I on a ship? Where am I heading to?

Don't panic, don't panic! I tried to calm down. There must be some reason as to why I am here.

I attempted to recall what had happened. *I remember that I was drinking with Nan Gong Zui and Kong Kong; the liquor burned as it went down my throat and was very hard to drink...and then? I held my head in my hands and thought as hard as I could, but simply couldn't remember a thing. Just what exactly happened after that?*

Suddenly, I spied someone from the corner of my eye. I rushed over and seized him by the arm. "Excuse me, big brother, but could you tell me where this ship is heading to, please?" I asked worriedly.

"This ship is the Star of the Ocean, which sails from the Central Continent to the Eastern Continent. Didn't you know that?" The man, who resembled a sailor, wore a questioning expression on his face as he answered me.

The Eastern Continent? I stared at him blankly. "The Eastern Continent? Since when did *Second Life* have so many continents?"

"...This world has a total of five continents: the Eastern, Western, Southern, Northern, and Central Continents. This should be common knowledge!" The sailor stared at me as though as I was a freak.

So that's how it is? "Then where am I from?"

“Judging from the ship’s course, you’re probably from the Central Continent, right?”

I rubbed the back of my head, grinning foolishly. “You’re probably right!” I exclaimed.

“So how can I get back to the Central Continent?” *Although sailing on a ship is quite an interesting experience, I’ll definitely get a dressing down from my teammates in Odd Squad if I don’t hurry and look for Rose Team.*

“You can take another ship back when you reach the Eastern Continent.”

“How much longer will it be until we reach the Eastern Continent then?”

“Probably another five more days or so! Can’t chat with you anymore; I’ve got work to do.” The sailor walked away, muttering to himself, “What a weirdo; the ship fare is this expensive and yet he wants to return even before he’s reached the Eastern Continent...”

Wait a second!

“Five days, then including the return trip, it’ll be ten days altogether?” *I want to cry, it’ll be a miracle if I don’t get scolded to death this time.*

I sighed. “I guess I might as well tell my teammates first.”

“Guys, I have something to tell everyone...” *Why aren’t they responding?*

“Paging Odd Squad, paging Odd Squad...” *Still no response from them? That’s impossible! Shouldn’t there be at least someone online at this time?* I grew panicked and hastily grabbed the Sailor-dàgē again. “Dàgē, why am I unable to reach my teammates via the messaging system?”

Having been forcibly stopped by me, the sailor asked me exasperatedly, “Where are your teammates?”

“On the Central Continent,” I answered obediently.

“Players on different continents cannot use the PM channel to communicate with one another; this includes the team channel as well. While you’re at sea, you can only PM players who are also on the ship.”

My jaw hung slack with shock. “I’m in deep shit this time.”

There was nothing else that I could do, however, so I simply sat woodenly on board the ship. At first, I could still look at the blue sky and the ocean, but I nearly went mad with boredom eventually. *The sailor-dàgē told me that it’s the off season right now, with very*

few players taking ships, not to mention ships that leave in the small hours before dawn, so I'm the only player on board this ship, waaaaah!

I rolled forward, backward, to the side... *I'm so boooooored! God! What on earth am I going to do? Even the NPC sailor-dàgē has gone into hiding after being pestered so much by me, so there's no one around for me to talk to.* I buried my head between my knees plaintively, my eyes red with incipient tears. “*Waaah, Lolidragon, Wolf-dàgē, Gui, Doll, and Yu Lian-dàsǎo, I miss you all so much, waaah!*” I'd realized only now how lonely I was without the rest of Odd Squad around.

“Mama, why cry-cry?” A child-like voice came from my pouch.

I froze for a moment, and then quickly opened my pouch. “*MEATBUUUUUN!*”

I took Meatbun out and hugged it tightly, showering it with kisses, pinches, and cuddles. “I forgot that I still have you.”

“Mama, Meatbun-bun feels pain-pain!” My hand had gone on a rampage, pinching Meatbun all over and causing the latter's bun skin to turn red. Just like before, Meatbun – which was afraid of pain – began to cry, with mega-huge teardrops falling from its eyes.

Erk! Shit. I hastened to console Meatbun in a kindly manner. It wasn't very effective, however, and Meatbun still ended up crying like two faucet taps turned on at full blast... *Erk! This is really bad, I'm afraid I'm about to be the first player to find out whether NPC ships can sink or not.* With Meatbun cupped in my hands, I tilted my head to one side and thought, *Hmm, the situation probably won't be as bad as I thought. At least I know how to swim doggy-style.*



“Although our liege lord is away on business, this city still requires managing, so we'll just assign each person their position first. If Prince is dissatisfied with the arrangement when he returns, we can reshuffle the positions.” Ugly Wolf looked at all the people below him. *Although we don't know where Prince has run off to, we still have to get everyone settled in first! I only hope that nobody will resent the arrangements.* He heaved a sigh at that thought. *Really, where on earth has Prince vanished to?*

“Let's do that then,” Nan Gong Zui said calmly.

“As I am unfamiliar with where all of your expertise lies, I will first assign positions to those whose abilities I am familiar with. Team leaders, please inform me if I miss anyone out.” Ugly Wolf began to list out names seriously. “Nan Gong Zui, Broken Sword, Wicked, and I will be in the military department, Yu Lian in the finance department. Gui and Lolidragon will be in the construction department for city planning and military

infrastructure – such as laying traps around the city – respectively. Lolidragon will also serve in the foreign affairs department, together with Doll.”

Nan Gong Zui smiled slightly. “I think I can only take charge of training the troops. I usually leave the task of coming up with military policies and battle strategies to White Bird; she is an expert at that.”

Madame White Bird raised her eyebrows and remarked, “A person who can lead troops into battle and a person with the talent to map out strategies and command battles from afar are often not one and the same. I suggest that the military department be further divided into two sections, one for coming up with strategies and another for commanding troops – that is to say, having two different types of positions: generals and military advisors. This will make things clearer for everyone.”

Ugly Wolf considered it for a moment, and then replied, “What you say makes sense; we’ll do it that way then. Nan Gong Zui, Broken Sword, and Wicked shall each be one of the three Generals, while Madame White Bird and I will act as the Left and Right Advisor respectively. Is there any other question regarding the military department?”

Seeing that no one else had any opinions on the matter, Ugly Wolf went on to the next issue. “As for the finance department, I really have no idea who else has expertise in this area aside from Yu Lian from my team, so may I ask if the other teams have experts in this field?”

“My team recommends Rose,” said Broken Sword, and everyone in Rose Team grinned at Rose as he added, “Rose isn’t any ordinary expert in this field; she’s practically the goddess of financial management!”

“I wish to join the finance department. I’m not an ordinary expert at minding money either,” Ice Phoenix said with a confident smile while the members of The Righteous Blades nodded their heads wildly in agreement.

Ugly Wolf nodded his head happily. “That’s great, Yu Lian won’t have to run finance department all by herself then.”

“Next, apart from Gui and Lolidragon who have been assigned to the construction department, I hope that all the thieves can aid Lolidragon in setting up traps. After all, this city is simply too big, and it’ll be impossible to rely on Lolidragon alone for this.” Ugly Wolf looked at the thieves who were present, and both Playboy Lord and Kong Kong nodded.

“Is there anyone here who is familiar with city planning or overseeing the construction process?” Ugly Wolf asked, frowning.

Fairsky pouted for a moment and then answered reluctantly, “I am, but I don’t want to work with *him*.” She glared at Gui fiercely.

“You should not mix your private affairs with work, Fairsky,” said Broken Sword sternly.

“I’m sorry,” said Fairsky with a stricken look. “Then I shall join the city planning section and do my best to help Gui out.”

“All that’s left is the foreign affairs department then. Is there anyone who wants to help Doll and Lolidragon?” Ugly Wolf asked.

Lolidragon said with a smile, “I recommend Feng Wu Qing.”

Feng Wu Qing retorted, “Hmph. Why should I join the foreign affairs department? Especially if you’re in it.”

“Aiyah, is it possible that the great hero Feng Wu Qing is unable to distinguish his private affairs from work? Does he intend to waste his skill with language and let mold grow on it instead?” Lolidragon asked caustically. “Or is he afraid that his achievements will lose to mine, and so decided that he might as well not join?”

Feng Wu Qing gnashed his teeth with hatred. “Me? Lose to you? I will most certainly join the foreign affairs department, and then you can see for yourself who is the true expert at diplomacy.”

This round, victory goes to Lolidragon! thought all the people present.

“Then we shall follow this arrangement for now!” Ugly Wolf finished up the personnel chart with satisfaction. “Next, we need to discuss the matter of The Righteous Blades. Although the city is currently being protected by the game admin, we will need to shoulder that responsibility on our own soon. As everyone knows, there are countless players eyeing our city for their own, so we must swiftly increase the number of players in our forces and decide on the method to manage them.”

Ugly Wolf looked directly at Nan Gong Zui, meeting his gaze squarely. “I will say it straight. A city cannot have two lieges, and it seems that the entirety of our military defense depends on The Righteous Blades. Nan Gong³, are you certain that you are willing to let your own group serve Prince, that you are willing to be Prince’s subordinate?”

Nan Gong Zui looked at Ugly Wolf, resolution clear in his eyes, and he said clearly, “If Prince were here, I could kneel down and swear my fealty to him in front of everyone from The Righteous Blades.

³ **Nan Gong:** This is not a typo. “Nan Gong” is Zui’s last name.

“I am not truly a good leader. I have known from the very beginning that I do not possess the aura of true ruler,” Nan Gong Zui explained slowly. “Instead of letting The Righteous Blades remain an ordinary group beneath my leadership, I would much rather find a better leader than me to lead them. And now, I’ve found one.”

“That fellow, Prince... I don’t know why, but I always think that the sight of him smiling gives people a very comfortable sort of feeling,” Broken Sword said with a grin. “I really want to see him standing on the city walls, laughing with that wild, arrogant laugh of his.”

Legolas replied coolly, “Really? I always felt that that fellow, Prince, is something of an idiot...so long as you’re a friend, he will trust you unhesitatingly, and will even be willing to throw his life away for you.” As Legolas finished speaking, however, there was a slight smile on his face.

“His blade dance is a true feast for both the heart and the eyes,” Kong Kong said, shaking his head with an admiring sigh.

Feng Wu Qing said awkwardly, “Although there was some unpleasantness between us earlier, his fighting prowess is really pretty impressive.”

“All right, all right, everyone, please don’t continue singing Prince’s praises anymore. Otherwise, even if he isn’t here, I think his backside will still stick up with conceit,” Lolidragon hurriedly interrupted their praising. *Sigh!* Her head ached as she thought, *If Prince doesn’t show up with an image that lives up to their expectations when he returns, there will be big trouble.*

Ugly Wolf too didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. “Anyway, let’s get the development of Infinite City well under way before Prince comes back.”

“No problem!” They were all filled with confidence, ready to prove themselves in front of their proud, mighty, and steadfast liege lord...



I knelt on all fours on the floor, scrubbing, scrubbing, and scrubbing the floor.
Uwaaaaaaah....

“How was I supposed to know that the ticket for the ship would be so expensive, actually costing five thousand crystal and three gold coins? I only had five thousand crystal, three gold, and ten copper coins, how was I to know that I wouldn’t have enough for dinner? Actually making me, the only player on this ship, scrub the floor as payment, they’re simply too heartless,” I muttered to myself as I scrubbed the floor. “Sigh, Meatbun, why is it that you don’t have arms? Otherwise you could be helping me with scrubbing the floor.”

Meatbun, which had been sitting obediently on top of my head from since the beginning, could not understand what I was muttering about at all, and so could only keep making the same reply, saying, “Yes, Mama.”

I scrubbed, I scrubbed... *Wait a second. No money? The return ticket has to be purchased right? This. Is. BAD!*

My body turned weak as jelly. *Five thousand crystal coins! That’s the amount that I’ve saved up from the time I started playing the game until now. I did give some of my money to the team, but it’ll still take a lot of time to earn five thousand crystal coins... What am I to do? Then that basically means that I won’t be able to go back for a very long time. Plus, I can’t message my friends; they’ll probably be worried about me.*

“Hey, we’ve arrived at the Eastern Continent,” Sailor-dàgē shouted.

I looked at Sailor-dàgē dazedly. “Dàgē, is there any other way to obtain a ship ticket other than by buying it?”

“No!”

Dazedly, I was shooed off the ship. Dazedly, I stood in the unfamiliar port. Only the smitten gazes directed my way were familiar. *Looks like this face of mine is also pretty popular here on the Eastern Continent; don’t tell me I should sell my body to earn money?*

“Gururu...” growled my stomach. *I’m so hungry. I want to eat*, I thought. Hugging my stomach, I remembered that I didn’t have a single copper coin on me and immediately my entire body went weak as jelly again... *Looks like I’ll starve to death before even getting around to selling my body for money!*

Unable to endure the insistent grumbling of my stomach any longer, I made up my mind. “Time to go hunting!” I exclaimed, but... *which way is it to the forest...?*

After a moment’s thought, I figured that any place that has trees should be a forest. By then I was so hungry that I had almost become a corpse, so it was with impatience that I rushed towards the forest. As expected, there I found my adorable little wolves...



“Meatbun, I don’t have meat buns for you to eat right now, so just try and eat some wolf meat!” I stuffed wolf meat down Meatbun’s tiny mouth even as I greedily devoured some myself.

Tears welled up in Meatbun’s eyes as it reluctantly chewed the wolf meat. “Tastes bad, Mama.”

“Really? I think it’s delicious!” *Anything will taste good when you on the verge of starving to death*, I thought. I swallowed the last piece of the tough wolf meat contentedly and then lay down on the grass on the lake bank, rubbing my stomach comfortably.

How on earth am I going to contact my teammates? I felt troubled. *It’s a pity that Lolidragon isn’t here to answer my questions; only now do I realize that she’s actually very useful...* “So I finally have to rely on myself?” I remarked to the air sadly.

I watched the clouds in the skies as they scudded by, feeling somewhat stoned, somewhat lonely, somewhat lost. Closing my eyes, I muttered, “I don’t like the feeling of being separated from everyone else.”

My eyes flew open. I jumped to my feet and roared at the sky, “I WANT TO GO BACK!”

“Are we taking the ship now, Mama?” Meatbun asked happily.

“...Yep, we’ll be able to take the ship once I’ve earned the last of that five thousand crystal coins,” I replied. *First, I should go and kill mobs for cash. As for selling my body...we’ll talk about that again when I really have no other choice!*

I’ll fight stronger mobs, I thought. *That way I’ll earn money faster.* I checked the contents of my pouch. Seeing that there were still a few health potions inside, my mind was set at ease and I began to make my way deeper into the forest. As my surroundings grew darker and darker, I cautiously rested my left hand on the hilt of my *dao* so that I could draw it at a moment’s notice.

There’s movement in the trees! I slowed my footsteps to a halt. Looking at the clearing in front of me, I could see that the silhouettes of a number of monsters. A smile crept onto my face and I drew my Black Dao. *Looks like I’ll be able to return to my team soon.*



Day Two...

I sundered two mobs with one swipe of my blade and then sheathed my *dao*. “This is monster number...?”

“This is the five hundred and fifth one,” Meatbun answered dutifully.

I exhaled. “How many gold coins do we have?”

Meatbun turned its white and chubby body around and, with some effort, burrowed into the pouch. After a while, that white and chubby body wriggled out. “One hundred and thirty five gold coin-coin, Mama.”

“Hmm, I’ve gotten used to the types of mobs they have here on the Eastern Continent, plus I also have enough money to buy health potions and mana potions, so I should be able to venture further in.” I looked at the precipitous valley in the distance and wondered, *Should I go there to look for higher level mobs? Higher level mobs have a higher chance of dropping rare items. If I can get several rare items, I might even be able to head back immediately.*

“Right! Get ready, Meatbun. After you use *Aroma Release*, we might encounter a boss!” I was in high spirits.

“Meatbun-bun is ready!” Meatbun’s tiny face was filled with childlike determination. *It’s so adorable!*

After I placed Meatbun on top of my head, I began to make my way towards the unknown valley. As I walked, my surroundings grew darker, and there would be gusts of chilly, sinister wind from time to time... *So cold*, I thought. My teeth were chattering and I had no choice but to dig out a long-disused cloak from my pouch and put it on. When I felt warmer, I resumed walking toward my destination.

“*Heelp...*” There suddenly came a cry for help. I froze for a moment and then began sprinting over to rescue that person.

When I arrived on the scene, I saw a girl being chased by around five or six Flaming Skeletons.... *Odd, why does this scene look kind of familiar?* I stopped to think. *Don’t tell me this is yet another necromancer who’s been frightened by her own skeletal minions?*

“Hang in there, Jing! I’ll save you once I drink some potions.” The male voice came from behind the girl.

The girl wailed, “Hurry up, Yun, I’m going to die!”

Jing? Yun? Why do these two names sound kind of familiar? I sank back into my thoughts once again...

Just then, the girl seemed to have caught sight of me. “Help, please help us kill these skeletons!” she cried.

That face belongs to Lü Jing...my best friend in real life— My god, Yun? Don’t tell me it’s Gu Yun Fei? I lifted my head to look at the guy behind her. *No mistake about it! It really is Yun*, I thought, rooted to the spot with astonishment. *So Jing and Yun were on*

the Eastern Continent, and we met here by sheer coincidence; looks like my “good fortune” is not the run-of-the-mill sort.

“I beg you, could you save me, please?” Jing’s eyes were glistening with unshed tears as she rushed towards me like a damsel in distress.

“Oh...” I replied somewhat dazedly. I grabbed Jing and pulled her behind me. Drawing Black Dao, I ducked and with a low slash, hacked both feet off a skeleton. Against the next one, I simply sundered it into two, and then separated the first skeleton’s skull from its body with a reverse slash... *Against mobs like Flaming Skeletons, I’ve long since been drilled by Doll to the point where I’m practically fighting out of reflex, and can make short work of a single skeleton.* Before Yun even arrived at a run to help out, I had already dispatched the five Flaming Skeletons with great ease.

“Holy...you’re really strong,” Yun said, gaping at me.

Should I say something in reply? Will they figure out that I’m Feng Lan? I felt a little hesitant.

“You really are extremely strong, unlike the two of us, who are really weak...” There was a sorrowful look on Jing’s face, and she even heaved a sigh.

You can save that act of fragility – which you use to lead people to their deaths with no intention of paying with your own life – for someone else, Jing! Against me, your best friend Feng Lan, that move is completely ineffective!

I chuckled to myself inwardly. *About my best friend, Jing, I know her too well. Jing may look like a delicate, pitiful Lin Dai Yu⁴ on the surface, but...in reality, she’s actually a peerless Taekwondo expert.*

⁴ **Lin Dai Yu:** A famous female character in Chinese literature, Lin Dai Yu (林黛玉 pinyin: lín dài yù) is one of the main characters in the novel Dream of the Red Chamber (Hong Lou Meng). She is the epitome of the damsel in distress – beautiful, fragile, easily heartbroken, and ultimately, dead.

In the story, Dai Yu and her older cousin, Jia Bao Yu, the young master of the Jia house, fall in love. However, Dai Yu was not well-liked by members of the house as she came from a relatively impoverished branch of the family. She was also easily depressed, or sorrowful – for instance, she collected fallen flower petals and buried them, then asked, “Today, I buried these flowers. When I die, who will bury me?”

Jia Bao Yu and Lin Dai Yu’s relationship was complicated by the fact that Bao Yu was being match-made to another cousin, Xue Bao Chai, who was comparatively more lively and sensible than Dai Yu. Bao Chai’s family was also wealthy, thus Bao Yu’s family favoured his match with her.

At the end of the story, Jia Bao Yu married Xue Bao Chai, but this was not by choice – he was deceived into believing that he was marrying Lin Dai Yu (since the bride’s face is covered by a red veil till the night

Yun too, sighed softly. “It’s entirely my fault. I can’t even protect you as a friend because my level’s too low.”

“Don’t say that, Yun. I’m already very grateful that you’re willing to help me level,” Jing said, looking at Yun with “gratitude”. “Sigh, I really wish that an expert player would be willing to help us with our training.”

“It is unfortunate, but how could it be possible that an expert player would be willing to help total strangers like us?” Yun said with a downcast expression.

Once again Jing looked at me bashfully. “We are most grateful to you for saving our lives, *Expert-dàgē*. I am called Lü Jing, and this is my *friend* Yun Fei. May we ask Dàgē for his name?”

I could feel a tingling sensation in my scalp as I was being cajoled by Jing. Whenever Jing cajoles somebody, that person will inevitably suffer an unspeakably horrible fate.

After I failed to reply for a while, Jing’s eyes misted with tears. “Could it be that Dàgē is unwilling to tell even his name to Jing?”

What should I do? I thought, panicked. Should I tell them that I’m Prince? But Yun seems to know a lot about Prince; he probably found out that Prince is on the Central Continent before I did. How will I explain to them the reason for my appearance on the Eastern Continent, especially when I don’t even know the reason myself?!

“Jing, since Dàgē is unwilling to tell us his name, it’s clear that he has no interest in small fries like us, so let’s not make things difficult for Dàgē anymore,” said Yun indignantly.

Then quit calling me “Dàgē” ... I thought, exasperated.

“But... Sigh! I thought we’ve finally found a Dàgē who is a powerful fighter, a man of his words, and a righteous person, and then Dàgē and I will...” The blush which had mantled Jing’s cheeks and the worshipful expression on her face suddenly gave way to incomparable disappointment, and her voice sounded choked. “Since... Since Dàgē looks down on Jing so, then...then...”

“Don’t be disappointed, Jing. I’m sure that Dàgē didn’t mean ill. It must be that he has something pressing to attend to, otherwise how could he possibly bear to leave us

of the marriage). In the end, it is revealed that Lin Dai Yu had passed away from illness. Upon learning the truth, Jia Bao Yu decided to become a monk.

For more information, refer to Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lin_Daiyu.

behind...especially such an adorable beauty like you!” consoled Yun. Next to him, Jing continued to maintain her pose as a delicate and weak young woman.

**Sweat* I finally understand what they’re trying to achieve, I thought. So they’re trying to use Jing’s beauty to lure this “Expert-dàgē” into training the two of them!*

As we are best friends, in principle, I should help them in their training. However, I’m in a rather unusual situation right now. Not only am I worried that they’ll find out that I’m Feng Lan, I’m also worried that they’ll figure out that I’m Prince. How am I supposed to help them in such a situation? I heaved a helpless sigh.

“Why do you sigh, Dàgē?” Jing asked, concern in her voice.

I looked into Jing’s eyes, which were filled with concern, and thought, *Although I really can’t tell if she’s truly concerned about me or just faking it, I still feel a little moved... Oh forget it; I’ll just help them out! After all, I’ve not shown them any concern ever since we started playing Second Life, and they’ve never complained either. If I continue to refuse to help them, I’m afraid I’ll really have a guilty conscience.*

Having made up my mind, I coughed a couple of times. Feigning the attitude of an Expert-dàgē, I said, “Ask not my name, meddle not in my business; follow me as you will!”

Listening intently, I could hear Yun muttering to himself, saying, “Wah... He really is a pro!”

As I walked, I suddenly remembered, *How am I supposed to lead them when I still don’t know their classes and levels?*

“Your levels? Classes?” I threw the two questions at the two people who were following me closely.

Yun introduced himself enthusiastically, “Dàgē, I am called Yun Fei. I’m level forty-five, and I’m a human Barrier Master.”⁵

“Xiǎomèi’s⁶ name is Lü Jing. I’m level thirty, and I’m a human Exorcist,” Jing replied shyly.⁷

⁵ **Barrier Master:** Possibly a reference to the manga *Kekkaishi*. Note that *kekkaishi* means “barrier master”.

⁶ **Xiǎomèi:** This means “little sister”. Though this is usually used to refer to females younger than oneself, it can be used to refer to oneself in a cutesy or humble sort of way.

⁷ **An exorcist:** Technically, the word should be translated as “a Taoist”, but only because exorcisms of this sort are usually carried out by Taoists in fiction. Modern Taoists are not always exorcists, however, so in this case the specific (exorcist) is more accurate.

Exorcist? Barrier Master? What sort of classes are those? Why have I never heard of them before? My footsteps slowed to a halt, and scratching my face, I had no choice but to admit my ignorance and ask, “Please explain your classes to me.”

Yun grinned at me as he replied, “Barrier Masters are pretty rare, so Dàgē probably won’t be familiar with the class! As the name suggests, a Barrier Master’s main job is to create barriers. The barriers have a multitude of uses; for instance, the most basic barrier is the *Flat Barrier*, which can block an attack from beyond. Some barriers can even reflect attacks, such as the *Mirror Shot* ability. Alternatively, I can create a three-dimensional barrier, inflicting all kinds of status conditions on players or mobs inside the barrier. For instance, I can cast *Weakness Barrier*, which will cause their attacks to deal less damage, or I can use *Slow Barrier* to cause mobs to move slower.”

I nodded; his class is kind of like Gui’s in the sense that they’re both support classes. “Offensive abilities?”

“Barrier Masters don’t have any offensive abilities,” said Yun, still grinning at me.

No offensive abilities? I felt stunned for a long while. No wonder Yun leveled up so slowly; you can’t train alone if you don’t have offensive abilities! That’s odd, he can’t train by himself? Then Yun must have a team! But I’ve never heard him mention it before... I frowned. “Don’t you need to return to your team?”

“I don’t have a team.” Yun laughed, embarrassed, and explained, “Most players don’t really understand the Barrier Master class. And since they hear that my ability revolves around creating protective barriers, they would rather find themselves a mage. In addition, my level isn’t high, so there are limits to the effectiveness of my barriers, which is why I still haven’t found a team till now.”

No wonder Yun, who is such a training freak, is still only at level forty-five, I realized. I really can’t begin to guess how much time it took him to train all the way to level forty-five. A heavy feeling grew in my chest as soon as I thought of how I, his best friend, never even thought of helping him. It’s time that I do my best to help Yun out, I thought.

“Dàgē should be more familiar with the Exorcist class,” Jing said with a smile. “Exorcists mainly use *Fu*⁸ to cast different kinds of spells.”

⁸ **Fu:** As Prince notes in the next line, exorcists use bells to exorcise in most Chinese dramas. However, *fu*s, which are usually special paper with characters written on them with an ink brush, are used usually to render a zombie immobile. This is how is the scene in Chinese period drama horror movies usually unfolds...

1. Zombie hops (in Chinese movies, they don’t shamble, they hop) into the scene.
2. Exorcist chants or makes some weird motion and the *fu* paper flies from his hand and sticks itself to the zombie’s forehead.

Exorcist? I thought an exorcist would be using a bell to command zombies... From Jing's explanation, it doesn't seem too different from a mage... I continued walking with my head full of questions. However, I knew enough now that I understood that Jing could cast spells and that Yun's was a support-type class, so I stopped asking them questions, and began to think hard instead. What would be the best type of mob for us to train on? This is bad, I'm not that familiar with the mobs here on the Eastern Continent. Which type of mob exactly should we fight?

All of sudden, Yun's smile became particularly fawning. "Dàgē, might Xiāodi⁹ be so bold as to suggest a good place to train?"

I stopped in my tracks. Yun's suggestion had just solved my dilemma. "Say it."

"We can train on Lesser Demons. They yield high experience and have high drop rates for treasures. Plus, there are a number of quests involving them. They're great for leveling, getting gear, and earning money!" Yun said excitedly, and then embarrassment crept across his face. "But a pro player like Dàgē probably has no need for money."

It might be true that I'm not lacking money, but I'm lacking a ship ticket that costs five thousand crystal coins.

"I really wonder when we will finally have enough money. Why is the ship ticket to the Central Continent so expensive?!" Jing said with a weary sigh.

I was astonished. *How does Jing know that I need money for the ship ticket?*

Yun and Jing both looked embarrassed. "Dàgē, actually we're trying to save up enough money to take the ship to the Central Continent. We intend to look for our friends there," explained Yun.

Ah, so I misunderstood them. Looks like Yun and Jing really plan on going to visit Professor Min Gui Wen and Prince...to visit me?

"There's no need to go; I'm already here for both of you to see," I couldn't resist muttering to myself.

"What?" Jing, who had sharp hearing, asked, puzzled.

I hurriedly cleared my throat. "Nothing."

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3. Zombie stops moving (and sometimes combusts).
 4. Exorcist rings the bell. The spirit leaves. If the person possessed is still alive, he/she will wake up.

⁹ **Xiāodi**: This means "little brother". Though this is usually used to refer to males younger than oneself, it can be used to refer to oneself in a cutesy or humble sort of way.

“Oh?” Jing shot me a dubious look.

“Let’s go and kill some Lesser Demons then!” I said, hastily changing the topic. “Let’s get the quests first.”

“Okay, Dàgē,” Yun replied me cheerfully, but...as Yun’s best friend, even with the hood of my cloak obstructing my gaze, I can still tell that there’s something wrong with that overly-brilliant smile on his face. *I have a bad feeling about this... I’m not going to die by my best friends’ hands, am I?*



I stood quietly outside the White Tiger City’s Adventurers’ Guild, waiting for the two people who had brought me to this city to be done with obtaining their quests. Fortunately, there was a huge map of the Eastern Continent hanging outside the Adventurers’ Guild, so I could finally see for myself the geography of the continent currently under my feet. *I think it makes no difference if I see the map or not, though, I thought. After all, I can lose my way all the way to Star City when I’m really trying to go to Moon City, so how can I possibly hope that a map alone would allow me to go sightseeing on the Eastern Continent freely?*

I raised my head and took a casual look at the map. *The Eastern Continent, as the name implies, is a continent to the east of the Central Continent. There are four admin-controlled cities here, and they are located in the four cardinal directions: to the east, Green Dragon; west, White Tiger; south, Red Phoenix; north, Black Tortoise. The continent really has an Eastern feel to it. It’s no wonder even the classes are extremely Eastern as well; even the food is Chinese!*

Beneath the hood of my cloak, I was busily munching the *xiaolongtangbao*¹⁰ that I’d just bought. *I’ll buy some wontons in chili oil*¹¹ later, I decided.

¹⁰ **Xiaolongtangbao:** *Xiaolongbaos* are sometimes known also as soup dumplings. They have translucent flour skins as opposed to fluffy skins like meat buns or *mantous*, and they are usually small enough to fit into a Chinese soup spoon. The filling is usually a mix of minced pork, chopped spring onions, garlic, seasoned with various condiments, and then mixed with soup stock, after which it is frozen and takes on a gelatinous form. When steamed, the fillings melts and the *xiaolongbao* will become filled with soup. Fancier variants may even include crab meat and roe. For more information on the normal *xiaolongbao*, please refer to this Wikipedia article: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiaolongbao>.

What Prince is eating here is a variant of the soup dumpling, called the *Xiaolongtangbao*. It is a bit different from the usual *xiaolongbao* in that there is greater emphasis on the quality of the soup. (That’s why the name has an extra “*tang*” – “*tàng*” is “soup” in Chinese!) We’ve dug around the internet looking for a couple of fairly simple recipes for the foodies out there and found two decent ones.

This one <http://schneiderchen.de/647Chinese-Xiaolongbao-Soup-filled-Dumplings.html> has an English translation next to the Chinese recipe on the site. Ray has also kindly translated another version into English for the foodies (with much agony, it seems). The translated recipe is here below, but you should still take a look at the site if you're interested in pictures of the *xiaolongtangbao*. The recipe is as follows:

When making the Xiao Long Tang Bao, there are four important steps.

One of the Xiao Long Tang Bao's biggest specialties is that it is delicious with lots of soup, and the method of the making the pork skin is the key to having fillings with plenty of soup.

For those of you need a measurement converter, here's one (<http://www.convertunits.com/from/kg/to/lb>).

Ingredients: 500g of raw pig's skin, 500g of pork, 20g (or a large bunch) of spring onions/scallions (10g used for pig's skin, 10g for onion and ginger juice), 35g of ginger (15g for pig's skin, 20g for juice), 15ml of rice wine, 250g of flour, salt, MSG, pepper, sugar, soy sauce, lard, sesame oil

The first step: Making the frozen pork skin

1. Add cold water to the pig's skin in a pot and put over a high heat for 2 minutes.
2. Remove the fatty meat on the skin and pluck away the fur.
3. Put 1500ml of water in a sufficiently deep pot, and put 500g of raw pig's skin, 10g of spring onion/scallions, 15g of ginger, 15ml of rice wine, and add salt, MSG and pepper in suitable amounts. Cook over low heat for 90 minutes, until the meat is very, very soft and easily pulled off the skin.
4. Remove and chop the pig's skin.
5. Put it back into the pot to cook for a short while.
6. Leave the pork's skin in a large, broad bowl to cool off and solidify. You may put it into the fridge (but not the freezer) after it has cooled off sufficiently. (Eri: To those who don't know their way around the kitchen, refrain from putting a hot or even rather warm object in you fridge until it's cooled to about room temperature.)
7. Remove the pork skin from the bowl once it has cooled off and solidified. (Eri: You should be able to remove it by upending the bowl.)

The second step: Making the fillings.

1. Shred the frozen meat using a shredder. (See this picture.)
2. Put into a large bowl.
3. Add 500g of pork, 7g of salt, 5g of MSG, 15g of sugar, 15ml of soy sauce and mix.
4. Add in 200ml of onion and ginger juice (see third step) and mix again. Mix it in the same direction forcefully, and finally add in the sesame oil.
5. Add in the frozen pig's skin. Note that the volume of the fillings made in this step and the volume of the frozen pig's skin should be about the same. (Eri: Hence, if you've reduced the amount of pig's skin or filling, then you must reduce the amount for the other as well.) Finally, add lard and mix everything.

The third step: Making the onion and ginger juice

1. Cut 10g of spring onions, and 20g of ginger into pieces.
2. Add 200ml of water and put everything into the blender, or use your hands to squeeze. (Eri: A mortar and pestle works too, but only if you have the patience to work in batches. Using your hands to squeeze ginger is even harder.)

“Dàgē , we’ve obtained the quests,” Yun’s bright voice rang out.

Ehhh! I won’t be able to buy my wontons in chili oil, damn it!

“To thank Dàgē for helping us, will Dàgē allow Yun Fei and Lū Jing to treat him to a meal?” Yun asked, his face shining with sincerity. As for me, of course I would be happy to be treated... *Ah, my wontons in chili oil, I’m coming!*

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3. Filter off the pulp and you will be left with the onion and ginger juice.

For the outer skin that is thin, and does not burst when full of fillings, it is made by adding cold water to all-purpose flour and kneading it.

The last step: Making the dough

1. Add 250g of flour to 120ml of cold water to form a lump. Leave it for 10 minutes.
2. Knead it continually for a while, and then cut it into small portions each weighing about 10g.
3. Roll it into a round disc such that it’s thick in the centre and thin at the sides. Put fillings inside and wrap it.
4. Fold it into shape. (Usually, 14 folds is the minimum. 20 folds is ideal.) Leave it for 10 minutes. (See picture for how to fold the flour skin.)
5. Put cold water in the steamer and steam them for 5-6 minutes. (Eri: The author of this recipe used 9 minutes.)
6. Take it out and serve.

Reminder: The *xialongtangbao* tastes best with ginger strips and dark vinegar.

¹¹ **Wontons in chili oil:** As the name suggests, this is basically wontons in chilli oil (NOT Tabasco). Because this dish is very easy to make, we shall provide you with a translation of the recipe. Here is a video (<http://www.ytower.com.tw/movie/view.asp?movieid=374>) demonstrating how to prepare the dish to boot.

Ingredients: Wontons, oyster sauce, soy sauce, refined white sugar, white or dark vinegar, white pepper, garlic, spring onions/chives, chili oil

1. Set water to boil in a pan. Once it boils, add your wontons (premade or whatever) into the water. It should be ready in about 1-1.5 minutes. (Eri: To those who have never dealt with wontons, do not overcook them. If you see that there are air pockets bubbling up beneath the dough wrap near where the fillings are, it’s time to rescue your wonton from the hot water. Failure to save them will result in soggy wontons that will fall apart easily.)
2. Mix 1 tablespoon of oyster sauce, 1 tablespoon of soy sauce, 1 teaspoon of refined white sugar (less if you don’t like it sweet) and 1 teaspoon of white/dark vinegar. Add a little white pepper.
3. Mix the wonton with the sauce, sprinkle finely chopped garlic and spring onions/chives on it, and then pour the desired amount of chili oil over it.

The crux of the dish is the chilli oil. You can get this in most Asian supermarkets. The dish originated from the Sichuan province of China, which is not surprising because the chili oil is a staple of Sichuan dishes. Warning: To those who have never tried this kind of chili oil before, it’s way hotter than Tabasco or normal chili.



Along the way...

“Dàgē, is it alright with you if we dine at Oriental House?”¹²

“Dàgē, is it really impossible for you to tell us your name? What if we get separated along the way?”

“Dàgē, your cloak is really stylish. I’m guessing that you must have a really fit body as well? Can’t you let Xiǎodì have just one glimpse?”

“Dàgē, may Xiǎodì be so bold as to ask you what your race is? Since you are such a strong warrior, I think you must be from the human race, right? Or are you a beastman? But you’re not that powerfully-built, so I don’t think you are one.”

“We’ve almost reached Oriental House; has Dàgē eaten at Oriental House before? If you haven’t, then I guess Dàgē’s base camp probably isn’t White Tiger City huh?”

From the beginning till the end of our walk, I hadn’t so much as uttered a word.

“We’ve reached Oriental House, Dàgē,” said Jing, smiling happily as she pointed to a red, traditional building. “The food and wine at this restaurant are all pretty good, especially the wine. Their *Clear Tranquility* wine in particular is famous in White Tiger City! Dàgē, why don’t you order a few main courses to fill up your stomach first, and then order some light dishes to go with the *Clear Tranquility*.”

“Right, that’s right, one seldom comes across such a good Dàgē, Xiǎodì must have a good drink with Dàgē today,” said Yun, laughing heartily.

Drink? What should I do if I wake up and find myself on the Western Continent the next time?

As soon as I received the menu, I hastily ordered my *wontons* in chili oil, in addition to a lot of other delicious-sounding food. Finally, I put down the menu reluctantly and waited for my mouthwatering dishes to be served.

“That’s all, and bring us two bottles of *Clear Tranquility*,” Yun told the waiter.

I watched, with eyes full of anticipation, as the dishes were served one by one. *Although I still haven’t seen my adorable wontons in chili oil yet, it’s not a bad idea to tuck into the*

¹² **Oriental House:** This is written as Zhong Hua Lou (中□□ prn. zhōng huá lóu) in Chinese. Many restaurants and inns in China in the past (and even now) have the “□” character in them, which basically means a building with more than one storey.

other dishes first, I thought. My hand rose, the chopsticks plunged, and a fragrant bite of food was delivered into my salivating mouth. *It's a good thing I'm shielded by my cloak, otherwise my "Expert-Dàgē" image would be completely ruined.*

Yun picked up my wine cup and began to pour just about the entire huge bottle of *Clear Tranquility* into my cup. "Dàgē, shall we have a drink first?"

I couldn't be bothered to answer him. *With such delicious food before me, who cares about best friends?* I stretched my claws towards the dish of silver thread rolls¹³ once more...

From the top of my head came the sound of Meatbun's child-like voice. "Mama, Meatbun-bun wants to eat-eat too."

Baffled, Jing and Yun peered left and right, searching for the source of the voice. I froze; I'd nearly forgotten about Meatbun's existence entirely. *Looks like Meatbun fell asleep on top of my head, that's why it was so quiet all this while!* I snatched a silver thread roll, snatched Meatbun from my head and placed it on my lap, and then stuffed the entire roll – which was larger than Meatbun – into Meatbun's mouth. Finally, I stuffed Meatbun back into the pouch. *It's finally quiet*, I thought, and heaved a relieved sigh.

Of course, the entire operation was carried out beneath the cover of my cloak. Cloak, oh cloak, you really are an indispensable tool for secretly feeding pets and maintaining one's image!

"That's odd, I thought I heard a child's voice just now?" Jing remarked, frowning.

I lowered my head and engrossed myself with eating upon hearing that.

Seeing me tuck in, Jing and Yun stopped bothering me and picked up their chopsticks to begin eating as well.

"Isn't this Xiao Jing?" A somewhat irritating voice came floating to my ear. *Which person is it who has no eyes to see that he's bothering me in the middle of my meal?* I narrowed my eyes and raised my head to look...

My god, this is such a classic, such a classic fop! He was a little similar to Fan, with all that shining, flashy golden armor, but he had none of Fan's elegance or divine harshness. What made his appearance still more ridiculous was that jewel-encrusted helmet on his head and that red cloak embroidered with dragons he was wearing. There was only one word to describe him, and that was...vulgar!

¹³ **Silver thread rolls:** It's like a bun, but what you do is cut the dough into long strips, kind of like noodles, and then wrap them into a bun shape before baking. Go <http://tinypic.com/fp1f83> to see what it looks like.

It's my first time seeing someone so vulgar that heaven and earth would be shocked and the demons themselves would weep. I doubt that I'd have such a comical effect even if I were to wear gold bars for clothes! It's a pity because this person's looks can still be considered quite handsome, but thanks to that outfit, he just feels intolerably vulgar, sigh! I lowered my head and continued to dig in. *If I keep looking at him, I'm afraid my eyesight and taste will both be damaged beyond repair.*

There was a sour expression on Jing's face as she looked at the vulgar dandy. Yun too, was not like his usual self as he continued to eat silently with a frosty look on his face.

“Xiao Jing, why didn't you say a word if you were eating here at Oriental House? I trust those bastard waiters didn't ask you, the lady boss,¹⁴ to pay right? If they did, I'll have to reprimand them,” said the fop, and the crowd behind him laughed half-heartedly.

Lady boss? Since when did Jing open this restaurant? Why haven't I heard her mention this? I wondered as I munched on a chicken's foot.¹⁵

“Huang Wei, don't you dare go too far with your words! Who do you think you're calling 'lady boss'?” Jing slammed the table and stood up sharply, enraged.

*Huang Wei?*¹⁶ *Not a bad name, but on this person, it sounds...* I continued munching on my *Taro Pie*.¹⁷

“Of course it's you, Xiao Jing. This Oriental House is mine, and you are my beloved wife, so of course you're the lady boss!” Huang Wei leered at Jing's beautiful face.

Yun finally had enough. “Jing isn't your wife, so quit spouting your nonsense. It's obvious that you're just a huge pervert who keeps pestering Jing.” His voice clearly showed that he was trying to control his rage as he spoke.

Huang Wei's cheeky smile was gone in a flash, replaced by a look of contempt, although to me, it looked more like the expression of a person who had just stepped in dog poo.

¹⁴ **Lady boss:** Usually the word here means “lady boss”, but an alternative way to interpret it is “boss's wife”.

¹⁵ **Chicken's foot:** Most of you have never eaten chicken's feet, so we need yet another culinary explanation here. Chicken's feet are used in Chinese cooking quite frequently. They make really good soup stock, for one (extraordinary as it may seem to some of you), and they can also be used to make light dishes, such as dimsum. http://www.ehow.com/how_2221703_make-chicken-feet-dim-sum.html an example of a dimsum recipe involving chicken's feet, while <http://img.poco.cn/food/diary/20051018/8198020051018153901978.jpg> is a picture of a completed dish (not of the recipe, though).

¹⁶ **Huang Wei:** Huang Wei's name is written as “皇威” (prn. huáng wēi). “Huang” means royal, or an emperor, while “Wei” means mighty, impressive, even aggressive.

¹⁷ **Taro pie:** As the name suggests, it's made of taro. It doesn't look like a Western sort of pie though, and though I couldn't find a more “rugged” version, the pies don't always look as pretty as the one we have http://news.xinhuanet.com/food/2004-09/01/xinsrc_570901011653125282032.jpg. The ones I see usually look like miniature bricks.

“So, a piece of garbage like you still dares to stick to Jing? I told you before that I’ll kill you every time I see you. Did you not understand or do you enjoy being killed?”

Eh? The dish that the waiter is carrying to us now, isn’t that my favorite wontons in chili oil? I swallowed my saliva and stared fiercely at that delicious-smelling, enchantingly red dish of wontons in chili oil, my heart aching. As for whatever’s going on nearby? I have no idea, my stomach’s doing the thinking now.

“So what? Even if you plan to kill me, Jing will still stay by my side, and not yours!” Yun smiled at him fearlessly.

The look on Huang Wei’s face suddenly changed, and he roared, enraged, “Damn you, don’t get too ahead of yourself! Just you wait; I will thrash you just like this dish.” With his right hand, Huang Wei snatched the dish from the waiter, smashing it on the ground and then stomping on the dish and its contents with his foot.

I watched as the *wontons* in chili oil, which had almost been delivered to me, was suddenly snatched by a hand from the waiter before my very eyes, after which the vividly crimson *wontons* slid from mid air and landed onto the ground amid the shards of the broken plate. On top of that, a damnable foot stepped onto it and even grinded itself into the mess; and so my *wontons* lay there, oozing to death, their goodness and beauty forever lost... As the shock was simply too overwhelming, I found myself sitting dazedly at the scene, thinking, *My wontons in chili oil...are gone?*

“Hmph, don’t think that I’m easy to bully, I have a Dàgē,” said Yun, looking at me confidently.

“A Dàgē? Hahaha, so what?” Huang Wei looked scornfully at me. He beckoned with his hand and immediately the five or six Xiǎodis at his back rubbed their palms and clenched their fists, clearly itching for a fight. “I do have a lot of Xiǎodis, though. Why don’t we see how many blows can your Dàgē take from my Xiǎodis?”

Jing and Yun were both extremely pale, and Jing said coldly, “I forbid you to harm the two of them, Huang Wei.”

“Fine, then become my wife obediently, and then, hehe...” Huang Wei began to laugh brazenly.

Suddenly, I jumped, landing on the table lightly on both feet, and then leaped toward Huang Wei, drawing my Black Dao in midair. Light danced off my blade, and I landed behind Huang Wei.

“Shameless!” I said coldly.

As you must know, every grain on a dish is the result of hard labor. It isn't a simple thing to make a dish of wontons in chili oil, so how can he waste food like this? Especially when that food is mine! Even if the heavens do not punish a person like him, I will!

All the people present were taken aback, wondering, *What on earth just happened?* Just then, Huang Wei's neck suddenly slid to the side. First, a trickle of blood began to seep down his neck, then – as the crowd watched, wide-eyed – an entire fountain of blood began to spurt into to air, and Huang Wei's entire head was propelled by the flow of blood away from his body. It rolled a few times on the floor, and then he turned into a pillar of white light and left, leaving behind only a puddle of fresh blood on the floor.

“How is it possible?” Yun murmured. “Huang Wei was wearing a helmet and full body armor, how can it be so easy to separate his head from his body?”

I looked with a heavy heart at the corpses of the *wontons* on the floor, feeling extremely pissed off. *After so much anticipation, only for my hopes to be dashed in the end, it really MAKES. ME. PISSED. OFF!* I leveled my Black Dao at the Huang Wei's five Xiăodis and, in an extremely cold and harsh tone that I rarely use, I said, “Ten seconds. Be gone, or die!”

The Xiăodis froze. They looked at me, clearly reluctant to leave but also afraid to come forward. None of them dared to move.

“Hmph!” I snorted coldly. Lightly pushing off against the ground with both feet, I skimmed across the floor swiftly until I stood in front of the nearest Xiăodi, and then executed my famous technique: *Nine-headed Dragon Slash!* Laced with flames, the ten consecutive slashes scored beautiful lines of crimson in the air at lightning speed. As the final blow, I brought my weapon down heavily onto the enemy, cleaving him in two. Then I slowly rose to my feet and sheathed my blade before turning back to my seat. As I turned, that unlucky Xiăodi turned into a pillar of white light and left.

From the beginning until the end of that display, no one had moved. It was only after I returned to my seat that the rest of the Xiăodis finally began to flee for their lives. I picked up my chopsticks with satisfaction and went back to attacking my food.

After a long while, Jing and Yun finally recovered their senses. They returned to their seats nervously, but did not continue with their meal and only stared at me, wide-eyed.

After another long while, I put down my chopsticks and said sternly, “Yun, Jing, Dàgē has something to ask of the two of you.”

Yun gulped, while Jing's expression was one of alarm. “What is it, Dàgē?” they said in unison.

“Can I order another serving of *wontons* in chili oil?”

“ ... ”

Chapter 5: Demon King Kenshin

Real life...

I took off the game helmet, feeling kind of drained. *To think that I actually became Jing and Yun's Dàgē... If they ever find out the truth, I will die a horrible death.*

I got up and began to prepare breakfast, feeling deeply troubled. It had been six, nearly seven days and I still had no way of contacting any of my Odd Squad teammates. *Sigh! Truth be told, there's actually many ways to solve the problem. Telling my brother would be the easiest way and yet, ironically enough, I just can't tell him...*

Briiing... Briiing...

Who could be calling at such an early hour? I answered the phone, puzzled. "Hello?"

"Xiao Lan? Are you alright?!" Zhuo-gēge's anxious voice sounded over the receiver.

"I'm fine. This is great, I can finally contact someone!" I was overjoyed. I had clean forgotten that I could contact Zhuo-gēge.

"Xiao Lan, where on earth have you run off to?" It was clear from his tone that Zhuo-gēge was relieved to hear from me.

"I... I'm on the Eastern Continent..." My voice grew tinier with each word.

"The Eastern Continent?" Zhuo-gēge was stunned. "What are you doing over there?"

"I have no idea either. I woke up and found myself there after drinking with Nan Gong Zui!" I said woefully. "Also, we can't send PMs to players on different continents, so I couldn't contact you guys at all."

Is it just me or does Zhuo-gēge sound as though he is trying to suppress his anger? "You went drinking with Nan Gong Zui and drank until you lost consciousness? You're a girl, how could you not know how to protect yourself?!"

"Ehhh... But I'm a guy in-game!" I scratched my face. *Nan Gong Zui and Kong Kong wouldn't do anything to me, a guy, right? Besides, is it possible to be XXed in a game? Hmmm... That's a question worth mentioning to Lolidragon.*

"It still isn't right. You are a girl after all," Zhuo-gēge insisted stubbornly.

"Oh... Well, I won't do it again. I don't like to drink anyway!" *That's how it is, right? I remember that the wine was unpleasant, but how did I get so drunk? How odd!*

Zhuo-gēge's tone relaxed. "It's almost time for you to come back to the Central Continent. You should stop playing on the Eastern Continent. Everyone's waiting for you in Infinite City, especially Nan Gong Zui – he's brought along an entire adventurers' group. They're looking forward to meeting you."

"But I can't go back; I don't have enough money for the ship fare," I told Zhuo-gēge pitifully.

"How much do you need?"

"Five thousand crystal coins."

"...I'll ask Lolidragon tonight when I log on to see if we can find a way to transfer money to you," Zhuo-gēge said, sounding troubled. "Though, Infinite City is a bit strapped for cash. I wonder if Yu Lian would be willing to spare the money?"

"Oh... In that case, I'll just earn it by myself." I felt a bit embarrassed. *I haven't done anything as the liege lord yet and already I'm being a hindrance.*

"I'll talk to them about it. For now, you should take on some high-level quests. With your skill, you should be able to complete several B-level quests¹⁸ on your own. The rewards for B-level quests range from several hundred to several thousand gold coins," Zhuo-gēge suggested, and then added worriedly, "But they may be quite difficult, so make sure that they're not too dangerous before you take them on!"

"Alright, I got it."

"Sis, where's my breakfast?" Yang Ming's discontented voice sounded from behind me.

Startled, I quickly said, "Zhuo-gēge, we'll stop here for now. Bye bye!"

As soon as I hung up, I turned to faced Yang Ming. After making sure that his face only held dissatisfaction and not a hint of suspicion, I relaxed.

"I'll make breakfast now."



Online...

¹⁸ **B-level quest:** The Adventurers' Guild offers all sorts of quests for players to complete. The rewards differ from quest to quest, depending on the level of difficulty. From high to low, the difficulty levels for quests are: X, S, A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.

With a somber expression, Wicked entered Odd Squad's current temporary meeting place — the prison. Just as he had expected, the members of Odd Squad and Dark Emperor were lazing on the ground, sleeping, or stuffing their faces with food... Not one of them looked even the slightest bit like a highest-ranking commander.

In a heavy voice, Wicked announced, "I have important news for Odd Squad."

Ugly Wolf reluctantly let go of Yu Lian, who had been in his arms, gave Gui — who was buried under sheaves of designs — a kick, fished Doll out of her snacks and shook Lolidragon — who was drooling in her sleep — awake. "What important news?"

"I know where Prince is," Wicked replied. The look he shot Gui held a hint of a challenge, and he watched with satisfaction as Gui paled.

"Where did that fellow run off to?" Lolidragon grumbled. "We're working our asses off here, while he, the liege lord, is happily fooling around out there."

"He's on the Eastern Continent," Wicked said calmly.

All eyes widened among the members of Odd Squad, while Dark Emperor's members — who had been making a din to one side — fell silent. Within a moment, the prison was so quiet that even the crackling of Fire Phoenix's flames could be heard clearly.

Finally, Gui asked, his tone a mix of concern and anxiety, "Why is he on the Eastern Continent? Why doesn't he come back?"

"He doesn't know how he got there either, possibly because he was drunk. As for why he hasn't come back, it's because..."

"I believe I know the reason," Lolidragon said exasperatedly. "The ship ticket to the Eastern Continent costs five thousand crystal coins, and the return ticket costs another five thousand crystal coins. Prince probably only had enough money on him for a ticket to the Eastern Continent, if I recall correctly."

"What? Five thousand crystal coins?" Yu Lian's smile was so frosty that the members of both teams could not help but observe a moment of silence for him.

Wicked too averted his gaze from Yu Lian's terrifying smile and looked at Lolidragon instead. "Is there a way to send Prince money, Lolidragon?"

Lolidragon broke out in a cold sweat and quickly looked away from Yu Lian's smile, which had grown frostier than ever, replying stiffly, "It is usually possible for a player to transfer money to another player, but if a player is on another continent, then it's impossible to send them a private message, much less transfer funds."

“What? Then what about Prince?” Gui turned pale as a ghost as he imagined Prince wandering about on a faraway continent, without a cent to his name, suffering from the cold and hunger, dressed in rags, and finally, ending up as a corpse on some street...



White Tiger City, Eastern Continent...

Prince: “Mmm, *wontons* in chili oil... Delicious!” I said, munching on the breakfast which Yun and Jing were respectfully treating me to.



“We’ll just have to ask Prince to earn the money for the ticket on his own,” Lolidragon said with a shrug, and then she crawled back to her cage to sleep without a second thought.

“Hmm...” Ugly Wolf scratched the fur on his head. “Since that fellow’s absence doesn’t affect Infinite City much right now, plus the Righteous Blades have long since settled into our city and can’t just quit anymore, it shouldn’t make much of a difference if Prince doesn’t return right away.”

Yu Lian smiled. “Not a penny for him!”

“Doll misses Prince-gēge a lot...” Doll said, and then furrowed her brow when she caught sight of her snacks out of the corner of her eye. “...But Prince-gēge would snatch Doll’s snacks to eat, so forget it.” Doll crawled back into her pile of snacks and began to eat.

“Wait, Prince is all alone over there, with no friends and not a cent to his name! We have to go and save him!” Gui shouted at his irresponsible teammates, his face white as a sheet.

“YOU are not going anywhere, so just get back to drawing designs obediently,” everyone retorted in unison.

Wicked looked at them helplessly, thinking, *Looks like Xiao Lan won’t be returning for the time being...* But that wasn’t a bad thing at all, he realized. Gui wouldn’t be able to see Prince.

On the other hand, he – Wicked – would still be able to talk to Xiao Lan over the phone.

Excellent! thought Wicked, his lips quirking into a smile.



My arms were folded across my chest as I studied the monster I would have to fight soon — a lesser demon.

The lesser demon resembled the “*oni*” from Japanese folklore, with its hideous face, sharp teeth bared in a snarl, short horns on its head, and a somewhat short katana¹⁹ in its hands. They lived in chilly, deep, and eerie caverns. If Jing and Yun hadn’t led the way, I probably wouldn’t have been able to navigate my way through this maze-like cave. *I’d better be careful not to be separated from them, or I’ll suffer a fate more horrific than accidentally ending up on the Eastern Continent.*

After not moving for several “long” minutes, Yun couldn’t keep silent for any longer and asked, “Dàgē, when are we going to begin fighting? If we don’t hurry and get the demon horns, we won’t be able to finish the quest!”

I felt a tad frustrated. *I don’t know much about the monster, and the people by my side aren’t my usual teammates from Odd Squad. We don’t even have a priest, so if I rush in carelessly, I might just join the ranks of the demons myself...* Nonetheless, I had to get started. I could only pray silently that this type of mob wasn’t too strong. “Yun, Jing, stand further back.”

After I gave the order to Jing and Yun... I mean, instructed them on what to do, I looked around carefully and found a lone lesser demon. Moving lightly on my feet, I stealthily crept up behind it, and then savagely stabbed through its back at its heart. Unfortunately, the lesser demon’s agility was unexpectedly high and it turned around, causing my blade to only pierce its shoulder. A green, sticky fluid — probably its blood — spurting out. Enraged, the injured demon brandished its short katana, and the sharp point of the blade came stabbing toward me. I leaned backward and the katana whistled past my waist, but an idea darted through my head, and I turned the motion into a backward somersault, kicking the demon and sending it sprawling backward. As soon as my feet touched the ground, I sprang toward the demon, slashing my weapon at it and severing its entire right arm.

The demon howled. Though it had lost its right arm and its weapon, it still tried to bite me. I wrapped my left hand about its throat tightly and stabbed Black Dao right through its heart with my right hand. Just as I was about to heave a sigh of relief, however, the demon actually bit my left hand. I winced with pain, thinking, *Don’t tell me the lesser demon’s weakness isn’t its heart?*

“Dàgē, cut off its head, you have to cut off its head!” Yun roared frantically.

¹⁹ **A somewhat short katana:** Our translators suggested that this might be a *kodachi*, but Yu Wo didn’t specify, so we’re stuck with “katana”.

So that's how it is. In the instant I understood, the demon no longer had a head on its neck. I quickly let go of the corpse, which was spurting blood everywhere, so as to avoid turning into a tank of green oil.

“Dàgē is truly a man of valor. Dàgē’s heroic display has deeply touched Xiǎodì. That backward somersault of Dàgē’s is truly peerless; elegant, yet unyielding as steel. Sigh! Xiǎodì can only bow to your greatness... However, could Xiǎodì trouble Dàgē to cut off the demon’s horns, so that Xiǎodì might be able to complete the quest?”

What the heck? If you want me to slice off the horns just say so! Spouting so much rubbish, you're making my skin break out in goosebumps. Still, the horn needed to be cut off, so my blade rose and fell, and I handed the small horns to Yun.

Having a rough idea of how strong the lesser demon was, I realized that I could probably handle them quite easily and my anxiety dissipated. I began to come up with a plan to help Yun and Jing level up and, after some thinking, I led Jing and Yun to a crevice in the cave wall and asked them to stand inside. “I’ll be in charge of luring the demons here. After that, Jing, I won’t let the demons harm you, so don’t worry and just cast your spells. Yun, set up a *Slow Barrier*.”

I gazed into the depths of the cave, closed my eyes, and breathed in deeply. Then I opened my eyes and smiled slightly. *Lesser demons, here I come.*

To begin with, I lured a single demon and exchanged blows with it with great ease. It was then that Jing pulled out a piece of *fu* paper. I stole a backward glance and saw her draw several strokes on the paper with her fingers before throwing the paper over, crying out, “Flames, true and thrice-concealed, go!”

Unexpectedly, the paper flew straight toward the demon. Seeing that the demon intended to dodge, I launched into a flurry of blows, forcing it to stay in place. Finally, the paper reached the demon and suddenly turned into three white flames, enveloping the demon. It howled in pain and reacted by lunging toward Jing, but unfortunately for it, a kick from me sent it sprawling back to its original spot.

“Flames, true and thrice-concealed, go!” Seeing that the flames on the demon were about to go out, Jing once again sent out another piece of *fu* paper.

This time, I watched in satisfaction as the flames began to reduce the demon to ash...

“AHHHHH!” Yun suddenly wailed. “Dàgē, the demon’s horns!”

Hearing that, I smoothly sliced off the demon’s horns and watched as the demon turned to ashes. *Looks like I can lure more of them,* I thought decisively.

Thus, the number of demons increased from one to two and ultimately three, after which I decided that was enough, as any more would leave me with insufficient space to fight. In this fashion, I would engage the demons, focusing on honing my defense. While I initially had many openings in my defense and couldn't react quickly enough, I soon grew proficient to the point where my defense was watertight. I grew more and more familiar with this method of fighting, which was completely different from the aggressive fighting style I had used all this time. *It is pretty good training for me... still, if only the mobs were stronger*, I thought in dissatisfaction.

After luring more than ten groups of mobs, I heaved a long sigh and said mildly, "Let's take a break."

Guilt washed over Jing's face. "I'm really sorry, Dàgē. Jing completely forgot that Dàgē needs to rest."

"It's okay," I said and sat down, recovering a bit of my energy.

"Wow, we've each gained a level, and we have enough demon horns to complete the mission," Yun said, his eyes sparkling.

I wasn't really keen on fighting any more of these lesser demons. I had nothing to gain from fighting them, and though my main objective was to help Yun and Jing, it would be advantageous to them as well if we fought higher-level mobs. With that thought in mind, I asked, "Are there any stronger mobs that we can fight?"

Jing's and Yun's eyes shone brightly, and Yun quickly replied, "Of course, Dàgē, why don't we take on demon maidens? A demon maiden's horns are worth more than a lesser demon's."

"The monster's features are...?" I asked.

Directing this question to Yun, the gamer, was the right thing to do, as he immediately replied with enthusiasm and confidence, saying, "Demon maidens are generally similar to lesser demons, except their levels are higher. Their weak point is their heads, just like lesser demons, but demon maidens use their sharp and long claws as weapons, and they move faster than lesser demons. However, with Dàgē's speed, you definitely won't have problems once you're familiar with their style of attacking."

I nodded. "Let's take them on, then."

Standing up, I stretched and said, "Lead the way."

The demon maiden had long, flowing hair, pale green skin, and wore a dress like the type ladies used to wear in ancient China. Its hands ended in extremely long nails, their edges glinting dangerously. I darted forward and we began to fight.

Yun, the zealous gamer, was right; the demon maiden was indeed more challenging than the lesser demon. Its perception was considerably sharper than that of a lesser demon, making it tough for me to strike her weak spot, her head. Moreover, it was extremely fast, and I had to focus on dodging – with great difficulty – initially. Unfortunately for it...

I smiled. The demon maiden's attacking style was limited to stabbing. I searched for an opportunity, and when the demon maiden once again stretched out a hand, thinking to leave holes in my body, I stopped moving, and then savagely hacked off its hand the moment it touched me. A demon maiden with one hand missing was nothing to be afraid of, so I used the same method to get rid of its other hand and to finish it off... although I wasn't as successful the second time I tried and a "small" hole appeared on my body.

Without making a sound, I secretly took a swig from a bottle of health potion, and then returned to my companions' side as if nothing had happened.

Yun's eyes were filled with worship. "Dàgē is really strong! I knew that Dàgē would definitely have no difficulty with it. We'll wait here for you to lure the monsters over, Dàgē."

"Alright," I replied. *Looks like I can train on stronger mobs now*, I thought, and happily went off to lure some demon maidens.



"Dàgē is really strong! In just three days, Lü Jing has leveled up five times and I've leveled up twice as well. Fighting higher-level mobs really speeds things up! What shall we fight next, Dàgē?" Yun said cheerily as he brought over a plate of *wontons* in chili oil.

I frowned, but still accepted the plate of *wontons*. Inwardly I thought, *I should really start to earn some money and prepare to return, although Zhuo-gēge had passed me Wolf-dàgē's message, saying that things at Infinite City were going along fine without me.*

So I simply said, "I can't stay here much longer."

Yun and Jing looked panicked. "Dàgē, you're leaving?"

"No, I need to make money. I need to earn five thousand crystal coins," I replied after swallowing a *wonton*.

"Make money? What, Dàgē needs money? But you didn't ask us to split our reward money from the quests earlier with you!" Yun paused suddenly, and then frowned slightly. "Why didn't you ask us to split the reward with you if you're in need of money, Dàgē?"

I remained silent. *With Yun calling me “Dàgē”, “Dàgē” all day long, how could I possibly even ask to split the money?*

“Dàgē, although we don’t have five thousand crystal coins, please take this for now!” Jing took out a bag of coins and pushed it toward me.

I sighed. *It’s almost time for them to get new equipment, so how could I possibly take the money from them now?* “No need, I’ll make my own money.”

“But, Dàgē, are you really going to leave us?” Yun’s expression was one of dismay, clearly unwilling to part. “We don’t know your name, or even what you look like. If we part now, we’d probably never meet again, Dàgē!”

We will meet again, but it will be quite some time before Jing and Yun manage to gather ten thousand crystal coins and come to Infinite City to find me. I wish I could help them earn the money for the ship fare, but my teammates in Odd Squad are waiting for me! Is there really no way out of this dilemma?

As though she’d gathered up her courage for something, Jing said, “Dàgē, I saw an A-level mission some time earlier. The reward money is substantial, and it doesn’t seem to be very difficult, we just have to retrieve the demon king’s hair tie. Since the demon king, lesser demon, and demon maiden are all similar types of mobs, it shouldn’t be a problem for Dàgē. Besides, even if we can’t beat it, we can just grab the hair tie and escape.”

It does sound like a pretty good proposition, I thought. If I can take the ship back to the Central Continent with Jing and Yun, then I’ll at least have someone to chat with and wouldn’t have to be bored to death like I was on the trip here. “Alright then, let’s get that quest.”

“Dàgē’s the best!” Yun happily cheered.



With Jing and Yun leading the way, I once again returned to the Demon Cave.

“Dàgē, we might have to spend some time searching, since the demon king often wanders around the areas further inside the cave. It’ll probably be difficult to find him,” Yun said worriedly.

“Okay. Let’s begin searching then.”

Jing, Yun, and I made our way into the depths of the cave and quickly reached the spot where we’d trained at recently. There, I stopped and fought a few lesser demons and demon maidens in order to work the kinks out of my muscles. We then proceeded deeper into the cave to an area where we’d never been before. As before, I would engage the

lesser demons and demon maidens that we encountered along the way and then let Jing and Yun get some practice.

After walking for some time, I beckoned for Jing and Yun to stop and take a short break, as well as to leave offerings to the Temple of the Five Internal Organs... that is, to eat. I chomped on a *shaobing youtiao*²⁰ and drained a bottle of soy milk...

“Dàgē, why do you treat us so well?” Yun remarked as he ate.

Do you even need to ask? Obviously it's because we're best friends! Since I couldn't very well say those words, I could only keep up my “big brother” façade and ask, “What did you just call me?”

“Dàgē...” Yun trailed off, and then he chortled with laughter. “Dàgē really is straightforward. Just because we call you ‘Dàgē’?”

“Just for that, don't you think it's not really worth it?” Jing looked at me with... *Conflicting emotions in her eyes? I must be mistaken.* “Aren't you worried that helping us would just turn out to be a waste of time, and that after you've helped us, we might just go our own way and forget all about you?”

I simply answered, “I don't do things that I will regret. Once I've decided to do something, I won't regret it.”

Jing and Yun didn't say anything else. *Why has the atmosphere suddenly turned heavy? I wondered. Did I say something wrong? Ah, forget it; I'll just eat my youtiao.*

“Ah...” Jing suddenly cried out. I turned around, startled, just in time to see Jing crash against the wall. I caught sight of the culprit out of the corner of my eye, and instantly I leaped forward and knocked Yun aside.

A katana came stabbing at my chest. I flipped through the air and as soon as I landed on the ground, I somersaulted backward to Jing and Yun's side. Grimacing in pain, I clenched my wounded left hand, blood spilling from between my fingers. I did not dare to take out a health potion, however, because I knew that as soon as I moved to do so, the

²⁰ **Shaobing youtiao:** A *shaobing youtiao* is a combination of two popular Chinese snacks or breakfast food. A *shaobing* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaoxing>) is a baked flatbread, often topped with sesame, and can contain a variety of stuffing (or none at all). A *youtiao* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youtiao>) is, as mentioned before in V1C4, a length of fried dough that's quite fluffy inside. A *shaobing youtiao* is basically a *shaobing* that has *youtiao* stuffing. It sometimes resembles a sandwich, while at other times it looks more like a turnover.

person standing across from me with the frosty, piercing gaze – Himura Kenshin²¹ – would definitely take the opportunity to attack.

That's right! The mob across from me with that head of red hair, the cross-shaped scar, and that rurouni outfit is DEFINITELY the battousai.²² This is rather unexpected; looks like the Nine-headed Dragon Strike that I had plagiarized has finally met its owner. He won't sue me for plagiarizing, right? I broke out in cold sweat.

Yun helped Jing to sit up, and shouted, “Dàgē, he's the demon king, be careful!”

What? The battousai is the demon king? Don't tell me that the demon maiden I killed earlier was Kaoru?²³

Hmm... Forget it, if I go on, nobody would get what I'm talking about. The important thing now is I deeply feel that the mob in front of me would be a very, very tough adversary. From how he sent Jing flying without me sensing it and how he subsequently managed to injure me even though I was moving at top speed, it was clear that his speed was certainly not below mine... *And he might even be faster than me*, I thought with a sinking feeling, since speed was my greatest asset.

The atmosphere was extremely tense, but there was no sign that the *battousai* intended to move. Instead, he stood where he was and the two of us exchanged stare for stare until at last, he opened his mouth and said, “Elf, why have you entered my territory, knowing that the Demon Cave does not welcome you?”

It took me some effort to conceal my shock. *He actually knows that I'm an elf? Is he a mob with artificial intelligence? This, this is my first time meeting one... Hold on a second! A mob with artificial intelligence? Then he must be a boss mob at least... I gulped. That can't be, right?*

If my Odd Squad teammates were here, I would probably have exclaimed proudly, “Come on then, you monster with a brain!” Reality is cruel, however, and I didn't even have a healer, so my pride immediately turned into good humor. *Gaaah, I'm so pissed off! Why am I so unlucky lately, so much such that even when I'm just trying to earn some money, I would end up bumping into a boss mob with artificial intelligence?*

“Elf, what exactly have you come here for?” The *battousai* suddenly looked at me with curiosity. “Elves rarely appear on the Eastern Continent; this is in fact my first time seeing an elf.”

²¹ **Himura Kenshin:** The title protagonist of the manga *Rurouni Kenshin*. See Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himura_Kenshin) for more details. Note that “*rurouni*” approximately translates as “wanderer”.

²² **Battousai:** According to Wikipedia, this was a title given to Kenshin in the manga *Rurouni Kenshin* in recognition of his skill as a practitioner of *Hiten Mitsurugi-Ryuu*, which utilizes superhumanly-fast *battoujutsu* (sword-drawing) techniques. The title literally means “master of sword-drawing”.

²³ **Kaoru:** Kaoru was Kenshin's companion and later on, his wife in *Rurouni Kenshin*.

So that's why he didn't kill me right away, I thought.

Jing and Yun finally reacted, exclaiming, “Elf? Dàgē?”

“I came to borrow something from you.” I forced myself to say it. After all, the chances of defeating him in combat and the chances of borrowing the hair tie off him were about the same... that is, almost none.

“The hair tie?” The *battousai* actually pointed at his hair tie with a smile. “Many people have fought me for this ragged hair tie. Just what use does it have?”

So you mean many people have failed? Just how strong exactly is this artificially intelligent mob? I thought. My hands and legs felt like jelly. “Uh, someone asked me to get it.”

“Who?” There was finally a serious expression on the *battousai*'s face.

How should I know? “Errr, his, her name is Kaoru!” I fibbed.

“Kaoru?” The *battousai* actually looked astonished. “It's her? I see.”

...Is this for real? What's going on now? I was kind of stunned. *I can't possibly be this lucky. So this quest doesn't need us to defeat this artificially intelligent mob? Could the game designer actually be a loyal fan of Rurouni Kenshin like me?*

“Tell me, did Kaoru say anything?” The *battousai* looked at me levelly.

Say what? This quest has a prequel quest? Oh crap, I thought desperately. *I'll just give it a random shot!* “She wanted me to tell you... to tell you that she'll wait for you forever.”

The *battousai*'s expression became gloomy. “That silly girl,” he said, and he undid his hair tie.

“Tell her not to wait for me, for I can no longer turn back.” With a melancholic smile on his face, he handed the hair tie to the wide-eyed, can't-believe-my-luck me.

I lowered my head and looked at the old, bloodstained hair tie in my hand, and then looked at Kenshin, whose expression was one of sorrow, as though something had broken within him. The phrase “artificial intelligence” vanished from my mind, and suddenly all I saw was a forlorn swordsman who was trapped and unable to reunite with his beloved person, who also happened to be my favorite character, Kenshin, as well. So I asked, “Why? Why can't you turn back? Why do you remain here as the demon king and not return to Kaoru's side?”

Kenshin looked at me for a long moment, then finally sighed. “You do not need to know. Just relay my message to Kaoru.”

There were still things that I wanted to ask, but Kenshin leaped backward and swiftly disappeared up the cavern wall.

With a heavy heart, I thought to myself, *He’s just an artificially intelligent mob, he’s just an artificially intelligent mob...* Still, the guilt refused to go away, for his hair tie and message would never reach Kaoru, and the culprit would be me.

Just then, Yun helped Jing to her feet and said, “That’s great, Dàgē! So that’s how the quest’s supposed to be finished. Now we can go back and claim our reward.”

“No, I want to find Kaoru,” I replied, gripping the hair tie tightly as I made up my mind. *I won’t regret it.*

“But, Dàgē...” Jing paled.

I held up a hand. *There’s no room for discussion, because I know that if I don’t do it, I will regret it all my life, whereas if I do it, no matter what the result may be, I will have no regrets.*

Jing and Yun fell silent and in the end, Yun said, “Very well, since Dàgē has decided to do so, we shall look for Kaoru together.”

I nodded and gave the hair tie to Yun. After that, the three of us walked together silently, and I couldn’t stop thinking about Kenshin’s behavior earlier. *Do artificially intelligent mobs have feelings? It’s impossible right? I shook my head, feeling a little silly... Then what about Meatbun? I caressed my pouch absently as I thought, Does Meatbun have feelings? It calls me “Mama”, cries when I disappear, and seems delighted when I pat it. Does it have no feelings? I could not, would not bring myself to say that it didn’t have any.*

“Dàgē, quick, take a look, there’s something down there!” exclaimed Yun, who was kneeling in front of me, next to a cliff.

Puzzled, I walked over to where Yun was and peered down the edge of the cliff. “It’s just pitch black?”

I felt someone grab me and looked down in bewilderment, only to see Yun grabbing my ankles. Before I could ask what he was doing, I felt a powerful force hit me in the back. With Yun hanging onto my ankles, I couldn’t do anything but pitch forward, both legs in the air... Finally, as I began to fall, I managed to turn around, and saw the conflicting emotions in Jing’s and Yun’s eyes.



Yun closed his eyes as he murmured, “Why? Why didn’t you want to claim the reward, Dàgē? Why did you have to hand me the hair tie? Why did you trust us so much?”

“This time, Dàgē will surely regret it!” Jing said with a pained smile.



My mind was blank as I fell, but slowly a thought surfaced in my head: *This cliff is really tall, so I should die instantly, and not end up lying half-dead on the ground.*

SMACK!

My splayed-out body hit the surface of the water. *Damn it... It hurts*, I thought, my face contorting with the pain. I grimaced and inadvertently swallowed several mouthfuls of icy water. It was so cold that I began to shiver, but I set aside the cold and tried to swim to the surface, only to find that my waterlogged cloak was weighing me down. With great difficulty, I freed myself from the cloak and fought to get to the surface, but my vision was steadily becoming blurrier and blurrier. *Waaah, to think that I would get to experience so many different ways of dying while playing a game...*

Suddenly, just as I was on the verge of death, I discovered that someone had grabbed me by the waist and was hauling me upward. *Have Jing and Yun come to save me? Is that it?*

I opened my eyes immediately and stared dumbly at a man who was... *kissing me?* After freezing up for a few seconds, I hurriedly pushed him away.

“Kenshin?!” I was startled to see that the person in front of me was Kenshin, whom we’d just parted from.

“Are you feeling better?” Although they were words of concern, Kenshin’s voice was emotionless as he spoke.

I asked dazedly, “You were doing CPR on me?”

“Yes.”

I tilted my head to one side and thought, *That can’t count as my first kiss then... No wait, my first kiss has already been given to my cousin, waaaaah! What the heck, my first kiss was given to my cousin, and my second kiss was given to an NPC? Sigh! My kisses have all been such disastrous encounters...*

“You’ve been betrayed by your companions?” Kenshin got to his feet.

“Seems like it,” I replied with a heavy heart. *I didn't expect that Jing and Yun would actually hurt me. They didn't know it was me, but still, it's wrong to harm others! Although I can understand their desire to get to the Central Continent more quickly...*

“You regret it then; you regret trusting them.” The look in Kenshin's eyes was incomparably frosty.

I got to my feet as well and scratched my face. “Nope, I don't regret it. No matter what, I would've helped them. It's a good thing that they don't know my name and appearance. This way, the next time we meet, at least they won't feel guilty. Letting the person known as “Dagē” vanish just like this might not be a bad ending.”

Kenshin looked me in the eyes, and finally let out a sigh. “I don't understand what you're thinking.”

“Hmmm, the matter is rather complicated.”

“I need you to meet someone,” said Kenshin, clearly feeling torn over something.

“Oh? Why?” I thought curiously, *Who could it be? It can't be Kaoru, right?*

“It's a quest. A hidden quest,” Kenshin said, looking at me sorrowfully. “And I can't go against it.”

I looked at Kenshin in astonishment. *Surely this isn't something that an NPC should be saying? I gulped. Don't tell me... don't tell me he really has developed feelings?* I blurted out, “Are you an NPC or not?”

“I'm an NPC... I think so?” Kenshin looked at me, and his eyes held both pain and uncertainty.

**Sweat* Perhaps that's no longer the case; perhaps he's really developed feelings and self-awareness. I have never seen an NPC reveal such sorrow or agony in their expressions.* “You have your own will then?”

There was a moment of silence, and then Kenshin replied impassively, “I do not know. It's just that one day, while I was fighting a player, I suddenly felt that something was very odd. I didn't know what I was doing, but it felt like I should be looking for someone, looking for Kaoru... But from the conversations between players, I gradually understood that things weren't the way I thought they were. I am an NPC, and it took me a very long time to understand what “NPC” truly meant. Ever since that moment, I no longer know what I am.”

“You are Kenshin,” I blurted out. “Do you really want to find Kaoru? Perhaps we can look for her together?”

“I already know that I will only find Kaoru’s grave. That is how the script was written. I will never be able to see her,” Kenshin replied with a pained smile.

“So what if I do manage to see her? Did things really happen between us? Did we really live together before? After which, I was challenged to a fight by the Demonic Dark God and imprisoned here upon my defeat, while Kaoru became trapped in Snow Village, such that the two of us can never meet. Originally, my greatest wish was to see Kaoru, but afterwards I slowly realized that everything was just a lie.”

A lie? I’d never thought of it that way, never realized that the arrangement we humans imposed upon the NPCs could be this cruel.

“Nevertheless, I have to comply with the system’s hidden quest and bring you to see that person. However, I hope... I hope that you won’t hurt him. Can you do that, elf?” Kenshin looked at me almost beseechingly.

I gave him a brilliant smile. “Call me Prince. Don’t worry, Kenshin’s friend is my friend.”

“So, what’s his name?” I asked as I peered around curiously at the pure white tunnel. From the vibe that Kenshin gave me, I’d expected that we would be walking through a dragon’s palace or some divine immortal’s sanctuary...

“He was originally called Lantis Ilanyushenlin, but he wants me to call him Sunshine,” Kenshin replied as he led the way.

Lantis Ilanyushenlin? Which retarded game designer came up with such a retarded name? I bet he picked alphabets at random and pieced them together to form a name. “Sunshine sounds much better. Is this person a guy?”

“He is, for the most part.”

Eh? Then what about the remaining part?

“We’re here.” Kenshin abruptly turned around and I suddenly noticed that before me was a pure white door with a ruby set in its middle. *How many ship tickets can be purchased with this ruby, I wonder?* I thought, drooling in secret and resisting the urge to climb up and try to yank it off.

“I hope you won’t hurt him. Although the quest requires you to fight him, you don’t have to attack as Sunshine is no longer controlled by the quest.”

“Oh, I understand,” I replied with a nod as I cheerfully thought, *It’s a good thing I don’t have to fight. I can’t even defeat Kenshin, let alone do this insanely difficult quest. (Aside from having to know about Kenshin and Kaoru and answer Kenshin’s question correctly,*

one must also have nothing better to do than fall off a cliff. If this quest isn't insane, then what is?)

At that point, I still hadn't realized in the slightest just how grave the implications of an NPC that isn't controlled by the quest parameters were!

Kenshin pushed open the gigantic door, and a gentle ray of golden light shone through the gap in the doorway. As I raised a hand to shield my eyes from the light, I thought I saw a silhouette within. I followed Kenshin into the room.

"Sunshine, this is Prince, the elf who came upon the hidden quest," Kenshin said, his lips curving into a smile.

"Oh? Really?" The human figure, which had been originally lounging on a divan, approached me.

I gradually began to make out the details of the human figure and promptly received a shock. *A dark elf?* His skin was as dark as a dark elf's, but instead of silver hair, he had long, silvery-purple hair, which he tied up into a ponytail. He had a pair of emerald green eyes, and he wore a two-piece outfit. On his lower body he wore a skirt that trailed down onto the floor, and there were no shoes on his feet, which were only wrapped with pieces of cloth.

I gaped. *Are you kidding me? Didn't Kenshin say that there are few elves on the Eastern Continent? Why is a dark elf part of the hidden quest then? Hmmm,* I thought, and then I suddenly saw that his ears were just like a normal human's. *Just what exactly is going on here?*

"Hello, Prince. I'm Sunshine," Sunshine said, and then bowed elegantly.

I looked at him, frowning, trying to figure out what the game designer was thinking... *An Arabic prince?* I suddenly realized. *Isn't this outfit and skin color Arabic? So that's how it is, the game designer was trying to come up with an Arabic design.* Understanding dawned upon me. *He's not a dark elf, he's AN ARAB.*

"Prince?" Sunshine was peering at me curiously.

I snapped back to reality and happily greeted my new friend. This was my first time meeting an Arab, even though he was an NPC. "Hello, I'm very pleased to meet you, Sunshine."

There was a slender smile on both Sunshine's and Kenshin's faces, and Sunshine began to ask me questions about the outside world eagerly.

As I wasn't familiar with the Eastern Continent, I could only tell them how I came to be on the Eastern Continent, and then I began to describe to them everything about the Central Continent, including my beloved Odd Squad teammates and our not-sure-if-it's-been-completed Infinite City.

"I really want to visit the Central Continent," Sunshine said with a slight frown. "I would like to see the outside world, to see real sunshine."

Sunshine? I see, is that why you named yourself Sunshine? Because you yearn to see the real sunshine... I made up my mind. "You guys can come with me and accompany me back to the Central Continent. I won't reveal your identities, and you can just pretend to be normal players. There won't be a problem."

"Seriously? You're willing to bring us with you?" A smile blossomed on Sunshine's face.

"Yep." I smiled as well, but just then I suddenly thought of something. "But even without me, you guys can leave, right? Why haven't you done so?"

Kenshin gave a bitter smile. "It's useless; I've tried. If the hidden quest hasn't been triggered, then when I leave the Demon Cave the system will forcibly teleport me back here. Sunshine can't even step out of this palace."

"Then can you leave now?"

"No," Sunshine replied, his brow furrowing, and he sighed. "You have to fulfill Kenshin's wish first."

I turned to look at Kenshin. "Your wish? You sure have a lot of wishes."

"That's because the system dictates it to be so..." Kenshin replied tiredly. "The hidden mission goes like this. You have to tell me your quest-giver – Kaoru's – name before I can give you the hair tie. After receiving the hair tie, you must not bring it to the Adventurers' Guild, but instead, bring it to Kaoru, who is gravely ill. Kaoru will beg you to bring me to see her, and you will return to the Demon Cave and tell me the news, that Kaoru is near death. I will then go with you to look for Kaoru, but upon seeing her grave, you will then accompany me to look for my enemy and have my revenge. Upon accomplishing all that, I will become your humanoid pet."

So that's how it is, but really, how many people would know that that's the method to obtain the hair tie? And after getting it, they'll have to give up on the enormous reward and instead give the hair tie, which was so difficult to obtain, to another NPC? And they'll even have to agree to bring Kenshin to meet Kaoru, and most ridiculous of all, they'll have to help an NPC get his revenge? Cold sweat dripped off my forehead as I silently paid my respects to the ancestors of whichever game designer it was who came up with this insane quest. "No wonder no one has completed this quest before."

“Yes, and Sunshine’s quest is even more difficult,” Kenshin continued emotionlessly. “After obtaining me, you must fall off this cliff. I will then rescue you and bring you to meet Sunshine, after which, when asked, you must say Sunshine’s full name or he will attack and kill you. In so doing, you will never be able to attempt this quest again.”

“Lantis Ilanyushenlin? Even if I were to keep guessing until Armageddon arrives, I would never be able to come up with that name,” I said weakly.

“You have to complete another quest, only then would you come across my name by coincidence. I think it’s carved upon a slab of stone containing a prophecy, on the world’s highest mountain, Azure Peak.” There was a glint in Sunshine’s eyes, and there was a note of dissatisfaction in his voice as he said, “But I don’t like that name.”

“Is this quest not meant to be completed? I mean, just how many coincidences would you need to do it?” I deeply suspected that if not for the fact that Kenshin and Sunshine had developed self-awareness, until the day *Second Life* shuts down, nobody would be able to accomplish this quest.

Kenshin grimaced slightly. “I think they didn’t intend for anyone to complete it. Until now, no player has managed to defeat me. If I became somebody’s humanoid pet, I would probably be worth a lot.”

Th-that would be true, I thought, gulping. *If I have Kenshin, I would have nothing to be afraid of. Even Lolidragon wouldn’t be able to bully me anymore.* “What about you, Sunshine? Would you become a humanoid pet as well?”

Sunshine continued to smile charmingly. “Yes, I would. After you finish the quest, I would be able to leave this place.”

“Yaaaaay! Not only have I gained two friends, but they’re super powerful friends!” I was practically bouncing around the room with joy.

“Friends?” Kenshin and Sunshine grinned. They had picked the right person after all.

“You have to finish all the quests, however, or you’ll raise the system’s suspicion,” Kenshin interrupted my cheering.

“Don’t worry. With you around, how could I fail to complete the quest?” I replied, without an ounce of fear.

Kenshin took over the reins of the discussion and continued to explain what we had to do. “In that case, let’s look for Kaoru’s grave first. It should be in Snow Village, which is in the northernmost area. We’ll look for the Demonic Dark God after that to carry out revenge, and then receive the prophets’ quest and look for the three prophets, who have scattered throughout the land. Each prophet will give us a fragment of a map. After

piecing them together, we'll go to the world's highest mountain, Azure Peak, and get the Stone of Prophecy, then hand the stone to the prophets. The prophets will give you this prophecy: The demon awaits his lover; his lover too, awaits him in pain. Only in the most silent and deepest of places can hope be found."

"What sort of weird prophecy is that..." I wondered, *Whoever gets that prophecy will probably throw up blood, right? After climbing up a tall mountain with such difficulty, only to get a weird prophecy...*

Sunshine explained, "It's basically hinting that you have to first accomplish the demon king – Kenshin's – wish and then jump off a cliff; only then can you meet me."

If somebody can actually figure that out, he should just go and buy a lottery ticket. He'll definitely win the grand prize! I thought, and the corner of my mouth twitched.

"Alright, it doesn't sound that hard. I'll bring Kenshin to look for Kaoru. Wait for the good news, Sunshine!" I assured Sunshine confidently, thinking, *With Kenshin around, what's so scary about the Demonic Dark God? All I have to do is look for a few people, climb a mountain, and then I'll gain Kenshin and Sunshine as my companions. With this much to gain, I'd be a fool not to do it.*

"Right. I shall await your return," Sunshine replied, looking at me trustingly.

My will to fight blazing now, I grabbed Kenshin and said, "Let's go, Kenshin. Let's finish this quest quickly, then we can come back and fetch Sunshine, and then return to the Central Continent."

I waved goodbye at Sunshine and then left through the enormous white door, towing Kenshin behind me.

"Good luck, Prince. May Allah bless you," Sunshine said as we left.

Still towing Kenshin along, we returned to the Demon Cave. With Kenshin around, it was a breeze to get out. I looked at the sky, which I hadn't seen for some time, and stretched my limbs comfortably. When I was done stretching, I discovered that Kenshin was looking at his surroundings with a dazed expression. I couldn't help but snicker, since it was so rare to see him looking this bewildered, and Kenshin immediately composed himself, though he still looked slightly embarrassed.

I suddenly remembered something. "By the way, you probably shouldn't walk around dressed like that, since many people might notice that you look a lot like the *battousai!*" *Although not everyone likes to read ancient comics like I do, hmmm... except for that bored game designer.*

“Is that so? Wouldn’t it be fine if we just tell them that I’m your pet?” Kenshin replied, unconcerned.

I looked at him unhappily. “But you’re not my pet. You’re my friend.”

Kenshin returned my gaze. Though his face was still expressionless, I could see the mirth in his eyes. “Then what should we do?”

“Hold on,” I said. I grabbed my pouch and began rummaging through it. Finally, I pulled out my newbie equipment, which I’d kept as memorabilia. *It’s a good thing I didn’t sell them*, I thought. “Wear these! And let down your hair; that way you won’t look so much like the *battousai*.”

Kenshin took the clothes from me and began stripping off his *rurouni* outfit right then and there... *Uhhh, should I turn away?* My gaze drifted upward. I would steal a couple of curious glances every now and then, but... *I swear, aside from his not-so-broad shoulders, lean arms, his six-pack, and two slender legs, I really didn’t see anything!*

When I saw that he was done changing... I mean, after Kenshin told me that he was done changing, I tore a strip off his old clothes and then tied it around his forehead like a headband.

Very good, I thought as I looked at him in satisfaction. *After putting on the newbie outfit, he looks like a teenager. This way, he looks no different from other players; in fact, he looks like a new player.*

“Can I continue to call you Kenshin? I don’t think it should be a problem.”

“Mm.”

“Let’s go, then. We don’t want to keep Sunshine waiting for long.” *So, off we go to find Kaoru’s grave*. Of course, I hadn’t forgotten to put on my opera mask.

“By the way, it sounds like Snow Village is a very cold place. Is it?” I asked worriedly.

“I don’t know. Never been there,” Kenshin replied simply.

“Are you scared of the cold?” I was curious.

“I don’t know. Probably not,” Kenshin replied, raising an eyebrow, as though he didn’t think that he could be scared of the cold.

Chapter 6: The Demonic Dark God

Not afraid of the cold? Then who the heck is the person desperately clinging to me for warmth right now? My teeth chattered as I staggered onward, having great difficulty in even lifting my feet, not to mention having to haul along someone who was desperately clinging onto me, with a face pale as a sheet and lips turning blue from the cold – Kenshin.

As soon as Kenshin and I teleported from White Tiger City to the Black Tortoise City in the north, we felt an obvious drop in the temperature, so I bought two fur cloaks and we began to hurry toward Snow Village. As we walked, I gradually came to comprehend just how onerous my fate was. *Why? Why? Why is there a BLIZZARD?*

*Holy crap, it really is damn cold! Even though I had put on or wrapped about my face pretty much everything from my pouch that could be worn, I continued to feel so cold that I found myself thinking, *If I were to spit, my saliva would hit the ground as a block of ice; if I were to exhale from my mouth, the moisture in my breath would instantly hit my face as ice.**

Next to me, Kenshin was even worse off. We had only just started making our way to Snow Village when he began to shiver non-stop. His condition didn't improve even after putting on his original *rurouni* outfit, and in the end he was practically sticking onto me for warmth. *Looks like in the face of extreme cold, even the strongest swordsman will fall!*

“Ken...shin, a- are we there yet...?” I croaked out with great difficulty.

“Al...most th-there.”

Kenshin's face was turning blue from the cold. *...Hey, can you at least open your eyes and actually take a look?*

Surrounded by heavy snow and raging winds in the middle of that blizzard, all I could see was an expanse of white in front of me. There was only my compass for directions as we made our way onward, and the hope that God, Buddha, and Allah would grant us their protection, seeing how I'm working so hard to save a person...I mean, an NPC.

“Ahhh!” My foot caught on something and I tripped, falling face down in the snow with my arms and legs outstretched, and that bastard Kenshin was stacked steadily on top of me.

“Ken. Shin! If you don't get up this second, I will throw you back into the Demon Cave to spend an eternity with Sunshine.”

“...” Kenshin’s expression was cold as he reluctantly got off his “fireplace”.

Without someone’s weight pressing me down, I could finally get back on my feet slowly. In my heart, I thought plaintively, *Even if I am not being earnestly religious – praying to God on one hand, Buddha on the other, and even referring to the Quran on the side – it’s just because I think that the more I pray, the more protection there will be! Did You all have to punish me like this, and even make me trip when there’s nothing to trip over in this ocean of snow?*

Kenshin looked at the ground with a frown and said, “You seemed to have tripped on a rock.”

I hurriedly turned to look. *Odd, that arch-shaped rock seemed to resemble...a tombstone? I actually stepped on a tombstone? Oh god, mister ghost, I didn’t mean to step on the front door to your house, so please don’t come looking for me for revenge at night... No, wait, that’s not right, I thought. This is the game world; if we die, don’t we get revived? Who on earth would need a tombstone... A tombstone?*

“Kaoru’s grave?!” I exclaimed.

“Let’s clear off the snow from the tombstone,” I said as I pulled out my Black Dao to use as a shovel and began shoveling away the snow.

It required a lot of effort to work in the middle of a blizzard, but nonetheless the two of us shoveled away the snow zealously. However, each time I cleared away a shovelful of snow, yet another load of snow would fall. Even after laboring on it for half a day, Kenshin and I still couldn’t see the words on the tombstone. As time trickled by, the look in Kenshin’s eyes grew more and more frantic and hopeless. Seeing his agony, I continued to dig with renewed vigor, but it was all in vain.

In the end, I was exhausted, having no more strength to continue digging. I could only watch as Kenshin continued to dig like a man possessed, and the more I watched, the more miserable I became. *Even though Kenshin knows that the past is just a fiction dictated by the system and has never really taken place, can he still not forget about Kaoru?*

As Kenshin continued to shovel away the snow that could never be fully cleared, his movements became more and more frenzied and erratic. His well-kept hair was already a mess, but still the snow continued to fall...

“Kaoru...” Kenshin cast aside his sword and wailed towards the heavens. His face was streaked with tears.

The snow stopped.

As the clouds slowly dispersed, a ray of light shone down from between the clouds and illuminated Kaoru's tomb. In the small area where it shone, the snow began to melt.

"Here lies Kaoru, who will wait for her beloved husband forever."

Kenshin staggered toward the tombstones and suddenly dropped onto his knees.

"Kaoru..."

I got to my feet and went to stand behind Kenshin silently, gazing at the tombstone together with him. Even though I already knew that this was how things would turn out, nonetheless I still felt an indescribable sorrow at the moment of truth. Rather than say that I grieved for Kaoru, who had passed away, it should be said that I grieved for Kenshin, who could not free himself of the fate that the system had laid in store for him.

"Should I not have come? If I didn't come, Kaoru would be able to live indefinitely," Kenshin shouted as he pounded the floor with his fists.

"Instead of waiting in anguish indefinitely, maybe she preferred to lie in her grave, waiting with the knowledge that you would come to see her," I said slowly. "Just like you, who preferred to come and find her, despite knowing that you could only see her grave."

Kenshin snapped out of his stupor and smiled bitterly. "Perhaps you're right."

"Let's go and get your revenge then. Even though your enmity isn't real, turn your sorrow into your motivation to fight, turn your agony into the energy to wield your sword, and fight to your heart's content. Go, and vent your emotions," I said, my eyes blazing with battle lust.

Kenshin's eyes, too, blazed. "Let's go." With that, he turned and, without even a backward glance, began to lead the way. The cold was forgotten.

As I thought, he's someone who likes to fight too, I thought, smiling. I've found someone who shares my interest.



"Kenshin, where is the Demonic Dark God? The blizzard might have stopped, but I'm very tired. If it's too far, can we go tomorrow instead?" I gave Kenshin my most pleading, helpless, and weary look. Unfortunately, Kenshin was clearly very different from Gui.

"It's in that cave halfway up the mountain. Come on," Kenshin said heartlessly, urging me to hasten even as he pointed at a cave entrance that was kind of far, but not quite *that* far away.

“Okay, okay...”

I wanted very much to grumble as I climbed up the snowy mountain behind Kenshin. As the cave drew closer, the unease in my heart grew greater and greater, as the terrifyingly enormous statue in front of the cave entrance became clearer and clearer. Aside from that, I also noticed that the cave entrance was so big that you could stuff five of me – stacked vertically – into the cave. *Five of me... That's almost nine meters, I think?* I gulped at that thought. *That can't be, right? It's probably that just the cave's a tad oversized; it's impossible that there's a monster that big, right?*

“Kenshin, do you know what the Demonic Dark God looks like?” I asked in a shaking voice.

Kenshin did not spare a backward glance, and merely replied as we hurried along, “From the image that the system gave me, it's colossal and heavily-built, wears a black robe, has a single horn on its head, and carries the incomparably huge Demonic Sword of Darkness.”

“It sounds really terrifying!” *That description contained words like “huge” and “heavily-built”. Plus there's that enormous cave entrance,* I thought, and suddenly felt that getting Kenshin and Sunshine might not be such a simple task after all...

“We're here,” said Kenshin as he stopped abruptly.

“Are we going in now? First let me see if I can find something that we can use as markers, so that we won't get lost inside the cave...” I hurriedly began rummaging around in my pouch.

Kenshin, however, stood right in the middle of the cave entrance and suddenly bellowed, “Demonic Dark God, I, Kenshin, have come to claim the debt owed to me.”

I froze and stared into the impenetrable darkness of the cave alongside Kenshin, but there was only silence, as though even the wind and snow did not dare to make a single sound. Burdened with an intense feeling of uneasiness, I immediately drew out Black Dao. The steely ringing made by my sword as it left its sheath seemed especially loud in the silence.

A small stone suddenly fell from the roof of the cave...after which, the ground began to shake violently, and a fierce gust of wind actually came from the depths of the cave, and I could barely keep standing. The interior of the cave, which was originally dark, was now shrouded in an eerie green glow.

I knew that the battle was about to commence and that the opponent for this battle would possibly be the strongest I had ever encountered. With a resolute heart, I went over and stood next to Kenshin and gazed at the cave entrance with a haughty look in my eyes.

At long last, the Demonic Dark God appeared.

With a heavy heart, I opened my mouth to ask, “Kenshin, strength and size may not be directly proportionate to one another, but do you think it’s possible that the Demonic Dark God might not even notice us, but just accidentally kill us by stepping on us?”

Kenshin looked up at the Demonic Dark God in front of us without a word.

My god, it really lifted its leg, I thought, and hastily scrambled further away, dragging Kenshin along. You’ve got to be kidding me, who on earth can even fight against this monster that has to stoop just to get out of a nine-meter-high cave?

“No, I *will* avenge Kaoru,” Kenshin said, wresting free of my hold and charging toward the Demonic Dark God unhesitatingly.

I watched as Kenshin charged toward the Demonic Dark God, and had no other choice but to run after him with a forced smile and furrowed brow. As I ran, I shouted, “Be careful, Kenshin! Don’t confront it head on.”

Kenshin seemed to have turned a deaf ear upon what I had said and instead rushed at the Demonic Dark God without so much as a word. As he neared the demon god, he jumped directly onto its kneecap, and then with a step on its muscle, he leapt into the air until he was directly in front of the demon god’s face, drawing his sword in that second. Just as it seemed he was about to slash the demon god’s face, its enormous hand came hurtling toward Kenshin’s side. Kenshin had no choice but to leap backward, dodging the giant slap that might have otherwise cost him his life.

“Kenshin, I’ll distract him. Go attack him from behind,” I shouted as I swung my *dao* down onto the Demonic Dark God’s foot.

CLANG! There was actually a sound of metal clashing when the sword and foot met? I lowered my head to take a look and gulped, not daring to believe that I couldn’t even nick the demon god’s skin. Let’s try again, I thought, and swung my sword down heavily again... CLANG!

“To think that my Black Dao can’t even do any damage to the demon god, it looks like I need further training.” I felt deeply frustrated. There I stood with my Black Dao in one hand, crestfallen, as several dead leaves were lifted into the air by a breeze...

“Prince, quick! Dodge it!” I heard Kenshin bellow.

I looked up and saw the so-called Demonic Sword of Darkness hurtling toward me with all the momentum of an airplane plummeting to the ground. I darted to one side with lightning speed, however, the airplane...the demon sword once again came slashing at me. *My god, I’m so small, but he can still slash at me horizontally? Isn’t this*

unreasonable? Which retarded programmer... I splayed out on the ground in a rather pathetic manner, narrowly evading that demon sword.

I rapidly clambered to my feet and immediately took to my heels, trying to flee...I mean, trying to distract the demon god, so as to give Kenshin the opportunity to launch a sneak attack. As I fled for my life, I wanted very much to cry; I could sense the earth trembling with each step the demon god took. The airplane demon sword would also swing at my butt from time to time... *I wonder, will I be stepped on and reduced to offal, or will I be diced and turned into meat paste?*

“Kenshin, hurry up with your sneak attack! If I’m turned into meat paste or offal, I guarantee that I will return to the Demon Cave and haunt you as a ghost!” I yelled desperately.

“I tried to cut him already, it didn’t work,” Kenshin replied, incensed.

“What?!” The color drained from my face. *Do the heavens want me dead this badly? But I don’t want to die such a gory death*, I thought, and shouted, “Kenshin, which way’s the cliff?”

Upon hearing my words, Kenshin’s dejection vanished and he rallied himself. “Turn left! Turn left, and it’ll be straight ahead.”

Turn left? For the first time in my life, I found turning left to be an extremely difficult action to execute. “Kenshin, I can’t turn left!” *I will be turned into meat paste if I do...*

“Demon god, your enemy is me!” Kenshin’s enraged roar sounded from behind, and as soon as the words left his mouth, the Demonic Dark God that had been hot on my heels actually turned around and went for Kenshin instead.

Seeing Kenshin make a beeline for the cliff, I immediately ran after him. As I ran, I thought, *How on earth are we going to make the demon god fall off the cliff? Trip it? It would probably step on me and turn me into a pancake and still not even register my presence!*

“Kenshin, how do you intend to make it fall off the cliff obediently?” Unable to get my thoughts straightened out, I could only open my mouth and yell desperately at Kenshin, who was in front of me.

“Prince, help me lure it to the precipice, as close to the edge as possible.” After suddenly saying that, Kenshin stopped running and simply began to dodge the demon god’s airplane sword, waiting for me to “take the next shift”.

“Can I refuse?” I asked, tears brimming in my eyes.

“No,” Kenshin replied coldly.

Waaah... I braced myself for whatever was coming and leapt at the demon god, slashing down at its kneecap mid-leap. As before, there was a loud “clang”. I turned and began sprinting frantically toward the cliff, and all I prayed for was for Kenshin to actually *have* a plan.

With the demon god hot on my heels, as the time spent on evading it grew longer and longer, I began to feel rather worn out. On several occasions, I only managed to dodge the blade narrowly, and was even cut multiple times by the fierce wind that followed in the wake of each swing of the giant blade. Combining the fatigue with the pain, I began to feel like I could keel over any time. Still, I forced myself to hang in there. *Sunshine’s still waiting for me to complete the quest, and I have to bring him back with me to the Central Continent!*

Give up? I don’t know those words!

Upon finally reaching the precipice, I nearly burst into tears. *To think a cliff, the same geographical structure that I have fallen off twice, would actually now save my life! Fate is truly unpredictable.*

No matter, I thought. Now that the cliff was right in front of me, I yelled frantically at Kenshin, “Kenshin, I’m at the cliff! If you have a trick up your sleeve then hurry up and do it, otherwise I’m about to go free falling with the demon god!”

Kenshin merely followed behind us, and the calm expression on his face seemed to hint at the calm before a storm. His right hand had long since been placed on his sword hilt. *Timing! He’s waiting for the perfect time to finish off his most hated enemy.*

Hmm, looks like I’m three centimeters away from a fate involving falling off a cliff... I turned my head and looked at the immense expanse of empty air beyond the precipice, and then turned to look at the enormous demon god. *That’s odd! Why am I always being forced to choose between falling to my death and being stomped to death? Could we try something new next time?* As I traded stares helplessly with the demon god, I spied from the corner of my eye a human figure leaping to a height that was about level with the demon god’s head... *Although he did make use of several nearby trees, Kenshin’s jump power is still incredibly amazing*, I mentally noted, impressed.

“*Air Shattering Strike!*” Kenshin bellowed in an incomparably powerful voice and unsheathed his sword at lightning speed, slashing toward the back of the demon god’s head... *This looks like it’s a move based on the sword-drawing technique?*²⁴ I thought,

²⁴ **Sword-drawing technique:** Kenshin fans may be more familiar with the Japanese term for this – “*battoujutsu*”. As the name implies, the types of moves based on this technique often involves (to varying degrees) the drawing of the sword, such as using the movement to build up momentum for the actual attack. See Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batt%C5%8Djutsu>) for more information.

and saw the gust of air following in the sword's wake press down the demon god's hair, followed by a resounding "CLANG!". Although I didn't know if the demon god was injured or not, I could see at least that Kenshin's strength was sufficient to cause the demon god to fall forward.

Looks like it's just a matter of time before it falls off the cliff, I thought, once again impressed by Kenshin... But why has the sky suddenly gone dark? I raised my head to take a look, and found myself gaping, wide-eyed, at the behemoth...the Demonic Dark God that was toppling over onto me!

Dear heavens, you should really lose some weight, demon god! With a body mass like that, I can't even find a place to escape to... My god! With a tear-streaked face, I mentally bemoaned my fate as I fell off a cliff for the third time...

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!" I screamed at the top of my lungs, clenching my eyes shut tightly as I braced myself for the excruciating pain of hitting the ground.
"AHHHHH..."

"Can you shut up?" Kenshin's cold voice suddenly came from above me.

"Ahhhhh...?" I raised my head and Kenshin's face came into view. I froze, and saw that Kenshin held in his hands the ends of a red length of cloth which was tightly wrapped about my waist, and...that Kenshin's pants had slipped to his knees as his belt was missing.

"Kenshin, is a loincloth comfortable?" I asked seriously. *It's something I've been wondering about ever since my last "accidental" peek.*

"What's a loincloth?" Kenshin asked with a frown.

"That's the cloth you're wearing right now to cover your important area."

Kenshin lowered his head to look at the cloth, evidently puzzled. "Don't you wear this?"

"No, I don't, I wear boxers," I denied solemnly. *I most definitely do not wear loincloths.*

"What's the difference?"

"Hmmm, I would love to discuss with you the differences between loincloths and boxers, but..." I trailed off, frowning. "You know, it's really not very...sanitary to be discussing the matter of underwear while dangling in mid-air, and besides, I'm not really used to not having both feet firmly planted on the ground."

I rolled my eyes. “As such, could you kindly pull me up first? I promise that I will clearly list out every type of underwear available to you, and then explain each of them in detail, okay?”

I climbed over the edge of the cliff and sat down on the ground, not quite daring to believe that I’d managed to avoid dying by falling off a cliff yet again.

<System notice: Prince has received a human-type pet. Please give your pet a name.>

“Kenshin,” I said lazily.

<Pet owner: Prince | Pet name: Kenshin | Level: 100 | Health: 10,000 | Mana: 1,500>

<Attributes – Strength: 300 | Physique: 150 | Agility: 150 | Intelligence: 50 | Willpower: 50 | Wisdom: 0>

<Techniques: Sword Drawing Technique / Continual Strike / Air Shattering Strike / Dragon Flight of Heaven / Void Piercer / Light Movement / Aerial Leap / Instant Ignition>²⁵

<Special notes: Quest pet, unable to level up, unable to learn new techniques>

“Even if we set aside the fact that you’re level 100, your stats are simply too terrifying. No wonder you’re so strong,” I said, looking at his stats with envy.

“It’s a shame that you can’t level up, though. The system is quite a cheapskate; I put in so much effort to get you,” I couldn’t resist grumbling under my breath.

Kenshin shot me a cold look and said mildly, “Running a few steps can also be considered a lot of effort?”

Hearing his words, I immediately jumped to my feet and retorted, “What do you mean, ‘running a few steps’? I’ll have you know that I came all the way from the Central Continent, and had to help Jing and Yun level up for so many days before I could be pushed off a cliff by them. In addition, I had to brave a blizzard to get to Snow Village, and I even tripped and fell... Hey, Kenshin, don’t go yet, I’m not done talking! What’s with that cold stare? Don’t you realize that I’m your owner? Hey, don’t you ignore me!”



“What are we supposed to do next?” Kenshin and I had teleported to the White Tiger City

²⁵ **Kenshin’s techniques:** Note that Kenshin here only has a few of his moves from *Rurouni Kenshin* such as *Dragon Flight of Heaven* (also known as *Amakakeru Ryuu no Hirameki*). Most of the other moves are not from the *Rurouni Kenshin* universe.

in the west. *Just what exactly are we supposed to do to free Sunshine, who's still stuck in the Demon Cave? I really can't remember.*

“We have to go to the Adventurers' Guild and receive the prophets' quest.”

“Right.” I understood.

After that, I eagerly stepped into the Adventurers' Guild. I wanted to finish the quest quickly and then bring the strong Kenshin and elegant Sunshine back with me to the Central Continent. *Sigh, I really miss everyone in Odd Squad.*

After receiving the quest, I looked at the piece of paper in my hands and felt rather dizzy. *What is this? Why is it that, on the map given to me by the Adventurers' Guild, the location of the three great prophets are pretty much just three points that would form a giant triangle when connected on the entire Eastern Continent? Wouldn't they be really hard to locate, even if I actually had a sense of direction?*

Never mind, I thought, and suddenly got back my nerve. *There's still Kenshin here with me. What am I scared of?* “Hey, Kenshin, it should be a piece of cake for you to locate the three great prophets, right?”

Kenshin slowly turned to look at me, his expression stoic as ever. “I don't know the location of anything aside from Kaoru's Snow Village!”

...Looks like this quest's difficulty might very well increase by three levels because of two people who have absolutely no sense of direction, I thought, heaving a sigh, and resigned myself to staring at the map. *Let's start with the nearest! This nearest point seems to be in the lower left corner; looks like it's in White Tiger City.*

“No matter, we'll just keep heading left and down,” I said, and began to walk forward briskly.

“Prince.” Kenshin, who had been following silently all this while, suddenly called out my name.

I continued to walk and only glanced back at him. “What?”

“You still haven't explained to me about underwear,” Kenshin replied with a dead serious expression.

“Hmmm, underwear...” *I only know that there are low-rise ones, ones with girdles, lacy ones, thongs... I wonder if guys have other types of underwear aside from boxers and briefs? Waaah, how would I know anyway? I can't possibly recommend lace underwear to Kenshin, can I? Oh shit, I really kind of want to do so. Kenshin wearing lace underwear... Heh! Hmmm, it might be worth a try.*

“Never mind,” Kenshin said abruptly.

I felt crestfallen. I looked at Kenshin with shining eyes and pleaded, “Why? I really want to discuss it with you. Let me tell you about it, *pleeease?*”

Kenshin fired another cold look my way. “For some reason, I simply didn’t want to know after seeing your smile.”

“...” I scratched my face. *So it was my smile that gave it away. Next time I must remember not to smile. Mission “Get Kenshin to Wear Lace Underwear” – failed... Such a pity.*

“Is this the sea?” Kenshin suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. He stared at the sea dumbly, as though he had never seen such a sight before. On his face was a complicated mix of delight and awe.

As for me, my feelings toward the sea weren’t half as pleasant. The memory of being trapped on the ocean, bored to the point of talking to Meatbun, and even forced to work as a deckswabber and clean off seagulls’ droppings in order to pay for my meals... is really not something I want to remember.

“Can we get closer to look at it?” Kenshin asked hesitantly, even awkwardly.

I flashed a pearly smile at him. “Of course.”

On the surface, Kenshin was calm as ever, but his footsteps quickened noticeably. I grinned and followed him. *To think that the stoic Kenshin would actually feel shy!*

Kenshin stopped before the sky-blue expanse of water, and I walked up silently to stand next to him. After a moment, I said, “It’s very beautiful, isn’t it? Wait till we rescue Sunshine and go to the Central Continent! You two will definitely see many more beautiful scenes like this.”

“Mm.” A ghost of a smile appeared on Kenshin’s face at last.

I glanced around at our surroundings. *Why does this place feel rather familiar?* I looked to the left and an extremely familiar-looking ship came into my view, as well as an extremely familiar-looking harbor... *We’ve actually ended up at the harbor?* I whipped out the map and checked it again, only to discover that I’d strayed by about forty-five degrees or so. *What a disaster!* I thought. *If I can’t even reach the nearest point on the map, then how on earth am I going to find all three great prophets?*

“Sigh, I can’t find the way,” I said, frowning.

Kenshin tore his gaze away from the sea and suggested, “There are a lot of people over there. Shall we ask them for directions?”

“A lot of people?” I turned and saw that there really was a quite a crowd. *It seems like they’re all watching something? Interesting*, I thought, and enthusiastically dragged Kenshin along toward the crowd. “Come on, let’s check out the commotion.”

“Commotion? Is it even more beautiful than the sea?”

“Err... It depends on your taste.”

This is really quite a lot of people...plus, it looks like the atmosphere is pretty tense? I looked at the crowd that had gathered, most of whom were clenching their fists and cracking their knuckles, with livid expressions on their face, and some had even drawn their weapons. *What’s going on?* I peered left and right, desperate to see just what was going on at the center of the crowd.

“Local mob boss Huang Wei,” blurted out the person next to me all of a sudden, and his voice was even shaking.

“Huang Wei?” *That name sure sounds familiar.*

“Lü Jing, are you going to be my wife or not? I’m telling you, I’ve already posted my people at all the rebirth points. If you say no, I will definitely kill this kid over and over until he hits level one again,” said a familiar voice – the kind that begs to be thrashed – from the middle of the crowd.

As soon as I heard it, my face darkened. *Huang Wei, you lowlife; you actually dare to pick on my best friends again and even try to force Jing to marry you? You obviously underestimated me.*

I shoved aside the gradually retreating crowd in front of me and immediately saw Jing, whose face was white as a sheet, and Yun, who was being held down by several other players. Rage boiled in my veins, and I said in an incomparably frosty voice, “If she’ll marry you, I’ll swallow my *dao* whole.”

All eyes fell upon me, and Yun exclaimed agitatedly, saying, “Elf? Dàgē is an elf alright. Is that you, Dàgē?”

I smiled. “Aside from me, which other elf would be sightseeing here on the Eastern Continent?”

“Dàgē...” There was a complicated look on Jing’s pale face as she cried out to me hesitantly.

I shifted my attention to Huang Wei, who was as shiny and as unbelievably crass as before, and spoke in an icily calm voice that belied my fury. “Huang Wei, right? Looks like the lesson I gave you the last time around wasn’t enough.”

“You...!” Huang Wei’s face contorted with anger and, to a lesser extent, terror. “God damn it, don’t think that I’m really scared of you. Last time you snuck up on me, but it won’t be that easy this time. Boys, get him! Whoever kills him will be heavily rewarded,” Huang Wei roared.

“The fight’s started, Kenshin,” I remarked to Kenshin, who was next to me, with a faint smile. I was feeling rather eager. *I had to endure so much frustration in the fight with the demon god. How can I pass up on this opportunity now that I’ve finally met someone whom I can bully?!*

Kenshin’s face was expressionless as he gave a curt nod.

I drew Black Dao, and smiled coldly as I looked at Huang Wei, who had retreated behind his henchmen, thinking, *You think that I can’t get to you just because you’re hiding at the back?* Kenshin and I darted forward simultaneously, completely unconcerned by the presence of eight thugs in front of us. We moved at lightning speed between their blades, my Black Dao and Kenshin’s sword were so fast that all that could be seen of them was a black shadow and silver gleam respectively, followed by blood spurting everywhere...

I leaped and darted about nonstop, feeling refreshed, not seeing the eight thugs as threats at all. *Heck, last time I dared to challenge them on my own, and this time I have a level 100 terror, Kenshin, by my side. It might be quite an insult to some, but to me, this fight is really just a game to get rid of my itch to fight.*

I left the last two guys to Kenshin to deal with and sauntered toward Huang Wei with a bland smile. “Huang Wei, listen to me carefully. Don’t ever let me catch you bullying these two people who call me Dàgē. Otherwise, no matter how much trash you bring with you, to me, they will still just be flies buzzing around.”

“As for you, I will definitely kill you without fail.” With a flick of my weapon, I knocked that flashy but utterly useless gold sword from Huang Wei’s hand and sent it skidding far away.

Nine-headed Dragon Strike!

I threw back my head and laughed wildly as I watched streaks of white light shoot into the sky. After a long while, I stopped laughing and a sudden realization hit me upon catching sight of Kenshin, who had finished off the remaining two thugs a while ago. *Hmmm... I’d just used Kenshin’s move right before him, hadn’t I? But...Kenshin’s techniques didn’t include the Nine-headed Dragon Strike, so it should be fine, right?*
sweat

“Are you guys alright?” I looked worriedly at Yun and Jing. Fortunately, aside from their pale faces, the two of them looked unharmed.

“Dàgē...” Yun walked up to me, regret evident on his face. Standing in front of me, he suddenly dropped onto his knees. “I’m sorry, Dàgē.”

I looked at him, bug-eyed, thinking, *Yun, this fellow who hates to lose face, is actually kneeling before me in front of this crowd?*

“Dàgē, we’ve deceived you so many times. Why do you still help us?” Jing asked as she came up to me, hesitation written all over her face.

I shrugged. “I said it before, I don’t do things that I will regret, and once I’ve decided to do something, I won’t regret it. I’ve already decided to help the two of you, and so I’ll help you till the end.”

“Dàgē,” Yun and Jing said in unison, and the two seemed to have made up their mind about something. “We beg of you, please let us stay by your side.”

“Huh?” I frowned. “The two of you should have enough money to go to the Central Continent now. Don’t bother about me and go there first. I still have some business to take care of here.”

Their faces suddenly turned pasty, and Yun asked in a trembling voice, “Dàgē, are you unwilling to let us stay by your side? I can swear that we will never betray you again.”

“It’s not like that...” My brow creased with thought as I wondered, *Should I let them follow me? I couldn’t decide. It would be good to have them along, especially since Yun’s and Jing’s sense of direction is definitely way better than mine...but if they come along, I will have to explain to them about Kenshin and Sunshine.*

“Demon king?” Jing suddenly exclaimed softly as she stared at Kenshin dumbly.

Yun too, turned to look at Kenshin, an incredulous expression on his face.

I paled slightly, and hastily said, “Don’t say anything first, just follow me.”



Jing and Yun led Kenshin and me to a restaurant and charged into a random booth. The two of them promptly sat down and two pairs of eyes began staring intently at Kenshin’s expressionless face. Amused, I deliberately picked up the menu slowly and leisurely ordered dish after dish, as though I hadn’t noticed their agitation... *Heh! I’m about to die from stifling my laughter. To think that I can tease them like this in-game; usually they’re the ones who team up to pick on me.*

“For the last dish, we’ll have...” *What should I order?*

“*Wontons* in chili oil, right, Dàgē?” Yun said with a cheeky grin. “I’ve fallen in love with *wontons* in chili oil as well. Dàgē’s taste in food is the best!”

I raised my eyebrows. *I must admit that when it comes to food, I’m definitely the connoisseur of our group. After all, aren’t I the one who always decides where to eat and what to order every time we eat out?* “Then *wontons* in chili oil it is.”

As soon as the waiter left the booth, Jing and Yun immediately fixed their eyes on Kenshin again, clearly determined to get to the bottom of the truth.

I sighed, and said sternly, “Jing, Yun, what I’m about to tell you two now is something very important. I want the two of you to promise never to tell anyone, and never to mention the matter again.”

Jing and Yun exchanged a resolute look, and Yun said firmly, “Dàgē, I am willing to swear that from this day on, I will obey Dàgē without fail. Since Dàgē has asked us not to speak of the matter, the two of us will not so much as breathe a word about it.”

“If Dàgē is still skeptical, then there’s no need to even explain the matter to us. We won’t object,” Jing said as well.

I looked at Kenshin inquiringly. After all, it was his business. I had no right to decide for him.

“Tell them. I have no desire for them to treat me like any other NPC,” Kenshin replied coolly.

Jing and Yun stared at him blankly for three seconds, and then Yun stammered, “You...you’ve attained self-awareness? Can it be true? This kind of thing that only happens in sci-fi novels is actually happening?”

“That’s precisely how it is.” I scratched my face, thinking, *So Yun’s actually smarter than I thought he was. He actually managed to figure out the truth just like that.* “Kenshin’s not the only one. There’s another one called Sunshine. I’m currently trying to figure out a way to rescue him as well.”

“There’s another one?” Yun and Jing were stunned.

“Yeah. I have to finish another quest, only then can I get Sunshine out of the Demon Cave.” I frowned. “There’s something I need your help with, though. I’m not too good at reading the map provided for the quest...”

“Let me take a look.” As expected of Jing, she’d gotten over the shock pretty quickly and calmly asked for the map.

I took out the extremely confusing map and passed it to her. Jing stared at the map, frowning, and then took out a protractor... *How professional*, I thought in admiration. *No wonder they never get lost. I should learn from them, but first, how do you use a protractor?*

“Head twenty degrees east-south-east from the harbor and travel for approximately fifteen kilometers,” Jing pronounced as she stowed away her protractor.

“Oh...” I replied indifferently as I chewed on my food. *After all, with them to lead the way – since Jing and Yun already said that they would follow me – I wouldn’t have to bother with this “east-south-east” or whatever.*

I picked up a meat bun from the table and stared at it mutely for a while. *I haven’t fed Meatbun for a few days now, right?* I thought, breaking out in cold sweat. *CRAP!* Not caring if Jing and Yun were still present, I hurriedly reached into my pouch and fished out Meatbun...

“Mamaaaaa!” Meatbun’s eyes were visibly swollen from crying, but as soon as it saw me, its face seemed to light up with joy. “Meatbun-bun missed Mama so badly, Meatbun-bun’s tum-tum is also very hungry-hungry!”

I couldn’t even begin to express the heartache and regret I felt. *To think that I’d actually forgotten to feed it...* I hurriedly fed Meatbun the edible meat bun in my hand. As I fed it, I apologized, saying, “I’m really sorry, Meatbun, I really forgot. It’s my fault for making you hungry for so long.”

“Mmmph, mmmph!” Meatbun’s mouth was completely stuffed with food, but it continued to look at me with happiness shining in its eyes.

Seeing that Meatbun was eating happily, I felt relieved and once again raised my chopsticks, ready to fill my own stomach...only to see three pairs of eyes looking on, stunned.

“A meat bun with eyes...” Yun said, wide-eyed and slack-jawed.

“A talking meat bun...” Jing gulped.

“...” Kenshin said nothing.

I chuckled. “This is my pet. It’s called Meatbun. Meatbun, say hello to everyone.”

Meatbun swallowed the large meat bun in its mouth and hopped onto the table, saying, “Hello, everyone-one! Meatbun-bun’s name is Meatbun. Meatbun-bun is Mama’s pet.”

“Mama?” Three pairs of eyes turned to look at me inquisitively.

“Meatbun’s not too good at distinguishing gender and always likes to call me ‘Mama’,” I replied, sweating furiously. *This is a complete lie. There’s probably nobody in this world as good at distinguishing gender as Meatbun...*

“Dàgē’s pets are really special,” Yun said with a helpless smile.

Hmmm, let me think. My first pet’s a meat bun with eyes, the second’s Kenshin, a manga character who’s attained self-awareness, and after rescuing Sunshine, won’t my third pet be an Arabic prince who’s gained self-awareness? They certainly are very special...

**sweat*!*



“So you like to eat meat buns, Meatbun-bun? That’s really unusual,” Yun said to Meatbun, which was “sitting” on his shoulder.

“Meat buns, yummy!” Meatbun replied, bouncing on its perch delightedly.

“Meat buns are pretty tasty. When did you start to speak?”

“After fighting with fire birdie.”

“What’s a fire birdie?”

“It’s Gui-gui’s pet.”

“And what is a ‘gui-gui’?”

“Gui-gui is...” Meatbun tilted its big head to one side in thought. “A thing like Mama.”

“Oh...another elf warrior,” Yun remarked, suddenly seeing the light. “Then...”

“...” *No comment.*

Along the way to the first prophet, two of us humans – Jing and myself – and an NPC listened speechlessly to the nonsensical conversation between another human and a meat bun. *Looks like Yun and Meatbun clicked together quite easily. Neither of them can stop talking – so they’d just keep talking to one another!*

“Jing, how much further is it?” I asked exasperatedly. *If I keep listening to the two of them chatter on, I’m afraid I will really end up with neurasthenia!*

Jing held the map in her left hand and a compass in her right. “It should be around here, Dàgē.”

“Let’s search around here, then.”

Thwack! My foot met some resistance mid-step. *Was there some obstacle?* I wondered, and looked down... *I actually kicked an elderly beggar’s bowl and sent it flying five meters away?* I gaped. *My god, what have I done?* I hurriedly picked up the bowl and apologized profusely, saying, “I’m really sorry, uncle. Here is your bowl.”

Seeing there wasn’t much of a reaction from the elderly beggar, I thought for a brief moment and then reached into my pouch and fished out several gold coins and placed them in his bowl. “Uncle, these gold coins are for you. I’m really sorry for knocking over your bowl.”

With the matter settled, I was just about to continue walking when I saw Jing and Yun staring at me in astonishment. “What is it?” I felt my face. *Nope, my mask is still in place! So what are they staring at me for?*

“Nothing, it’s just... Dàgē’s attitude towards NPCs is really unusual,” Yun replied in a tone of surprise.

Jing took a deep breath and said, “No wonder Kenshin and Sunshine chose you to take on their quest.”

“...” Kenshin’s impassive face suddenly twitched. **Sweat* If I recall correctly, the reason why they chose me seemed to have to do with the fact that no one else has fallen off that cliff before...*

Still, I had to keep up my appearance, and so I coughed twice and in a falsely stern tone, said, “Since when did Kenshin have a quest for me to take on? What are you two babbling about?”

The two of them immediately panicked. “Sorry, Dàgē. We didn’t say anything.”

I nodded and said in a relaxed tone, “Let’s hurry and locate the prophet.”

“Yes, Dàgē.”

A weak voice came from where the elderly beggar was kneeling on the ground, saying, “Why do you seek the prophet?”

We turned to look at him. “We wish to learn about the prophecy inscribed upon the peak of the Azure Mountain,” I replied hesitantly.

The beggar sighed faintly and got to his feet slowly. “Looks like I can’t hide forever! I am one of the three great prophets.”

“Ah?” All of us were dumbfounded. *Is he for real? Is it so tough to be a prophet that he has to resort to begging in order to eat?*

“Young man, seeing that you’re a good person, I won’t make things hard for you. I was originally going to ask you to do something in order to prove that you are a righteous man,” said the prophet with a benign smile. “Now, I shall hand this piece of the map of the Azure Mountain to you unconditionally.”

I accepted the map piece from him, feeling a bit stunned. *We got the first fragment this easily?*

“Excuse me, mister prophet, but what were you going to ask us to do initially?” Jing asked curiously.

“Challenge the Fierce Tigers’ stronghold on Tiger Mountain and kill their three leaders,” the prophet replied lightly.

Jing’s and Yun’s jaws were hanging open in a most inelegant fashion. “The Fierce Tigers’ stronghold... That’s an area no less dangerous than the Demon Cave, and we would have to kill the three bosses?”

After a long while, Yun finally managed to close his mouth. He turned to look me reverently and said, “Dàgē, I really am in awe of you. Xiāodi will definitely learn from your example, and have a noble heart which does not deign to serve as a healer of the masses.”

Hey, can you not abuse proverbs like that? Healer of the masses indeed! And to think that you’re majoring in Chinese literature like me, I thought, scratching my face. Still, it’s truly unexpected that such a small action would actually save us so much trouble. Just as well; this way, the time until I get to see everyone in Odd Squad again will be even shorter.

I turned toward the elderly prophet-beggar. “Thank you for the map piece, uncle prophet. We’ll be on our way now to look for the second prophet.”

The prophet smiled. “Such a polite fellow. Then let me give you yet another hint. The northern prophet often appears at that place with chickens, ducks, fish, meat, green vegetables, and carrots.” After saying that, he knelt down once again and resumed being a beggar.

“The wet market?” I mused, scratching my face. *The designs for the prophets sure are weird. Here I thought they would all be hiding like hermits in the mountains or other secluded places with only birds and beasts for company.* “Then let’s go to the Northern Tortoise City to look for the northern prophet!”

“Yes, Dàgē.” Jing and Yun looked at me more worshipfully than ever.

“Looks like this quest will be easier than I thought.” *Right?* I thought confidently. *Members of Odd Squad, I’ll be coming home soon!*

Chapter 7: The Battle Begins

“Yu Lian, are we still lacking a lot of money?” Ugly Wolf asked. He looked at his wife – whose brows had been locked in a permanent furrow for the past few days – with some distress.

“A lot, a lot.” The furrow between Yu Lian’s eyebrows deepened as she discussed the financial accounts with Ice Phoenix. Both of them looked very pale.

“This isn’t working. We won’t last for much longer, not unless we come up with other ways of earning money soon,” said Ice Phoenix. She threw down a stack of documents and began massaging her temples.

“But we’ve already sent all the people who could be spared out to earn money. In another two weeks, the game admin will be withdrawing all the NPC guards, and then the members of the Righteous Blades who are out earning money will definitely have to return to protect Infinite City. At that time, our finances will be in an even worse state,” Yu Lian said, troubled.

“But won’t there be players visiting and spending money in our city at that time?” Ugly Wolf asked.

“No, the city would only just be starting out, so we definitely won’t be breaking even for some time. We don’t have enough people to work as shopkeepers, peacekeepers, or soldiers either, therefore we must continue to expand our staff... Just these expenses alone are shocking enough, not to mention the fact that we have to continue the construction of the city. The hundred thousand or so crystal coins that we have right now won’t be enough for our purposes,” analyzed Phoenix.

Ugly Wolf tilted his head to one side as he mulled the information over. “Gui’s blueprint of the city is almost done. Shall we send him to the other three cities to perform on the streets for tips?”

“Mm!” Yu Lian noted down the new method of increasing the city’s income with a serious look on her face.

“So how much money did you manage to swindle out of other players, Lolidragon?” Ugly Wolf asked Lolidragon, who was lounging nearby.

“The hundred thousand crystal coins I got from swindling others have been used up a long time ago,” Lolidragon replied. She rolled her eyes at Ugly Wolf. “I’m already a wanted fugitive. My appearance and methods are pretty much common knowledge throughout Sun, Moon, and Star Cities by now. It’s impossible to con them anymore.”

“What a pity...”

“If Prince was here, he could tag along with Gui to perform on the streets,” Lolidragon raised her eyebrows. “His voice is *really* good, and with that face of his, he would definitely earn a lot.”

“Does Prince sing very well?” Phoenix immersed herself in her imagination...

“Then when Prince is back, we’ll send him off to perform on the streets. With his abilities, if he takes the task assigned to him seriously and earns money, and if we sell a few small treasures, we should be able to earn all the money back!” Yu Lian calculated.

“The problem is, will that guy take the task assigned to him seriously?” Lolidragon disagreed.

...That is another big problem!

“We’re in trouble,” Nan Gong Zui said as he slowly walked in, his face somber.

“Can you not use such a shocking opening line? We all know that we’re in trouble with things the way they are,” Lolidragon said, rolling her eyes at Nan Gong Zui.

Nan Gong Zui ignored Lolidragon. There was a trace of anger in his voice as he explained, “Fan is recruiting soldiers. They’ll be invading Infinite City once the NPC guards are gone.”

“Fan?” Upon hearing her ex-lover’s name, Phoenix’s eyebrows furrowed, and a complicated feeling welled up in her heart.

“One disaster after another.” Yu Lian’s expression darkened. “Now we’ll have to recruit more soldiers as well.”

“Prince isn’t back yet?” Nan Gong Zui asked calmly.

“Uhhh, about that...” The members of Odd Squad began to stammer.

Nan Gong Zui turned to face Ice Phoenix. In a kind but firm voice, he said, “Phoenix, leave the room for a moment. There are some things which I have to discuss with the members of Odd Squad.”

Although she was reluctant to leave, Phoenix knew better than to argue. In a small voice she said “okay” and then obediently left the room.

Nan Gong Zui watched as Phoenix closed the door, and then turned around to face the members of Odd Squad.

“What exactly happened to Prince? Tell me.”

There was a long silence in the room...

“I am aware that although Prince is remarkably strong and values his friends and honor greatly, he is also scatter-brained, a little silly, plus he has no sense of direction.” Nan Gong Zui said steadily.

“You should’ve told us earlier!” Everyone else breathed a relieved sigh.

“So you already knew about Prince’s true personality; you should’ve told us earlier, we were worried half to death!” Lolidragon patted her chest, having yet to recover from her fright.

“Where exactly is Prince?” Nan Gong Zui asked again patiently.

“He’s on the Eastern Continent,” Ugly Wolf replied without hesitation now that there was no need to conceal the truth.

Nan Gong Zui frowned uncomprehendingly. “What is he doing there?”

“The result of his lack of a sense of direction and drinking.” Lolidragon’s expression darkened.

“...” Even though he was already aware of Prince’s true personality, Nan Gong Zui couldn’t help being stunned for a moment. “When will he be back?”

“We don’t know,” Lolidragon answered honestly.

“You guys don’t seem to care much about Prince.” Nan Gong Zui said mildly, but dissatisfaction was evident in his tone.

“It’s not that we don’t care, it’s just that we don’t want to imprison him yet,” Lolidragon replied calmly.

Nan Gong Zui gave her an uncomprehending look.

“You will understand in the time to come,” Yu Lian added with a smile.

Just then, Gui entered the room. The very first phrase to leave his mouth was “Bad news.”

He received several glares in response.

“What happened this time?” Lolidragon asked lazily.

“Wicked said that Prince might have to delay his return,” said Gui, clearly tormented by the news.

“Just what *is* that guy doing?” A vein popped on Lolidragon’s forehead.

Wicked, who had entered the room after Gui, was frowning. “He refused to say, but it seems to be of great importance. He said that he will hurry back as soon as possible.”

“As soon as possible? The enemy’s almost knocking on our door, yet our liege lord is still wandering around on the Eastern Continent?” Lolidragon stood up abruptly. “No, Wicked, tell him that he must board the ship within three days, no matter what he’s doing. How are we supposed to fight this war when our liege lord isn’t even around?”

“I will relay your message,” Wicked said with a nod, but after a moment’s thought, he added, “But I cannot predict what he will do.”

“That guy can’t even predict his own actions, so how could you?” Lolidragon replied, massaging her temples. In a weary tone, she continued, “We can only hope that he will return before Fan reaches the city. After all, Prince is still the heart of Infinite City.”



“Hahaha!” I laughed to myself, thinking, *The map fragments sure were a piece of cake to collect. All I had to do was answer a few questions of the northern prophet in the wet market, and then win against the eastern prophet in a game of Sic Bo²⁶ at the gambling den, and the three map fragments were all mine. This quest is so easy!*

“How is it possible that somebody can actually differentiate twenty different kinds of vegetables and ten different kinds of fish meat from one another? And even spell out the names?” Yun asked disbelievingly. All the fish meat had looked exactly the same to him, and they even tasted alike.

“How can somebody manage to win ten games in a row of *Sic Bo*?” Cold sweat dripped down Jing’s forehead. Dumb luck couldn’t even begin to cover it.

“Kenshin, this map is too difficult to assemble. Help me piece it together and then pass it to Jing,” I said after trying in vain for while to piece together the three map fragments and tossed them to Kenshin to deal with.

²⁶ **Sic Bo:** A gambling game originating from ancient China. Basically, you roll three dice and then bet on the total outcome. There are a number of bets you can place, but the two most common bets are “big” (that the sum of the dice is greater than ten and less than eighteen) and “small” (that the sum of the dice is greater than three and less than eleven) See Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sic_bo) for more information.

Yet this person can't even piece together three pieces of a map... Jing and Yun thought, staring dumbfounded at their companion. Isn't this a bit too far-fetched?

Kenshin caught the map pieces and tossed them onto the table. Just when he was about to begin piecing them together...

"Wow, Kenshin, you've already pieced them together. That's quick," I said, staring at the completed map that was laid out on the table, and hastily beckoned Jing over. "Jing, quick, take a look and see where this is."

"..." Kenshin looked at the already completed map and frowned, not saying a word.

"I can roughly tell where the location is," Jing said thoughtfully.

"That's good, let's set off then." My brow creased with thought. According to Zhuo-gēge, I had only about three days left to complete my quest and pick up Sunshine. I had to hurry.

"It's so tall." Standing at the foot of Azure Peak, which was so tall that its peaks were lost in the clouds, I had a dark premonition in my heart... *With our skill, climbing a mountain shouldn't be a very difficult thing to do. Right? I hope so...*

I turned to Jing and Yun. "Since you two aren't warriors, it might be rather difficult for you to scale this mountain, so just set up a camp here and wait for Kenshin and me to return."

"Yes, Dàgē." Jing and Yun nodded.

"Let's go, Kenshin." Kenshin too, gave me a nod, and I lifted a leg, ready to climb this mountain, but just then... I suddenly turned around and said to Yun, "Hey, return Meatbun to me."

Shock, disappointment, anguish, and reluctance appeared on Yun's face, and he bit back tears as he handed Meatbun back to me. "Meatbun-bun, you must return quickly, otherwise I will be very bored."

"Meatbun-bun will return quickly. Don't cry-cry, Yun-yun." Meatbun's eyes too, were filled with tears.

The atmosphere was that of a sorrowful parting. In this fashion, a human and a bun gazed at each other heartbreakingly, as though they were a couple who were being forced to separate. From time to time, they would even throw me pleading looks, as if they were begging me – the heartless murderer who was brutally separating two lovers – to show mercy and let them off... *To hell with you!* I gave Yun a smack on the head.

“Let’s go, Meatbun.” Two veins popped on my forehead as I turned and left.

“Yes, Mama.” Meatbun hopped after me, its eyes filled with happiness, leaving behind a plaintive Yun who kept shooting resentful looks at me.

“Right, let’s start climbing.” I gazed up at Azure Peak, and what I saw was not the cloud banks, but the faces of my teammates in Odd Squad.



“How much longer?” Nan Gong Zui asked Kong Kong and Lolidragon calmly.

“They’ll definitely be here in half a day.” Kong Kong replied angrily.

“Fan brought around seven hundred people. Warriors make up around two thirds of the force; the rest are mostly mages and priests. They’re very high on offense power. It’s going to be hard,” analyzed Lolidragon.

Nan Gong Zui’s thought went to Infinite City’s defense force, which had around two hundred warriors, fifty archers, fifty mages, twenty priests, and twenty thieves... and thought that if not for the fact that his opponent was Fan, whom he detested the most, he – Zui – would probably have surrendered right away.

Nan Gong Zui sighed softly. No matter what, he had to defend Infinite City for Prince. After all, the Righteous Blades had poured in so much of their heart and soul into building the city. “White Bird, here, chair the meeting.”

White Bird too, was frowning slightly. The situation did bode ill, but as they say, it’s easy to defend a city and hard to lay siege. She believed that so long as they planned carefully, capturing Infinite City would definitely be no easy task.

“All groups, report on your situation.”

“The eastern, western, and southern gates have been walled up and they definitely can’t be opened. Aside from the northern gate, the only other way Fan’s forces could enter Infinite City is by scaling the city walls, but we’ve prepared and placed hot oil on them. What I fear is that we won’t have enough oil for Fan’s forces...” Gui’s brow furrowed deeply with thought. “We’ve only finished the gates recently... Sigh, the cost for reopening the three gates and reconstruction alone when this war is over will be sufficiently alarming.”

In contrast to her usual willful self, Fairsky wore a pair of glasses with a black frame and held in her right hand a scroll of information, which was so long that it trailed along on the ground. In her left hand she held an abacus and she analyzed meticulously, “Fortunately, we’ve allocated an adequate amount of money to the construction of the

city's foundations. The city walls will definitely hold out. With a force of five hundred, it would take... about a month, fifteen days, three hours and forty-six minutes to break through the wall, but since this is a game, I seriously doubt that anyone can sleep for an entire month with the game helmet on without complications. Also, the city gate is extremely strong. Even taking into account magical attacks, it can last for at least several days."

Yu Lian sighed and massaged her temples. "Where are we going to get the money for the three gates from?! Sigh, Phoenix, you guys report on your status. I need to get a cup of tea to calm my nerves."

Phoenix hastened to speak. "Due to a severe lack of archers, every warrior has been equipped with a mid-level crossbow and arrows. Although their damage would be nothing compared to real archers', they should be able to make up for it with their strength and maim or kill the enemy from atop the city walls... even though this increases the burdens of the finance department." Phoenix too, felt faint when she finished her report.

"What about supplies and ammunitions?" White Bird asked thoughtfully. Regardless of the state of their finances, they had to have supplies and ammunitions. Without even just that much, there would be no way for them to win the battle outnumbered as they were.

"We've followed the list given by the military department and made the necessary purchases." When they'd first received the list – which was as long and as horrifying as the cloth used to bind old grannies' feet in ancient China – Phoenix and Yu Lian had just stopped short of huddling together and weeping. However, they were forced by the harsh reality (or rather, White Bird's despotic rule) and could only force Lolidragon to head out and con more people yet again...

"How about the mages?"

In a gentle yet firm tone, Rose said, "I've already let the mages know that their main duty is to maintain the defensive barrier and prevent Fan's mages from destroying the city gates, but I think we may not have enough mages compared to Fan's forces. However, I can guarantee that all our mages are top-notch."

"Even if they have to drink mana potions like water, they must hang in there," White Bird said fiercely.

Both Rose and Phoenix sighed, but still they answered, "Understood."

"Do we have any reinforcements, foreign affairs department?" White Bird asked, although she knew better than to hope for any help from that quarter.

Feng Wu Qing shook his head with a sigh as he fanned himself. “It’s not so easy to find reinforcements. Right now, Infinite City has nothing to offer, so how many people would be willing to come to our aid?”

A vein popped on Lolidragon’s forehead. “You jerk, were you just fooling around outside the city while I was being pressed into hard labor by the finance department? You couldn’t find even a single reinforcement?”

Feng Wu Qing replied coldly, “Hard labor? More like serving as a fox spirit!”²⁷

“You!” Just as Lolidragon was about to throttle Feng Wu Qing, Ugly Wolf grabbed her by the collar, so she was unable to strangle Wu Qing to death.

Feng Wu Qing’s cold expression thawed as he grinned slightly. “I didn’t find much by way of reinforcement, just a hundred and twenty warriors, thirty mages, and then some priests!” *It’s a pity Sis refused to help; otherwise I would definitely have the help of yet another brother-in-law. She’s such a selfish sister to refuse to just help defend a city.*

Lolidragon’s mouth immediately formed an “O” shape. She leveled a trembling finger at Feng Wu Qing and said, “You... you... Where did you manage to find that many players?”

Feng Wu Qing rubbed his nose and then admitted, “My parents also play this game, plus my mom’s a writer, so she summoned her loyal readers to help out.”

“Lazy fellow,” Lolidragon replied disdainfully.

“You...”

“How did the trap-setting go?” White Bird ignored the bickering duo and turned to ask the thief Kong Kong.

Kong Kong nodded and said, “I’ve already gathered all the thieves beforehand and we’ve laid countless traps around Infinite City, only leaving a few narrow routes past them. Hmph, if that playboy Fan dares to draw close to Infinite City, I guarantee that he will either be blown to bits or buried alive.”

“Next is the most important group – our military department,” said White Bird as she turned to look at Nan gong Zui, Wicked, Broken Sword, and Ugly Wolf.

²⁷ **Fox spirit:** While fox spirits do appear in a number of oriental mythologies, the fox spirits of Chinese mythology are rather unique. For one, they often adopt human appearances – to be precise, they often appear as beautiful young women and, occasionally, beautiful young men. In many myths, the fox spirits utilize their good looks to seduce or bewitch humans. This is possibly a contributing factor to the impression that fox spirits (in Chinese mythology) are often evil and unscrupulous. See Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huli_jing) for more information.

“The Righteous Blades have been training hard ever since we arrived in the Infinite City. Although the members who joined later are not as skilled or as united as the original members of the group, they’ve made tremendous improvement this past month. Their average level is fifty or so, which is pretty good,” Nan Gong Zui reported dutifully.

Ugly Wolf said confidently, “I’ve placed the extra men that Wu Qing recruited on top of the northern gate. Even if the gate is breached, these hundred players can hold out until others come to reinforce them. The remaining players will be positioned upon the city wall and defend it using magic and ranged attacks with their bows, thus slowing the enemy’s advance. Together with fifty selected strong players, Odd Squad and Dark Emperor will defend the central tower.”

Broken Sword looked at Legolas, and the latter nodded. “Legolas and I have already made sure that the warriors have learned basic archery skills. Although their accuracy and strength cannot compare with actual archers, they’ll have no trouble with bending a bow and shooting arrows.”

“I have already divided the players into smaller teams, taking into consideration how well they work together as well as other factors. I believe this will prove very useful during melee combat,” Wicked reported on his progress with a serious expression.

Seeing that all the departments were done with their reports, White Bird began to explain the strategy for the upcoming battle. “First and foremost, I want to say that during the battle, Infinite City’s rebirth point will be shut down to prevent enemies from resurrecting inside our walls, which would be very dangerous to us. Although shutting down our rebirth point will also prevent *our* players from getting back in, this is a necessary move. Does everyone understand?”

All the people present nodded.

White Bird continued with her explanation. “There’s another thing everyone has to note: We are the defenders, so our most important duty is to defend the city center. No matter what, we must protect the central tower and the Infinite City gemstone, as once it’s shattered Infinite City will no longer belong to us. I believe everyone understands the severity of this matter, so we must defend the gemstone to the death.”

(Author’s note: All player-owned cities will have a central tower. Within it is the city’s gemstone. Usually, the central tower cannot be entered, but during a siege, players can shatter the gemstone by force. Whoever shatters the gemstone will take over the city as its liege lord, and the original ruler will lose his/her control over the city.)

“Defend the gemstone to the death!” everybody roared.

Finally, White Bird couldn’t resist raising a question which Zui had forbidden her from asking. “Will the liege lord be returning?”

Everybody looked at the members of Odd Squad, who turned to look at Wicked in unison. Wicked merely said, “I don’t know.”

White Bird’s voice was filled with suppressed frustration as she said, “It’s one thing if the liege lord doesn’t show his face for an entire month, but to actually be absent when somebody’s laying siege to the city? Isn’t that too much?”

“Prince will be back, he definitely will.” Lolidragon gave White Bird a firm look.

White Bird too, looked steadily at Lolidragon. “Let’s hope so.”

Let’s hope so... Although Lolidragon’s gaze did not waver, her back was wet with sweat. May the heavens protect Prince from getting lost again!



“There must be around a thousand players in this crowd.” Even the calm and fearless Madame White Bird could not help turning pale at the sight of the alarmingly large force formed up neatly in ranks and dressed and armed with superior equipment and weapons that glimmered under the sun. In addition, there was a giant siege engine and nearly ten scaling ladders... If the shock was any bigger, she would probably have just jumped off the city wall straightaway.

Their faces were all pale, but Nan Gong Zui said coolly, “We have to hang in there. I don’t wish to disappoint Prince.”

Wicked raised his eyebrows. “I will never let disappointment show in his eyes.”

“A disappointed look does not suit Prince,” Gui said coldly.

Nan Gong Zui walked to a place where everyone could see him and then drew his sword abruptly. The ringing of cold steel calmed down the agitated defenders. After surveying them once with his eyes, Nan Gong Zui roared emphatically, “For our Infinite City, we shall fight to the death!”

“TO THE DEATH!” the warriors roared, echoing his words.

Nan Gong Zui stared at Fan, who was also staring at him from far away, and muttered, “Come on then, Fan. Let’s finish this.”

“Archers, nock your bows and wait behind the arrowslit for the signal. Get ready for the first volley of arrows,” ordered Legolas, who was the commander of the archers.

“Warriors, move the cauldron of oil into place and then attack using your bows first! Once someone begins to scale the walls, pour the hot oil on them immediately. Also, protect the archers and the mages well,” ordered Wicked swiftly and composedly.

“Mages, put up the barrier!” Yu Lian and the other mages immediately took their positions well behind the city walls, combining their power to cast a protective barrier large enough to envelop the entire Infinite City.

The battle was about to begin at any moment!

“Prince, I will bring you down from your position as the lord of Infinite City.” Although Fan was still smiling gently, those who were familiar with him could tell that there was an icy look and a deep thirst for vengeance blazing in his eyes.

“All men, prepare to attack. Infinite City will be ours!” Fan ordered as his forces advanced upon Infinite City, like a celestial general leading his immortal soldiers into battle.

“Quick, hurry! Pour the hot oil to stop them from climbing up,” Wicked bellowed frantically as he moved among the defenders. “Yu Lian, hurry and get the mages to help destroy the scaling ladders.”

Yu Lian hurriedly replied, “Right. Phoenix, stay here and take command of those maintaining the barrier. Team one, and you, Ming Huang, follow me.”

“God damn it, the difference in numbers is just too big.” *To think that Fan actually had so many men skilled at dismantling traps; those traps were placed for nothing*, Nan Gong Zui thought, swearing silently to himself as he looked at the densely-packed horde of enemy players – like a colony of ants – attacking the city walls. He could only forcibly suppress the rising panic in his chest and ask everyone else, in a steady tone, to remain calm, and then desperately fire arrow after arrow, hoping that he could take down a few more enemy players... Occasionally, he would raise his head and gaze into the distance as though he could see Fan’s face – impassive but for the trace of a smile that seemed to say that the city was already his.

“Zui, they’re about to breach the city gates,” Ugly Wolf said, struggling not to panic.

“What?!” Nan Gong Zui exclaimed. “Didn’t the mages get rid of the enemies in front of the city gates?”

“They did. Maybe it’s because the enemy has too many mages... I don’t get why the city gates were destroyed so quickly either; perhaps Gui and Fairsky estimated wrongly?” Ugly Wolf frowned. “In any case, we should redirect some of the players to defend the city gates now.”

“The defenders are already having a hard time fending off the players scaling the walls. There’s no way we can redirect anybody to guarding the gates,” Nan Gong Zui replied, panicking inwardly. Or should they get those defending the central tower to defend the gates instead? But no, the central tower was simply too important. There was no way they could decrease the number of players guarding it... but it would also be a disaster if the city gates were breached.

Ugly Wolf watched with empathy as Nan Gong Zui’s expression grew more and more troubled. After all, he too, couldn’t think of a solution, which was why he came to ask Zui, hoping that a miracle would appear, that he could think of a solution. “Zui... is there a way?”

“...” Nan Gong Zui stared at the sky and could not suppress a sigh. “If I had another month’s time or twice the funds, Infinite City’s forces and defense wouldn’t be in such a sorry state.”

Ugly Wolf scratched the fur on his head upon hearing that. “Hopefully that fellow Prince will hurry back in time.”

Nan Gong Zui smiled bitterly. “Even if Prince returns, we will only have one more defender. What difference would it make?”

“I don’t know,” Ugly Wolf replied as he scratched his face, “But... Prince himself is a synonym for a miracle.”

Nan Gong Zui frowned uncomprehending and gave Ugly Wolf a questioning look.

Ugly Wolf smiled. “Didn’t you come to Infinite City because of Prince’s miracles as well?”

Nan Gong Zui smiled as he shook his head. “Sigh, we can’t hope for a miracle this time.”

Wicked approached them from one side, and he seemed oddly calm in the midst of the chaos of war. “We’ve run out of oil, we’re losing the city wall, and the city gates are almost completely breached. I suggest we retreat and defend the central tower.”

Wicked and Ugly Wolf both looked at Nan Gong Zui questioningly.

With a heavy heart, Nan Gong Zui commanded, “All troops, retreat to the central tower!”

Upon receiving the order, all the various teams began to make their way reluctantly to the central tower. At this point, the benefit of training in smaller groups became clearly visible as team members smoothly assumed their respective roles in the team. Shielded and protected by the warriors, the archers and mages continued to attack the enemy even as they retreated, and even managed to take down quite a number of enemy players.

Moreover, the teams could cover for one another and provide support for other teams that were having a hard time. In this fashion, the soldiers of Infinite City fought and retreated to the plaza in front of the central tower, putting up a final stand against those enemy players who had come to take over Infinite City.

“Archers, volley!” Nan Gong Zui had already lost count of the number of times he had given the command to fire. The streaks of white light in the skies were practically like fireworks, yet the number of enemy players didn’t seem to diminish at all. *A thousand men? I’m afraid it’s more than that*, he thought, troubled.

“You should just surrender, Nan Gong Zui. If you do, I might just consider giving you a small position.” The benevolent smile on Fan’s face held a trace of rage.

“Hmph!” Nan Gong Zui merely sneered. Although Fan’s troops greatly outnumbered Infinite City’s, he was still the invader. All those cauldrons of hot oil would definitely have cost him countless men. Besides, the members of the Righteous Blades had all received extensive training in large-scale fighting, so the situation wasn’t necessarily in Fan’s favor. With that thought, Nan Gong Zui’s spirits lifted.

“So you choose the hard way,” Fan said coldly. “Kill him!”

Just as suspicion entered his mind, Nan Gong Zui was suddenly sent sprawling to the ground. His shoulder went numb for a moment, and then flared with pain. He looked over his shoulder and saw that the one who’d pushed him down was Lolidragon, while Madame White Bird was looking incredulously at a panicky Phoenix. Nan Gong Zui sighed. “Phoenix, you...”

“Phoenix, what are you doing?” White Bird demanded, staring at her own sister in disbelief. Phoenix actually tried to kill Nan Gong Zui? And she was clearly listening to Fan’s order; hadn’t she already transferred her affections to Prince?

“I...” Although she’d panicked when she saw that Nan Gong Zui was still alive, her spirits lifted after she took a look at Fan, and once again, she fired a bolt of magic at Nan Gong Zui...

“Do you take me for a corpse?” Lolidragon coolly sent Phoenix sprawling with a kick, and then calmly pinned the latter to the ground.

Nan Gong Zui got to his feet without a word, his heart gripped in ice. He’d always sincerely treated Phoenix as his godsister, forgiving her mistakes time after time, protecting her, worrying that she would feel guilty, feel upset... yet the result was still like this.

“Zui...” White Bird looked guiltily at the dispirited Nan Gong Zui, and then at her sister, whose face was almost buried in the ground. She could only sigh yet again. Why did this

sister of hers always have to choose to sacrifice everything else for her love? To even become a spy...

“You sabotaged the city gates, didn’t you?” Although it was phrased as a question, Gui’s tone was one of certainty. He knew that there could not have been a mistake in his calculations, so someone must have sabotaged them; otherwise, they would never have been breached so quickly.

Upon hearing Gui’s question, as all those present turned to look in sudden realization and anguish at Phoenix, the latter buried her face even more deeply into the ground.

Everybody had worked hard, pouring in their efforts to defend the city, and yet there was a spy, and it was actually somebody so close to them. At that thought, the defenders of Infinite City grew disheartened. Fan seized the opportunity and began the attack. It seemed that the defense of Infinite City was in a critical situation, as cracks appeared in the defense surrounding the central tower. Nan Gong Zui and his team were in particularly low spirits, wracked with guilt and uncertainty...

Uncharacteristically enough, Fan led the charge, and the defenders of Infinite City were actually so dispirited that the enemy managed to charge right up to Zui.

“Nan Gong Zui, in the end, you’ve lost,” Fan said lightly, a satisfied smile on his face.

Nan Gong Zui looked at Fan bleakly and said in a hoarse voice, “I can take whatever revenge you throw my way; just let Phoenix off!”

Fan broke into maniacal laughter. “Let Phoenix off? Hahaha, she doesn’t want me to let her off! As for *you*, Nan Gong Zui, I definitely will—”

“Wahhh! Whoever’s down there, make way!” A piteous cry from above could suddenly be heard. Why did the voice sound rather familiar?



WHAM!

Damn it, if I’d known, I wouldn’t have stood up as I pleased. So when they tell you to “sit on an airplane”²⁸, you should really sit and not “stand on an airplane”; the same holds true for flying carpets! I want to cry; my entire body feels like it’s about to break... I looked up into the sky at the crowd sitting on the flying carpet. Kenshin and Sunshine were idly sipping their tea, while Jing and Yun were staring dumbly at me, who had fallen off the plane... I mean, the carpet.

²⁸ **Sit on an airplane:** Just to clarify, this is the Chinese way of saying “take an airplane”. We’re not referring to the act of sitting on airplane, but the act of taking the airplane as a mode of transportation.

Oh, by the way, I should mention that such a uniquely Arabic object as a flying carpet is obviously a treasure belonging to Sunshine. It's all thanks to that carpet that I could come back so quickly to Infinite City.

My entire body ached as I stood up slowly, only to see everyone from Infinite City staring at me. I said slowly, "Whew, good thing the ground was soft; I almost fell to my death."

Everyone stared at me blankly, and then suddenly shifted their gaze to my feet. After a moment of confusion, I too, looked down at my feet... *Oh, so I crushed a human cushion to death. Doesn't this human cushion look rather familiar?* I yanked the cushion dude's head backward by the hair in order to see his face. *Fan?* I thought, scratching my head. *So it's him. Whew, my conscience can finally be at ease, then. Crushing this sort of person to death isn't worth agonizing over.*

"Prince!" Fan snarled, glaring at me as he spat a mouthful of blood.

"It's you again!" I interjected quickly. "I'm sick of that opening line; can't you change it to something else?"

"Don't glare at me like that. It's not like I know why I'm always making things hell for you. Maybe it's our fate?" I cocked my head to one side, thinking, *Is it just me, or am I always subduing Fan? Maybe it's because he's called "rice"²⁹, so he's destined to be cooked by me?* "Oh yeah, what are you doing in Infinite City anyway? Sight-seeing? The city's open to the public already?" I asked uncertainly.

"..." Everyone continued to stare at me wordlessly.

Lolidragon rolled her eyes and bellowed irritably, "He came to attack the city!"

"Our idiotic liege lord has finally found his way home," Ming Huang – who could never say anything useful – shouted idly.

"Ohhh!" My eyes narrowed. *He dares to attack our city? What nerve!* I immediately threw a punch at Fan and sent him sprawling. Seeing that he was about to reach into his pouch for a health potion, I raised my eyebrows and then stomped on the back of his hand with one foot.

"You cowardly bastard; fight me one-on-one if you've got the balls!" Fan yelled desperately, seeing that he might be killed any time.

I gave him a bloodthirsty smile and then said nonchalantly, "One-on-one? Sure, just wait till I've cleaned up your friends."

²⁹ **He's called "rice":** No, Fan's name doesn't mean "rice", it's just that "rice" is also pronounced as "fan".

I looked at Fan's forces and then suddenly remembered what Zhuo-gēge had told me over the phone, about how Lolidragon wanted me to put on the façade of the Blood Elf when I got back... *Sigh! I'm not too keen on the idea, but since when have I been able to disobey Lolidragon? I'm resigned to my fate...* So I drew my Black Dao and ran my tongue over the blade lightly, without forgetting to smile slightly. "So many people for me to kill, that's great!"

I watched the enemy with satisfaction, seeing that some of them had widened their eyes, while others gulped... *Hey, you, over there, is there need to wet your pants? Am I really that terrifying? I'm only twenty and in the prime of my youth, not to mention lovely and charming...*

"Prince, the atmosphere over here on our side – among the defenders of Infinite City – isn't too good. You should do something about it first," Lolidragon told me over a PM suddenly, interrupting my moment of narcissism. Since she rarely uses such a serious tone, something major must have happened.

"What happened?"

"Phoenix didn't really fall in love with you, only pretended to do so. Her aim was to serve as a spy in Infinite City. She sabotaged the city gates and nearly killed Nan Gong Zui," Lolidragon said heavily. "Prince, if you can, try and make Fan look bad by beating him up some more. Perhaps this way, Phoenix might really transfer her affections to you."

I broke out in cold sweat. *Phoenix... your luck with the opposite sex is about as "good" as mine; you have to fall for either a dastardly playboy or me, a transvestite?* Still, as I said, there was simply no way I could disobey Lolidragon's orders.

I looked at Nan Gong Zui. As expected, he looked as though he had lost all will to live, which seriously pissed me off. I stomped on both of Fan's hands a couple of times to prevent him from secretly taking a drink from his health potions, and then marched up to Nan Gong Zui and, ignoring the astonished looks on everyone's faces, I gave him a punch. Completely caught off guard, Nan Gong Zui hit the ground hard as a result and stared at me blankly.

I raised an eyebrow. "I'll settle the business with your sister later, so just kill these guys and vent your hatred together with me first!"

Nan Gong Zui got to his feet with a forced smile, thinking, *What can Prince do when it's a matter of a person's feelings?* However, he was more than happy to vent his hatred by killing Fan's soldiers. "Right."

"Hey, up there, are you guys done with your tea? Coming down yet? The fighting's about to start!" I said casually.

The flying carpet drifted down slowly. Sunshine, Jing, and Yun retreated to the rear while Kenshin, Zui, Broken Sword, Wicked, and I, being warriors, stood shoulder-to-shoulder at the front. With a smile, I said, “Game, start!”

Extra Chapter: Companions for Eternity

“This time, Dàgē will surely regret it, right?” Lü Jing smiled bitterly.

“We hinted at it to him before,” Yun Fei retorted half-heartedly.

“Yeah, we did hint at it, but he still chose to believe in us...” Lü Jing suddenly turned to yell into the abyss beyond the cliff, “Dàgē, why are you such an idiot?!”

Yun Fei, too, couldn't hold his feelings in any longer and yelled angrily into the pitch-black darkness beneath. “You're a complete idiot! You didn't even realize that we'd set everything up right from the start. We'd noticed you fighting mobs on your own for a few days, saw that you were a strong player and wanted you to power-level us, so we deliberately aggroed the Flaming Skeletons and got them to chase after us. How could you not have figured it out? How could you not have realized that it's impossible that Jing, who only knows *True Thrice-Concealed Flames*, would attack mobs of the same element like the Flaming Skeletons?”

“It should have been obvious that I held a grudge against the owner of Oriental House, so why did we still deliberately choose to go there to eat? You don't need a brain to know that I wanted you to deal with that bastard Huang Wei for me.” Jing's expression was fierce.

“We knew full well that no one has ever managed to complete this quest for the hair tie. In fact, that no one has even *survived* it, but seeing that the reward money was ten thousand crystal coins, we still brought you here on a suicide mission, just to try our luck. And you just followed us like this, without even bothering to ask us about the quest details?” Contempt was evident on Yun's face.

“You saw for yourself how strong the Demon King was, but you still didn't suspect us, and even entrusted the hair tie to Yun so easily? And you walked to the edge of the cliff? Even when Yun grabbed you by the ankles, you still managed to look so puzzled.” Jing began to laugh wildly. “How could anyone on Earth be this naïve, this foolish?”

The two of them finished yelling, their chests heaving with the effort, as though they had screamed out all of the frustrations weighing on their minds. Their expressions were identical – identically lost and numbed.

After a long while, Jing said quietly, “Let's go. The Central Continent awaits us. Don't forget, Xiao Lan is there as well.”

“Yeah,” Yun said, casting one last look back at the cliff, his emotions so complicated that even he himself couldn't tell what they were.



“Now that we’ve got the tickets, let’s get something to eat while we wait for the ship.” Lü Jing’s face was still as hard as stone.

“Yeah,” Yun Fei answered, and then frowned. “Though do we have to leave so soon? I wish we could stay on the Eastern Continent a little longer.”

“Don’t be silly,” Lü Jing said fiercely. “Don’t forget, Dàgē will surely return to White Tiger City. It’ll be a blessing enough if we don’t bump into him while we’re waiting for the ship, and here you are, thinking of staying a little longer?”

Yun Fei didn’t reply and merely followed Jing into a nondescript inn silently.

“Owner, two plates of fried noodles, a plate of green vegetables, and a bowl of fish soup,” Yun said as he looked at the menu, ordering Jing’s – who wasn’t a picky eater – share in addition to his own as per usual.

“Yes, sir, coming right up,” said an NPC dressed as a waiter with a smile. He left to give the cook their orders.

Yun Fei suddenly remembered something and hurriedly shouted, “Ah, right, I forgot the *wontons* in chili oil – Waiter! We also want a plate of…” Yun Fei’s face went white mid-yell.

“And a plate of?” The waiter returned and asked dutifully.

Lü Jing looked at Yun Fei, who had fallen silent, but she merely said indifferently, “And a plate stir-fried shredded meat.”

“Sure, coming right up.”

Yun Fei remained silent until the food arrived, but when he raised his chopsticks, he discovered that he had no appetite at all. His stomach felt heavy, as though a rock had been stuffed into it, and his heart was filled with a myriad of nameless emotions. Finally, he sighed, put down his chopsticks, and looked at Lü Jing, who was eating the fried noodles at a steady pace. “Jing, I don’t like the way things are.”

“You think that I like it any better?” Lü Jing, too, put down her chopsticks, a stiff look on her face. “Besides, wasn’t it you who planned this entire thing, right from the beginning to the end?”

“But I didn’t think that all of those schemes would be used on the same person; I thought that no one would help us twice,” Yun Fei said, frustrated. “How on Earth does a Dàgē who’s dumb to such an extreme even exist?”

“It’s precisely because he was so dumb that he was tricked by us. It’s a good thing, in a way; let this be a lesson to him, so that he won’t be tricked again,” Lü Jing said quietly, and then she quickly began to eat again, making it clear that she wasn’t in the mood to discuss the matter any further.

Yun Fei could only sigh as he gazed out of the restaurant, as though he fervently hoped that someone would suddenly barge in.

A figure really appeared in the doorway. Yun Fei was startled, but also a tad worried, and he wondered if Dàgē would forgive them this time. In his heart, he secretly wished that Dàgē would be so foolish that he would continue to forgive them.

“I’ve finally found you two adulterers! This time, that cloaked fellow won’t be around to get in my way!” the person said as he came through the doorway, and Yun Fei and Lü Jing recognized Huang Wei’s venomous tone as well.

“Huang Wei.” Lü Jing blanched.

“Yes, it’s me, your most beloved husband, Jing-Jing, my sweetie-pie,” Huang Wei said, leering at Lü Jing.

There was no way Yun Fei could simply watch idly as his best friend was being harassed. “Huang Wei, don’t think that we’re still newbies. It’s not going to be so easy for you to bully us now.”

“And just what exactly can a barrier master do, going up against my lackeys?” Huang Wei looked coldly at Yun Fei. “To think that you’re actually stupid enough to choose to be a barrier master, a rubbish class.”

“What did you say?!” Yun Fei was enraged. What he hated more than anything else was other people belittling the barrier master class; these people didn’t even have the faintest clue as to how useful a barrier master could be in defending a city. He just hadn’t managed to find anyone wise enough to appreciate his decision yet.

“I said, you piece of trash, stay the hell away from my wife,” Huang Wei drew his shiny gold *dao*, and swung it at Yun Fei mercilessly.

“Yun!” Lü Jing shoved Yun Fei aside and the gold *dao* bit into Jing’s body brutally. Biting back a cry of pain, she glared at Huang Wei, then turned into a pillar of white light and shot into the sky.

“Jing...!” Yun Fei yelled, watching as the white light disappeared.

“Damn it, I got the wrong person,” Huang Wei said, regarding Yun with spite. “You piece of shit, I know that you guys intend to run away. I also know that you’ve bought

ship tickets, but I'm warning you, if you intend to run away, do so alone. Lü Jing will never be able to escape from the Eastern Continent and from my control."

"Hmph, the tickets are valid forever. Even if we can't take this ship, we can always take the next one," Yun Fei retorted, looking at Huang Wei coldly. "I don't believe that you have the ability to change *Second Life*'s rules."

Huang Wei began to laugh loudly, however. "I might not be able to change the rules, but I can arrange for my people to stand guard at the docks around the clock and kill you guys each time they catch sight of you. Let's see just how many levels you two have for my boys to rid you of."

Yun's face was white as a sheet. "You..."

"Listen, kid, I'm warning you, don't think about running away with Lü Jing. Don't even think about getting close to her again. If you do, I'll make you pay." Huang Wei turned around to his lackeys and commanded, "Give this kid a sound beating. Heal him up whenever he's about to die and then continue to beat him, and don't let him use death to escape. Beat him until he'll never dare to get close to Lü Jing again."

"Huang Wei, I'm telling you, I'll definitely bring Jing to the Central Continent, I definitely will!" Yun Fei bellowed. Unfortunately, facing several warriors, there was really nothing a barrier master could do...



"God damn it!" Gu Yun Fei fled offline in a pathetic manner, only to find that the phone was ringing off the hook.

As soon as he pressed the "Answer" button, Lü Jing's frantic face instantly appeared on the screen. "Yun, are you alright? Why didn't you return to the rebirth point after so long?"

"Isn't it obvious? That bastard Huang Wei beat me up into a pulp and even got a priest to heal me, so that I couldn't just die. Finally, when I couldn't take it any longer, I logged off," Yun Fei replied. He couldn't resist touching his face; just a short while ago, his face had been left swollen by the beating he'd received in-game.

Lü Jing looked pale. "Why didn't you log off sooner, and instead let him continue to beat you up, you- you idiot?!"

"I have my pride!" Yun Fei muttered sullenly.

“Forget Huang Wei, we’ll just rush to the docks tomorrow immediately after logging on. Otherwise, if we really run into Dàgē... The consequences won’t be any better,” Lü Jing said, distressed.

“Huang Wei said that he’s going to get his people to stand guard at the docks around the clock.” Yun Fei sighed.

“What?” Lü Jing’s face grew even paler.

“What should we do now?” Yun Fei was deeply worried.

Lü Jing took a deep breath, and then calmed down. “Let’s wait a few days before logging on. Huang Wei can’t possibly have people standing guard there forever!”

“I hope so,” Yun replied, although he still felt that Huang Wei seemed to be pretty deeply obsessed with Lü Jing.



“Huang Wei, what on earth do you want?” Lü Jing was infuriated; she wanted to know how much longer this person intended to keep causing trouble. He had, true to his word, really kept a look-out for them at the docks for so many days.

“I want you to be my wife,” Huang Wei replied, smirking.

“Stop dreaming,” Yun Fei bellowed. “Jing wouldn’t fall for a douche-bag like you, so save it!”

Contempt spread across Huang Wei’s face, and he looked at Yun as though he had just seen a pile of dung. “You’re really asking for it, and you even dare to be with *my* Jing. Boys, let him have it.”

“Huang Wei, stop it!” Lü Jing turned pale with fright.

“Sure – if you agree to be my wife, Lü Jing.” There was a cold look on Huang Wei’s face. “Don’t choose the hard way, Jing. I’ve gone soft on you for too long already.”

“Jing, don’t agree to it!” Yun Fei was being restrained by a few players. Even when faced with the prospect of being beaten up yet again, he still tried to stop Jing.

Seeing that Yun Fei was being restrained, doubt appeared on Lü Jing’s face. Biting back tears, she looked utterly miserable and pitiful as she said, “Why must you coerce me like this? How can something like love be forced?”

Huang Wei stiffened. “If I say it can, it can. What’s so bad about marrying me? I’ll provide food, clothes, and lots of spending money. What more can you ask for?”

Lü Jing’s suffering was clear on her face, and her tears finally began to fall. “Is giving me lots of spending money the same as love? That’s not what I want!”

By this point, a crowd had gathered on the docks. There were, of course, plenty of onlookers, and when they saw such a lovely girl weeping from being forced into a marriage, many of them began to voice their disapproval, and other onlookers – who could not stand by idly – began to clench their fists and crack their knuckles. The atmosphere was increasingly volatile.

Huang Wei turned toward the crowd with an ominous look in his eyes. “Damn it, shut the hell up! Make any more noise and I’ll bloody well chop you all up too.”

Upon hearing that, the noise only grew louder and people began yelling angrily.

“Damn you! Being that cocky even though you’re snatching someone’s bride?”

“Chop me up? I’ll chop *you* guys up first!”

“He’s too much, how could he coerce a girl like that!”

“Poor thing; the girl’s already crying.”

Huang Wei didn’t back down in the face of the crowd’s anger; in fact, he became even more arrogant. “Damn it, you people think you can get away with it just because there’re more of you? Don’t think that I, Huang Wei, only have so few men. Just wait till I call for ten of my boys to come and take care of you guys; we’ll see if you dare to make a peep then.”

“Mob boss Huang Wei?” someone in the crowd exclaimed. Anyone who had stayed in White Tiger City for any period of time would probably have heard of White Tiger City’s tyrant, Huang Wei, who would – with the support of his eight lackeys – bully others, use money to suppress his dissenters, kill players whom he didn’t like, and flirt shamelessly with any pretty girl who caught his eye. Huang Wei had uncountable crimes listed against his name, but for the sake of money, there were still a huge number of people willing to work for him. No one dared to do anything to Huang Wei as long as all those warriors continued to work for him.

Those among the crowd who were about to intervene began to hesitate upon realizing that the cruel person in front of them was actually Huang Wei. After all, Huang Wei’s power within White Tiger City was something they were all deeply familiar with. No one wanted to make things awkward for themselves, not if they wanted to remain in White Tiger City...

Yun Fei and Lü Jing had originally pinned their hopes on the indignant audience coming to their aid; they had not expected that Huang Wei's name alone could scare the crowd like this. Their spirits sank.

“As expected, only an idiot like Dàgē would do something foolish like upholding justice,” Yun Fei said with a bitter laugh before he lapsed back into silence. It seemed to him that it would be a very, very long time before he and Jing would be able to go to the Central Continent to look for Xiao Lan.

“...” Lü Jing's tears had long since stopped. She could only sigh in resignation as she looked at the crowd of people, none of whom dared to step up in their defense. It looked like she and Yun would have to go missing from *Second Life* for a period of time.

Huang Wei looked satisfactorily at the now-silent audience, before turning to Yun Fei and Lü Jing. “Lü Jing, are you going to be my wife or not? I'm telling you, I've already positioned men at all the rebirth points. If you say no, I'll definitely have this kid killed over and over again until he hits level one.”

Yun Fei's and Lü Jing's faces were both bone-white. Lü Jing opened her mouth, but the words refused to leave her mouth...

“If she'll marry you, I'll swallow my *dao* whole,” a familiar voice said. Yun's and Jing's hearts skipped a beat as they thought, *Dàgē?*

Yun looked ecstatically toward the source of the voice. At that moment, the person had also walked out from the crowd – it was a masked white-haired elf. In an emotional voice, Yun exclaimed, “Elf? Dàgē is an elf alright. Is that you, Dàgē?”

The elf smiled slightly. “Aside from me, which other elf would be sightseeing here on the Eastern Continent?” True, only an elf like him with his level 100 “ability” to get lost would be wandering around here...

“Dàgē...” Jing's expression was beyond complicated.

The elf looked toward Huang Wei and said softly in a voice laced with the threat of an imminent storm. “Huang Wei, right? Looks like the lesson I gave you the last time around wasn't enough.”

“You...!” Although he was livid with rage, Huang Wei had not forgotten the fright he'd received from the elf during their last encounter. It was precisely because he knew that Yun Fei and Lü Jing were no longer traveling with that person that he had dared to stall the duo, but now he'd bumped into this formidable elf, whom he had no intention of riling, yet again.

“God damn it, don’t think that I’m really scared of you. Last time you snuck up on me, but it won’t be that easy this time. Boys, get him! Whoever kills him will be heavily rewarded!” In front of a crowd, there was no way Huang Wei would willingly back down and lose face. Besides, the elf only managed to win the last time around by using a sneak attack; this time, he – Huang Wei – would be well-prepared. He would have his revenge!

“The fight’s started, Kenshin,” the elf remarked smilingly to the red-haired warrior next to him, who looked like a newbie. The red-haired warrior only nodded, his face an icy mask.

Two figures streaked toward Huang Wei and his men at lightning speed...

“Dàgē...” Yun Fei was astonished; he’d never thought that Dàgē would once again help them without another word. Why did Dàgē treat them so well? Even after he and Jing had pushed him off a cliff, snatched the hair tie from him, and were planning to run away, Dàgē would still help them unconditionally. *This Dàgē is really such a fool*, Yun thought, but in spite of his words, he was deeply touched, and warmth enveloped his heart.

“Jing, let’s accompany Dàgē to the Central Continent, okay?” Yun said calmly to Jing, but while it was phrased as a question, he stated it like it was a matter of course. “After we look up Xiao Lan in the Central Continent, I want to follow Dàgē. I don’t want to look for the professor and Prince anymore.”

“Yeah,” Jing replied without hesitation as she looked at the two figures engaging Huang Wei in combat. She, too, knew that they would be the real idiots not to follow someone like Dàgē.

After the elf and the red-haired warrior had thoroughly taken care of the eight thugs and Huang Wei, the elf threw back his head and laughed for a long time, clearly astonishing the surrounding crowd with his arrogant demeanor.

“Dàgē, we’re definitely following you.” Yun Fei’s and Lü Jing’s eyes glittered with determination and there were broad smiles on their faces.