



**The Annotated Mina
Volume Two**

Mina de Malfois

Volume Two

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Memoirs by Mina de Malfois.

Dedicated to the Clives and Harkers, and to all of Mina's friends and supporters at livejournal and journalfen.

Special thanks are due to Mutecornett for her artwork, to Tamaris for her podcast, to Scifantasy for being generally brilliant, and to Notmonica for appearing as Mina at Phoenix Rising.

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2.1. Mina de Malfois and the Exclusive Society

That first week at St. Scholastica's I found myself really *needing* some *Sanguinity* time to unwind in. Some things about the school were disconcertingly new to me. I'd graciously acquiesced to their demand that I complete two full years there to get a St. Schol's degree, even though I'd only been a year shy of a degree at my old uni, but some of the particular courses they insisted on were bizarre in the extreme. I say if a language is dead you ought to let it quietly moulder in peace. It's indecent, unearthing it and making us decline bits of it.

And the rarefied atmosphere was a little difficult to adjust to, even though I'd always thought I rather craved a bit of rarefied atmos. When I first arrived a flock of girls descended on my taxi and made off with my luggage. I climbed out to find myself face to face with Hilda of the S.S.--I mean, sorry to go all Godwin's Law here, but when she said, 'I am Ms. Gna, your housemother,' one couldn't help thinking the only usage of 'mother' one really expected to hear from her was 'motherland.'¹ 'The freshmen always carry luggage in for the upperclassmen,' she continued, sounding as if she disapproved of both freshmen and their seniors. 'You will of course have missed the chance to do that,' she went on, sounding even more disapproving of me. 'Come with me now to pick up your keys.'

I followed her inside Tia² House, my dormitory, to a small office on the ground floor. 'First you must sign this,' she said, and produced

¹ Mina seems to be conflating Russia with Germany here. Not that I'd even have noticed without Moselle Green's help (you see why I need the Clives).

² Tia is, of course, one of the siblings in the novel 'Escape to Witch Mountain,' which was later made into a Disney movie. Key's novel may possibly have been inspired by Zenna Henderson's 'People' stories. St. Scholastica's buildings, in keeping with the university's patron saint, reference a number of brother and sister pairs.

Key, Alexander. *Escape to Witch Mountain*. 1968.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Escape_to_Witch_Mountain]

[<http://www.ldsfilm.com/movies/EscapeToWitchMountain.html>] (accessed 20 October 2007).

a document that proved to be an agreement to abide by the school's rules. I signed it, and she whisked it away, photocopied it, chomped the photocopy with a three-holed punch, and thrust the photocopy and a binder at me.

'What's this?' I asked, accepting the binder.

'Your copy of the rules,' she said, and forced the photocopy into my free hand. I stuck it in the binder, and she nodded approval and handed over a set of variously sized keys.

The St. Schol's rules had to be seen to be believed. I skimmed some of them during the excruciatingly slow lift ride, and became temporarily so engrossed that I accidentally forgot to get out, rode back to the ground floor, and had to go up all over again. The required courses alone boggled credulity, and the section on outside activities was an anachronism of preserved-in-amber calibre. Incoming students, including both 'freshers' and transfers, were all but forbidden to work during the autumn and spring terms; even 'uppers' were strongly discouraged from holding jobs except during summer term. It was *archaic*. Luckily I'd held onto my summer earnings, which ought to be enough to cover spending money, but *still*. I suppose they wanted us available for other things, like the 'voluntary guest lectures' in the evenings. 'Attendance at voluntary events is mandatory for new students,' the rulebook proclaimed, without so much as a blush or a footnote referencing Orwell.³

Uniforms weren't required, which came as rather a shock, really, after the mandatory volunteerism--and at any rate they seemed to be *worn*; almost every student I'd seen had been wearing a St. Schol's shirt or sweater or something, but this was, the rulebook assured me, 'entirely at the student's own discretion.' I decided to err on the side of caution and treat myself to a few wardrobe additions when I visited ye olde school bookshop. I hadn't any textbooks to buy, since a neat stack of texts had already, courtesy of my scholarship, been delivered to my room, but I *did* have a long list of supplies and additional readings, mostly novels, which I was 'strongly advised to purchase before the first class sessions.' Okay then. I was also, the rulebook ordered me, required to check my mailbox regularly and keep it cleared out 'for the convenience of the housemother, who will otherwise have to hold your

³ Orwell's Doublethink was the inspiration for 'mandatory volunteerism.' Orwell, George. 1984. New American Library; Reissue edition (January 1, 1961).

mail in her office.’ The housemother looked capable of *eating* my mail, so I vowed to stay on top of that.

And some things at St. Schol’s were disconcertingly familiar. That first day, I’d found room 303⁴ without difficulty--it helped that my luggage was piled outside the door. Inside were two each of beds, desks, chairs, computers, closets, and semi-loaded bookcases. Having dragged my stuff inside, I sat down to have a look at the computer, then had a mild attack of nerves and rechecked the rulebook. Yes, it confirmed, the computer was mine to use, but there was a full page on what I couldn’t do with it: infringe on my roommate’s privacy, use speakers instead of headphones, point the webcam at my roommate’s half of the room, etc. Fine by me: I value privacy considerably. I suppose that was a form of foreshadowing, because at this point there was a knock at the door.

‘Who is it?’ I called, not looking up.

‘One of your fans,’ said a sarcastic and awfully familiar voice. It was Jen.

So as I said, what with one thing and another I was really looking forward to the Hockeystickers’ planned sea voyage to the Patricic Rim. I might have to share a room with Ami Jenever, but at least I could avoid Josh Amos in-game--it was to be, after all, an all-girls’ trip.

Not that I mean to suggest that Jen was horrible to room with, because she wasn’t. As at camp, she seemed to come and go at odd hours, but she was pleasant enough when she was around. She was disconcertingly tidy; she never left clothes out, and kept her bathroom supplies to a bare minimum. She didn’t seem to own any trinkets, just essentials like clothes and electronics and books. Anything else she owned was either locked into her desk or, in the case of a few cards and pictures, thumbtacked to her bulletin board. I found myself being much tidier than usual just to keep up.

‘Tsk, tsk, Mina,’ Jen said one evening that first week, ‘don’t tell me you’re one of those *cruel* people who sully themselves by reading Fandom_Gossip?’

‘I read Fandom_Gossip⁵ religiously,’ I admitted. Really, who

⁴ Mina and Jen share Room 303, but no, Mina will not be shot or resurrected. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Matrix]

⁵ Fandom_Gossip doesn’t exist, but Fandom Wank has oft been accused of cruelty--so imagine FW if Hedda Hopper was a mod.

doesn't? It's like a 1940s Hollywood gossip sheet, all coy innuendo and campy hints, but with linkage.

'You chant it in a dull monotone and wait for all your wishes to come true?' Jen asked. I gritted my teeth and issued a revised statement.

'I read Fandom_Gossip *regularly*,' I said calmly.

'You *feature* in Fandom_Gossip regularly,' Jen said, throwing herself down on her bed and folding her arms behind her head. 'So what's the latest?'

'Rumour has it a bitter bunny is leaving Otakukin Awakening over linguistic disagreements,' I read. 'No links yet,' I added. 'It's just in the 'In Brief' column.'

Jen snorted. 'She's *still* leaving? What, is she stuck in the door or something?'⁶

I skimmed the unlinked hints in the rest of the column and moved on quickly to the heavily attributed gossip of the main section.

'Doctor's peace disturbed by generational warfare,' it began, and the several embedded links led to a handful of private journals (one now flocked with annoying thoroughness, I noticed) where a ginormous argument over chan was raging.

'Similar trouble is brewing in several cauldrons, and keeping the Girls' Dormitory up at night,' F_G continued, and I followed the next set of links with a growing sense of dread. That fandom featuring well-polished wands was, it appeared, acrimoniously ripping itself a faultline over cross-generational fanfiction featuring startlingly precocious schoolchildren, and the rift between the Jolly Hockeystickers and Holidays had been erased from memory. Now, past differences forgotten, they were forming battlelines based on their 'support for freedom of speech and open fictional exploration of sexual fantasy' vs. their 'utter abhorrence for chan and responsible concern for its effect on its producers, as well as its possible encouragement and normalization of real-life abusers.' I winced. When even the summaries are that long-winded, you know the levels of outrage are dangerously high.

I messaged Arc. 'Is this latest chan kerfuffle going to be a problem

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/]

⁶ 'She's still leaving? What, is she stuck in the door or something?' was first said by Drakyndra, and the line was even funnier in its original context.

for Penn'd Passion?' I asked sympathetically.

'It already is,' she admitted.

'Oh, no,' I typed. 'Is it because of Warrlor's child-version of PrincessB?'

'No,' she replied. 'Warrlor's promised me solemnly that there won't be any sexual scenes involving PrincessB in his fic, and I'm inclined to believe him. My immediate problem is the Girls' Dormitory set. They've submitted a rash of stories which are stuck in the editorial queue, and they can't be accepted or rejected until I put some sort of policy in place.'

'What will your policy be, pro or anti?' I asked.

'I'm not sure,' she said. 'I'm consulting a few legally-minded chums, and I'd also like to talk to a representative from the old school Hockeystickers.'

'How about RowanMarlow?' I offered eagerly. 'She did her *dissertation* on girls' school stories.' More importantly, she was booked to come along on our sea voyage, so perhaps I could persuade Arc to join us. I didn't mention that part, but once again she beat me to the punch.

'She did approach me about using the *Honey'd Briar* for some trip they're taking,' Arc said. 'Perhaps I'll say yes after all, and join them.' She logged off, and I did a private little happy dance around the room.

When I returned to the computer I checked in at the Manor and found Liz in the kitchen, making tea. 'What's up?' I asked, happy to see her, and settled myself at the kitchen table with a contented wriggle back in the real world.

She shrugged. 'There've been pro- and anti-chan rallies in the park every day,' she reported in bored tones. 'You've received a few invitations to Otakukin Awakening events--I left them on your desk.'

'Oh, and I ran into Warrlor earlier,' continued Liz, pouring tea. 'He seemed slightly agitated. He told me to warn you against spending too much time alone with Josh Amos.' Back in the dorm room I started guiltily, but my avatar remained outwardly calm. 'I tried telling him that it was highly unlikely you'd be spending *any* time alone with Josh Amos, but it didn't really seem to penetrate. You know Warrlor: he only hears what he wants to.'

I nodded and changed the subject. 'Are you and Stasia coming along on the Patricic Rim trip?' I asked.

'I am,' Liz said, 'but Stasia can't. She blew her in-game allowance and a bunch of day-off credits on some new friend. Something about a

bad break-up, and a broken heart, and tearful late-night IM conversations.’ Liz shrugged again. ‘I couldn’t follow the whole thing, but the upshot was that virtual jewellery and presents were needed⁷ to convince the new friend that life was worth living, so Stasia chipped in to buy something pretty for her avatar to wear.’

‘That was kind,’ I said dubiously. ‘Kind’ is so often a useful word substitute for ‘stupid.’ Of course, the smooth running of my own *Sanguinity Online* life owes much to the kindnesses of fans and strangers, so it didn’t exactly behoove me to critique other people’s gift-giving--but at least I never resort to *tears*. That’s the kind of cheap emotional blackmail I can’t stand. ‘Pity she’ll miss out on the trip, though.’

‘I suppose she decided friendship took priority,’ Liz said, but her voice held a note of doubt, too.

It was with a sense of great anticipation that I logged in on Friday evening. The night stretched out in front of me, gloriously devoid of responsibilities or the necessity of a reasonable bedtime. Tomorrow I could sleep ‘til afternoon, and then do homework; tonight was made for *Sanguinity*. I had bottled water, snacks, and freedom.

The chan debate, I noticed, was still spread across *Sanguinity*space. The harbourfront was plastered with banners. ‘Think of the children!’ shrieked the anti-chan signs, while the pro-chan ones leered

⁷ Like, say, moonstones.

‘By now, it’s beginning to be the end of the summer and Otakon is approaching she decides she wants a moonstone ring for her Princess Serenity costume. I figured fine, we’re both cosplayers, I understand she wants to be elaborate and accurate as possible. So we go to a little jewelry place that’s near some outlet stores. After looking for almost an hour, she decides on one and I pay for it then it turns out it needs to be re-sized because it’s too big. (And I just found out TODAY that the re-sizing fee actually DOUBLED the total price.) So we go to pick it up a couple days later. As soon as we get into the car, the first words out of her mouth are “So this is an engagement ring, right???” At this point in the relationship I was agreeing with her just to keep her quiet and happy.’ hanyouinuyashav. ‘Usagi Kou: Scott’s Testimonial.’ [<http://www.sm.mypockybox.com/frame/UsagiKou-Scott.php>] (accessed 20 October 2007).

suggestively, ‘Think of the children.’⁸ There were also, I noticed, far more than the usual number of drooling idiots about the place, and for once that isn’t meant metaphorically: there were avatars staggering around or slumped against the walls. I didn’t have time to waste on idle speculation, though, so I ignored them for now.

When I reached the dock where the *Honey’d Briar* was berthed I saw that Xena and Arc had already arrived. Stricken by inexplicable shyness, I ducked behind some crates, and then found to my mortification that I was close enough to ‘hear’ their conversation--the game had assessed my proximity and brought the tickertalk lines at the bottom of the screen into focus accordingly.

‘Why is it,’ Xena was saying, one hand disarranging her already wild hair, ‘that when I try to take two young things out for a swift canoe ride Eva leaps in to prevent it, but no one bats an eye when you take an entire barque-load out for an extended cruise?’

‘Xena,’ Arc said reprovingly. And Xena tossed her head back and laughed.

‘It must be your spotless reputation for Girl Scout virtue,’ Xena went on. ‘I was always better at the practical skills than the vows. Ropes and all that. What *did* you see in me?’

Unexpectedly, Arc answered, ‘Bird-song at morning and star-shine at night.’⁹ There was an awkward pause, during which I died a thousand embarrassed deaths, and then she went on in a more normal tone of voice, ‘Any message to pass along to the Patricians, Xena?’

‘Dear Goddess, no,’ Xena said firmly. ‘I can’t stand those females.’

‘That sounds...personal,’ Arc remarked.

‘I wasn’t unlucky enough to pony up money to support them,’ Xena said grimly, ‘but I knew them just well enough to know they’re worth avoiding. I’m the first to respect an honest pro, you know me, but layer on too much hypocrisy and pseudo-philosophy and it just irritates. And I hate bullying, particularly the kind that disguises itself as friendship.’

⁸ Somehow I doubt that Helen Lovejoy would approve of the myriad ways we use that phrase.

⁹ ‘I will make you brooches and toys for your delight
Of bird-song at morning and star-shine at night.
I will make a palace fit for you and me
Of green days in forests and blue days at sea.’
R.L. Stevenson. ‘Romance.’

I'd prefer to avoid that group in future. Though if Miss Hoar¹⁰ still has the good leather belt she 'borrowed' from me, you can steal that back.'

'What's going on?' said Liz, right in my ear, and my avatar leapt about a foot.

'Nothing,' I said with quiet dignity, straightening up, and we strolled onto the ship together. In actuality my heart was pounding with well-concealed excitement at the realization that *Xena* had been the gorgeous stranger I'd seen at camp. Now that I'd figured it out, the resemblance to her avatar was obvious.

I felt a distinct pang of nostalgia as we sailed past the Produce Isle,¹¹ and wondered how the Cultists and Tartanists were making out. Liz loaned me her telescope, and I caught a glimpse of the Gay Unicornists flagellating themselves on the beach. Still imperfect, then. I shuddered.

We sailed on, past the emerald-green isle where many of the NPCs reside--Liz, poor overwrought dear, fell into a swooning heap in inadvertent reaction to our proximity to Pierce and Jab, even though we didn't actually *see* either of them. Eventually we landed at a small, tidy, domesticated island featuring what looked like a boarding school, or perhaps a summer resort. A tall, tweed-clad woman came out from the main building. 'The Directress,' RowanMarlow explained to the rest of us. 'The blonde maid behind her is her sl--uh, servant.'

The Directress stepped down from the veranda, a wooden cane swinging at her side and a riding crop held in the other gloved hand, and came to greet us. 'Welcome to the Patricic Rim!' she said, inclining her head courteously in a way that quite made up for her inability to shake our hands right now.

'Hello,' we chorused, sounding ludicrously like schoolgirls.

¹⁰ 'Mar 11, 2002 09:38 someone mentioned earlier about visiting Gillian Lancer. I have been fortunate (unfortunate) to have been punished by Miss Martindale Miss Frost and Miss Lancer. I can tell you that by far the hardest caning was from Miss Martindale. Miss Frost was good but not as good as Miss Martindale. Miss lancer does not seem to know how to hold a cane properly and does not deliver a hard stroke. Unfortunately Miss Martindale ,i think, no longer offers punishment sessions. Regards TB'
[<http://members.aol.com/bonfesse2/gdata02.htm>] (accessed 20 october 2007).

¹¹ You of course remember the Produce Isle.

[http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/AFT_in_the_produce_isle]

Arc, cautiously eyeing the Directress' accessories, introduced herself and Rowan.

'I know who you are,' the Directress graciously assured them both. 'Many of our girls frequent the Girls' Dormitory.' Arc looked unsurprised.

'How many girls are there?' she enquired politely.

'The dormitories can only house forty residents at a time,' the Directress said regretfully, 'but of course, we have *hundreds* of non-resident members.'

Arc glanced casually around the otherwise empty island. 'Of course,' she said, polite but sceptical. She and Rowan exchanged glances. I would have exchanged glances myself, but I wasn't standing near enough.

'More and more pettes are attracted to our philosophy *every day*,' the Directress insisted, 'though of course the sweet blonde things may not grasp *every* complicated point--but the corps of brunettes that daily swell our ranks do their gallant best to explain things!'

The heads of all of us from the *Honey'd Briar* swivelled, as discreetly as we could manage the swivelling, as we all looked around the clearing for signs of habitation. No corps of anything, blonde or brunette, was in evidence.

'Wait,' said Liz slowly and dangerously. 'You think brunettes are more intelligent than blondes?'

The Directress smiled indulgently at her. 'Not at all, you dear young thing,' she said. 'We merely notice that brunettes have a better grasp of complicated and *technical* matters, while blondes are more ethereal and spiritual. You needn't worry your head that we look *down* on blondes--quite the contrary! We adore and idolize them, and turn to them for spiritual direction.' Liz's face had assumed the distinctly non-spiritual look of someone reining in the urge to give out explicit directions.

The Directress' daintily-clad maid, who was still standing at the top of the stairs, smiled at us shyly and nodded enthusiastic agreement as the Directress spoke. 'I feel happy and fulfilled,' she began.

'Silence, child,' the Directress interrupted sharply, and the maid stopped speaking and threw us a trembling smile. The Directress gestured towards Arc, and continued smoothly, 'Your captain, here, for example, looks to be the quintessential brunette. I can tell just by looking at you,' she said, beaming at Arc, 'that you are organized, intelligent, and thoroughly sensible.'

‘How kind of you,’ Arc said icily, but the Directress seemed oblivious to the chill.

‘And yet I bet the girls you like are, shall we say, fluffier and rather endearingly silly,’ the Directress concluded smugly.

‘Not at all,’ said Arc.

‘Because,’ the Directress said triumphantly, and then seemed to hear what Arc had said and wilted a little. ‘What do you mean, ‘not at all?’ she asked.

Arc shrugged. ‘I like intelligent women,’ she said.

‘But,’ insisted the Directress, ‘surely you’re instinctively drawn to feminine, sweetly silly blondes?’

‘Femininity is wonderful,’ Arc said dryly. ‘Idiocy isn’t.’ I cheered inwardly. I despise silly women.

The maid had been listening raptly. ‘You mean you’re a brunette who...who likes other brunettes?’ she gasped now, sounding both shocked and fascinated. ‘That’s perverse!’

‘*Molly*,’ the Directress snapped. ‘We do not speak of such things!’ She resumed a diplomatic smile. ‘So, what other questions can we answer for you?’ she asked.

‘So how many women are resident here right now?’ Arc asked. All the friendly had gone out of her voice.

The Directress looked uncomfortable for the briefest of seconds, but quickly regained her poise. ‘Would you care for a tour?’ she asked gaily. ‘The dormitories can house forty!’

However many people the dormitories *could* house, the only people we actually saw for most of that day were the Directress and her maid, although after dinner, when we joined them in the cinema, they introduced themselves as ‘prefect Flora’ and ‘schoolgirl Molly,’ and pretended not to have met us before. The cinema itself was the same room as the dining room, but they made us go out and then come back in by another door once they’d changed costume. All of this made me intensely uncomfortable, as barking madness tends to. I mean, role-playing is all well and good I’m sure, but dragging others into it makes for much social awkwardness.

It was a relief, really, when a large hairy man dressed in S&M fetishwear burst into the cinema right in the middle of the first ‘talkie.’ ‘Let’s get this session started!’ he bellowed, and then came to an abrupt stop when he saw all of us. He blushed, all four cheeks pinkening, which we couldn’t help but seeing as he was wearing chaps. ‘I’m sorry; I didn’t realize you had company,’ he said. The

Directress affected to ignore him.

‘You have a gentleman caller,’ Rowan said, in the strangled tones of one trying not to laugh.

‘Men aren’t allowed here in the Patricic Rim,’ the Directress said calmly. One almost had to admire so complete a break with reality.

‘But I have an appointment,’ the poor guy said, brandishing a ping-pong paddle hopefully.

‘Disciplinary problem?’ Arc asked. The Directress shot her a hostile look, then struggled to resume smiling.

‘Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no,’ she said, playfully brandishing her riding crop. ‘We are *not* a spanking group. Molly,’ she continued, ‘see to things, will you?’¹² The maid leapt up and coyly but speedily beckoned the intruder out of the room.

By then it had begun to rain in the Patricic Rim, and, more to the point, in the cinema. Looking up, I saw that the ceiling was constructed entirely of flowers, and it was dripping rather badly.

‘Your ceiling is made of lotus blossoms,’ Liz said disapprovingly.

‘Isn’t it lovely?’ the Directress gushed. ‘Impractical, I know, but the blondes insisted--and how can I, a mere brunette possessed of common sense, overrule the ethereal spiritual wisdom of a blonde?’

‘You know,’ said Liz, ‘your society might run more *smoothly* if the silliest and most delusional members *didn’t* have the final say.’

‘Silliest? Delusional?’ gasped the Directress. ‘Are you referring to the blondes?’

‘No,’ said Liz pointedly, looking at the Directress. Shortly thereafter we were denounced as heretics and asked to leave--a not uncommon occurrence in fandom.

The night voyage back to the mainland was nearly uneventful, except for a conversation between Arc and Rowan that I chanced to overhear. They were leaning against the railing, gently illuminated by the moonlight. I slipped behind the lifeboat to listen.

‘No,’ Rowan was saying, sounding as if she was agreeing with something Arc had just said, ‘it’s not cross-gen I object to; it’s the idea of a relationship between the staff and students who *are still in school*. It spoils one of the most important aspects of the school story genre: the idea of a space where girls can mature and develop the capacity to monitor *themselves*, without interference from males or adults. The

¹² [<http://www.floggingmolly.com/>] (accessed 20 October 2007). Ankaret spotted that, to my considerable delight.

guidance from the faculty should be meaningful but subtle, and romantic relationships would trample on that. It's not that I object to sexuality in the genre, it's more that I think it should be confined to peer-to-peer power equivalent relationships. There's no reason authors can't simply set cross-gen fics in the future, when both people are independent adults.'

I saw Arc nod. 'And their time at school is so fleeting, anyway,' she said wistfully. 'It would only be a matter of a few years, after all. If the subtextual relationship was strong enough, it would easily survive a delay--and love and respect would be reason enough to wait.'

I snuck my avatar back to my bunk before logging out, chilled by a strange apprehension. Penn'd Passion needed a firm policy re: chan, I knew, but for some reason this conversation worried me. I couldn't place my finger on just *why*, though.

Witless of Gor
a Patricic Rim fanfiction
written by Jane Noman

I RECORD THESE HAPPENINGS AT THE COMMAND OF MY MISTRESS, BAR ALCOTT.

There is much I do not understand. Brain? What is brain? Let others find what meaning they can in this narrative. I am a blonde, and meaning eludes me.

I gather that my story is neither as unique, nor as strange, as it may seem. By the standards of the Patricic Rim I was regarded as extremely beautiful. Yet here on Whirled, I am a fifteen-gold piece blonde, more lovely than many, yet far excelled by many whose stunning beauty I can only envy. It's as if the universe has paid me back for every time a worthy Brunette felt intimidated by my beauty, back in the Patricic Rim! I had been rich, too, and educated, and popular, so really the whole slave-trade thing served me right. My fate will be a comfort, should this narrative ever fall into the hands of an insecure brunette with grandiose fantasies. To read it is to feel justified.

Traders, I have learned, ply the slave routes between Whirled and the Patricic Rim. If you are beautiful, and desirable, you may fear. Yet I think there are perhaps worse fates that might befall a blonde than to be brought to this world, even as a prize of Brunettes. She could find herself forced to read an entire series written in such stilted prose as this, for example. Far better to be enslaved!

I was on a camping trip when I became separated from my friends and found a strange rubber-coated metal object. I turned it over and over in my hands and studied it by the light of the campfire. It was about twelve inches long and four inches in circumference. The colour of the material was blue, and the strange device hummed faintly, and vibrated. I somehow knew, as it throbbed in my slender hand, that my destiny was upon me. Then, by a mechanism too complex for a blonde to explain, and via some prose too turgid to repeat here, it summoned the ship which brought me to Whirled. I think this will be more erotic if I leave out the really dull bits, don't you?

Once I reached Whirled my mistress taught me I was a slave.

"You are a slave," she told me. "You are owned. You are blonde. You will be forced to be blonde. If you were free, and Whirlean, you might be permitted by Brunettes to remain as you are, but you are neither Whirlean nor free. The Whirlean Brunette will accept no compromise on your blondeness, not from a slave. The blonde will be what the Brunette wishes her to be: a blonde, fully, and Hers. If necessary you will be whipped or starved."

Whirlean mistresses, incidentally, almost never deprive a blonde of sex. I'm sure you're as shocked and astonished as I was to learn this.

I learned that it was the duty of every slave to please her mistress, even unto the point of near mind-reading. I was taught to only speak of myself in the third person, rendering conversation nearly as clumsy as this narrative. There may, indeed, have been such things as free blondes, but they were of much less interest than enslaved blondes, and not much ever got written about them.

It is, I was taught, the nature of the blonde to submit; accordingly, it is natural that, when she is forced to acknowledge, accept, express and reveal this nature, she should be almost deliriously joyful, and thankful, to her mistress; she has been taught her blondehood. It was destined: I was a slave. I was the helpless victim of Brunette lust, will, and strength, and yet it was my nature to admire Brunettes as much as I feared them.

I learned to instantly contort my body into insanely detailed poses. To kneel was to reveal my deepest, wanton nature. I was flogged when I failed in this or any other duty. I learned to take pride in my absolute obedience, but that too much pride led only to punishment. You'd think that, submission being the natural destiny of blondes, it would take less whipping and discipline to *force* us to submit, but I suppose it would be less fun that way.

I did not always want gentleness from my Domina. It did not displease me to be forced to recognize, and incontrovertibly, and with my whole body, that I was in a Brunette's arms, those of a true Brunette, and was a slave. Sometimes, I confess, I even wanted the whip, not for its pain, which I feared, but for its proof of my domination, that I was owned, and wholly, and was going to be mistressed. But, sometimes, too, I wanted gentleness, and, in a slave's helplessness, begged for it--the sort of begging that would please even the most inferiority-complex besieged mind.

"You belong at the feet of Brunettes," my mistress taught me.

“You are a slave.” Somehow among the flogging and the training and the spanking I realized that I was bound to her by the strongest of all bonds. I was her slave, but more abject still, I was her love-slave.

"I am chained at your feet," I said. It was a saying of a Whirlian slave girl, to express her feelings. I brought her wine and kissed the cup in which I brought it.

"Do some Brunettes care for their blondes," I asked, "just a little?"

"Some Brunettes care for them much more than a little," she said.

"Even natural blondes?" I asked.

"Those are the best sort," she said. "Bottle blondes are mere fifteen-gold-piece blondes, compared to those!" She flogged me then, exuberantly, for sheer joy at the sight of such beautifully reassuring submission.

1. 'Whirled' is a silly name for 'counter-Rim,' yes, but no sillier than 'Gor' or 'counter-Urth.'
2. BAR ALCOTT is an anagram of TARL CABOT. The whole 'written at the command of' thing comes from *Captive of Gor*.
3. Absolute obedience seems an odd thing to take pride in, doesn't it?

2.2 Mina de Malfois and the Author's Worst Nightmare

The problem with writing these memoirs is that one never knows what to put where--it's a bit like cloistered virgins writing slash, really. I mean, in fandom as in mundane life, many things develop all at once, even if you're only *aware* of one development at a time. Take *Sanguinity's* rising tide of RPF: I was all set to tell you about it, but on further reflection it seems to me that the roots to all that lay in a slight misunderstanding that arose concerning the relationship between self and Josh--it produced minor hysteria among the shippers, but then again, what doesn't?

It began with Rabbit, really. She was the first to assign ulterior motives to an *entirely innocent* fannish friendship. But I suppose it was partly my own fault that she decided to count me amongst her mortal enemies. Only partly: after all, Rabbit has a large contingent of mortal enemies, mostly made up of her former bestest friends,¹⁵ so clearly the common element is Rabbit herself, and I do use the word 'common' advisedly.

I can trace the start of her peevisness towards yours truly to that lunchtime when I raced like a mad thing up to my room to toss a parcel onto my bed. I'd checked the mail after a hurried lunch and found a package from Arc that *just* fit into my mailbox. Half an inch more in any direction and I've have had to pick it up from the house mother, not a chore those of us without masochistic urges relish, so it seemed the better part of wisdom to bring it up to my room at once, leaving the box clear for future mail.

I couldn't resist opening one end for a peek at the contents on my way up. It was brimful of little gifts from my fans, mostly notebooks and pens by the looks of things--at Arc's suggestion, I'd quietly but firmly been stating my preference that they *not* gift me with large or

¹⁵ Rabbit is here channelling many people, amongst them Ataniell, FPB, and Usagi Kou. Some people are just more passionate than others.

expensive things.¹⁴ She'd said, and I couldn't but agree, that it was taking unnecessary advantage.

Anyway, I threw the box onto my bed and raced off to class, and I just didn't notice the gift that was already there, so that later, when I found it in all its carefully-wrapped splendour, I *assumed* it had fallen out of Arc's parcel. After all, the rest of the contents had scattered across my bedspread, and it didn't occur to me to try to squeeze them back into the box. No one packs as efficiently as Arc. It's futile even to try.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. The next bit happened because Jen was asleep--or possibly just pretending to sleep--on her bed when I got back to our room that afternoon. Sprawled out on her back, she honestly did look like a guy, and a not-undishy one at that. Specifically, you know, she looked rather like a slightly scaled-down version of PrinceC, only with different hair. I gazed at her for a while, lost in thought. Long moments drifted past. I suppose I must have been overtired or something--although I was settling into my classes beautifully. The only one that worried me at all was the 'media studies and cultural practises' course, and the problem there wasn't academic so much as social. It dealt with fanac, including fanfiction. I felt in *constant peril* of being outed. I was walking that knife edge between displaying a thorough knowledge of the subject and betraying myself as a practitioner. Let's face it: when it came to fanfiction studies, I was

¹⁴ One senses this will not become a trend among BNFs (although in Mina's case, think of her Amazon wishlist as a sort of bibliography: she is not dying; do not send lipgloss).

'Of course, faking your death is a big lie. As I'm sure most of us have experience with, it's a lot easier to believe someone when they tell you a little lie, like "I'm a model!" or "I'm totally dating that one guy from that one band!" or "My cat ran away and I'm so depressed. Send love! (And iPods!)" But the same rule applies, you know? Think about it-- is there anyone in this person's life who can *actually verify* the story? With *facts*, not just "She told me so, and I believed her?"

It's a high standard of skepticism, but there's a solid reason for it. It only takes a psycho or two to ruin fandom for everyone, you know? At this point, if you're going to be like, "Send me iPods," you're going to have to back up your story. There's no point in pretending to be shocked/surprised when people don't believe that your cat fell in a well on your word alone. People have been burned; that's just how it is.' Liviapenn. 'Establishing one's fandom bona fides.' 02 December 2006. [<http://liviapenn.livejournal.com/441056.html>] (accessed 20 October 2007).

more akin to the thing on the slide than to the scientist peering down the old ‘scope. There was only one other person in the class who struck me as *overtly* fannish, and she was one of those Age-of-Sail-and-Austen types.

I rather resent Austenfen, you know. They’re lovely people and all, and exquisitely polite, but it’s my opinion they have an unfair advantage. They can *publish* their fanfiction.¹⁵ They don’t even have to go through the motions of renaming characters after themselves¹⁶ and changing deatheaters to demons¹⁷: they can just flat-out admit

¹⁵ There are too many of these to list. A small sample:

Berdoll, Linda. Darcy and Elizabeth. Sourcebooks Landmark (May 1, 2006).

Berdoll, Linda. Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife. Landmark (May 2004).

Bebris, Carrie. North by Northanger. Forge Books (March 21, 2006).

Barron, Stephanie Barron. Jane and the Unpleasantness at Scargrave Manor. Crimeline (December 1, 1996).

¹⁶ For example, Clary is named after her creator Cassandra Clare (formerly Cassandra Claire), the fanfiction author of, among other things, ‘Mortal Instruments,’ a HP fanfic notorious for pairing siblings Ron and Ginny Weasley, and ‘The Draco Trilogy,’ known for its seamless insertions of quotations from such sources ‘Buffy the Vampire Slayer’ and ‘Blackadder.’ Clare, Cassandra. City of Bones (Mortal Instruments). Margaret K. McElderry (March 27, 2007).

‘This Buffy-esque YA novel does not translate well to the audio medium, and part of the problem lies in the story’s pacing. Teenager Clary discovers she can see supernatural beings that no one else can, gets drawn into the world of the Shadowhunters (teens who kill demons and monsters) and learns that her mother is somehow mysteriously connected to all the strange happenings around her. As a result, a good chunk of the novel consists of long explanatory passages, as various characters fill Clary in on supernatural creatures, the history and rules of the Shadowhunters and her mother’s entanglements—all of which come across as tedious lectures. In addition, narrator Graynor makes almost no attempt to differentiate the various teen characters’ voices.’

Publishers Weekly (Copyright Reed Business Information, Inc.).

¹⁷ Changing deatheaters to demons hasn’t produced wank *yet*, but it undoubtedly will. See footnote 5 for a hint.

‘She learns that the teens are Shadowhunters (humans who hunt and kill demons), and Clary, a “mundie” (i.e., mundane human), should not be able to see them either.... Clary must find the cup and keep it from a renegade sector of Shadowhunters bent on eliminating all nonhumans, including benevolent werewolves and friendly vampires....The characters are

they've written a three-volume sequel¹⁸ to *Pride and Prejudice*¹⁹ and go ahead and offer it for sale. Come to think of it, 'phans' have the same excuse²⁰--the copyright on their source material is past its best-by date. It's almost enough to make one want to dust off some sort of antique canon oneself.

I guiltily caught myself staring at Jen, and hurriedly turned my eyes from my prone and unconscious roommate to browse that week's Fandom_Gossip. As always when you're trying to distract yourself from someone, I hit upon an immediate mention of the person. 'Josh Amos has gone missing--and not for the first time,' the first item purred. 'Rumour has it the handsome lad disappears regularly, and for good reason.'

I clicked the links provided, and found several bland-ish posts wondering where Josh was when he wasn't at cons, and then several other posts (ranging from impassioned to hysterical) berating the

sporadically characterized and tend toward behavior that is both predictable and slightly repellent--Clary finds out who her real father is about 200 pages after readers will have it figured out.' Heather M. Campbell.

[<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6436119.html>](accessed 20 October 2007).

¹⁸ Aidan, Pamela. *An Assembly Such as This: A Novel of Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman*. Touchstone (May 30, 2006).

Aidan, Pamela. *Duty and Desire: A Novel of Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman*. Touchstone (October 3, 2006).

Aidan, Pamela. *These Three Remain: A Novel of Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman*. Touchstone (January 2, 2007).

¹⁹ 'Obviously, the prejudism against mudbloods is supposed to symbolize the prejudism in our world, but sometimes I have to wonder if JK really wanted to put forth that message. It seems for me that she's failed miserably, if I could feel so indifferent to mudbloods and their ordeal.' Onlyinfatuated, quoted by Shallow_kid. 16 December 2005.

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/861124.html] (accessed 20 October 2007).

²⁰ This has given us such things as:

Forsyth, Frederick. *The Phantom of Manhattan*. St. Martin's Paperbacks (December 15, 2000).

Vehlow, Gwenith. *The Phantom of Paris*. PublishAmerica (July 28, 2003).

Pettengill, Nancy Hill. *Journey of the Mask*. Writers Club Press (August 23, 2000).

original posters for posting. Josh's whereabouts, I gathered from the second set of posts, were Not To Be Discussed. It was dangerous, disrespectful, or criminally irresponsible to ever ask where he was. He had, they shrilly insisted, very good and important reasons for being unreachable.

This hush was imposed, the hints ran, either because his nearly-famous status required secrecy in order to protect the privacy of the actors and directors he hung out with, or else because he was on the run from his family,²¹ which was comprised of international art thieves, diamond smugglers, actual mafia bosses, a religious cult, or survivalist terrorists. Each post from the secrecy police claimed to *know the truth*, but none of these verified truths agreed with the other, and it *wasn't safe* to post any actual evidence.

I snorted quietly as I skimmed the final links to a couple of meta-posts analysing the morality, legality, and history of fannish requests for location concealment. For someone on the run, 'Josh' was sleeping pretty peacefully.

I didn't intend any *harm* when I updated my livejournal. I'm a big fan of secrecy, believe me. *Nothing* could have tempted me to out Josh or reveal his whereabouts, and even if I had been tempted, the fiercely worded St. Schol's rulebook would have put an abrupt stop to any inclination to breach my roommate's privacy in even the slightest degree. But all that fannish interest in the absurd secrets of someone who wasn't even, let's face it, a *real* BNF set my teeth on edge. I couldn't resist tweaking the hysteria, just a little.

'Apparently Josh Amos hasn't been in regular contact with anyone else,' I wrote breezily. 'Just one of the perks of BNFdom, I suppose. And speaking of perks, I have to offer heartfelt thanks for the following.' And I listed the various little gifts I'd received, lavishing praise over each and thanking each fan by username. I even remembered to thank the Directress for sending me a contraband copy of *Witless of Gor: a Patricic Rim fanfiction*.²² Then I got to the last item.

²¹ Renne, Jeanine. *When a Fan Hits the Shit: The Rise and Fall of a Phony Charity*. Heisenberg Press (September 2004).

²² Apologies to John Norman, for this parody; one hopes he has a sense of humour or, failing that, a weakness for femmefans. Norman, John. *Witness of Gor*. New World Publishers (August 16, 2002).

The little package in metallic-blue wrap had no gift tag or note of any kind, just a single band of silver ribbon across it lengthwise. I undid it carefully, and found myself confronted with a second layer of wrap: silver, with a metallic blue ribbon around its width, and still no note. Very mysterious, and utterly enchanting. I momentarily suspected PrinceC, but *his* gifts were always accompanied by letters or poetry. So after listing everything else I concluded my lj entry with warm thanks for the anonymous generosity of whoever had sent me the exquisitely double-wrapped gift, which I described without any idea that I was throwing fuel on an irrational, jealous flame.

When I unwrapped the second layer, the gift turned out to be a paperback. I stared in horror at the back cover. Someone had shaved a Rodent of Unusual Size, and taught it to wear clothes!²³

No, wait: that was an author photograph. I flipped the book over. Ah. For some reason, one of my readers had seen fit to send me *Soul of a Rutter*,²⁴ another in the series of spy novels ('based on the TV. series!') by every fan's least favourite profic²⁵ author. I paused to reflect solemnly on the endless nuance and subtlety of which the English language is capable. Consider the wide and tragic chasm which lies between the phrases, 'a novel based on the critically acclaimed TV. series' and 'the critically acclaimed novel based on a TV. series.' Of such sadnesses are born great resentments and much

²³ Goldman, William. The Princess Bride. Ballantine Books; 25 Anv edition (November 17, 1998).

See also [<http://www.leegoldberg.com/>] (accessed 20 October 2007).

²⁴ It'd sound more poetic as Soul of a Writer, wouldn't it? But perhaps it's about James Bond, who does rather a lot of rutting. '...to be a writer - a REAL writer - one has to have the soul of a writer. And that particular soul understands in no uncertain terms that fanfic is soulless.'" Paul Guyot, quoted by Ignatius. 16 June 2005.

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/732225.html] (accessed 20 January 2008).

See also: The Soul of a Writer.

[http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/The_Soul_Of_A_Writer] (accessed 20 January 2008).

²⁵ Various profic authors have produced spy novels and other tv spinoffs. The Vampire Affair: The Man From U.N.C.L.E. #6. Ace Books (1966).
Goldberg, Lee. Diagnosis Murder #7: The Double Life. Signet (November 7, 2006).

wank.²⁶

The next issue of F_G went some distance towards explaining the purpose of the gift, though not its origins. A series of links under the heading 'Plagiarism scandal on the horizon' revealed that a handful of my more ardent fangirls were deeply upset. Excerpts from the proficcer's most recent 'original' novel were, they argued passionately, lifted from well known fics I'd uploaded several years before. A couple of posts laid out line by line comparisons to prove the point, and by G'hod, they proved it. What was I supposed to do now?

I returned to F-G while I pondered the problem. The item following the plagiarism discovery was also, I saw, about me. I frowned slightly. As gratifying as fandom's attention is, too much of it inevitably leads to unpleasantness.

This looked harmless, though: the chattering classes at F_G were wondering whether Josh Amos might be making a bid to replace PrinceC in my affections. I wasn't sure where they'd come up with either bit of that, but it looked unlikely to cause drama--which just goes to show that I can be charmingly naive, because it couldn't have produced more drama if it had had a stage and a costume department at its disposal. I *did* notice that one of the F_G links led back to my post thanking people for the various gifts I'd received, but I hadn't mentioned liking either PrinceC or Josh, so I shrugged it off as a link malfunction.

PrinceC had been too busy 'adjusting to university' to be online much, anyway. I surreptitiously checked Josh's lj, but there was nothing there about me. His last entry was a tersely-worded denial that

²⁶ Not to mention the really bad fiction such resentments give rise to: 'It's pornographic, scatological, ultraviolent, and generally over-the-top. Innately, this isn't bad; I've got a fond place in my heart for extremely offensive satire. But Goldberg uses this extreme openness to lousy effect, for the most part. While he happily descends into the gutter about such things as what a lunatic sex-obsessed fan calls his penis ("superwarp plasma pleasure warhead," in case you're wondering), or what a nauseating female fan uses for personal pleasure (a homemade vibrator in the shape of Mr. Snork's elephantine nose), he doesn't use his range to the best effect. Rather than use this freedom to be *creative* and extraordinarily vulgar, Goldberg is just vulgar.'
Gharlane of Eddore. 19 March 1997.
[<http://www.geocities.com/~fossilfreak/books/btb.htm>] (accessed 20 October 2007).

there was any possibility he'd be getting back together with Rabbit. The comments were a wonder to behold, as various friends and former friends showed up to alternately praise and bury her, and to either mourn or celebrate the break up. Apparently 'not giving a damn' just wasn't an option amongst their set. Everyone who'd ever known either of them seemed compelled by some mysterious force of wank to voice an opinion. It was surprisingly engrossing reading. I opened a bag of crisps and settled in.

I started guiltily when Jen entered the room, and quickly clicked away so she wouldn't see I'd been working my way through an enormous thread devoted to Rabbit's supposed eating disorder.²⁷ Rabbit had showed up to respond to each and every abusive observation that she'd look better if she ate something. 'OMG I eat lyke all the time! ^_^' she'd written. 'I like hate it when people say I'm ana or whateva! 0_o!'

'No, you don't,' Josh had sneered before freezing the thread. 'You love it, the way you love all attention. You'd be thrilled if everyone would worry more about your imaginary disorders, and maybe buy you some tacky crap to help you cope.'²⁸ I shot Jen a half-admiring

²⁷ While real eating disorders aren't funny at all, the fanfiction versions manage to be mildly hilarious.

' "Yes it is." He ran his hand through his hair. "You don't know how it is, Lizzy, you ..."

"No, I don't know and I never will if you don't tell me!" She cried, obviously upset with him. Her tone softened when she realized that he was really concerned about this. "Why are you so worried about her?"

Darcy walked towards the bed and sat, cradling his head in hands. "I never told you, but Georgiana had an eating disorder when she was a teenager." Belen. [http://www.austeninterlude.org/belen/ap/ap_31.html] (accessed 20 October 2007).

'[Anorexia.DrugAbuse.Mild Pedophillia.SasukexSakura.] All her life she wanted to model, but when her dream comes true, things take an unexpected turn and Sakura spirals into the dangers of modeling. Will Sasuke be able to help her when he himself suffers?' ~anorexia. [<http://www.fanfiction.net/~anorexia>]. (accessed 20 october 2007).

²⁸ 'Her boyfriend has asked me to let you know that if you feel inclined to send her any gifts besides what's on her Christmas Wish list, she likes especially the following:

Lip balm, lip gloss, butterflies, dragonflies, kittens, angels, bunnies,

glance. Josh was a *bitchy* ex-boyfriend. I could hardly wait for Jen to leave the room so I could check whether Rabbit had made a response post in her own lj. This was as riveting as a low budget soap, and besides, I was dying to find out how much she knew about Josh. I mean, just because *I* wouldn't stoop to exposing him didn't mean I wouldn't watch if someone else did.

In the meantime, there was *Soul of a Rutter* to deal with. 'Reading the 'original novel'?' Jen asked when I picked it up, her voice laden with inverted commas, and I saw her point. Even without benefit of fangirl-created comparison tables I'd have recognised that the plagiarism rumours were well-founded. I saw subplots that had been lifted from my own work, twisted round horribly to fit into the novel's 'plot,' and I was fairly certain I could identify plot twists from several other fanficcens as well. Only the lamest, sickest bits were 'original.'

And upon reading those I was, in a word, appalled. *Soul of a Rutter* descended to such levels of sub-drivel that it was difficult to imagine how it had ever found a publisher. Some parodies are sophomoric. *Soul of a Rutter* would have had to put in about sixteen years' steady growth and development to achieve sophomorphism. It was firmly stuck in the diapers-and-scat quest-for-a-big-breast nursery school of literature.

I know the scifi and fantasy genres have housed some ghastly things, but this bugged belief. It told one more--much, much more--than one had ever wanted to know about the mind of the profic author. Doubtless he'd chortled to himself over every misogynistic or homophobic cliché, but a sane adult reader would be less easily amused. His 'range' stretched from fat jokes to fart jokes, along the way ripping off *Galaxy Quest* and *Free Enterprise*.²⁹ A largish

snowmen, x-mas trees, lieetl presents like earrings, make up, stuff like that.' Herohunter on the subject of Svmaria's misscarriage. Quoted by Semirecluse. 30 November 2006. [http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/1029513.html] (accessed 20 October 2007).

See also: Laptopgate.

[<http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Laptopgate>] (accessed 20 January 2008).

²⁹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galaxy_Quest] (accessed 20 January 2008).

percentage of page-time was spent venting spleen at any actor unfortunate enough to have crossed the author's path, and a larger percentage to sneering at fandom. It was less a novel than a kind of case study paging Dr. Freud loudly and repeatedly. I set the whole mess aside, feeling soiled.

The next day, as I put off the distasteful chore of issuing some sort of response to my fangirls' righteous, and rightful, indignation over that sordid bit of drivel, I cruised on over to catch up on Rabbit's meltdown. I was delighted to find she'd provided stellar distraction in the form of a voicepost. It was a bit baffling, though, to listen to, because it wasn't about Josh at all: it was about me.

I wasn't, she claimed, all that special. I wasn't the first girl to get one of those double-wrapped gifts, and I wouldn't be the last, and it didn't mean *anything*, and it wasn't fair because--here she burst into dainty sobs--she'd thought it meant something *special*. The whole thing was incomprehensible, and I don't just mean the low-rent accent or the confusion over the specialness or lack thereof. Had someone given Rabbit a copy of that book? It beggared belief if they had. She didn't, I mean, strike one as an avid reader.

I decided I needed to have a closer look. I'd kept the pretty wrap, but neither it nor the novel contained any clue as to what had set Rabbit off. She *couldn't* be upset about the plagiarism accusations, could she? After a moment it dawned on me. The twice-wrapped book must have been a gift from Josh. It hadn't come in the parcel at all; Jen must have left it on my bed in an effort to communicate something-or-other. Either she'd been helpfully alerting me to the problem, or trying to enrage me by confronting me with proof of plagiarism.

I logged in briefly, hoping I'd find Josh in-game so I could ask. I mean, I've no objection whatsoever to gifts, but I *was* curious as to the intent behind this one. And I can't quite explain why, but it seemed easier to talk to Josh in *Sanguinity* than to Jen in our room. Chalk it up to my nearly-British reticence, or sheer geekish awkwardness.

I pushed my way through a clump of drooling idiots, strolled into the Otakukin Awakening tent, and immediately realised I'd made a

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Enterprise_%28film%29] (accessed 20 January 2008).

mistake. Rabbit was seated on a red velvet sofa,³⁰ holding court. She was shedding perfect crystalline tears, each individual tear taking its time about spilling from one of her violet eyes to trace its solitary way down her alabaster cheek. Her posse twittered and sighed in helpless, admiring sympathy. A tear froze in mid-roll at the sight of me. ‘Are you looking for Josh?’ she asked icily, arranging her crimson lips in a soft, vulnerable pout.

My nerve failed me in the face of such calculated beauty. ‘No!’ I said, a trifle too perkily. ‘I’m looking for...uh...PrinceC!’

She sat forward, her features assuming as near to a shrewd

³⁰ Ah, red velvet sofas: where would fanfic be without you?

‘Once Serpentine had retrieved her temporarily discarded wand from the corner of the potions classroom, tossed aside in a moment of anguished frustration, Snape led her into his office and directed her to his comfortable antiquarian velvet couch with walnut clawed feet wrapped around Austrian crystal.’ Xandria. ‘Underbelly of a Snake.’ 2002. [<http://www.akasa.bc.ca/snape/TUOAS/06.html>] (accessed 20 January 2008).

‘Christine sank into a red velvet sofa. Madame Giry sat beside her.’ ChristineDaae1870. ‘A Christmas Rose.’ 29 October 2005. [<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/2639616/1/>] (accessed 20 January 2008).

‘With that he turns and walks away. When you see that he is out of the room you fall onto the red velvet sofa. You start to think about everything and you realize that you have to see Rafe. The only way you can sort out your feelings is if you see Rafe again, if you can talk to him. "Dar." You whisper, standing up.’ Crush1983. The Darkness and the Light. 27 June 2005. [<http://www.quizilla.com/users/Crush1983/quizzes/The%20Darkness%20And%20The%20Light%20Pt.%2019%20~Discovering%20Love~/>] (accessed 20 January 2008).

“Miss Swan and Miss Sinclair have arrived.” The butler announced, letting you and Elizabeth step past him into the room, and then disappearing discretely.

“Elizabeth, Cassandra. How nice to see you.” Janet exclaimed. “Do sit down.”

She ushered the two of you to sit on a dark red velvet sofa, overstuffed with sickly sweet embroidered cushions. “I have some wonderful news.” She continued excitedly. Janet held out her left hand which was adorned with an enormous, expensive-looking diamond ring.’ Christabel. 15 January 2005. [<http://christabel.proboards31.com/index.cgi?board=snow&action=display&thread=1105832186>] (accessed 20 January 2008).

expression as habitual idiocy would allow. ‘That’s right,’ she said thoughtfully, self-interest dripping from every syllable. ‘You like him, don’t you?’

‘Enormously,’ I said, injecting as much sincere enthusiasm into my voice as I could summon up. She stared at me closely for a moment, and then smiled. A more *histrionic* writer than myself might be tempted to compare the sweetness of that smile to candy-coated cyanide.³¹

‘That’s wonderful,’ she said, and gave a girlish giggle as she tossed her improbable hair. ‘He isn’t here right now. But I’m sure you’ll see him soon!’ I quickly backed out of the tent before she could offer to be my BFF or to murder me in cold blood or something. Just before the tent flap flopped shut in my face I realised that Stasia was amongst the court, sitting at Rabbit’s feet.

I reluctantly resumed pondering the plagiarism problem. What should I do? Confronting the profic author was out of the question: I’d never be shot of him again. What was needed was to let my fans know how I hoped they’d respond. Should I denounce him as a thief and set my readers on him, or should I denounce him as a thief but urge my fangirls to treat him with the pity due to the grossly perverse and untalented?

Arc hadn’t been much in evidence online lately, but she still provided a moral compass. I asked myself, ‘What Would Arc Do?’ and immediately all was clear.³² I made an lj post urging my readers to take the moral high ground and refrain from accusing or denouncing the poor hack. Instead, I suggested, they should leave him gently worded concrit and encouragement, so as not to discourage him or crush what little talent he possessed--harsh reviews are *so* unbearably awful.³³ And they could always, I pointed out, buy used copies of the

³¹ ‘Her smile glittered like poisonous water.’ Cassandra Clare, *City of Bones*, quoted in Canon Sues [http://community.livejournal.com/canon_sues/81143.html?style=mine] (accessed 20 October 2007).

³² Of course the original form is ‘What Would Jeeves Do?’ I understand you can buy bracelets to remind yourself to assume this moral framework when making decisions.

³³ “I’m not playing around about the time-constraints issue here, either. There have been points at which I was spending over 40 hours a week answering email--- as much time as I spend at my dayjob. This took a severe toll on my health, and as of February I have been on hiatus in order to get my various

thing, rather than supporting him financially by paying the full price. (I later learned that illegal scans were making the rounds, which was of course *deplorable* but hardly unexpected--the fen usually balk at shelling out money for abuse.)

I half expected Rabbit to ignore me after our encounter in the tent; her voicepost had, surely, vented as much spleen as she could possibly hold over my innocent receipt of a gift from her ex? But I'd overestimated her ability to let things go. Rabbit's too passive-aggressive to resist cuddling up to the people she professes to hate. I'd barely finished my own post when I had an email from her bearing a dozen attached photographs. 'I thought you might enjoy these,' her email cooed. 'They're from last year's KawaiiKon!'

I noted cynically that she was much less illiterate via email than in public posts, then opened the photographs, which were all of PrinceC looking stunning in a variety of costumes. The lad *is* photogenic, there's no denying it. I was almost persuaded that Rabbit really was trying to make nice when I noticed she'd cc'd the pics to Ciyerra.

I glared at the cc line for a moment, and then took decisive action and messaged Ciyerra. 'Did Rabbit email you a bunch of photos of PrinceC?'

'Oh, yes,' she confirmed, in sparkly pink font.

'Did she happen to say *why*?' I asked politely.

'She told me she wasn't sure whether he would want her to give them to you or to me,' Ciyerra simpered, 'so she sent copies to us both. *giggle* She just wanted to be fair, she said.'

I just *bet* she did, I thought as I logged off with an icy, 'ttyl.'

That *bitch*.

But I could take comfort in having dealt with the proficcer in a

health problems, and the resulting financial problems due to doctors' bills etc. under control. I posted a notice on ff.net (the only archive site over which I have direct control) alluding to the situation and asking for a moratorium on email for a while. The combination of physical/material problems and the deeper sense of artistic vertigo based on the extreme disagreement among my readers has left me in need of what the artist Jacob Lawrence called "a retreat, not in the sense of defeat... but of renewal." I needed, and still need, some time for renewal, both of my health and of my creative energies.' Riley, [<http://www.witchfics.org/riley/ptq/newbits/ptqintro.html>], 7 August 2002 (accessed 016 March 2007).

See also: [http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Oulangi:_Just_A_Reader]

mature fashion. A few days later when I checked out *Soul of a Rutter*'s Amazon listing, I was pleased to see the number of reviews my post had prompted. It was averaging three stars, which was frankly more than it deserved, and the reviewers were outdoing themselves in their efforts to find something nice to say.

'The author, an obvious fan of Mina de Malfois' early work, has paid extensive homage to her fanfiction,' one said diplomatically, neatly skirting the word 'theft.' Another had enthusiastically suggested that 'parts of this satire are mildly funny,' and several had very kindly stated that 'the author is better-known for his spin-off novels, which are almost as satisfying as fanfiction.' They hadn't been able to refrain from describing his writing--stilted, stiff, and forced were three of the more frequent adjectives--but they almost unanimously urged the author to 'keep writing--you'll probably improve someday!' All in all, they were being just darling.

F_G rounded it off beautifully in their next update, linking to several firsthand reports that 'everybody's favorite profic hack' had been spotted at an LA convention, drinking heavily and hurling vulgar insults at fellow-authors and fans alike.

Sweet.

2.3 Mina De Malfois and the Seasonal Goodwill

The holidays were upon us, but not to worry. I had all my shopping completed, and had solved most of my fandom-giving needs by converting some carefully-hoarded cash into points and paid accounts for my nearest and dearest.

Other people had been majorly stressed over finals, but not I. I'd had other worries. It was time for our quarterly *Sanguinity* reports, and I was anxiously awaiting my points statement. The St. Schol's exams had been vigorous, but not impossibly so, and I intended to reward myself with lots of gaming during the break. I should have some nice, peaceful evenings for it: most of the students went home for the hols. The campus kept up hot and cold running mail-service and meals for the rest of us. In fact, I'd had a package from PrinceC on the afternoon I finished my last exam.

'I didn't wish, Lady Mina, to risk offending you by uploading this to Penn'd Passion's RPF section until you'd seen it,' ran PrinceC's black-ribboned note, 'so I had it privately bound for your perusal.' He'd sent me a gift-wrapped volume of a Cafe Press-enabled zine of his fanfiction. I was touched, notwithstanding my natural apprehension about anything that could be considered suitable for PP's Real Person Fic section. On the one recent occasion I'd ventured into that particular den of iniquity, all the highly rated and wildly popular stories had featured Josh, most often portrayed improbably boning a Gay Unicorn.³⁴ I still hadn't fully recovered: I had some retinal scarring. Whatever PrinceC had written, I consoled myself, it couldn't possibly compare.

A half-hour later I let the copy of *Angst and Cheese*³⁵ slip from my

³⁴ Tinhat shoutout. I would dearly love to read a Josh/Elijah fic...

³⁵ . *Angst and Cheese*, aside from being a summary of much badfic, is of course an homage to *Hungry Fantasies*, better known as 'that Mac and Cheese fic.'

'Elijah chuckled.

"No, I'm doing macaroni and cheese"

nerveless fingers, and let the cold chills overtake me as I stared blankly into space. ‘You all right?’ Jen asked, breezing into the room. I nodded weakly. In truth, two hundred pages of extremely graphic hurt/comfort featuring myself and PrinceC had left me suspended between nausea and arousal, but I didn’t feel like talking about it. Jen pounced on the abandoned-in-every-sense book,³⁶ and raised an eyebrow at the cover art. I didn’t blame her. I couldn’t *imagine* who he’d got to draw that for him.

‘PrinceC crossed the boundary into RPF?’ she asked, sounding amused. I nodded numbly, and she chuckled unsympathetically. ‘Don’t get hung up on it,’ she said. ‘I’m sure he likes you too much to really mistreat the fictionalised version.’

It *was* true that the worst the fictionalised Mina had had to endure was witnessing a car accident--the fictionalised Ciyerra had been hit and hospitalised,³⁷ traumatising the f. Mina and providing an excuse for the f. PrinceC to demonstrate his kindness by taking her home and whipping up some noodles. I brightened slightly.

‘Are you going home for the holidays?’ I asked. Watching Jen pack, I almost regretted having decided the nearly-empty dorm would be preferable to crashing with my mum and sisters. Almost, but not quite.

She looked evasive. ‘Not exactly home, no,’ she answered, closing her suitcase and easily lifting it and a large brown box. ‘I’ll be with friends. Oh, wait.’ She stopped in the doorway and set her stuff down

Dominic was smiling on the other end, Elijah knew that.’

Bailey; reposted by Esorlehcar.

[http://community.livejournal.com/badfic_mainline/4467.html] (accessed 21 January 2008)

³⁶ Unlike poor Miss Prism’s three-volume novel, which was only abandoned in one sense.

‘Miss Prism: Alas! No. The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned.’ Oscar Wilde. ‘The Importance of Being Earnest.’

³⁷ If you think that’s unusually cruel for RPF, you need to spend more time with the Doctor.

‘And thus we have... Sophia Myles getting hit by a car. And fanbrats squeeing over the possibility of her death, in order to preserve their cute happily ever after.’ Drakyndra. 30 October 2006.

[<http://drakyndra.livejournal.com/155863.html>] (accessed 21 January 2008).

long enough to retrieve a silver-wrapped package³⁸ from the box. She tossed it to me. 'It's a cd of filksongs,' she said cheerfully. 'Don't worry; most of them aren't about you. I thought you'd enjoy the Weirdling Minstrel's Sanguinity.'³⁹

After she'd left I drifted to the window and watched as she reappeared below. The driver of the over-full car stepped out to stuff her suitcase in the trunk. He looked, at least at this distance, suspiciously familiar. I was almost certain I'd seen him on IMDb.

I wondered how everyone else was celebrating the hols, or even which hols they were celebrating. I'd asked PrinceC, not that his answer was enlightening. 'Mostly we keep up my mother's family's customs,' he'd said. 'They're a lot more observant than my father's side of the family.'

'Oh, yes,' I'd said encouragingly. 'So what sort of celebration do you have?'

'We're very traditional,' he'd told me. 'It's a bit embarrassing, really.'

Traditionally what, though? I wondered how rude it would be to ask. 'How so?' I typed, opting for vagueness.

'Oh, you know, we do all the usual things. We spend the twelve days hosting parties and watching the original series, and Aunt Susan makes her Gladst and Uncle Peter usually drinks too much Check'tluth. And there are round-robin letters from the relatives that can't be there; some of them spend months creating art and fic for those.'⁴⁰

There was a longish pause. I had no idea what to say. He

³⁸ Note signature Josh-Jen wrapping.

³⁹ I've never heard it done live, but I love the lyrics:

'Fight against the vampires,

Take your island back,

And when you're all done Booting ass

Have a Sammich for a snack.'

Weirdling Minstrel. 2 December 2006.

[<http://wminstrel.livejournal.com/825.html>] (accessed 21 January 2008).

⁴⁰ I'll confess: I would dearly love to do this. One imagines Bjo Trimble throwing this sort of celebration (at least, one does once one has talked to the brilliant Scifantasy). See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bjo_Trimble] (accessed 03 February 2008)

misinterpreted my stunned silence. ‘We’re not *fundies* or anything,’ he assured me. ‘I mean, we don’t stick *just* to the original series. My parents are quite critical about canon, even--they participated in the Gaylaxian letter-writing campaign,⁴¹ you know!’

I assured him it all sounded lovely, but really, after that conversation I’d been a bit afraid to go around asking anyone else. Who knew what murky fannish depths I might uncover if I kept prying? Clearly for some it really was AWOL, and one best left undisturbed by idle questions. I mean, what if I caught Arc indulging in some orgy of unheard-of Tolkienistic revels? I’d be mortified.

Bored and lonely, I headed online, and immediately gave in to that irresistible urge to go look at the most recent horrid thing to have been brought to my attention--in this case, Penn’d Passion’s RPF stash. I noted with pride and horror that PrinceC/Mina fic was now nearly as popular as Josh/actorfic. A number of even less likely pairings were represented, to say nothing of the threesomes. There was also a note from Arc pinned at the top of the page; it asked that anyone wishing to submit an anon fic do so via the ‘request for privacy’ queue, which, she promised, they would make every effort to respect. I wondered what sorts of things people didn’t want their usernames attached to--given the things they were *willing* to put their names to, it was baffling in the extreme.

By now caught up in full-blown trainwreck syndrome, I did a search for all the fics containing my name, and promptly regretted having done so. PrinceC had, as he’d promised, withheld his contribution to the field of Minafic,⁴² but seemingly no one else had. I

⁴¹ ‘That was back in 1990. The next year, Roddenberry responded to a Gaylaxian-led letter-writing campaign by promising to bring gays into the “Star Trek” universe. “In the fifth season of ‘Star Trek: The Next Generation,’ viewers will see more of shipboard life in some episodes, which will, among other things, include gay crew members in day-to-day circumstances,” Roddenberry wrote in a statement to the Advocate, a Los Angeles gay magazine.’

Jonathan Kay. ‘Gay “Trek”.’ 30 June 2001.

[<http://www.omnivore.org/jon/orwell/2001/Gay%20Trek/Gay%20Trek.htm>] (accessed 21 January 2008).

⁴² Yes, there is Mina RPF, and very romantic it is, too.

‘Mina whirled, aiming her pistol and immediately lowering it. “Josh!” It took all her self-control not to shout the cherished name for all the world to hear. There he was, silhouetted against the parlor door, dressed all in form-fitting

found PrinceC/Mina, Josh/Mina, *Rabbit*/Mina--of all the unlikely things!--and others too embarrassing to mention, including a multi-chapter fic in which I was run over by a motorcycle and Josh and Rabbit rekindled their romance over my bleeding body. At that point I decided I'd had a long enough immersion in squickitude, and headed in-game instead.

When I walked into the Manor kitchen Ciyerra was sitting at the table crying again. She'd been doing that a lot lately. She was in spirit form, but since we've all also seen her walking around in-game as a normal person, or as normal as Ciyerra's ever going to manage, that's a lot less creepy than it used to be. Stasia was polishing the silverware and making soothing noises--whether to comfort the dessert forks or to shut Ciyerra up I can't really say.

'What's wrong?' I asked.

Ciyerra solidified for a minute to talk to me. 'It's livejournal,' she gulped. Well, I didn't like some of their recent changes either, but it didn't seem worth dissolving in tears over. I pointed this out.

'No,' she said. 'I mean it's my friendslist at livejournal.' Therein, I well knew, lay plenty of potential for sorrow, so I pulled up a chair and prepared to listen to a tale of woe and bitchery.

'I decided to do a friendslist cull,' she explained. 'I just had too many people on there to read them all, and some of the ones I *was* reading were writing things I didn't approve of, so I felt it was really necessary. You must know what that's like, Mina.' She looked up at me through lashes heavily bedewed with tears. Stasia made the admiring noise of one aesthetically pleased by an artistic icon or avatar, but then, Stasia collects Candybar Dolls, so her tastes *might* trend a little downscale.

And frankly, I *didn't* 'know what it was like.' When I defriend someone it normally means I've found out I can't bloody stand them. Otherwise, if you're on my friendslist you're on there until you

black. "What are you doing here?"

"Are you not woman enough to know?" he whispered back huskily.'

Kadorienne.

[<http://belladonna.org/midnightoil.htm>] (accessed 21 January 2008).

Nota Bene: my shameful taste for E. M. Hull's The Sheik has been shamelessly catered to. And, as observant readers have noted, Seasonal Goodwill ended with the promise of a sort of threesome (although the third person is an NPC).

defriend me, and that's that. I mean, people are probably aware I never so much as glance at my friendslist most days, because I'd never have time to do anything else but read it. I don't hold with snubbing other people because *I* don't have time, though.

'Were the people you defriended upset?' I asked gently. Perhaps she'd never thought about how harsh a defriending could feel, in which case this would be a valuable learning experience.

'Some of them were,' she admitted. 'But, you know, I gave them a 'comment if you want to stay' post, so I don't see why they're complaining now. But most of them,' she burst into tears again, 'didn't even notice!'

I suppressed a smile. 'Maybe a few people were away from the computer that day?' I suggested.

'It wasn't a few,' she sobbed inconsolably. 'It was over three hundred.'

I was a tad confused. How could someone--even someone 'dead'--defriend over three hundred people without there being any notice of it, anywhere? I knew she hadn't done anything wildly attention-whorish lately, but surely she wasn't utterly invisible.

'Had you been on their friendslists long?' I asked. Her wailing increased, rendering her completely incomprehensible.

'She wasn't ever on their friendslists at all,' Stasia told me quietly.

'What?' I asked, not sure I followed this last bit.

'They were people she'd friended along the way, but who never friended her back,' Stasia explained. 'She finally decided to drop them, because they hadn't ever responded to her comments by mutual-friending, but they didn't respond to *that* either. Look on the bright side,' she said more loudly, addressing Ciyerra, 'at least you're no longer close to the 750 friends limit, so you can add more people now. A lot of LNFs wish you'd friend them back.' Ciyerra gave the anguished roar of someone who doesn't want to friend back LNFs, then faded back to ghostliness and disappeared completely.

'The girl's an incurable loon,' I said, with more honesty than tact.

'She's a sensitive, delicate, artistic soul,' Stasia insisted, clasping her hands together and dreamily dropping her chamois. 'I bet lots of real artists are just like her.'

'If lots of artists were just like her, the galleries would be empty and the psych wards would be full,' I said. 'Actual artists have to emerge from the abyss of self-induced grief long enough to *paint* something.' But Stasia continued to look starry-eyed.

‘Nothing matters more than friendship,’ she proclaimed. ‘That’s why every truly sensitive girl needs to surround herself with people who really care about her *happiness*.’ She had kind of a point, no matter how emo its expression. One does need real friends, not just a friendslist, or fangirls, or people to shove wishlists at.

Bloody fandom. I glared at the screen. Why did any of us even bother? It was all too obvious Ciyerra’s ‘friends’ had let her down, and who knew what kind of fall Stasia was setting herself up for.

On Christmas Eve I found myself alone, reading fanfiction to pass the time, with my IM window left open in case Arc was lonely and needed to talk or anything.

Instead I got Warr1or. ‘Do you ever feel like everything’s pointless, and nobody understands you?’ he asked. ‘Or as though you’re invisible to the people you care about?’

Well, if I did, I was hardly going to tell *him* so. I’m fondish of Warr1or and all, but not to the point of soul-baring.

‘I don’t have time for this right now,’ I typed, as patiently as I could manage. ‘I’m waiting to talk to Arc.’

‘I am also waiting to talk to your Archivist,’ Warr1or answered stiffly. ‘I have things to discuss with her privately.’⁴³

‘Me, too!’ chimed in an unwanted sparkly pink text, and I groaned out loud at the sight of Ciyerra’s username. ‘I want to talk to Arc too!’ I rolled my eyes, but someone else answered before I could.

‘Why are you people hanging around a message board on the holidays?’ It was, to my deep relief, Archivist12 herself.

‘I just...’ I hesitated, reluctant to say this in front of the others, and then thought, why the hell not? If I had to suffer seasonal angst, I might as well infect them too. ‘I just...dash it all, Arc, I’ve just been feeling that everything is pointless. All this. Fandom. Why do we *do* it?’

There was silence: no text at all.

‘Is that what’s wrong with you two, too?’ Arc asked, finally.

‘Yes,’ admitted Warr1or.

‘Kinda,’ typed Ciyerra, and her text barely sparkled at all.

‘And you mean to tell me that all three of you, in spite of years of observation of the gap between holiday TV. specials and real life, somehow expect me to come up with some kind of last minute

⁴³ Perhaps he has unspeakable RPF submitted via the privacy queue?

wisdom?’ Arc asked. ‘That’s what you’re waiting for, a meaningful holiday episode?’

I felt my throat tighten. I couldn’t think of any adequate defence, and neither, apparently, could the others.

‘Okay, but I’m only saying this once,’ Arc said, ‘so listen. You still there, Mina?’

‘Yes,’ I assured her.

‘You’re paying attention, Warrlor?’

‘Yes,’ he answered.

‘BalletChic?’ Arc continued.

‘Yes,’ typed Ciyerra.⁴⁴ Aha! I thought, but said nothing, and Warrlor remained likewise silent about this admission.

‘Good,’ Arc said. ‘Have you all read *the Velveteen Rabbit*?’⁴⁵ We all admitted we had. I fervently hoped no one was saving a transcript of this chat. Soppiness looks awful in the cold light of day.

‘Then you all remember the bit about the toys who don’t usually become real,’ Arc went on. I didn’t, actually, until she started listing them; I’d forgotten there were any toys that didn’t make it to real. ‘The ones that break easily, Warrlor; the ones with sharp edges, Mina; the ones, BalletChic, who have to be carefully kept.’

I was holding my breath, and I rather suspected the others were, too. My eyes, I don’t mind admitting, had filled up a bit.

‘That’s why we’re here,’ Arc said patiently. ‘To wear off the sharp edges, and repair the breaks, and to keep each other. Here we all are, the staid and the hysterical, the sound and the silly, and it’s almost irrelevant how well we’re getting along at any particular moment: all fans belong in fandom, and we’re all becoming real.’

‘Goodnight, Arc,’ I typed, sniffing.

‘Goodnight, Mina. I’ll see you in the new year. Goodnight, you lot,’ she signed off cheerfully. ‘I have to go approve some anon fics.’

‘Happy Holidays, guys!’ said Ciyerra, in giant pink sparklefont, and I smiled in spite of myself.

⁴⁴ Of course, even when everybody already knows about her sockpuppeting, BalletChic may exhibit that oh so common tendency to deny it.

⁴⁵ If you haven’t read Margery Williams’ *The Velveteen Rabbit*, you jolly well should. It’s a bit twee, mind you, but if you can manage A. A. Milne, you can manage this.

‘Goodnight, Mina,’ said Warr1or quietly once the others had left. ‘BTW, I didn’t know what to get you, so I chipped in the last ten points you needed.’ That’s right: it was past midnight. The points reports would be out! He was gone before I could thank him properly.

Though, honestly, I don’t know what could possibly have constituted adequate gratitude. Thanks to the events I’d hosted, the sea voyages I’d participated in, and the generous contributions of both the Tented Tartanists and the Malfois Manor staff, I’d tied with PrinceC for highest point standing in the game. As the current most highly ranked players, PrinceC and I would, the report informed me, be granted one night of bliss with Lord Henri Antoine Silvestre de Gravina himself.

I almost swooned right there in the dorm room. This looked set to be the most erotic and meaningful sexual experience of my life to date.

2.4 Mina de Malfois and the Youthful Enthusiasms

‘Thank you for reading,’ I typed, dutifully responding to a recent comment on the introduction to *At His Lordship’s Behest*, which was still picking up new readers even after a largish break between updates. In truth, I’d been shamefully neglecting my fanfiction lately, preferring to reserve my plot bunnies for my original fiction. My recently conceived Young Adult work-in-progress was guaranteed to create a stir.⁴⁶ It was layered with metalevels of meaning and laden with subtle references (to amuse the jaded and snarkish), while still lightly witty in tone and romantic in plot (so as to please my devoted fangirls and frequent readers).

But I had, to my credit, been actively involved with *other* people’s fanfiction. I’d been attending the Penn’d Passion editorial board chat sessions, proffering my opinions not only on Dread Lane works but on several other sections, and was pleased to have had the opportunity to save a quite-worthy fic from rejection. Some confusion had arisen as to whether the title contained a spelling error or a deliberately silly pun, and I’d saved the day by pointing out that it was neither: takeaway food was, in fact, a crucial plot element in *Take Me, Wonton Time Lord*,⁴⁷ so that was clearly the word the author had *intended* to

⁴⁶ Let’s hope Mina doesn’t start editing or deleting all negative reviews; that would make her look silly.

See: LadyRogue’s FW report. 16 January 2006.

[<http://www.journalfen.net/community/clairvoyantwank/311518.html?thread=10990302#t10990302>] (accessed 21 January 2008).

⁴⁷ *Take Me, Wonton Time Lord* is just one example from a quite wide range of Wonton Fanfics. Severus has been known to be quite wonton. We also, sadly, have wonton destruction.

And incidentally, who amongst us *hasn’t* cried out, ‘Take me, Time Lord’ during a passionate moment? I know I have. (The author of the Time Lord piece, BTW, is not responsible for any wontons.)

‘To be honest, I was rather shocked at his behavior. Severus was quite wonton. He crawled into my lap, spread his legs wide and rubbed himself against me.’ Ravenkiss. ‘Subjugation.’

use.

Also, I'd been very busy scholastically. I had a major paper assigned in my media studies course, and the truckload of books I'd checked out of the library were the mere tip of the research iceberg. I needed to familiarize myself with some original sources, and *that*, the cadre of front desk librarians informed me, meant gaining access to one of the special collections rooms. Each of these was guarded by a ferocious specialist librarian, and the one in charge of the fanac collection was, so rumour had it, a sort of über-librarian, bristling with degrees and publications and surrounded by a staff of assistants. I'd heard the lady was a tiger,⁴⁸ and had felt a cowardly relief when I'd found, on my first approach, that the fanac collection was locked, because its irregular and inconvenient hours had meant I could postpone my den-bearding for a few days. There's something about the really *rigid* sort of librarian that scares one, well, rigid, don't you find? So I'd put in several diligent hours perfecting my outline and making thorough use of my secondary sources, preparatory to trying again.

But quite apart from monitoring Penn'd Passions' borders, and from the necessity of gaining access to the Great Fanfiction Works that had made it into print and thereby into the library's zine horde, I had other fanfic problems brewing. Personal ones.

Chan and student-teacher may have been safely banned from Penn'd Passion, but they were rampant elsewhere on the net, and to

[<http://inkstain.inkquill.com/isf/archive/32/subjugationpart.html>] (accessed 21 January 2008).

'Summary: Other worlds, wonton destruction, utter chaos, and the Mirror Evil King...just another day at the office for Stan, Rosalyn, and Ari.'

Silent Elegy. 'Mirror, Mirror.' 19 February 2006.

[<http://www.icybrian.com/fanfiction/categories.php?catid=38>](accessed 21 January 2008).

"Take me, Time Lord."

His eyes lit up with desire and he was kissing her once more as his hands slowly un-did the zip of her top. Soon it was discarded on the floor and his pin stripe jacket soon joined it.'

[http://community.livejournal.com/time_and_chips/1547174.html] (accessed 21 January 2008).

⁴⁸ Which adds a new layer of worry to the lady or the tiger problem.

See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lady_or_the_Tiger%3F]

my intense dismay I found I wasn't going to be able to avoid the issue. It was Warr1or who let me know, actually. 'Mina,' he messaged me, 'do you read an archive called Candy 4 Children?'⁴⁹

'I most certainly do not,' I snapped back.

Everyone's heard of that site, of course: it's downright notorious. But I've always been afraid to click on any link leading back to it, lest the authorities show up and slap me with a scarlet letter 'P' for 'paedophile.'⁵⁰ It's not that I can't, as the more shrill supporters always put it, 'distinguish reality from fiction.' It's just that I lack faith in the ability of your average vice cop to understand or care about the nuanced arguments surrounding the literary merits of lolicon and incestfic. I don't want to go down in fanfic history as a famous test case.

'No, of course you don't,' he responded soothingly. 'I knew that couldn't be right. It's just...one of your fics has been nominated for a Lollipop Award.'

I broke out in an instantaneous cold sweat. I had to steel myself to go look, and it was every bit as bad as it could be. My first thought had been that the fic Arc had deleted from her archive had resurfaced here, but this was actually worse. A fic I'd written years and years ago, when I was well underage myself, was listed right there on the front page of Candy 4 Children.

You have to understand: at the time I wrote it, I was very young, far too young and innocent to appreciate the inherent wrongness of cross-generational non-con incestuous femmegreg. I'd been too naive to fully understand the implications of what I was writing. I'd certainly never dreamt the fic would survive to cause my adult self such intense chagrin. Who knows how many varying flavours of pervert had seen '*Bound for Detention*'; believed to be an early work by Mina de Malfois' listed amongst the other horrors. It was small consolation to note that so far, 52% of said perverts had voted for it.

I clicked on the title and confirmed that yes, they'd archived the full text of that long-forgotten creation. I'd thought I'd tracked down and deleted all extant copies of it, back when I'd started to gather a following. Its sudden resurrection was horrific. I had nightmarish

⁴⁹ See: [<http://www.4chan.org/>]

⁵⁰ Of course the real Scarlet Letter was an 'A.' I know you knew that. Nathaniel Hawthorne. [The Scarlet Letter](#).

visions of it falling into the wrong hands, gleefully pounced on by those who would see, all too clearly, its full potential to embarrass me. If anyone passed it on to Arc or PrinceC or Xena I'd expire from sheer mortification. Funny: I'd imagined there was *nothing* left that could cause me to blush in PrinceC's presence,⁵¹ but I'd underestimated the cringe levels achievable via fanfiction.

Candy 4 Children didn't make it easy to identify its maintainers, much less to contact them--not that I blame them; the majority of their readers and authors might well be creative geniuses exploring the delights of human sexuality in an *entirely* harmless way, but there was no way to be sure about any of them, was there? I did, though, find Gerry'sGirl listed as one of the moderators of the C4C livejournal group. It was an invitation-only community of select literary perverts, and Gerry'sGirl didn't, she informed me, have the authority to let me join, but she reluctantly promised to pass my concerns along to the group.

Someone called MidgeDarling IM'd me the next night. 'I'm so sorry,' she wrote in a gentle calligraphic font, 'that your story was uploaded when you weren't looking for the extra attention. It should never have been nominated without your permission in the first place. But, as you must know, sometimes fans hold on to copies of particularly beloved works from years past. It's a compliment to your ability, my dear.'

Yes. Well. Not all my abilities are ones I want put on display. 'Can the story be removed?' I asked, by which I obviously meant *remove my story*.

'Oh, no,' she said. 'It's terribly annoying, I know, but Candy 4 Children has a policy against removing fanfiction. Otherwise, authors could so easily be intimidated by unreasonable laws that it would be catastrophic to our archive--and to free speech and creativity. Once the story leaves the author's harddrive, it belongs to all of us. I know it must seem unreasonable, but it's archive policy.'

'But isn't C4C *your* archive?' I asked, bewildered. 'If you agree it's an unreasonable policy, can't you overlook it just this once and de-nominate my fic?'

'That's against our policy,' she said firmly, and logged off.

⁵¹ I'd imagined there was *nothing* left that could cause me to blush in PrinceC's presence, having, you know, been in a cyber-threesome with him and all.

Was I destined to gain a reputation amongst age-players? There had to be *some* solution. Confronting the thing directly by posting about it was out of the question--it would only link my name more firmly to the whole sordid loli-noncon mess. Perhaps, I mused, I could float some protective rumour that *Bound for Detention* had been written under extenuating circumstances of extreme youth and stupidity. Better yet, maybe the whole thing could be pinned on someone else; I could blame some deserving LNF, who'd be instantly vaulted to the ranks of known authors, a leap so devoutly to be wished that surely they'd be *grateful* for the misattribution.

I just want to state for the record that although I *read* anon memes, I have never actually posted in one. I *know* the meme, but I don't, so to speak, acknowledge it in public, and if I met it on the street I'd give it the cut direct. That said, I do have to admit I've more than once contemplated its potential usefulness for disseminating helpful rumours. On this occasion I was *seriously tempted*.

Not so tempted that I'd rush into anything, of course. Instead I messaged Arc.

'Arc,' I asked cautiously, 'you know the anon meme?'

'That font of sparkling wit and stale grudge-wank?' she replied. 'You haven't been posting there, have you?'

'No, no,' I assured her. She did have a point: it did rather reek of grudging. 'I just...wondered if you read it.'

'I've tried,' she replied, 'but in the end, I realized I preferred fresh vitriol to stale. Why are you asking? Have I been abusing my capslock key?'

'Of course not,' I said, not mentioning that I'd had her pegged as a lowercasasaur anyway.⁵² 'I just thought, you being C of M and all, perhaps you hung out there.'

'I'm so devoutly C of M I sign my attacks,' she said crisply, and rang off. I hoped I hadn't insulted her. I'd never meant to suggest she *posted* there; I'd only wanted to gauge whether she thought it was too, too infra dig for *me* to do so. Apparently she did, so there was nothing for it but to discard my half-formed anon rumour scheme and wait for inspiration to strike. In the meantime, I settled down to distract myself with my collection of PrinceC pics and the attendant consoling thought that at some point this year he was due to turn nineteen. The photos

⁵² Of course, if Arc is secretly on an anon meme out there, she's a propercasosaur

Rabbit had sent me were typically gorgeous, although there was a clutter of people in the background of each one--other con-attendees vying for camera space or possibly for the chance to get next to PrinceC.

Or, I realized, to get next to Josh, who was the focal object for most of Rabbit's pictures. In one snap Josh and PrinceC appeared side by side, dressed identically in blue and white track suits,⁵³ only Josh held a 'second place' card instead of the 'first place' PrinceC had earned. PrinceC was slightly taller, slightly broader-shouldered, and, apparently, slightly more talented at...wearing perfectly ordinary sports clothes. Whatever. Although really, when you thought about it, it *was* impressive that Jen could appear in public as Josh and pass so well. If I hadn't met Jen at camp, I'd have been utterly taken in by the young man in the photographs.

On my second or third flip-through I noticed something else. Almost every one of the con shots had a guy lurking in the background. Sometimes he was blurred, and usually he was so far back he was hard to spot, but he was usually there if you looked long enough. I recognized him immediately, of course, although in several shots his face was partially obscured by his own camera. In the flesh he was Marlboro-man handsome, sort of ruggedly hick but in a hot way. I couldn't for the life of me imagine why *he* was at KawaiiKon; he looked far too homespun. Brokeback Otaku?⁵⁴ It just didn't seem likely. Was he stalking PrinceC?

Just to jack my stress levels into the stratosphere, the following Monday I received an email from one of her assistants stating that my preliminary interview with the Media Fandom librarian was set for the following afternoon. She would, the message rather coolly informed me, be willing to listen to my explanation of my essay topic, and if she felt the collection contained anything pertinent we would make further appointments. Without coming right out and saying so, the email created the distinct impression that I would not be doing any casual browsing of the collection; possibly, if I were found worthy, thoroughly frisked beforehand, and safely chained to a chair I would

⁵³ Perhaps they've been cosplaying as Prince of Tennis characters?

⁵⁴ Sadly, Mina is not immune to using 'Brokeback Mountain' as shorthand.

be allowed a closely supervised glance at a few pre-chosen items from the shelves. I shivered, and moved quickly on to the next message.

‘Mina, I’m so sorry,’ said Gerry’sGirl’s email. ‘I had no idea, when you contacted me about C4C, how serious the problem was. Look, a bunch of us are on the mainland in-game. If you can, meet us at the Tartan Tent and we’ll try to come up with a plan to help you, okay?’

I had no idea why the Tented Tartanists would be willing to assist a femmeslasher, but I couldn’t afford to turn down any offers of help. I headed down to the harbour and found Gerry’sGirl, Meg, Christine and Darla waiting for me inside their plaid edifice. Mrs.Sev arrived just after I did. ‘Mina!’ she said happily. ‘Are you ready to embark on a relationship with a fictional male?’

‘I’m having a problem with an old story of mine,’ I explained, ‘that I wrote when I was very young. It’s resurfaced, and I want it gone.’ She looked concerned, but not outraged. I began to suspect Gerry’sGirl hadn’t told them the full story. ‘It was a...well, a kind of a slash story.’

‘It’s the Cult of the Gay Unicorn, isn’t it?’ she said, her eyes flashing dangerously. ‘They’ve resurrected your youthful indiscretion for their own fiendish purposes. Their pernicious influence has permeated every area of fandom. They force their way in where they don’t belong, intruding again and again⁵⁵ and encouraging easily-led fans to join them in their perverse canon-warping.’

‘Have you met Warrlor?’ I asked before I could stop myself.

‘Yes, when he was our guest,’ said Mrs.Sev reverently. ‘I’m sure he would support me in my determination to resist the will of the crowd and refuse to write slash.’

‘Wait. People are trying to force you to write slash?’⁵⁶ I asked.

⁵⁵ I’m sorry. That is a truly unforgivable slash pun.

⁵⁶ ‘Save Authors From Slash!

I’ve been lurking on FAP for a long time and I’ve noticed something really awful.

A lot of really good authors are being seduced by slash. This is terrible, especially since their slash is usually poorer quality than their other work and as everyone knows slash contains a lot more porn and so on than het. (I know not all slash, but generally.)

A striking example of this would be Maya. She wrote my fave fanfic, DMAB...R? and a really funny D/G thing too, but now all she writes is H/D and it’s really sad and offputting. We need her back for D/Hr! She is very talented and it’s a shame she’s wasting it like this.

There are a lot of other authors too. Frances Potter, even Lori put slash into

‘People have been openly mocking me, and no one from the Cult of the Gay Unicorn *ever* offers my fics the kind of reviews and recs they deserve,’ she said, in the conclusive tone of a conspiracy buff armed with irrefutable facts.⁵⁷ ‘Are they behind your fic problem as well, Mina?’

‘I very much doubt it,’ I admitted. ‘The fic in question was femmeslash.’

her fic, and now Cassie Claire has been dragged into it as well. Soon we'll have no good authors of het left! What is the deal?

We should let these authors know how much we appreciate and want more of their het, and stop with this fantasy of turning the characters gay.’

DracoWorshipper, Fiction Alley Park,

[<http://forums.fictionalley.org/park/showthread.php?s=&threadid=31621>], 1 May 2003 (accessed 19 May 2007)

‘I think there is a certain amount of perceived - inadvertent peer pressure in fandom, to feel like you have to be bi, in order to fit in. I see a lot of apologetic "sorry, I'm just not" comments around, and that makes me uncomfortable as well, because it's about who you are, you know? And I want people to be happy with who they are and not feel like they have to be bi to fit in.’

Brooklinegirl, [<http://brooklinegirl.livejournal.com/478424.html>], 14 February 2007, (accessed 16 March 2007).

‘I've never felt under any pressure to write slash as opposed to other genres and writing other genres hasn't done me any harm—one of my most popular stories was gen and I've got good feedback for het as well.’ Shaggydogstail, Immeritus Blacklight,

[<http://www.immeritus.org/index.php?name=Content&pid=40>], (accessed 15 March 2007).

⁵⁷ Ah, fandom: if you aren't complaining about being reviewed, you're complaining about not being reviewed.

‘The situation is this: in the last few months I have received enough conflicting feedback on Pawn to Queen to give Kafka emotional vertigo. I suppose I should be grateful, given the number of writers who complain that they find it hard to continue when no one reviews their stories, that I have such, ah, prolific readers. Unfortunately, however, none of my readers agree with each other. I think many if not most of you can appreciate how this could leave a writer feeling more than a little paralyzed. I know that whatever I do next with this story, I'm all too likely to have someone out for my blood.’ Riley. ‘A Note From Riley.’

[<http://www.witchfics.org/riley/ptq/newbits/ptqintro.html>] (accessed 21 January 2008).

They stared at me in utter shock, except for Gerry'sGirl, who looked guilty, and rightly so. Why on earth was she complicit in C4C activities anyway? 'I was very young,' I said apologetically, but they still looked scandalized.

'Mina,' said Mrs. Sev firmly, 'it's high time you met a suitable fictional male and settled down.'⁵⁸ I refrained from pointing out that, while Lord Henri Antoine Silvestre de Gravina had been *exceptionally* satisfactory on our night together, I wasn't ready for commitment in either sense of the word.

'You really should consider it,' Darla chimed in, 'or at *least* try Astral Dating.'

Ah, yes. While carefully not meeting their appalled gazes just now, I'd noticed they were supporting slogans in support of...something. Gerry'sGirl and Christine wore campaign buttons that declared, 'Astral Marriage is between an Incarnation and a Character.' Meg and Darla must have disagreed with whatever that meant, because their buttons read, 'Astral Marriage is Universal: Equal Rights for Incarnate Relationships.' I squinted at the tiny font, and Darla misinterpreted my avatar's expression as puzzlement--not that I wasn't *feeling* puzzled, mind you, but I honestly didn't want further clarification.

I got it anyway, regardless of my deeply held sense of Do Not Want. 'We believe that if two incarnate souls meet and fall in love on the astral plane, they have as much right to an Astral Marriage as anyone else!' Darla proclaimed.

'Uh huh,' I said. I had no idea what she was on about.

Mrs. Sev snorted. 'It doesn't matter what you believe,' she told Darla. 'Astral Marriage between two incarnates just won't work. How can it? Neither of them truly inhabits the astral plane! Their carnal nature cheapens the whole concept. That sort of bond is unnatural, and it's doomed to fail. I feel as sorry for that girl as you do, believe me, but this crush of hers won't last.'

'We'll see,' Darla said. 'I'm rooting for them, anyway. Rabbit *deserves* happiness.'

'How can you root for them?' Christie said, rolling her eyes. 'You don't even know who this secret love *is*.' They seemed to have forgotten I was even there.

'But she loves him, whoever he is,' Meg said dreamily, 'so they'll

⁵⁸ You know what fandom needs? An astral dating service.

be happy. It's *so* romantic.'

'It's abnormal,' Mrs. Sev said, 'and Rabbit of all people should know better. She's been part of the Otakukin Awakening for years.'

'Exactly,' said Darla. 'She's Otakukin. That's almost exactly the same as being a character, even if she no longer inhabits the astral plane.'

Whatever this was, it could wait. I cleared my throat. 'I hate to interrupt this discussion,' I lied, 'but I was hoping you could help me with my fanfiction problem.'

But as it turned out, they had nothing helpful to suggest other than that I should salvage my good name by entering into a stable relationship with a decent fictional male. So the next day I headed to the library not only filled with trepidation, but with my C4C problems still very much looming.

The über-librarian herself opened the door at my knock. I stared, momentarily stunned into silence.

My first rational thought was that she must be, if not an actual *denizen* of the Patricic Rim, at least a fellow-traveller. She was extraordinarily, crisply retro, from the chain on her glasses through the fitted 1940s skirt and all the way down to the black t-strap shoes. I'd have bet cold hard cash that those were real silk stockings, not anything nylon, and I bet they ended mid-thigh, too, and had seams up the back. I wrestled my thoughts away from garters with some difficulty, resting my gaze on the charm she wore around her neck: a delicate silver gun.⁵⁹ Something about that pendant jostled my memory, but the thought was gone before I could pin it down. I gulped, tried to pull myself together, and stuck out my hand to shake hers.

'You must be Mina,' she said, and I yelped as something twined around my ankle. It was a sleek grey cat. I glared at it for its contribution to the overwhelmingly inept first impression I must be making. 'Please come in,' the librarian continued, gracefully ushering me inside, 'and tell me about your project.'

⁵⁹ That's, obviously, the emblem of the Cult of Mean. It can be found on Mina's Amazon wishlist, if any of you want to buy yourselves one.

See: [http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Cult_of_Mean]
[<http://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/20W0EEDL0DYCQ>]

I sat down, determinedly not looking at her, and began my rehearsed explanation. ‘I want to look at some print zines so I can see if there are examples of authors using fanfiction as a social levelling mechanism within fandom.’

‘A levelling mechanism?’ she asked, her voice calm and encouraging. She pulled out a chair opposite me, but I stared resolutely at my hands.

‘Yes,’ I said, trying to sound more intelligent than I felt. ‘My paper is on the use of fanfiction to create a meritocracy--I’m arguing that anyone who writes well and intelligently has the opportunity to be taken seriously within fandom, regardless of their age or income. I wondered if there was any evidence in the print zines of people being treated as equals in spite of differences in age or status. Like, perhaps the letters pages might ‘out’ someone as much younger or older than expected...’

I trailed off, finding it ludicrously difficult to put into words what had seemed so clear a thesis when I was alone at the computer. When I glanced up the librarian was looking at me curiously.

‘Do you really think fanfiction fulfils that function?’ she asked. At least she was taking me seriously; that was something. If I were her I’d have written me off as a lunatic by now, and an incoherent one at that.

‘Oh, yes,’ I said enthusiastically. ‘I think a lot of fanfiction authors are aware that if everybody knew their real-life identity at the outset, they’d be dismissed as ‘just a kid’ or ‘some middle-aged woman’ or whatever. But if you’re lucky enough to find readers for your fanfiction, they’re often willing to extend some respect even if you belong to some group they usually dismiss.’

She was still watching me with what I hoped was thoughtful consideration. ‘You could be right,’ she said. ‘Fans do live in their heads to a large degree; perhaps fandom does offer a space where external factors can be overcome.’ She stood up abruptly and waved a hand at the rows of bookshelves. ‘Browse all you like, but don’t take anything out of this room, and *don’t* reshelve anything. Leave it on the table and I’ll deal with it later. I’ll be at my desk,’ she gestured to the corner office, ‘if you need anything, but please try not to need anything: I’ve got work of my own to get through. My assistants will be in and out, but they shouldn’t disturb you. Don’t interrupt them if you can possibly avoid it.’

I sat silently staring after her as she walked to her office; it wouldn’t, I thought, be seemly to pounce too eagerly, though I was

longing to--on the stacks, I mean. I couldn't think what to say. I should have burst into paeans of gratitude, I suppose, but she seemed too remote and austere to appreciate fawning. 'What's the cat's name?' I asked finally, just as she was opening her office door.

It was a lame, desperate attempt to prolong the conversation, but she smiled slightly all the same. 'Adage,' she said, and closed the door shut behind her, leaving me looking dazedly at a sign which read, 'J. Silverman.'⁶⁰ That had gone far better than I'd had any reason to suspect it would, all in all.

It was as well that my academic pursuits were going so swimmingly, because over the next little while my real life provided a much needed escape from my fannish one, which was swirling rapidly into chaos. As seems always to be the case in fandom, the one thing I wanted to go unnoticed immediately commenced a wild surge in popularity.

Fandom_Gossip, damn their eyes, spotted two essays about the implications of femmegreg, both of which not only referenced *Bound for Detention* but quoted from it heavily. I'd never been the subject of such serious-minded meta before now. In any other circs it'd have been downright flattering to follow the debate on whether f/f impregnation was a bold blow for feminism, a sly subversion of male privilege, or merely an immature fantasy constructed to ward off fear of the Holy Peen.

And then, as if the deluge of academic-style analysis weren't quite enough attention already, thanks, the Girls' Dormitory set got hold of the fic and clasped it to their bosoms, having recognized it as one of their own. It had been set, that is to say, in one of the trad. girls' school series so dear to their hearts. They started pestering me via email to

⁶⁰ *Adage* deserves a full quotation:

'That is the problem which is torturing me, Jeeves. I can't make up my mind. You remember the fellow you've mentioned to me once or twice, who let something wait upon something? You know who I mean -- the cat chap.'

'Macbeth, sir, a character in a play of that name by the late William Shakespeare. He was described as letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would", like the poor cat i' th' adage.'

P.G. Wodehouse, [The Code of the Woosters](#). It's in chapter two, if you're looking for it.

repost the thing at PP, and followed up with handwritten letters-- invariably drenched in scent and written on pink stationery--repeating this plea. They produced a flurry of artwork and icons in support of *Bound for Detention*'s Lollipop nomination, made impassioned posts about the necessity of reclaiming this important contribution to J.H.-positive fanfiction, and started a campaign to get even more readers to go to the Candy 4 Children site to vote for the dratted thing.

By now, the Jolly Hockeystickers seemed to have forgiven me entirely for having PrinceC's attention. One of them organized a whip-round so they could buy me more My Little Ponies than I'd ever, to be entirely honest, wanted. A few artistic souls even sent me hand-customized ponies painted to represent characters and themes from my fandoms. I will admit that Blood-Drop the Sanguinity Pony was quite cute. I checked my amazon wishlist at one point, worried that I'd had an episode of amnesia and *asked* for ponies, but no: just lipgloss and books.

But this sudden influx of ponies to my mailbox, however kindly meant, couldn't divert me from my growing anxiety over the fic. It had, I learned, escaped the confines of C4C.

Volunteers from the Girls' Dormitory had been reading *Bound for Detention* out loud and on-camera, and uploading these productions to various vidhosting sites. It was 'a homage to Mina!!!' they insisted, but I rather cynically wondered if it wasn't aimed at PrinceC--several of the readers had chosen to wear lingerie for their videos, and many of them had framed PrinceC fanart clearly visible on their desks or bedroom walls. Hmm: perhaps they hadn't *entirely* forgiven me after all.

Title: The Cad and the Schoolgirl: an original novel

Author: Mina de Malfois

Dedication: for the staff of Malfois Manor, with affection and appreciation

Sage Montgomery sighed heavily.

The girls in her dorm were planning a performance for Valentine's Day, to be held in the common room. All the sillier girls from nearby dorms had breathlessly pledged to attend, and no doubt the more easily led of the boyfriends would be in tow. There was to be a small cover charge, to raise funds for whatever idiotic thing the dorm committee came up with next.

And Trill kept pressuring her to participate. 'The show will be lovely,' she kept saying, but Sage was unconvinced of the loveliness possible for any show with set dressings made of tissues and pipecleaners. 'We even have a part reserved for you.'

'What sort of part?' Sage asked suspiciously.

She hesitated. 'You'll be the Spirit of Singleness,' she said finally. 'No,' Sage told her.

'Oh, come *on*, Sage,' Trill pleaded. 'It's a wonderful part, and the costume is gorgeous. You get to walk slowly and tragically to the centre of the stage, in measured steps, and drop to your knees. It will be so beautiful and sad--I bet everyone will cry. It represents loneliness, and will remind everyone that it's important to find love, which,' she added in idiotic solemnity, 'is the True Meaning of Valentine's Day.'

'How about I walk slowly and tragically to the centre of the stage, in measured steps, and slit both my wrists?' Sage counter-offered. 'It would be just as beautiful and sad, and less sickening to me personally.'

Trill gave her a resentful look. 'You're not taking this seriously,' she informed Sage, in the smug tones of someone putting her finger on the root of someone else's problems.

'Probably not,' Sage agreed.

Trill sighed, nearly as heavily as Sage had. 'You're really not

making an effort to fit in, Sage,' she said. 'I mean, I know you're literary or artistic or whatever, but you could at least try to be like normal people. I don't let my singing turn me into some kind of loner freak, do I? I'm disappointed in you.'

They'd been roommates since September, and she was only just now getting around to being disappointed in Sage? 'I'm disappointed in *you*,' Sage told her. 'I figured by now you'd have moved on to acceptance and realized your efforts were futile.'

'I refuse to give up on you,' Trill informed her, sounding threateningly cheerful. 'You're coming to the mall with us tonight, and picking out a Valentine's Day outfit--if you won't perform, you can at least show up and be supportive.'

'I need a new outfit to be supportive?' Sage asked, but then decided it was easier to give in, and probably less depressing to trail along to the mall than to spend another Friday night in the dorm. 'All right, all right. Who's 'us,' exactly?'

'Irene, Danielle, and Ashley,' she said. 'You remember Irene; she went to the ballet with us.'

'Oh, right. That was pretty,' Sage said, and by 'pretty' she meant 'dull.' Irene had been decent company, though, and Danielle and Ashley, who shared the room next door, were unobjectionable. 'No boyfriends?'

'I'm meeting Billy at the mall,' she said, 'and Irene's German guy will probably be there.' Her already maniacally cheerful look brightened further, and she added perkily, 'maybe you'll meet someone.'

'Yes, because that's *just* how my ideal romance begins: a pick-up at the mall,' Sage said sarcastically. Trill rolled her eyes dramatically and exited, leaving Sage to her reading. She was midway through *Pride and Prejudice* for about the tenth time; it was one of her favourites, and since it was on the required reading list for her Intro. to Eng. Lit. class she'd seized the excuse to reread it.

The trip to the mall was every bit the nightmare she'd anticipated, and yet, perversely, she found herself almost enjoying the chance to wade in the shallow side of life. 'Maybe,' Sage told herself as she let the others stuff her into various ridiculous outfits and listened with ironic detachment to their enthusiastic shrieks, 'I ought to be majoring in Cultural Anthropology. I could do a major study of the cultural interactions of the terminally trendy.'

Eventually they'd talked her into buying enough stuff to satisfy

their notions of what the well-dressed frosh was wearing, and started trying on stuff themselves. Sage waited until they were in the changerooms and told them she'd be in the bookstore, bolting while they were still semi-undressed and incapable of pursuit.

The bookstore had given itself over entirely to huge displays of romance novels and Valentine's related gifts. The insistent pinkness and sparkle was a bit blinding, but Sage had a secret weakness for historical romance, and was soon too busy browsing to bother scowling. She quickly accumulated a stack of books and was seriously considering a shelf of romance-themed ornaments. She didn't normally buy things that just sat there waiting to be dusted, but there were a set of miniature picture frames with 'portraits' of heroes from a new series of Regency romances that she couldn't quite resist. She picked one up and gazed wistfully at the dark-haired, perfectly attired gentleman captured in the frame.

'Who's that? Your boyfriend?' asked a voice behind her, and Sage turned to glare at Billy, who was smirking down at her.

Billy was Trill's beau, the requisite hunk of male flesh that accompanied her everywhere, kind of like an accessory but louder and more annoying. Oh, yeah, and popular and good-looking, but that went without saying, didn't it? The only way Trill would date a guy only two years older than herself was if he scored really high on her other criteria, which pretty much consisted of looks and popularity.

He grinned and ran one hand through his hair as if aware that it was attractively tousled. 'No,' Sage corrected herself, 'the most he could logically be aware of is that he's attractive; he probably couldn't *spell* the word tousled, let alone think it in a sentence.' 'What do you want?' she asked.

Evidently she wasn't scowling hard enough, because he didn't lose the grin. 'Trill sent me to get you,' he said. 'We're going for drinks.'

But Sage, being both under the legal drinking age and unfashionably unwilling to sneak into bars, refused. Feigning reluctance to the best of her abilities she returned to the group just long enough to apologize to the others, excused herself with an imaginary headache, and headed gratefully back to the dorm, weighed down by a bag containing newly purchased books and one utterly irresistible portrait.

Footnotes

1. Sage Montgomery is named after clary sage.
2. Trill is named after Trilby.

2.4 Mina de Malfois and the Youthful Enthusiasms (continued)

With some trepidation I listened to a few of these recordings, averting my eyes from the heaving bosoms and fluttering lace of the more impassioned performers. It had been so long since I'd written 'Bound for Detention' that I couldn't remember most of it. The passage of time is merciful that way.

I did snicker somewhat when I reached the villainess of the piece, one Razzberry Martini.⁶¹ I'd forgotten until now, but back in the days of my youth I'd used, with innocent malice, to avenge myself against internet acquaintances by writing caricatures of them into my fanfiction--the better to savage them, my dear.⁶² Of course I'd long since grown out of that sort of petty vengeance, but one loses one's temper so easily when one is young, and does silly spiteful things as a result.

⁶¹ 'Razz: to deride; make fun of; tease. Synonyms include chaff, deride, fool, fun, jeer, jest, jive, joke, josh, kid, mock, rag, rib, ridicule, satirize, taunt.' [<http://thesaurus.reference.com/browse/razz>] (accessed 21 January 2008).

'Martini: a cocktail made with gin or vodka and dry vermouth, usually served with a green olive or a twist of lemon peel.' [<http://dictionary.reference.com/help/faq/language/e40.html>] (accessed 21 January 2008).

⁶² And some people never outgrow that. We're looking at you, Michael Crichton.

"Best-selling novelist Michael Crichton doesn't just get mad when his critics disparage his adamant view that there is no proof of global warming. Nope, he gets even, by portraying critic Michael Crowley in his next novel as Mick Crowley, a small-dicked rapist who gets uncontrollable urges for kids still in their diapers."

Entrenous88. 'I sincerely hope that the spirits of drowned polar bears come HAUNT him while he sleeps!' 14 December 2006.

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/otf_wank/511860.html] (accessed 03 February 2008).

For the first time in years I wondered what had become of Razz--in real life, I mean, as she seemed to have left fandom. She'd fancied herself my rival back in the day, and thought herself destined for the stage and the publishing houses, though prison by way of juvie hall had struck me as the more likely outcome. Had she ever, I wondered, made sufficient contact with reality to learn that German characters should know German and that fanfiction set in historical France ought not to include cellphones? I doubted it. Research hadn't been one of her strong points.

But it was one of mine, I reminded myself, and an interview with PrinceC might yield not just advice about 'Bound for Detention,' but also information about those photos. Did he even *know* he'd been followed closely around KawaiiKon?

I IM'd him fairly promptly. 'Got a moment?' I asked.

'Anything to get away from studying,' he responded, and gallantly added, 'particularly if it pleases you, my lady.'

I sternly warned my toes against curling until mid-February, when PrinceC was due to turn nineteen.⁶³ 'It's about KawaiiKon,' I said.

'That was an unmitigated disaster, wasn't it?' he said. 'From being stalked everywhere to that *distasteful* kerfuffle with Josh Amos and his set...'

'Hang on. So you knew you were being stalked?' I asked.

'Of course. I'm stalked at every con,' he said, a trifle proudly I fancied. 'I have that effect on fangirls. I imagine you know what it's like.'

'Oh, that,' I said. 'Yes, I know about *that*. I was wondering if you'd been aware of any *particular* stalkers. Any mutual acquaintances of ours.'

'Not that I noticed,' he said. 'Why?'

I suppose if one's every move at cons is followed by a pink cloud of giggling underdressed lunatics, it *is* hard to spot another guy. I bit back a sarcastic remark and calmly offered to flip him a picture.

'Is that *Warrlor*?' he asked after a moment. 'You know, I vaguely remember noticing this guy there, but I didn't know him at the time, so I didn't speak to him. And then I left slightly early, after realizing the con had been embroiled in *vile* scandal.'

'What was the scandal, anyway?' I asked, but he shut down.

⁶³ His birthday is on February 14th, of course.

‘I’d rather not discuss anything that crowd are involved in,’ he said stiffly.

I was amazed by that. PrinceC isn’t usually squicked by much of anything. I had, after all, good reason to know he could handle himself--or, more to the point, others--masterfully enough to impress even the Tented Tartanists.⁶⁴ He wasn’t, I mean to say, *shy*. But he disappeared now awfully quickly.

And speaking of shyness, as I was crossing the campus after my next-to-last research appointment, I was jarred from my melancholy reflections that all too soon I’d be losing my access to the Media Fandom Collection by the shyness-inducing recognition of someone heading in the opposite direction. There could be no forgetting that glamorous, ambiguous blonde, last seen being firmly escorted from Camp Silver Lake by the vigilant Ms. Hamill. It was xenalvr herself, or rather, Xena. Or rather, I realized belatedly, something else altogether--she must have a real name. She stopped short at the sight of me.

‘What are you doing here?’ I gasped, but she just shrugged that off, and I was hesitant to press the issue.

‘I can’t bear to see someone wandering around the campus completely sober,’ she said. ‘It’s like watching someone browse the internet completely sane. Let’s go grab a drink, youngling.’

I followed her meekly to the campus bar, the *Cath and Chris*,⁶⁵ and once we were seated with a couple of tankards of ale I had a flash of inspiration. ‘Were you at KawaiiKon?’ I asked, and when she nodded between quaffs I said encouragingly, ‘Then you must know about whatever it was that Josh did that PrinceC finds so offensive.’

She looked mildly reluctant to talk. ‘Possibly not really a story that should be spread any further,’ she said. ‘It was a very well-managed scandal at the time, but I’m not sure it was meant for wider distribution.’

‘But it can’t have been *that* bad,’ I said, losing some of my awe for her in my sheer determination to know. ‘Look at how popular Josh still is!’

She shook her head. ‘This is fandom. They don’t necessarily get

⁶⁴ *I had, after all, good reason to know he could handle himself*, having spent that night with him and Lord Silvestre de Gravina.

⁶⁵ The *Cath and Chris* is named for the siblings/lovers in V. C. Andrews’ *Flowers in the Attic*.

angry with charismatic people who do something wrong; they're just as likely to get angry with anyone who mentions what the popular person did wrong.⁶⁶ If the person doing the mentioning lets slip that they're upset about what was done, then the anger swells into pure outrage.' She caught the waitress's eye and gestured for another ale, though privately I thought she was beginning to sound as if she'd had enough. She'd managed, though, to suggest a reason for PrinceC's circumspection. Josh, however much it irked me to admit it, was a serious contender popularity-wise. Any public denouncement of him would be as likely to negatively affect the denouncer. My curiosity redoubled.

'Please,' I said, and Xena crumpled abruptly.

'All right,' she said, 'but if you're intending to act on this info in any way, you didn't get it from me. Got it?'

'I promise,' I agreed.

She paused, as if trying to figure out how best to begin. 'Rabbit showed up at KawaiiKon,' she said finally, 'with some extremely silly girls--high school friends of hers. Most of them were younger than her. Maybe all of them were; she lies about her age, and it's hard to sort out details. Anyway, they were strictly off-limits to the adult population, capisci? No one paid a lot of attention when she was just ferrying alcohol up to the hotel room for them--I mean, everyone knew they were underage, but most people didn't begrudge them a few drinks. Although,' she added darkly, 'there were a few complaints even at that point.'

'Some people don't approve of underage drinking,' I said, more primly than I'd intended. My irritation at the mere mention of Rabbit and her friends added a prissy note of disapproval to my remark--but it was them I objected to, not the alcohol, honestly. I didn't want my Josh-story turning into a Rabbit-tale.

'But then word got around,' Xena went on, 'that the girls had come to party. The way I heard it, they were determined to get laid. No one was sure how seriously to take that; it sounded more like something

⁶⁶ *They're just as likely to get angry with anyone who mentions what the popular person did wrong*, as is alluded to in Avocado's *The Cassandra Claire Plagiarism Debacle -- Part XIII through Epilogue*. Avocado. 06 August 2006.

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/bad_penny/11003.html#epi] (accessed 03 February 2008).

they were saying to sound daring than like anything real. And frankly, in my opinion, they weren't cute enough to risk it. But then Josh Amos showed up.' She stopped again, giving me an odd look, but I didn't say anything--I was too busy trying not to even *think* the word 'Jen' in case I gave anything away via ESP or something.

'He had at least one minor actor with him, and a handful of stagehands and light jockeys and sound engineers,' she said. I choked on my beer, and Xena nodded. 'Oh, yeah,' she said grimly, 'the stuff about his having industry connections is true. I saw his grandiose entrance with my own eyes.'

I was too busy reeling at this revelation to see where the story was going, so it came as a shock when she went on, 'The next I knew of it, the con had practically *exploded* over rumours that Rabbit had pimped her friends to Josh's entourage.'

I blinked. 'But you don't--you can't mean that *literally*?' I said. 'I mean, surely no *money* exchanged hands?' But I could see why PrinceC had referred to Josh being embroiled in 'scandalous rumour;' this fit that description extraordinarily well.

'That's exactly what I do mean,' said Xena. 'The way it was told to me, they collected twice. The guys Josh brought supposedly paid him for access to Rabbit's friends.'

I was horrified but fascinated. 'And?' I prompted. She paused for a well-timed swig of beer, prolonging the suspense. Something about the glitter of her eyes suggested she enjoyed making me wait when she knew I was near to bursting with curiosity.

'And--at least according to the rumours I heard--before she split Rabbit collected money from her little friends, claiming she could get them a night with the actor.'

'But wait a minute,' I objected. 'The actor can't have spent the night with all of them. Wouldn't they have demanded their money back when Rabbit didn't deliver?'

Unexpectedly, Xena grinned. 'That part of the con was pure genius,' she said, 'and I saw it in person, even though I didn't know *what* I was seeing until later. Josh's friends were all wearing white masks and tuxedos in the bar that night.⁶⁷ Turns out when they went upstairs, each of Rabbit's friends *thought* she was getting the actor, but

⁶⁷ Scifantasy drew my attention to this ConScrew storyline: [http://www.conscrew.com/index.php?strip_id=25]

only one *did*; the rest were getting the set crew.⁶⁸

I almost grinned myself, but in an appalled way. It was *horrible*, of course, if it were true...but it was also, in a twisted way, rather a brilliant scheme. One *almost* admired the sheer revoltingness of it.

But Josh, though: wow. How utterly callous. Of course Xena didn't know what I knew; probably I was one of the very few to have caught on to the Josh-Jen scam. So Xena wasn't getting the full shockingness of the thing, because she didn't realize the high school girls had been sold out by two women.

I wondered, briefly, why it was that Rabbit hadn't outed Josh as Jen. I mean, I saw clearly enough why she'd keep quiet about it back when they were a couple, working schemes together: honour among con artists, and all that. But now that they were on the outs, why was Rabbit still holding her tongue? She must *know* about him, if they'd been a couple.

'You don't sound entirely disapproving, somehow,' I remarked, watching Xena closely. She did look faintly furtive, as if she were concealing something, but perhaps she was feeling guilty now that she'd spread the rumour further.

She shrugged slightly. 'I suppose not,' she admitted. 'The scandal *made* KawaiiKon. And,' she grimaced slightly in an unconvincing gesture of self-disapproval, but then her grin broke out, 'no matter how hard I try, I can't *really* feel sorry for anyone involved.'

I couldn't *really* believe any of it had happened, personally, but I thought it would be rude to say so outright to the person plying me with drinks and stories. 'But how does anyone know about this?' I asked. 'It sounds like it happened very much behind closed doors, so how did the rumour start?'

'Ah, that was the best part,' said Xena. 'Someone behind those closed doors turned informant. A photocopied expose showed up all over the hotel: taped to walls, on tables in the lobby. They detailed the whole thing: who hooked up, how much money exchanged hands, which techie operated the biggest boom.'

⁶⁸ And as Ankaret pointed out, a familiarity with historical France could have saved them.

[<http://mina-de-malfois.livejournal.com/16607.html?thread=535775#t535775>]
See also; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Man_in_the_Iron_Mask]
(accessed 03 February 2008).

‘But who,’ I began, and she shook her head.

‘The expose was signed ‘le Corbeau,’ but that’s just the shared username of the F_G link collector: anyone could have been behind it.’⁶⁹

I was starting to be amused in spite of my better judgement. ‘Warrlor must have been outraged,’ I said. ‘Did he pitch a fit in the lobby, and denounce KawaiiKon as an immoral den of rape-accusers?’

She frowned. ‘No, he left early,’ she said. ‘He may have missed the whole thing.’ She checked her watch. ‘It’s time for me to go,’ she said, and looked amused when I gave her my most suspicious look. ‘No, kid, it honestly is. Prior appointment,’ she said, and breezed out, paying our tab on her way. It’s a sign of how deeply I was pondering her story that I didn’t even *think* of following her until too late--she was nowhere to be seen when I emerged from the bar.

Back in my room, I IM’d Warrlor, and casually brought up KawaiiKon, intending to do a little discreet probing about his presence in those photographs. ‘I heard you left early,’ I said.

His reply bristled with indignation. ‘I left immediately after accidentally walking in on the all-male strip poker game in Josh Amos’ room,’ he said. ‘I don’t approve of yaoi-themed gambling, so of course I couldn’t stay once I’d seen what they were up to.’

‘An all-male strip poker game? In Josh’s room?’ I repeated, bewildered.

‘I know,’ Warrlor responded. ‘It was completely immoral and perverse, but I assure you I left before my participation could taint the good name of *Sanguinity* fandom.’

But *that* wasn’t what had been worrying me at *all*. Exactly what kind of scam had Josh been pulling, and, more to the point, how *precisely* had he been planning to pull it? It was time, I vowed grimly, to confront Jen.

Of course, in order to confront someone you have to find them, and Jen, frustratingly, was not much in evidence around the old dorm room these days. As had been her habit at camp, she was up and out in the wee hours when all normal people, self included, were still in bed, and she got back at Godknowswhen o’clock at night. A casual glance at

⁶⁹ The expose was signed ‘le Corbeau,’ and as Dubaiyan noted, that’s not the first time that name’s been used, either.

[<http://www.criterionco.com/asp/release.asp?id=227>] (accessed 03 February 2008).

her side of our room revealed nothing except the highly *suspicious* fact that she'd installed travel locks on her closet and on all the drawers of her desk and bureau.

Every impulse urged me to consult Arc, but I wasn't sure it was ethical to do so. It wasn't just the issue of passing around unverified gossip, which quite frankly gave me only the most minimal pang of conscience; it was more the sense that I'd be directing her attention to one of those morally dubious, possibly nearly criminal, corners of fandom. Some dark and murky depths, I mean to say, ought not to be plumbed by anyone as unsullied as Arc. I had a sneaking suspicion she might not be too chuffed to learn she was, however tangentially, associated with some game being played not entirely according to Hoyle.⁷⁰ If Jen were, as it seemed she must be, embroiled in a web of assumed identities and under-aged sex, Arc would, I surmised, feel honour bound to inform Ms. Hamill--and if Jen was here on the same sort of scholarship I'd been given, then her reputation as a Camp Silver Lake alumna in good standing could be tied to her enrolment here at St. Schol's. That was more damage than I wanted to inflict on anyone.

My head ached. Perhaps I should just leave all this alone--treat it like an unacceptable piece of canon, and pretend it didn't exist. After all, I wasn't the fandom morality squad, right? It was none of my business *really*.

Of course, a complete list of things that were none of my business that I'd nevertheless devoted countless hours to would fill several volumes. No one, let's face it, is in fandom to mind their own business. I'm hardly the first fan to practically stalk some other fan online just because they've impressed or irritated me. And Jen, in or out of her Josh pose, was more than interesting enough to warrant further stalkage.

I wasn't going to go through her trash or anything. Besides, her wastebasket was always empty. I was just going to start collecting rumours in an organized fashion, maybe in a designated folder, and devote a few bookmarks to keeping tabs on her online life. And I needed--well, wanted--to ask her about that poker game.

To my disappointment, the coldly delicious Media Fandom librarian wasn't there when I went for my last appointment. Her bee

⁷⁰ I assume you probably know Hoyle's Rules, but just in case you don't: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Hoyle]

swarm of assistants were, though, and in her absence they were much more voluble. When I got there they were huddled in conversation, and *obviously* discussing their absent superior. ‘I can’t believe that pirate-looking person was a friend of hers. I think she’s been kidnapped or blackmailed or something,’ one was saying, breaking off abruptly when he saw I was listening. He glared down his nose at me in attempted superciliousness, but I was unrattled. I’m *not* in the habit of kowtowing to mere graduate students, and I could tell from their pallor and lethargic posture that these were grad students. Well, either grad students or zombies, anyway, and as they’d shown no untoward interest in my brains I was going with grad students-- those never seem to evince much interest in my brains.

‘Pirate?’ I repeated, intrigued. ‘You mean Xenalvr? The *librarian*’s gone off with *Xena*?’

‘Xena?’ repeated one of the females, and snickered, but the male who’d spoken first shushed her.

‘You *know* this person?’ he asked me.

‘Tall? Broad-shouldered? Tangled reddish-blond hair of various shades?’ I countered, and they gathered round in fascination.

‘Have a coffee,’ said the spokesboi now, and I saw that they had, in *certain* contradiction of library rules, set up a percolator right there in the archive. When the librarian’s away the special collections assistants break loose in a big way, apparently. I felt shocked and thrilled, and accepted a cup of contraband. I don’t drink a lot of coffee, but I respect its relevance to their tribe, serving as it does in place of food, water, and any semblance of a social life. Taking coffee with grad students is like sharing neckroom with a vampire, and drinking *forbidden* coffee is an even higher mark of respect. I felt distinctly cool and transgressive as I sipped it.

‘So, about this blonde person?’ prompted the spokesboi, who I’d learned was called Seldom.⁷¹

‘I can’t say anything about her online life, because that would be betraying a confidence,’ I said, pausing dramatically to sip at my

⁷¹ One of the character classes in D&D (shut up) is Archivist. If you visit this page [<http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/ex/20051007a&page=3>], you’ll notice Anselmo Durod being quoted there. A quick run through an anagram generator, and you get “Seldom Around,” which is one of the best names ever for an archivist, imho.

coffee. ‘But,’ I continued, ‘I *did* have a drink with her at the campus pub last week. Oh,’ I said, suddenly seeing the obvious. ‘She must have been on her way here then. What happened?’

‘She showed up here, making an enormous racket,’ one of the female assistants said. ‘Ms. Silverman had to physically *drag* her into her office to mute the noise.’

‘But what did she *want*?’ I asked, entirely forgetting to maintain the appearance of upper-handedness.

‘She said it was high time they went on a real life cruise for a change, and she wanted Silverman to take a couple of weeks off,’ said Seldom. ‘And she must have talked her into it, because,’ he gestured wildly towards the empty office, ‘we’re bereft and leaderless for the next two weeks. Left alone to dust and catalogue, while She-Boss gallivants...’

But I’d stopped listening, though he didn’t stop talking. A real-life cruise. The caffeine fluttered and bounced in my stomach as I remembered Xena’s virtual-life cruises, and whom she’d taken them with. The shelves spun, and I sat down abruptly on the edge of a chair stacked with folders as the implications sunk in.

‘Are you all right?’ asked Seldom. ‘Can I get you anything?’

I shook my head to clear it. ‘Actually,’ I admitted, after several speechless moments, ‘I think I’m pretty much done with the archive materials for now. My rough draft is fairly well flush with citations. I really just came back to...’ my voice trailed off. ‘Well, nothing, really,’ I finished lamely.

‘Then,’ offered one of the females, her eyes gleaming, ‘is there anything you’d like us to bring you just for fun? After all, it’s not often you get access to a special collection.’

I pondered her offer carefully. What I’d *really* like was to just browse the shelves, taking stuff down at random, but apparently they weren’t far enough gone in unsupervised dissipation to allow that. ‘Do you have,’ I asked, ‘anything by a fan called Razzberry Martini? I’d like to reread her stuff, or maybe photocopy the relevant zines. She disappeared years ago, or possibly retreated to APAzines.’⁷²

‘My dear,’ said Seldom, as two of the assistants nodded and headed off to gather up Razz’s stories, ‘I can go one better than *that*. I have

⁷² APAzines are how we used to circulate fanfiction, once upon a time. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amateur_press_association]

her self-published novel. I mean, it's here in the collection as well, but I *own* two copies of it. I might,' he said teasingly, 'be persuaded to lend you a copy. Or sell you one.'

'Why would anyone want two copies of a self-published novel by Razz?' I asked, astounded. 'Surely that's taking ephemera too seriously?'

'I'm writing my thesis on it,' he said stiffly. I apologized, but I must confess my principal emotion was more one of amazement than regret, and he must've seen it in my face. 'Well, I'm writing it on gender constructions in fandom, actually,' he explained. 'But Martini's novel is such a fascinating example that it's become the central focus.'

I kindly refrained from asking how much of his life he'd wasted on this, and instead hunted around in my knapsack and dug out enough money to buy his spare copy of *Didymous Spuriousity: the Memoirs of Razzberry Martini*.⁷³ 'Memoirs?' I said suspiciously, gazing at the lurid cover. 'I thought it was supposed to be a novel.'

'Oh, I'm sure it's highly *fictionalized*,' Seldom said. 'No one in their right mind would buy her wise-child literate-whore persona.'⁷⁴

⁷³ Again, you probably all know this, but for the record, *Didymous Spuriousity* is called that because:

Didymous: Arranged or occurring in pairs; twin.

Spurious: 1. Lacking authenticity or validity in essence or origin; not genuine; false.

2. Of illegitimate birth.

3. Botany: Similar in appearance but unlike in structure or function. Used of plant parts.

And of course it might remind you of another title, [The Heart is Deceitful Above All Things](#).

⁷⁴ The [bumper_car](#) spotted that this is a J.T. LeRoy reference.

[<http://www.jtleroy.com/>]

'Certainly LeRoy seemed suspiciously similar to the characters in Cooper's novels, fucked-up teenage boys in perpetual danger, or to the wise, otherworldly children in Ewert's Web film *Piki & Poko*.' Beachy, Stephen.

'Who is the Real JT LeRoy?' 10 October 2005.

[<http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/people/features/14718/>] (accessed 03 February 2008).

There's also an Amy Player parallel.

'The thing is, Amy has used other identities before--and every time, and I mean EVERY TIME, her goal has just been to fool people into thinking she's

According to her she was part of a suburban demimondaine, consuming culture and paedophilic customers at shocking rates, and all in her after school hours. It *can't* be true. She can't really have gone straight from youth group meetings to hang out with the other motel mice,⁷⁵ plying her trade so she could afford higher-end tastes than her allowance covered. But,' he confided in a near-whisper, 'I almost wish it *were* true. It's a strangely compelling fantasy: precocious teens, jaded before their time, burdened by a longing for artistry and literature that their dull elders can't understand or afford.'

'You don't mean it's actually any *good*?' I asked, appalled.

'Well,' he admitted, 'it's terribly uneven, of course. And it gets confusing at points. I'm still not sure whether it's about just the main character and her twin,⁷⁶ or whether there's a second set of twins as well, and there's no way of sorting out if they're brothers or sisters. My thesis is going to suggest the gender confusion is a deliberate subterfuge, so that the narrator can cross the boundary between 'male' and 'female' so fluidly that the distinction blurs. After all, she begins the novel by claiming it's a 'coincidence' that the character and the author share the same name--so *obviously* she's intentionally problematizing the whole idea of identity.' Or else, I thought, she didn't know what 'coincidence' meant and was too lazy to look it up.

'Or perhaps,' he continued, badly misjudging my interest levels, 'it's all a ruse to protect the real identity of the author.'

'That sounds fascinating,' I told him while I stopped paying attention, which is my standard practice when anyone starts telling me about their thesis. Let's be honest: anyone who uses the word 'problematize' in conversation should be ignored, or possibly hanged.

But back in my room, once I'd read her rather short novel, I revised

more interesting and glamorous than her real self. Look at the LJ entry about "Ciyerra." That was her first big splash into online fandom and she masqueraded as her own foster-sister, who had been sold into child slavery and prostitution just like JonBenet Ramsey. For crying out loud, you know?' Turimel. Comment to 'The LA Story In Full.' 21 January 2005. [<http://turimel.livejournal.com/75050.html?thread=507434#t507434>] (accessed 03 February 2008).

⁷⁵ Motel mice are arguably another LeRoy reference, since LeRoy wrote about 'lot lizards.'

⁷⁶ Shadowkitty and Bentley noticed something important about this.

my opinion slightly. It wasn't entirely lousy. It was a definite improvement on her fanfiction--the photocopies had confirmed my dismal opinion of her earliest work. Granted, the gender confusion of both the novel's narrator and the narrator's sibling made it difficult to know if there were two or four people, and I found this conceit more 'annoying' than 'literary.' And the most charitable opinion I could muster on Razz's attempt to style this a *memoir* was that perhaps she was *ill*: Veracity Deficiency Disorder is all too common amongst would-be writers.

Still, in a queer sort of way I'd *enjoyed* her book. It's not as if her lies were thoroughly reprehensible: she'd never claimed to have HIV or ridden on the coat-tails of the abused,⁷⁷ and she managed to write about her slightly trashy and provincial background with a trace of affection, instead of setting up poor-religious-folk stereotypes just to deride them.⁷⁸ *That* was refreshing.

And her brother and sister protagonists, however many of them there were, were compelling and oddly sympathetic as they desperately chased high culture and settled for pop, amassing a confusing collection of classics and manga, opera and musicals, theatre tickets and DVDs—the whole tangle supposedly funded by their illicit lives as 'motel mice.' I didn't *believe* it, but...it did seem an extraordinary thing to have made up. I caught myself wondering if it *could* be true. *Could* she have spent her adolescence sneaking out

⁷⁷ . *It's not as if her lies were thoroughly reprehensible: she'd never claimed to have HIV or ridden on the coat-tails of the abused*, as did the creators of Anthony Godby Johnson (see also *The Night Listener*) and J.T. LeRoy. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Godby_Johnson] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Night_Listener_%28novel%29] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JT_LeRoy]

⁷⁸ Horrible, classist behaviour indulged in by a certain fan:

'It looks like his intention was to get real Christians to join the fight, and it seems he did manage to hook one, although you can see that most of the people responding counseled him to cool it and stop talking to Msscribe. At any rate, on Msscribe's next post, which she made to draw attention to her Nutty Christian troll for anyone who might have missed him, a real, non-sockpuppet, non-Harry-Potter-fan Christian named [info]danjanboe commented...'

Charlotte Lennox. 'The Msscribe Story, Chapter Three.' 16 June 2006. [http://www.journalfen.net/community/bad_penny/1870.html] (accessed 03 February 2008).

after dance classes and skipping drama club to perpetuate a sibling sex ring?

Of course she couldn't have, I reminded myself firmly, and then started in alarm as Jen entered the room. She raised one eyebrow as I leapt to my feet, and wordlessly shut the door behind her.

'I have to ask you something,' I began, and then realized more background would be required. 'I have to *tell* you something.'

'Please, do whichever you like,' she said, irritatingly unflappable.

'I know you're Josh Amos online,' I said bluntly, wanting to wipe that small cool smile off her face. She looked momentarily shocked. I gloated, but inwardly, because I wanted her to confide in me and alienating her wouldn't help. 'And what I wanted to ask is: how were you planning to manage a strip poker game as Josh? You'd be exposed as soon as you started to lose.'

'I never lose at poker,' she said, cool once more. She stepped closer, much *too* close, and I had to look up at her. My heart hammered wildly. 'Anything else you wanted to know, Miss Mina?'

And there was, but I couldn't find words for the sudden flicker of speculation that was making the hair at the back of my neck stand on end. This close, Jen was unnerving. She felt, if you see what I mean, all *wrong*. For the first time I wondered which was the poser, and which the pose. *Was* Jen pretending to be Josh online? Or was Josh walking around pretending to be Jen?

But surely, I told myself, she'd had breasts under the thin t-shirts she'd worn at camp, right? My memory groped wildly for some clear image of her, but there wasn't one. I tried convincing myself that if she hadn't had breasts I'd have noticed their absence, but the negative argument wasn't completely reassuring either, and her current sweatshirted presence wasn't helping at all. She was smiling at me oddly. I took an awkward step back, banging my leg on the edge of my bed and knocking *Didymous Spuriosity* to the floor. She stooped courteously and picked it up, her face going still and expressionless.

'No,' I managed to gasp. 'There's nothing else I wanted to ask.' And I excused myself with what I'll admit was unseemly haste, but really, I *had* to get out of that room. I was sitting in the TV room for a good half-hour before my heart slowed to anything *like* its normal rate.

I didn't see Jen in the flesh for days after that, but Josh showed up online displaying a spirit of thorough comradeship and helpfulness. He made a quite convincing post arguing that my early work, while intriguing, was after all mere juvenilia, and that no one should be

judged on their childhood efforts at self-expression.⁷⁹ He needn't have made the post--I had no intention of revealing the Jen/Josh connection, if that was what was worrying him--though I appreciated it all the same. It's kind to try to shift the focus when an admired BNF is getting too much heat from the spotlight.

But 'Bound for Detention' was destined, it seemed, for fame. I confess, much of my previous chagrin had dissolved in the face of those impassioned readings and the continuing wave of gifts. Really, I was beginning to sense that I looked no more ridiculous for having *written* it than other people looked for having *read* it. It compared favourably, I humbly concluded, with the creative efforts of my long-ago peer group, and if it could enjoy a resurgence of popularity at this late date it must have some sort of merit. And if Arc *did* read it--well--perhaps it wasn't an altogether bad thing that she should have a glimpse into my early efforts and inclinations. I decided to rise above my discomfiture for the sake of my fans, and selflessly uploaded a copy of 'Bound for Detention' to the Penn'd Passion submission queue.

⁷⁹ As Vuirneen noted, that's more self-serving than not.

Sanguinity Fanfiction: The Dreams of Angels

Title: The Dreams of Angels

Chapter: Two

Author: Warr1or

Pairing: PrincessB/Jab. Sammich forever!

Dedication: For all my fellow sammiches, especially lady_earwig; may the purity of PB/J illuminate your own lives as it has my own.

In the days that followed Jab was pleased to see that Pierce, though possessed of a naturally frivolous nature and ill-accustomed to hard, simple labor, worked determinedly at stocking the castle's storage areas with supplies. Jab knew that Pierce's eyes often followed his own efforts, and he read in that gaze a straightforward admiration for the muscled ease with which Jab hoisted even the heaviest kegs and boxes. Jab kindly proffered praise of the prince's own weaker efforts. He had learned early in his life as a landsman that the recognition and respect of one's manly peers can ease even the most difficult task. "You're doing well, my prince," he said now, laying one large hand on the prince's shoulder. Pierce trembled, doubtless with fatigue from the day's tasks.

Pierce himself, though trained since birth to set his own opinions above those of any mere peasant, felt a renewed rush of heated admiration for this most steadfast of friends. It can't be wrong to look up to Jab, he consoled himself, although admitting even in his thoughts that he looked up to Jab, both physically and spiritually, made him blush warmly. It's not as though I make mental obeisance to some unworthy bumpkin. Jab may be of peasant stock, but he is as quick witted as any noble I have ever known, and well learned. He is honest, and loyal, and a skilled and talented man. There is surely no shame in my appreciation. I don't admire the peasant class in general. I've never felt aught but pity or amusement for any provincial lout before now. So it isn't some unlooked-for change in myself. It's just that Jab, however rustic his background, exemplifies all that is most excellent in a man.

"Thank you," Pierce said out loud, his voice hoarse and low. Silently he reprimanded himself. That's going too far, he told himself. You command armies and servants. You do *not* need to thank this man. But he knew, at a level much deeper and more instinctive than class prejudice could reach, how very worthy Jab was of his fullest gratitude. Without Jab's stalwart care and practical suggestions, the de

St. Aubyn court would have languished, unprepared for attack. For far too long the royal household had been lulled by contrived treaties, choosing the coward's path and ignoring the black-veiled threats behind the vampires' agreements. It had taken Jab's blunt, honest assessment of the castle to awaken Pierce to the dangers of his family's situation. The de St. Aubyn wealth and privilege were a false facade of strength. It was shameful to reflect that his family had left themselves so exposed to mortal and moral danger just to secure their life of ease and pleasure seeking. With Jab here to guide him, Pierce intended to relinquish such flimsy, glittering pursuits for the truer, fuller, deeper pleasures of virtuous manly interaction and the most vigorous red-blooded endeavors.

It was a measure of the revolution in Pierce's attitudes, though a measure unmarked in his own consciousness, that even here at the de St. Aubyn's ancestral home he continued to resist the pressure to cast aside his workmanlike companion in favor of more elite peers. Pierce's uncle the king had openly mocked their efforts to assemble supplies of food and weapons. Princess B had, with her instinctive sweet childlike sympathy, begged her father not to bully her cousin. The king had laughingly protested. He wasn't singling out her cousin and his oafish friend, he told the princess; he just had a lively sense of humor, and so he mocked everyone without bias. The princess, dear innocent maiden, had allowed herself to be persuaded. Pierce had not, though he did not stoop to argue pointlessly: he had more important calls on his time. But he was fully aware that his uncle's attacks were no mere mirthful pastime. The king had a hidden agenda. It was obvious. Why else would he be deliberately heaping scorn on their plans and, even more, on their firm, pure friendship? Pierce could not stand by and let that happen unopposed.

Even now, as he and Jab stood in the cool air of the storage room beneath the castle and admired their growing stockpile, the king approached with a supercilious smile. "Your Highness," said Pierce through gritted teeth, inclining his head correctly but resentfully.

"Nephew, if you've developed a low taste for sweaty, agricultural labor, I have cornfields that need harvesting," the king said derisively. He opened a cask standing next to him, and dipped the bejeweled gold tankard he was carrying. He sniffed the contents curiously, and then laughed scornfully. "Water?" said the king. "Have you forgotten, my brute-bewitched nephew, that we have ample wells here at the castle?"

"That water is special," Pierce said firmly, thankful that he had had

the foresight to store the bulk of it in his own chambers, and Jab's, safe from prying eyes. Only this one cask had been set down here, accessible to the unappreciative king. "We had it brought in specially from the countryside."

"There is nothing special in the damned countryside!" shouted the king in a fit of pique. He threw his tankard against the far wall, spilling its contents and spattering Jab with the spray. Pierce felt an untamed, stormy anger rising within him.

"Uncle, it is blasphemy that even a drop of that pure water should be wasted," he said. "I cannot save that which has seeped into the floor; I only pray it can cleanse the taint of bartered privilege from this accursed place. But I can save these few precious, glistening beads." And so saying he stepped towards Jab, lowered his tongue to Jab's bare shoulder, and licked the water that lay on his tanned skin. The king shuddered with anger or revulsion and fled. Even the usually dauntless Jab shivered at the unexpected physical contact.

"What strange alchemy is this?" Jab asked huskily. He smiled. "The unworthy recoil from the countryman's strengths, or falsely equate the rustic with the base. But you, my forthright and courageous friend, embrace the husbandman in perfect resonance. Our attachment does you great credit, my prince."

2.5 Mina de Malfois and the Artistic Temperament

I'd resolved not to spend the next two weeks fretting about Arc's possible reactions to my juvenilia, and so I plunged wholeheartedly back into *Sanguinity Online*. I'd been neglecting it shamefully lately in favour of uni assignments. I felt I owed it, to myself and to my fans, to sample all that in-game life had to offer. PrinceC had already issued an invitation to some sort of event--he'd said something about a really Great Rite⁸⁰--and I was sure there was lots more fun to be had. Besides, when I'd impulsively tried sharing my fic worries with Josh he'd been blithely dismissive. 'You know what might take your mind off your problems?' he'd suggested.⁸¹ 'Solving somebody else's. I don't know if you've seen her in-game lately, but Ciyerra's morphed into a drooling idiot. Check with Liz; she'll fill you in.'

I was far too charitable to point out how very little morphing must have been required, what with Ciyerra's having been an idiot since the day I'd met her. I'd assured Josh I'd look into it. So I was ready for pretty much anything when I skipped up the front steps and into Malfois Manor to consult with Liz, and just as well: Liz's first words to me were, 'We have to stage an intervention.'

Not really my scene, interventions. But possibly, I thought hopefully, the online kind were more entertaining. After all, the substances *S.O.* players were most prone to over-indulgence in were blood and religion; those were a lot less sordid and depressing than, say, alcohol or crystal meth. So perhaps this would be a lark. Liz rather dampened that hope by shaking her head sadly and launching into a tale of staggering woe.⁸² 'Of course you realize,' she told me, 'that your night with PrinceC and Lord Henri Antoine Silvestre de Gravina

⁸⁰ PrinceC, you'll remember, is a Crowleyite, so while Mina doesn't pick up on this, he's actually trying to invite her to the Rite of *Heiros Gamos*.

⁸¹ With Josh, of course, it's hard to tell if he 's trying to help Ciyerra or to help himself.

⁸² Bad pun. Sorry.

set off *waves* of jealousy.’ That was gratifying to hear, and rather sweet of Liz to tell me, since I knew she herself wasn’t immune to either gentleman’s charms. ‘It’s no wonder Ciyerra plunged into addiction.’

‘What exactly is she addicted to?’ I asked, businesslike.

‘I don’t know what she’s on,’ Liz admitted, ‘but she’s been making a fool of herself every day.’

In my experience Ciyerra was well capable of making a fool of herself without being ‘on’ anything. ‘Are you sure there’s a problem?’ I asked doubtfully.

Liz looked faintly amused, but said, ‘From what I’ve seen and heard, yes. She’s been slurring her speech balloons and stumbling around completely uncoordinated. I’ve caught her several times now walking into walls instead of drifting through them. We should at least check into this.’

I wasn’t completely convinced much larkishness would result from that course of action, but when Stasia breathlessly announced PrinceC’s arrival I put the facts, such as they were, before him, tactfully giving Liz a few moments to recover from the dead swoon she’d collapsed into on sight of him. Honestly, she wasn’t to be blamed. His avatar was immaculately fitted out in the uniform of the de Gravina Royal Guard, and let me tell you, those vampire tailors *really* know their work.

‘That sounds serious,’ he said, astonishing me.

‘Are you sure?’ I asked. ‘It could be just a bid for attention, or a new fad.’ I was remembering the uncoordinated zombified avatars I’d seen down at the dock. Perhaps Ciyerra had picked it up from them.

He hesitated. ‘I shouldn’t be telling you this,’ he said, which I understood to mean he was dying to tell me. ‘I’m not even supposed to know this myself.’ I pulled my chair up closer, and Liz came round, propping her head groggily on one hand but paying determined attention. We watched his chest admiringly as he took a deep breath and launched into his explanation. ‘*Sanguinity*,’ he said, ‘has a covert educational directive.’

‘Oh, yes?’ I said encouragingly.

‘The game is only fully operational if you’ve managed the basics of grammar and spelling,’ he confided. ‘The more errors you make, the more poorly your avatar responds to commands, and if your grammar gets *worse*, or you slip into netspeak, the results are pronounced. The game punishes your avatar for transgression, though if you neither

improve nor deteriorate it registers that as a learning disorder and is lenient.’

‘Punishes how?’ Liz asked.

‘Your avatar’s appearance gets slovenly and uncoordinated, and it starts to slur its speech and make, well, *poor choices of interpersonal alliance*,⁸³ independent of its operator’s wishes.’

We digested this ‘Pedagogy of the Obsessed’ revelation in silence for a moment.⁸⁴ ‘You mean,’ I said eventually, feeling a rising sense of glee, ‘that Ciyerra is semi-literate?’

Liz shook her head. ‘She can’t be,’ she pointed out reasonably. ‘Her avatar was fully functional and stylish until recently.’

I conceded her point. ‘Then...she’s slipped into netspeak or gotten sloppy about grammar?’ I asked. ‘I don’t get it. Why didn’t she just write properly once she noticed her gameself acting like an idiot?’

‘Perhaps she can’t,’ PrinceC said. ‘Perhaps she’s drinking heavily in real life and *can’t* pull it together in-game.’

I considered this. It sounded a grim and sordid situation, *not* the lighthearted gaming relief I’d been so desperately in need of, but I felt a reluctant tug of obligation. Ciyerra was the Malfois Manor ghost, after all. It did leave me with some slight moral responsibility, I supposed.

‘All right,’ I said, sighing. ‘We should try to help her. At least it makes a change from essay writing.’

I realized as soon as I’d spoken that that sounded ungracious, but PrinceC responded sympathetically. ‘I know,’ he grumbled in agreement. ‘I’m beginning, Lady Mina, to understand exactly why you felt it necessary to take a break from your own studies.’

‘You are?’ I asked in alarm, blushing as the shameful words ‘insufficient funds’ surfaced from the well of memory.

‘Oh, yes, absolutely,’ he said. ‘I’m beginning to think I should schedule regular sabbaticals myself, even though it would take longer to finish my degree. Do you realize this is the first time I’ve logged on here in over a week? And I’ve had to miss two cons this year. What

⁸³ Yes. Well. We all make those sometimes, don’t we? Especially when drunk.

⁸⁴ *Pedagogy of the Obsessed* owes its phrasing to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and its subject matter to online fandom.

kind of ‘education’ can I be getting if it disrupts my travel plans 20% of the time?’

‘How perfectly dreadful for you,’ I said, relieved. ‘I *quite* agree. Uni’s supposed to *broaden* your experience, not curtail it like that.’

His avatar laid one perfectly gloved hand on my arm and held it firmly while gazing deeply into my avatar’s eyes. ‘I knew you’d understand,’ he said huskily, and even though the soundcard transmitted the ‘thud’ quite clearly I barely noticed that Liz had fallen, unconscious again, to the floor.

While she was out PrinceC repeated his invitation to that rite he’d mentioned. ‘I’m sure you’d enjoy it,’ he said meaningfully, ‘even though Lord Henri Antoine Silvestre de Gravina won’t be there.’ I blushed from head to toe, and frantically nudged Liz with one foot until she woke up.

‘So where exactly has Ciyerra been staging these public displays?’ I asked hurriedly, the second Liz’s eyes opened.

She pulled herself into her chair and I repeated the question. ‘She’s been staggering around all over the place,’ Liz said. ‘Except for some of the youth nightclubs--Stasia says she’s fine there.’

‘Which clubs are those?’ PrinceC asked.

‘Several different ones,’ Liz said thoughtfully. ‘The Sordid Angel and Naughty Kitty are the ones Stasia goes to most frequently.’

‘Then we should head over there and check it out,’ I said decisively.

‘I can’t,’ Liz said. Really, it’s so hard to make the help do *anything* these days. ‘I have a guild meeting.’

‘I didn’t know you were in a guild,’ I said, inserting a subtle note of rebuke and hurt feelings into the proceedings. It *wounded* me, the way my staff kept secrets and conducted personal lives on the side, it really did. Some of them, I had reason to know, even maintained lj filters that I wasn’t privy to.

‘I’m not, exactly,’ Liz said, seemingly oblivious to my wounds. ‘I’m trying to organize a guild. I’ll let you know how it goes.’

I was almost, but not quite, mollified. ‘How thoughtful of you,’ I said, chillingly correct. ‘And PrinceC and I will inform you of our findings once we’ve cased Ciyerra’s haunts.’

‘Perfect,’ said Liz briskly, beaming the open friendly smile of someone who doesn’t even know she’s offended a dear friend and employer. I forgave her, silently. I’m not one to dwell, as you all know.

The bars Liz had named were indeed, it turned out, located in *Sanguinity*'s youth section. I confirmed this when my avatar, striding along beside PrinceC, came to an abrupt and undignified halt as she crashed into an invisible glass wall.

'Lady Mina!' PrinceC said, hurrying to my side. 'Oh, Blood, I'd forgotten you're over twenty-one. You can't get in here.'

'What?' I asked, dazed.

'There's a protective barrier around this area,' he explained. 'Adults can't get in here. Some of the bars I can't even get into--they have an '18 and under' policy.'

'Then how is Ciyerra getting in?' I asked, annoyed. 'She's my age, and not just in the real world; her *Sanguinity* profile clearly lists her as an adult.'

PrinceC looked bewildered. 'I have no idea,' he admitted.

There was a cynical laugh from a nearby alley, and Josh stepped out of the shadows. 'I'm amazed,' he said, smirking. 'Are you serious? Neither of you know how to cross age barriers?'

I didn't like what I thought were the implications of that. PrinceC looked equally affronted, though whether by the suggestion that we'd willingly hang out in the underaged sections of *Sanguinity* or merely because Josh knew something he didn't I couldn't say.

'Why,' I asked coldly, 'would you expect either of us to know how to breach an age barrier? What possible reason could we have for lurking around the children's section?' If he brought up *Bound for Detention*, I vowed, I was going to exact some form of terrible revenge.

Josh looked amused. 'Because, dear Mina,' he said, placing an overly-familiar arm across my shoulders, 'it's an absolutely ideal place to acquire fans and disciples.'⁸⁵

I shrugged out from under his admittedly attractive arm. 'I've never needed to go trolling for fans,' I informed him. 'My legions of fangirls seek me out, not the other way around.'

⁸⁵ And, reportedly, underaged lovemonkeys.

"I'm slightly disturbed that she's in her 40s and one of the reasons she's leaving JF is because they don't allow minors. Dude, find asslicking minions friends your own age, or at least somewhere in the same decade."

Wanktastic, 04 November 2005

[<http://www.journalfen.net/community/wankitywank/3536.html?thread=344528#t344528>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

‘Well, *whatever* brings you here,’ said Josh, failing to admit that he’d played any part in this, ‘you’re very lucky that you ran into me.’ PrinceC snorted. Josh looked him up and down thoughtfully.

‘*You’ll* just need a simple age patch,’ he said. ‘It will hardly alter your appearance at all. Just plug the code I’m emailing you into your userinfo.’ PrinceC looked highly reluctant to plug anything of Josh’s anywhere. ‘I have something special for us, Mina. After all, we need disguises; PrinceC only has to shake off a few months. Unless you’d like to change,’ he offered PrinceC with exaggerated courtesy. ‘Can I offer you a change of sex, or species?’

‘No, thank you,’ said PrinceC firmly, and Josh snickered.

I didn’t entirely trust Josh, especially now that his *extremely* OOC concern for Ciyerra’s well-being stood exposed as a scam of unknown purpose. But somehow my suspicions failed to stop me from inserting his code into my profile, and PrinceC must have done the same, although he grumbled about the immorality of illegal hacks.

‘*So* upright and honest,’ Josh said, leering at PrinceC. ‘A perfect scout. If unauthorized alterations bother you, you can always wait here while I escort Mina wherever she’s going.’ PrinceC, to my enormous relief, refused; this all felt dangerous enough without being alone with Josh.

We all, by common consent, rebooted, and I reeled in horror. PrinceC was, as promised, largely unchanged, but Josh and I had been dramatically reconfigured as young cat-eared otaku. Josh’s hair was electric blue. Worse yet, mine was pink.

‘Oh, yeah,’ Josh added casually, ‘the rules are different in the zone—you can relax your grammar and spelling. In fact, you kind of have to.’ As he spoke we stepped through the barrier and into teenland.

‘Yes,’ said Josh. ‘It’s the covers you and I are using; PrinceC is safe. But if we sound too literate, the disguise will fail, and you’ll look like yourself. So while we’re in the clubs, try to utilize some netspeak.’ That speech *hadn’t* been in netspeak, and I watched in fascination as his avatar flickered between otaku-kid and the usual Josh.

‘Why netspeak?’ I asked, though I already understood. I just liked watching him shimmer.

‘The game expects u 2,’ he responded. ‘Liek I said, r hax will fale if we’re 2 literate. r default is dum. Teh youth areas r zoned for netspeak neway, so we cn walk ok and stuf in here.’

So that was how it worked, I mused, irritated by this evidence of

cloaked-and-bearded Grammar Nazism.⁸⁶ The childsafe areas of *Sanguinity*, having been designed for teens, didn't punish poor grammar with drunkenness. An interesting idea, but a bit discriminatory, no? 'What happens to fully literate teens who loathe netspeak, or who start using proper grammar?' I asked, nettled on their behalf. (I am ashamed to record, even for posterity, how I actually typed that speech.)

'They can lose the bunny ears and stuff, and sometimes extremely literate youths cause the barrier to malfunction and they gain access to all the XXX parts of *Sanguinity*,' Josh claimed, then transformed back into the blue-haired stranger with a quick, 'Cum on!!!' And that, dear reader, is quite enough illiteracy to be going on with. I'll give you the clean version, and you can *imagine* us typing like idiots for the duration of this scene, if it's all the same to you.

PrinceC rolled his eyes and twitched his wolf-ears in annoyance. 'Shows how much *he* knows,' he said, while Josh led on. 'That's not a bug, it's a feature. The barrier is meant to fail for literate players--the game is designed to encourage new players to abandon netspeak. The increased access to adult areas is a perk for intelligent teens. And it *doesn't*,' he added hotly, 'extend to x-rated regions when you're under eighteen. It only lets you enter areas that are safeguarded against explicit sex. The Creator has more sense than Josh gives her credit for.'

I wondered briefly whether all these barriers were meant to protect the kids from the adults, or vice versa. I hate to *exclude* people, but

⁸⁶ The Nazism in this sentence is, I assure, purely the Grammar kind, not the Harmonian kind.

'I consider both G/H and R/Hr "the Real Deal," just like I consider Eva Bruan/Adolph Hitler "the Real Deal." Eva was crushing on Hitler for YEARS for reasons unknown. Hitler kept her around because, since "The Night of the Long Knives" when the SA was destroyed by the SS (Putting the SS in power.), the rumor going around German High Command was that the reason the SA was destroyed was because their Leader rejected Hitler for a sixteen year old boy. Said Leader was given a gun with a single bullet, and told to do the right thing. Hitler had the SS destroy the SA in revenge for this rejection.'

Lysette, quoted by Tehrin. 06 April 2007.

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/hp_cornfield/22392.html] (accessed 03 February 2008).

quite honestly I don't hang out with young fans all that often. I prefer the company of adults. And the last thing I need is to be accused of leading someone's child astray. I'd rather steer clear until they're all grown up and have gone astray on their own. It was making me nervous just being here on the wrong side of that barrier. Perhaps, I thought in a moment of cringe-inducing clarity, this is how Arc feels about me, because of the whole student-staff divide.

We entered, against my better judgement, the Sordid Angel. My swift prayer that no one I knew would be there was immediately kicked to the curb when I saw Stasia dancing wildly, part of a circle of girls that centred around Rabbit. I was about to suggest to PrinceC that we leave, but at that exact moment some guy said, 'PrinceC! Who's the girl? Hottie!' and I remembered: *no one could recognize me*.

'Would you excuse me for a moment?' I asked, and made my way across the dance floor, unobtrusively joining the fringe of Rabbit's circle.

What can I say? My avatar *was* hot. Josh had done well by me; I made a mental note to thank him. I was accepted into the ring around Rabbit without comment. Rabbit herself even danced her way towards me, smiling with a degree of friendliness that should, in retrospect, have worried me. 'I saw you walk in!' she yelled over the music. She wrapped her arms around me and ground her avatar against my back. Several girls screamed and cheered in mock, or at least I hope it was mock, arousal,⁸⁷ and the usually sweet-tempered Stasia glared at me. 'And I know the guy with you is Josh,' Rabbit whisper-hissed in my ear, 'so now I'm wondering: who the hell are you?'

'Who wants to know?' I countered, leaning my head back against her shoulder.

'His former fiancée,' she said coldly, but without dropping the smile for an instant. Anyone watching would have assumed she adored me.

⁸⁷ Tsk, tsk, Mina: you're failing to be supportive.

"1. Several incidents of a type of humor, as in, one woman stating how hot she was about (show, story, picture, character, whatever), and another woman nearby saying basically 'if you're going to be horny, don't bring it near me'. And everyone laughs and goes on, but this is a homophobic statement." Cimmerians, 27 March 2007

[<http://cimmerians.livejournal.com/7268.html?thread=213348#t213348>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

‘His...what?’ I gasped, stumbling to a halt. I turned to face her. Her friends danced on around us, either oblivious to the tension or, more likely, used to watching Rabbit smilingly eviscerate people on the dance floor. ‘Wait, what? You were going to get married? Where, in Canada or something?’

‘No,’ she said, tossing her hair. I opened my mouth to argue, but I didn’t get a chance. ‘You’d better not be thinking of spreading lies and rumours about him.’

‘I wouldn’t!’ I protested, though I thought ‘lies’ was a funny way to describe the truth. ‘I just...I mean...are you *sure*?’

She narrowed her violet eyes. ‘Of course I’m sure,’ she said. ‘He has a *penis*, thank you very much.’⁸⁸

‘He does? You’re really sure?’ I asked, willing to face her prettified wrath if it meant getting a definite answer to this pressing question.

‘Yes!’ she snapped, then regained her composure and her candy-coated smile. ‘I should know. We used to sleep together as children.’

‘You used to do what?’ I gasped, but she just laughed and licked my neck before walking away. Her friends all spontaneously quit the dancefloor and trailed after her.

‘Talking about me?’ Josh asked when I staggered over to where he was standing. I didn’t deign to respond.

‘Ciyerra’s in the lounge,’ PrinceC announced, returning from an apparent reconnaissance mission to the back of the club. He took my hand, and we made our way to the poorly-lit room where Ciyerra sat surrounded by adoring teens. Her worshippers wore unnecessarily revealing clothes topped by long striped knitted scarves,⁸⁹ and if that reflected their real-world tastes then I spontaneously renounced all hope of understanding current fashion trends. I felt ancient in the face

⁸⁸ Thanks again to Turimel, to Fandom Wank, and to the intellicock.

“Yes, VB did come out to live with OB in Oregon, but VB was depressed and some time before had committed suicide. Mr. Frodo is definitely a man (which OB can attest to having slept with him that night and been brushed by his Very Real Cock Thank You as he got out of bed that morning) and she doesn’t appreciate her dead ex-girlfriend being labeled as her current and very live boyfriend.”

Guinevere33, 26 May 2004

[<http://www.journalfen.net/community/fwgreatesthits/1169.html>] (accessed 17 March 2007).

⁸⁹ I was thinking Doctor Who here, but HP fandom also works.

of such faddish idiocy. I mean, if you're chilly enough to require an endless wool scarf, then the obvious solution would be to put some bloody clothes on, wouldn't it? Replace your bum ruffles with an actual skirt, sort of thing.

As we edged our way into the lounge some of those present shot me hostile looks, a phenomenon I thought not unconnected with the admiring and openly lustful looks they all threw PrinceC. He seemed oblivious to all this admiration and lust. 'Bunch up, you guys,' he said, and a flock of alarmingly young avatars leapt up to make room for us. I realized that, however abhorrently youthful they were to my eyes, these were in fact very nearly PrinceC's peers. Gads. We sank into an overstuffed sofa, and Josh sat down beside me.

'Are you a friend of PrinceC's?' one of the flock asked me perkily, and I nearly bit my tongue in half to keep from introducing myself. You can't imagine how trying it is for a BNF of my popularity to go about incognito.

'She's my girlfriend,' PrinceC said suavely but inaccurately, holding up our still-clasped hands. A bit embarrassing, the hand-holding. I mean, all right for people his age I'm sure, but I felt mildly silly. And everyone else, judging from their expressions, now wanted to murder me in cold pixels. Except for Ciyerra herself, who was eyeing PrinceC hungrily but carefully showing no sign of noticing I existed. Her cut direct was flawless, I'll admit. I snuggled in vengefully against his right arm.

Once we'd settled in, the group's attention returned to Ciyerra, who was basking in their gaze. Her tragic pose and carefully bowed head didn't fool me: she had to be loving this. She raised her head and sorrowfully sipped green liquid from a skull-shaped goblet.⁹⁰

'I used to be famous in fandom,' she said in melancholy tones, but shook her head sadly as soon as her audience began to ply her with eager questions. 'No, no: I can't tell you who I was.' She sobbed, and raised a black lace handkerchief to her face.

'I thought everybody knew who she was,' I whispered to PrinceC, then clarified, 'I mean, I thought they knew who she was pretending to be.'

'Not this crowd,' Josh pointed out. 'That's the beauty of the young.'

⁹⁰ That would, of course, be absinthe, and I suspect Ciyerra's a Byron fan.

These are mere Babes in Fandom, Cara Mina.⁹¹ They've been fans for precisely ten minutes, and know nothing about recent history or fannish norms. Trust me: if you committed psecicide right here in front of them, nine tenths of them would fall for it, and when you were found out they'd be as shocked as if it were the world's first lie.'

'Do you miss being famous?' asked one Innocent Young Thing.⁹²

'Oh, not really,' said Ciyerra, and both PrinceC and Josh laid warning hands on my thighs. 'It's a relief, honestly, to not have my every move watched by a crowd of fangirls. But what I do miss, more than anything, is the creative outlet my art used to afford me. I feel as if my soul is stifling without it!'

'Yes,' another bescarfed⁹³ listener sighed, nodding solemnly. 'I think my soul would shrivel up and *die* if I stopped making beaded

⁹¹ *Cara mia*, natch. A bit like Mrs. Elton's *caro sposo*, I suppose.

⁹² That would be akin to a Bright Young Thing, I guess.

⁹³ For your enjoyment: knitting wank.

'The main reason we write here is to communicate (i.e., it's not a creative writing forum), and if you cannot effectively communicate with people because they're becoming bored and/or cannot decipher what you're saying, you're not doing anyone any good.'

kitchenwitch

[<http://community.livejournal.com/spinningfiber/990136.html?thread=7772600#t7772600>], 5 December 2006 (accessed 15 March 2007)

'I am sorry to see that when you made the medal you put a naked person on it. My children and family look at my blog and so do members of my church. I worked hard and I really wanted this medal and now I can't use it. I can't put a naked picture on my blog. I wish you had thought of how other people live when you made a medal that is supposed to be for everybody.'

J, quoted by Franklin, 'The Panopticon: Medal Mailbag,' [<http://the-panopticon.blogspot.com/2006/03/medal-mailbag.html>], 01 March 2006 (accessed 15 march 2007).

'I will say that I feel sorry for those like J who are so determined to see obscenity everywhere that they deprive themselves of many of the good and beautiful things that humanity has created.'

Franklin, 'The Panopticon: Dear Marie,' [<http://the-panopticon.blogspot.com/2006/03/dear-marie.html>], 02 March 2006 (accessed 15 March 2007).

jewellery.’⁹⁴

‘Then you understand me, *really* understand me,’ Ciyerra said thrillingly, and the kid looked suitably thrilled, though if she’d known what an utter *loon* she was being credited with understanding she’d probably have fled in terror or disgust. ‘I can’t return to my art,’ Ciyerra went on. ‘No, don’t ask me why.’ No one *had* asked her, the silly bint, but none of her audience were alert enough to point that out. She seemed to be casting some sort of spell over them. ‘But I simply must find some other means of expressing myself creatively. I need to be part of the Artistic Community once again.’

‘You could write fanfiction, have you heard of that?’ offered one of her acolytes helpfully. All three of us on the couch winced in a moment of perfectly synchronized pain.

‘Yeah, there’s a really hot story called *Bound for Detention*,’ said another. ‘You could do something like that.’ I snickered, unable to stop myself. Ciyerra gave us a chilly look, then rose gracefully to her feet, pausing to straighten out the long skirt of her Victorian mourning garb.

‘That’s a little too crude for my taste, darlings,’ she said, ‘but I’m sure I could create something every bit as erotic, and vastly more subtle and romantic, if I tried.’⁹⁵ And on that note she left, followed by a gaggle of youthful players and, at a discreet distance, the three of us. As soon as she passed the age barrier her adoring followers dropped off, and she began to stumble and flail wildly. Was she, I wondered (trying to force myself to feel sympathy rather than amusement), sitting out there somewhere, alone at her keyboard, assuaging her longing for an artiste’s life by getting sloshed on absinthe? My effort to will up some sympathy failed, and I sporfled quietly.

Over the next few days we all strove to be tolerant of Ciyerra’s unmet need for artistic self-expression. I began to believe PrinceC had been right when he suggested she was drunk in real life. She’d

⁹⁴ That’s shameless fanservice for Gjules. I needed to use some kind of craft in that sentence, and we’d just been discussing beadwork, so... *shrug*

⁹⁵ As Dubaiyan pointed out (<http://mina-de-malfois.livejournal.com/17685.html?thread=637717#t637717>), Ciyerra’s being very Lady Catharine-esque there with her potential proficiency. And this? Is one of those references I would have forgotten to credit. So especial thanks to Dubaiyan for that.

repeatedly posted the same quotation everywhere: on her livejournal, on her Deadjournal, on her *Sanguinity Online* profile page, on the door of her room in Malfois Manor. It claimed of artists, in defiance of common sense and A.A., that ‘to that end, their lives must contain a kind of youth and spring, a kind of habitual intoxication.’⁹⁶ Trust Ciyerra to take bad advice literally.

But Liz and PrinceC and I also discussed the possibility that we’d been had. If she was really drinking heavily offline, would she be obliquely boasting about it via quotage? Maybe she’d started cold-bloodedly abusing the English language in order to gain unfettered access to the easily impressed denizens of the youth section. Having slipped into bad grammar, she might be habitually misspelling her way around the rest of the *Sanguinity* landscape, and making a zombiefied fool of herself in the process. Netspeak is a gateway drug, you know.

She pulled it together while she was on-duty at Malfois Manor, however. I couldn’t fault either her haunting abilities or her work ethic. What I could fault, and did, was the extraordinary parade of guests she saw fit to drag home on her off-hours. She was seeking an artistic outlet in dead earnest, was our resident spirit. To that end she was socializing with the sorts of people that made one rather appreciate the bourgeoisie and their blessed mundanities.

Liz and I were sharing a pot of tea the afternoon Ciyerra showed up with someone called ‘Purl of Pauline.’⁹⁷ ‘This is Purl,’ Ciyerra said grandly. ‘She’s an artist who knits.’

Well, I’m never behindhand in greeting a fellow artist, even if they aren’t a wordsmith. ‘What’s your forte?’ I asked encouragingly. ‘Do you paint, or sculpt, or what?’

‘I knit,’ said Purl pointedly. Well, I knew *that*; Ciyerra had just said so. But why was she blithering on about her grannyish hobby when I’d asked about her art? She must, contrary to all appearances, be shy. ‘Perhaps you’re familiar with 42.8, my commentary on the necessity of ecoterrorism,’ she said, ‘or N30, my bold condemnation of corporate multinationalism.’ I wasn’t, though I felt a fleeting respect for the seriousness of her chosen subjects.

‘These were...paintings?’ I guessed cautiously.

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Section 800. In the immortal phrase of Scifantasy, Ciyerra’s being an Übermoron.

⁹⁷ The Perils of Pauline.

‘No,’ she said impatiently. ‘They were homespun hand-dyed skeins of wool.’⁹⁸ Liz and I exchanged a brief look, heavily laden with suppressed laughter, and fled.

Later that day I wandered into the Malfois Manor rose garden and had the misfortune to run into Ciyerra and another new discovery. This one, Ciyerra told me proudly, was Turr K’ee, widely renowned for her meta posts.

‘I’ll have to make a point of visiting your livejournal,’ I said cordially, in response to which mild pleasantry Turr K’ee freaked abruptly out.

‘That’s the hellish part of being so intelligent and attractive!’ she informed me, waving her arms wildly.⁹⁹ ‘People are always looking at

⁹⁸ I bet people think I make this stuff up, but I don’t.

“185 yards

10 oz

apx 11 WPI

2 ply

(one ply being hand dyed black wool top with hand dyed red mohair locks.

The other ply being wool, nylon and recycled silk sari.)

58,408 is a rough estimate of Iraqi civilians killed since Bush invaded.

The largest percentage of the population, are children.”

Pippikneesocks, “58,408,”

[http://community.livejournal.com/fiber_friday/203270.html] 5 January 2007

(15 March 2007)

“124 yards of hand-dyed, handspun Navajo 3 ply wool. The word "grief" brings to mind the pain that mankind inflicts upon its own and the Cherokee Trail of Tears is one such example.”

yarnwench, “Grief,”

[http://community.livejournal.com/fiber_friday/203085.html] 5 January 2007

(15 March 2007)

⁹⁹ “Okay, here’s something depressing: I self-sabotage with diets/weight because being constantly hit on puts me into anxious terror, not really because I’m rape-paranoid, but a) because I hate getting sexually harassed all the fucking time, and b) because at some point, one of them will ask me out and I’ll have to say no. I’ll have to lie or out myself or say no.

So two things I hate: being noticed not on my terms and saying no. Plus lying. No wonder I stayed fat; I had enough anxiety triggers in fucking graduate school as it was without being sexually harassed by skeezy male professors. It’s exhausting, you know? There’s an entire gender I don’t trust and it’s exhausting, because I like being beautiful but I don’t like all the constant noticing. You get to recognize the look in their eyes. I knew it from

me and reading me and making passes at me! And it's pointless, pointless! There are only about four people on livejournal who are intelligent enough to understand my posts anyway!¹⁰⁰ I backed away hurriedly, and immediately thereafter adjusted the Manor's security settings upwards so Ciyerra would be unable to bring home unscreened guests.

In short, our resident ghost's restless moodiness was growing oppressive. It came as quite a relief when she announced her decision to return to photography. True, I'd waxed impatient back in the day when she'd been posting regular shots of her at-home ghost-of-BalletChic altar. But having her resettle into familiar idiocy was, I put it to you, preferable to watching her bounce from one bad influence to another in her quest for inspiration.

And she was not without talent, I had to admit. Granted, photographs of ball-jointed dolls¹⁰¹ in compromising positions might

when I was fourteen, and it always made me so unhappy when it came from men. Which it usually does when you're a late-blooming lesbian. Even before the Blindingly Obvious became apparent to me, I always knew that that look was bad news for me because I couldn't give them back. So fucking great. I'm a perfectionist and the not fucked in the head part of myself likes doing good health things and being as beautiful as I can be and happy in my skin, but the crazy and cynical realist within are like, "fucking great, I can't wait for the daily energy suck that is constantly being hit on for being a pretty, femme-y lesbian with good taste in comics, the ability to shoot a gun, and scorn for pretty boys. THAT WILL BE THE FUCKING BEST."" Jennyo, [<http://jennyo.livejournal.com/761002.html>], 14 March 2007, (18 March 2007)

¹⁰⁰ "5. Esoteric academic stuff has a place in fandom and I'm not necessarily responsible for translating it for you unless I'm aiming at the wider reading audience. I mean, yes. I would love to have the long discussion of performing sexuality on LJ and how there's a curious tension between the (female heterosexual) author and the queered text that she's producing, and in the queered interaction she produces as a performing subject where affective response is inscribed as a virtual sexual interaction, but if there are four people who understood what the hell I just blathered above, I'm cool with that. And telling me I'm just being esoteric to be superior or to flaunt my insecurities makes me want to beat you with a stick." Jennyo, [<http://jennyo.livejournal.com/346641.html>], 16 July 2004,(18 March 2007)

¹⁰¹ [<http://arkadiandreams.livejournal.com/>].

not be to everyone's taste--quite honestly it might not be to *anyone's* taste--but she brought a lot of flair to the endeavour. Her choice of dollclothes, furniture, backdrop and accessories were skilfully done. Word spread, and I selflessly helped spread it, rewarded by the in-house presence of an increasingly perky and cheerful haunt.

In short order the Cult of the Tented Tartan caught wind of her portraiture. Several of them willingly paid *Sanguinity* points for naughty photos of mannequins representing their favourite fictional males. I admit to perusing those in shocked fascination. A blond vampire, a confusedly-similar blond wizard, several masked gentlemen including one deformed masterful virgin, and a variously attired Time Lord all made their appearances.¹⁰² The Tartanists proudly sported Ciyerra's commissioned works on their userinfo pages, seemingly oblivious to the inherent weirdness of dollfies with their hands down their pants.¹⁰³ Ciyerra basked in this newfound source of attention, and I started accumulating notoriety points just for having her on staff.

I did wonder, though, what would happen when the commissions ran out. I needn't have. Liz had quite sensibly devised a plan that made fullish use of Ciyerra's affinity for props and settings. It turned out that the Guild she'd been organizing was for actors. She'd contacted all those who'd done readings of *Bound for Detention*, plus a few comely Elizabeths who'd expressed an interest. Now she suggested Ciyerra join them as costumer and set designer, an offer our artiste eagerly

¹⁰² *A blond vampire, a confusedly-similar blond wizard, several masked gentlemen including one deformed masterful virgin, and a variously attired Time Lord* would be, in order of appearance: Spike from BtVS; Leatherpants!Draco from the Draco Trilogy; Tuxedo Mask and the Phantom of the Opera; and of course Doctor Who.

¹⁰³ Well, it's no weirder than marrying them.

"i am just curious. if i get an engagement ring for my boy and myself, is it weird/crazy/mad to you? i treat my dolls not as my "kids", but as my "boyfriends". does anyone else do the same thing? can dolls be married to their owners instead of another (or other) dolls?"
Haha, in Den of Angels; quoted by Hristaesir, 09 March 2006
[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/903961.html] (accessed 17 Marck 2008).

See also:

[http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Can_My_Doll_Marry_Me_Instead_Of_Another_Doll%3F] (accessed 17 March 2008).

accepted.

I felt ever so slightly neglected, and I was seriously tempted to set aside my other works for a while to try my hand at writing a vidplay for the Guild. I was past due a feverish burst of creativity, really. Liz had already acquired one completed vidplay which was, she assured me, not only dead brill in its own right, but cleverly calculated to take full advantage of the current craze for femmeslash. What could I possibly say to that, other than that I was delighted? Polite noises notwithstanding, though, what I really felt was irritation. My *Bound for Detention* had only just reinvigorated intellifemmeslash,¹⁰⁴ and here was some other author honing in on plots I might well have been intending to write myself.¹⁰⁵ *Grasping*, that's what it was.

But I have to admit, when Liz flipped me the script I was rather taken with it. Josh's phemmeslash was a cleverly recast *Phantom* with all female characters, and the scenes in which Erika appeared in Krista's bedroom were *quite* hot. Ciyerra would be well challenged in differentiating the various sets, since every scene took place in a character's bedroom, as they spoke directly into a webcam. But then, Ciyerra excelled at altars, so no doubt she was up to the task.

Liz could hardly wait, she said, to start production of *The Theatre Manager's Daughter*, and really?¹⁰⁶ I was looking forward to seeing it myself.

¹⁰⁴ Intellifemmeslash is not to be confused with intellislash or the intellicock.

[<http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Intellislash>] (accessed 17 Marck 2007).

[<http://www.journalfen.net/community/fwgreatesthits/1169.html>] (accessed 17 Marck 2007).

¹⁰⁵ Josh stole the ideas she was going to have!

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/1042717.html] (accessed 17 March 2008).

¹⁰⁶ *The Theatre Manager's Daughter* is a little like Takarazuka POTO, only not: in *The Theatre Manager's Daughter*, the characters as well as the actors are female.

[<http://community.livejournal.com/phanwank/780843.html>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

2.6 Mina de Malfois and the Sin of Apostasy

I'd been wrestling for some time now with the question of what to do with my work in progress (which was ferociously popular, and continued to be a major draw at 'Penn'd Passion' even without regular updates).¹⁰⁷ But I was pushed into making a decision when rumour reached me that Warr1or had embarked on a new crusade. I wasn't eager to become a target, as you can well imagine. And Arc was still away, although due back soon, so I was having to ponder the problem on my own.

The thing was, Warr1or had decided that any fanfiction author found guilty of abandoning a work in progress was a kind of fandom apostate, and he had taken it upon himself to hunt those authors down. He suspected them, he made it clear, of desertion: WIPs left languishing without updates were clear proof, to his heated and disordered mind, that the author was drifting away from *Sanguinity* fandom. And so he was not only tracking down authors of WIPs, but subjecting those on his list to a campaign of harassment designed to force them to make a choice. Either they must make a public declaration of their loyalties and update the damned fic, or else they must remove and destroy all their *Sanguinity* works and post a Goodbye Cruel Fandom letter.¹⁰⁸

I don't mind telling you, I'd already considered taking down *At His Lordship's Behest*. It wasn't that I hadn't had a sufficient number of comments to persuade me to continue. I'd had a thoroughly gratifying amount of positive feedback, and a quick comparison with *Of Vice and Velvet's* comments stats showed me still, as expected, in the lead. But I just hadn't had time to work on it, and I couldn't seem to rekindle my initial creative enthusiasm. Only the thought of my fans stayed my

¹⁰⁷ This installment, especially the first sentence, is meant to echo the tone of *Snailmail Affair*.

¹⁰⁸ Numerous Goodbye Cruel Fandom letters exist, of course, written whenever someone feels FAFIA. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GAFIA>]

hand: I knew how upset and bereft they'd feel without those opening chapters to console them.

Not that some of them deserved any consolation. You would not believe the sense of entitlement some readers have. Just because they'd sent me a few paltry gifts, or bestowed paid account time or *Sanguinity Online* tithing points on me, some of these fangirls were possessed of the entirely erroneous notion that they had a positive *right* to updates. They pestered me with questions, and with reviews that said only, 'Update soon!!!' I had begun to fully and deeply appreciate Arc's advice about not accepting gifts.

And now that Warr1or was on the prowl once more (though no longer, thanks to my home in Tia House, claiming to be possessed of my IP address), the question had acquired new urgency. In his self-consecrated quest to cleanse our fandom of apostasy he had crossed a dagger-drawn line. He had breached that one revered standard that rises above mere differences of creed, practice, or symbol, and that eclipses variance in pairing, kink, genre or even fandom: the Sanctity of the Friendslock.¹⁰⁹ He had been quoting, as evidence of certain apostasy among the Sanguinites, from livejournal posts that *had never been public*. The internet quaked with indignation.

Unfortunately it also quaked with mirth, and at PrinceC's expense. Warr1or hadn't, I was convinced, *meant* to humiliate PrinceC. He'd merely publicly denounced a perceived defection from *Sanguinity* in favour of something that, in Warr1or's phrase, 'constituted a new fandom on which PrinceC was bestowing the undeserved gift of his attention.' And, unwilling to let the defection occur unopposed, Warr1or had screencapped and reposted parts of one of PrinceC's flocked-and-screened posts--in order, he said, to prove that PrinceC's interests had shifted. I noticed Warr1or didn't denounce PrinceC as immoral, faithless, or vile (and those were three of the least objectionable terms he'd applied to the other authors of ill-updated WIPs). Instead he'd made a heartfelt plea to *Sanguinity* fandom at large to rush to *Of Vice and Velvet* and smother PrinceC with renewed entreaties to continue it.

Except *Sanguinity* fandom was too busy reeling about with laughter to offer much in the way of positive feedback and pleas for continuance. What Warr1or had chosen to interpret as 'a new fandom'

¹⁰⁹ The Sanctity of the Friendslock is such that even Fandom Wank respects it

was more along the lines of ‘an embarrassing delusion.’ No bloody wonder PrinceC had carefully flocked his post and secured it from the eyes of all but the similarly deluded. For once I found myself grateful to have been left off a friend’s special livejournal filter: it stood me in good stead not to have been screencaptured commenting to encourage PrinceC in his special spiritual beliefs. The variously-titled historical personages who *had* been caught commenting were all likely too far gone in eccentricity to care that their pseudonyms were being bandied about the internet, but *I* wasn’t.

PrinceC, it stood revealed, had made a lengthy and solemn post announcing to his ickle wee friends¹¹⁰ that he was, in fact, the reincarnation of someone called James Morrow Walsh.¹¹¹ And he might have been able to pass that off as an in-character RPG post¹¹²--I suspected that was what Warr1or had taken it for--but the chain of comments made it too, too unflinchingly obvious that he and his special filter were in deadly earnest. They all, to a mun, believed that they were reincarnates, and were moreover bound and determined to defend the Good Names and posthumous honour of their former selves.¹¹³

It was all rather mortifying. I mean, my avatar had been seen in-game--however heavily disguised--holding *hands* with his. We were

¹¹⁰ For *ickle wee friends* see <http://community.livejournal.com/weeicklefriends/>.

¹¹¹ James Morrow Walsh was real, of course.

¹¹² In-character RPG posts can be found at <http://community.livejournal.com/deadmentalking>.

¹¹³ *Determined to defend the Good Names and posthumous honour of their former selves*, much like that wonderful Wellington incident.

“Second, we have Meg, who goes by theironduke on LJ (she has since bahl-eeted her journal because of OMGDRAMA). Meg has previous issues with the girl who plays Wellington (the_iron_duke) in Dead Men Talking - a long story, but I won't relate it now because everything involved is deleted, friendslocked or both. Suffice it to say Meg is a bit obsessed about the Duke of Wellington and his honour. To the point of sometimes claiming to BE the Duke of Wellington (see napoleonic_dead, her "reincarnation" community) and sometimes role-playing him in RPGs.”

Winter, 30 March 2005

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/668329.html] (accessed 17 March 2008).

known to spend time together; some of that time, most particularly our night with Lord Henri Antoine Silvestre de Gravina, was notorious for its implications. And now here PrinceC was, known to all and sundry as a deceased Mountie.¹¹⁴

Little good it did *now* to chastise Warr1or for his defiance of lj etiquette: the damage had been done. And anyway Warr1or was still obstinately insistent that apostasy was the greater evil.

I had, I'm sure you'll see, to prevent similar catastrophes from befalling me personally. The problem was, I was a tad guilty-as-not-yet-charged. It wasn't that my devotion to *Sanguinity* had weakened at all; I was still as thoroughly enthralled, enamoured, and en-other things as ever.

But I did sometimes feel a pang of wistful regret that I wasn't broadening my horizons and expanding my fanbase with a few brief but talented fics in some of the other newly popular fandoms. I mean to say, a few thousand words devoted to brotherly love here or to handsomely bare-pated villains there¹¹⁵ and I could easily capture a little of the applause and lipgloss currently being scooped up by others. Being tied to *At His Lordship's Behest* unfairly limited my range. If I passed on *AHLB* for completion by some other author, I would spare myself the tedium of Warr1or's crazed wrath while simultaneously freeing up my time for shorter fanfiction.

And sometimes, to be perfectly frank, the shorter the fanfiction the better. Completing a piece in that first flush of fannish enthusiasm is infinitely preferable to letting it drag on for fifty-odd chapters, by which time your original readers are all disenchanted with your characters' clothing choices and/or particular tradition of witchcraft,¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ PrinceC's identification as a deceased Mountie is a sort of reference to Due South

¹¹⁵ Mina is thinking of the Supernatural and Smallville fandoms.

¹¹⁶ Readers becoming disenchanted with your characters' clothing choices and/or particular tradition of witchcraft are most probably encountering Leatherpants!Draco or Strega!Hermione.

Something Impossible by Cassandra Claire, MSTed on 01 March 2005 [<http://deu-sex-machina.livejournal.com/3059.html>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

Pawn to Queen by Riley, 23 February 2003, [<http://www.witchfics.org/riley/ptq/>] (accessed 17 march 2008).

and your new readers are too intimidated by the length of the thing to even begin. I longed, sometimes, for the heady freedom of the one-shot.

So I decided to pre-empt whatever Warr1or might have gotten around to doing to me. I made a public post outlining my reasons for setting aside *AHLB*--comments off *natch*; I wasn't interested in debate--and then put it up for adoption over at one of the WIP placement communities.¹¹⁷ Of course I felt a faint pang of regret, but really, what was the worst that could happen? If it was brilliantly concluded by some other pen, some of the accolades were bound to reflect back on me for having started it so well. If it was taken up by unskilled hands and poorly finished, my own opening chapters would stand in talented contrast to the subsequent hack job. Whichever happened, the unwritten version my fans imagined me writing would outstrip any actual fic that could possibly exist. And I'd be encouraging new writers, really, when you think about it; I'd practically be mentoring them. I couldn't lose. And now I had all the pleasure of new fandoms to explore, and world enough and time¹¹⁸ for the exploration, not that I had any intention of quitting *Sanguinity Online*.

And then Arc returned to the internet. I'd been waiting with mingled hope and dread for this, because the realization that I'd seen and interacted with her offline self was more than a bit unnerving. What if my real-world incarnation was a letdown compared with the glittery breathtaking BNFdom I'd achieved online?

I shouldn't have worried. Arc messaged me out of the blue, which was in itself pretty reassuring. She'd heard, she said, that I had set aside *At His Lordship's Behest*, and she strongly hinted that she approved of my decision to redistribute my time and energies more fairly amongst several fandoms. 'You have been putting in a lot of hours wandering around *Sanguinity Online* with Eva's son,' she said.

¹¹⁷ Such as http://community.livejournal.com/wip_adoption.

¹¹⁸ And *world enough and time* for the exploration is shamelessly lifted from my favourite seduction poem. Loving thanks to Andrew Marvell for *To His Coy Mistress*:

'Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime...'

Hat tip to Angua9, without whom I would have forgotten to footnote this.

‘It must be fatiguing. Perhaps some of that time could more profitably devoted to your novel, or to shorter fanfiction. You have done some rather *interesting* work in the one-shot line.’¹¹⁹

I gathered from that that she’d read *Bound for Detention*, but I couldn’t *quite* bring myself to ask outright. After careful consideration during her absence, I’d concluded that *B4D* was the sort of work that needed time to sink in before one asked for honest reactions.

¹¹⁹ Everyone’s motivations are open to question here. Mina *might* be abandoning AHLB at an opportune moment, just before PrinceC’s OVAV starts garnering more comments. Arc *might* just be urging Mina to spend less time with PrinceC. Warr1 or *might* be refraining from abusing PrinceC openly because he fervently admires him, even the delusional military-personage bits.

2.7 Mina de Malfois and the Brides of Fictionstein

‘Little did I know,’ began Arc’s message.

A little confusing, that, but I was delighted to hear from her.

‘Something wrong?’ I asked sympathetically.

‘It’s the First Amendment,’ she typed. ‘We’ve broken it. I haven’t seen such widespread religious hysteria since livejournal put bunny rabbits in its page headers.’¹²⁰

¹²⁰ You’d think, if you were an optimist, that I was kidding. But no. Livejournal holiday decorations are really serious business. Mind you, you’d think after the hundredth iteration Livejournal would just take slightly greater pains to be inclusive.

“FYI: NOT ALL OF US ARE CHRISTIANS

How about some more graphics on the banner other than a menorah?”

Connie_chung, 03 December 2005,

[<http://news.livejournal.com/88717.html?thread=27852173#t27852173>]
(accessed 17 March 2008).

“As much as I thought the halloween header was kind of cool, I'd really prefer the option to disable the special holiday headers. This one is a bit hard to read text on top of (like say, who's logged in) unless you have a monstrous resolution, and almost find it a little religiously offensive. Don't get me wrong-- as an art piece, its cool--but as something I have to look at day in and day out, I'd just rather have the choice to "opt-out."”

Jojobear99, 02 December 2005,

[<http://news.livejournal.com/88717.html?thread=27801741#t27801741>]
(accessed 17 March 2008).

“I'd rather get comment emails, and be able to switch off this reminder of the "happy holidays". Really don't want to have to see it for 25 days now.”

inbetween, 03 December 2005,

[<http://news.livejournal.com/88717.html?thread=27835789#t27835789>]
(accessed 17 March 2008).

“You're kidding, right? You managed to come up with three Easter icons and FIVE for Earth Day, but not even one for Passover? How about a simple pic of a seder plate. Nice excuse.”

half_elf_lost, 06 April 2007,

I was suitably horrified on her behalf. ‘Oh, *Arc*,’ I scolded gently. ‘You haven’t been putting up religious symbols in the library, have you?’ I mentioned the library deliberately there. A subtle reminder that archivists aren’t uniquely omniscient was well in order, I thought, and would do a bit to restore the balance of knowingness back towards the author, where it belonged. Quite frankly, the realization that she not only knew who I was and what I looked like, but was also gorgeousness incarnate herself, had rattled me slightly. I don’t know how you picture *your* archivist, but I’d always imagined mine a bit more pedestrian and possibly reassuringly dowdy.

‘I put up a book display,’ she said cryptically, ‘and then lacked the foresight to say no to candles.’¹²¹ Until things calm down, those of us who can walk away have, while a skeleton staff holds down the fort. You should drop by, though. You might find it informative.’

Little did I know, to borrow *Arc*’s apt phrase, how very bloody informative I’d find it. To begin with, when I mentioned in passing to Jen that I was on my way to view a riot in progress at the library, she invited herself along. She had her jacket on--black leather, very James Dean meets Joan Jett--and was holding our room door open for me before I’d managed to muster a convincing excuse, so there was nothing for it but to walk across campus with her, stepping briskly to keep up with her loping stride. It felt damnably awkward, and I don’t mean just because of our mismatched leg lengths. Jen and I were amongst the most cordial of roomies in our or any other dorm, part of that ever-shrinking pool of people neither one of whom had put in for a transfer-of-roommate by next term or sooner, but we didn’t actually spend much time together. Or any, really. We didn’t, as it were, hang out with each other. Possibly that was the foundation of our entente cordiale, if you examined the thing closely. Neither of us had had the opportunity to have gotten heartily sick of the other, or to’ve learned to despise the other’s voice, clothes, friends, tastes, or habits.

Really, I was better acquainted with Josh than with Jen, which made it all the more uncanny to be walking to the library with her. I

[<http://news.livejournal.com/97924.html?thread=44225668#t44225668>]
(accessed 17 March 2008).

¹²¹ *Arc* is being coy and evasive there--if there’s one thing she doesn’t ever lack, it’s foresight.

wasn't the only one who found it odd; several classmates eyed us curiously, eyebrows quirked.

When we entered the library lobby we quickly became entangled in a throng of sign-bearing protesters. These were milling around grumpily in front of a line of security guards, who stood just in front of the inner doors, firmly blocking further penetration. A protester carrying a 'Baa, Baa: Ban Sheeple!' placard was standing toe to toe with one guard, yelling, 'Why does society always support the entitlebaas¹²² and their brain-numbing rituals? We have rights too! Why are we stuck out here, while the mindless baas are milling around inside?'

'Because,' the security guard explained patiently, 'you guys were the ones clubbing people with signs.'

Two girls wearing 'Keep your soul covered in public' t-shirts were engaged in breathless conversation right in front of us. 'I was in the park once--a *public* park--and I saw this guy sitting on a bench with his eyes closed, mumbling to himself?' one was saying. 'And when I went over, he was praying. Right there in the park. Which our tax dollars pay for!'

'That's disgusting,' the other one said. 'Stupid worsheep--why do they even have to go out in public and force their conformist beliefs down our throats? Can't they just stay home? What did you do?'

'I went up and smacked the back of his head as hard as I could,' her friend said smugly, nearly beaming a passerby in the head as she waved her 'Iconoclasm Now!' sign, 'and I told him rational people shouldn't have to look at his soul-baring!'

'Who the hell are these people?' I asked Jen as quietly as I could manage.

'Members of the Atheist Students' Society,'¹²³ Jen said, looking amused. 'I'm amazed you haven't run into them before now. They hold weekly meetings and monthly protest marches and regular

¹²² Entitlebaas are like entitlemoos, but they pray instead of (or in addition to, I guess) breastfeeding. Suzycat spotted the cf_hardcore reference.

"EntitleMOO is above the law."
Laturner, 25 April 2007,
[http://community.livejournal.com/cf_hardcore/3009232.html] (accessed 17 March 2008).

¹²³ Sorry. I couldn't resist.

overnight anti-prayer vigils. They're supposedly very popular on a lot of campuses.'

A handful of these progressive rationalists had started brawling, whether within their own ranks or with the security guards it was hard to make out in the confusion. Whichever, it used up whatever reserves of patience the security staff had been drawing on, because they started grabbing the anti-baas by their sloganed t-shirts and tossing them out of the lobby. We almost got tossed along with them, but Jen, stepping forward and talking quickly, convinced a guard we were actually there to use the library, and he let us in. 'You spit on a single library patron,' he told us firmly, 'and I'm personally hauling you both out of there, you got that?'

I've never spit on anyone, myself, especially not in a library--but then, perhaps I'm just less committed to rational thought and iconoclasm than the protesters. Who knows: perhaps I'd behave differently if I went to regular meetings with other freethinkers to learn how to resist societal religious pressures.

Inside the library there was wailing and gnashing of teeth, and candles. Many, many candles.¹²⁴ I drifted to a confused stop and stared. Jen, striding into the foyer beside me, came to an abrupt halt and froze. Only her eyes moved, carefully scanning the crowd that was milling around a large book display in the centre of the room. 'Mina,' she said after a moment, 'I have to leave.' And she fled the scene so

¹²⁴ Like the green candles being lit for Snape.

"Hi all!

Today I was thinking again of how to make it all work, as the most votes (here and on my site/forum) go to the wave.

I know some of you can't light your candle then, as you'll be away to the bookstore *OHH LUCKY YOU!!* so...

I thought why not light it later then? I am sure not all of you will be away in the middle of the night, so those few should be excused to light it later, right? If we do it like this, I am sure all the problems around the lighting will be solved right ladies?

Feedback is welcome! I wish to hear ALL of your opinions on this: all the 142 members indeed!

Love and hugs!

Conchita"

Conchita (Snapedarkangel), 18 April 2007,

[<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/saveseverus/message/1120>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

abruptly I didn't have time to speak, let alone to question her on her sudden change of heart. Curious. Perhaps she had a fear of open flames.

The book display, I saw at once, must be the one Arc had mentioned. In itself, it seemed a completely innocuous attempt to showcase a selection of well-known novels. Moving closer, and peering between the candle holders who were standing or kneeling in a circle around the display, I was able to pick out some of the titles and authors. It was a fairly standard list: *Wuthering Heights*; the Harry Potter series; several Gaston Leroux; *Dracula*; *Three Men in a Duvet, to Say Nothing of the Shoggoth*,¹²⁵ *Pride and Prejudice*; CS Forester and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

The shelves holding these books had, I saw, been lavishly decorated and adorned, and it was readily apparent that some other hand than Arc's must have strewn red and white roses, coloured tealights, small ribbon-tied scrolls and strings of beads in front of the books. No librarian, I felt quite sure, would have constructed such a clutter of dust-collecting ephemera, and those tealights looked positively hazardous. I *tsked* under my breath, filled with archival

¹²⁵ Most of the books are straightforward, but *Three Men in a Duvet, to Say Nothing of the Shoggoth* takes a little explaining. The obvious reference is Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat, to Say Nothing of the Dog*, which Etrangere and Gjules and Gondolinchick01 were the first to spot (barring the ever-brilliant Clives, natch, because technically they're ALWAYS the first to spot references). It is, as Gjules helpfully informed me, available for free on Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/308>). Etrangere also reminded me that the next logical step here is Connie Willis' brilliant *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, which is one of my favourite books ever.

Okay, next: why the Shoggoth and the duvet? First of all because I'm a Lovecraft fan, and have been for years. But also: I have a shocking crush on the voice (yes, just the voice—I have a terrible voice-and-accent fetish) of a gentleman called 'Paul Cthulhu' (<http://www.myspace.com/ysdc>), who along with two other gentlemen hosts a podcast called 'Yog Radio' (<http://www.yog-sothoth.com/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=60>). (Yes, seriously: I get these voice-crushes sometimes; it's an embarrassing character flaw.) It's a Call of Cthulhu podcast--*shut up*--and early on, before they were as well-equipped* as they presently are, they recorded it under a duvet 'to improve the sound quality,' or so they claimed. I've always found that suspiciously slash-worthy, personally.

*And I meant well-equipped with recording devices, you lot. Get your minds out of the gutter.

empathy.

‘I *know*,’ said a voice next to me, perfectly in tune with my disapproval. ‘It was a fully functional book display before people started dumping ‘tributes’ all over it.’

‘Seldom,’ I said, nodding in greeting.

‘Have you ever seen anything *like* this?’ he went on, gesturing towards the robed and costumed figures.

‘Not in real life,’ I admitted unguardedly. I went hurriedly on, before he could ask what I meant, ‘So who are these people? And what does it all mean?’

‘It means,’ Seldom said glumly, ‘that a percentage of the reading public are actively mentally ill. These people are some sort of cult or something, and they’re devoted to characters in those books. Have you ever heard anything so strange?’

I realized, with something of a sinking feeling, that yes: I had. I didn’t say so to Seldom, though. ‘And the beads and little scrolls?’ I asked.

‘The scrolls are poems,’ he said. ‘It’s fascinating, really. They’re all written to or about the men in the books. The beads I’m less sure of. They seem to be using them to pray, but I haven’t been able to get close enough to find out. Whenever I try they close ranks and make weird remarks about my being merely a ‘real male.’

‘Ah,’ I said, now convinced I knew which precise shade of loon dwelt beneath the white robes and was nesting in the library. ‘Well, you know: women’s space, and all that.’¹²⁶

‘Oh, I know, I know,’ said Seldom hastily. ‘I’m very sensitive to all that, naturally. I just can’t help but be curious. There’s something peculiarly fannish about their devotion to these particular books. I’d love to do a paper on this.’

‘Mmmm,’ I said noncommittally. ‘Well. Perhaps I can get close enough to find out more. But Seldom, how did it start? I mean, what

¹²⁶ Women’s space, and all that does rather recall, as Snorkackcatcher noticed, the recent paid/not paid fanfiction discussions.

Cupidsbow, How Fanfiction Makes Us Poor, [<http://cupidsbow.livejournal.com/239587.html>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

Cupidsbow, Women/Writing 1: The Response So Far, [<http://cupidsbow.livejournal.com/239992.html>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

brought them here?’

‘I have no idea,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘No one has any idea. The book display went up, and for a few days everything was ordinary. A couple of the front desk librarians mentioned there were a few women sitting around in the lobby, but it didn’t seem all that unusual. Then a handful of them got up a petition asking permission to light candles, just here in the foyer. That sounded relatively harmless, but the next thing we knew full-scale worship had broken out: prayer beads, chanting, robes, you name it. And then last night the protesters showed up to denounce the library for having a covert religious agenda. Now half the staff have abandoned us, so we’ve set up the percolator and we’re taking turns observing the worshippers.’

‘Sounds fun,’ I said weakly. ‘Perhaps I can...uh...infiltrate their ranks and do a little field observation.’

Seldom’s eyes gleamed with graddish enthusiasm. ‘There’s hot coffee waiting upstairs, if and when you have anything to report,’ he promised, before reluctantly heading back to the Media Fandom Special Collection to resume work on his thesis.

Not a moment too soon, either. A woman I’d never seen before was sidling up to me, shyly looking me up and down. ‘Mina?’ she said, and I nodded. Her smile widened. ‘I *knew* it,’ she said. ‘You look just like your avatar, darling girl. I’m Mrs. Sev.’

Title: The Cad and the Schoolgirl: an original novel

Author: Mina de Malfois

Dedication: For Notmonica, and for the staff of Malfois Manor, with affection and appreciation.

Home from the mall, Sage found herself feeling mildly depressed. ‘Perhaps,’ she thought irritably, ‘I should have stayed with the others after all.’ The problem was, not only had she not gotten over high school, she was still stuck at some even earlier stage of deciding how she wanted high school to be. She was still wasting time mulling over options that had expired: maybe she should try homeschooling, maybe she could write for the school paper. She knew it was over and done with, but it had all gone by too fast, when she wasn’t looking. It felt as though she’d glanced up from what she was reading just in time to notice grad was over and oh, by the way, everyone else had friends already. And now she was in real danger of having her university years disappear the exact same unconsidered way. She’d already spent one term enjoying classes and book lists and sleeping in; maybe it was time to, you know, interact with other human beings. ‘Except,’ she concluded grimly, as she always did, ‘I can’t find any I really *want* to interact with.’

Over her bed there was a small shelf, placed just high enough to be hazardous to anyone tall who sat with their back against the wall--it cleared Sage’s head by several inches. Most residents kept their shelf cluttered with photos of boyfriends, family, and pets. Sage’s was depressingly bare, except for the days it was a temporary resting place for keys and pocket change. Now she stacked her newly purchased books on the shelf, and her spirits lifted perceptibly at the sight of their uncreased spines and promising cover art. Last of all she set the portrait into place, lingering with appreciation over the square jaw and high collar of the Regency hero. He looked, she thought, a proper rakehell--and then she blushed scarlet with embarrassment, deeply thankful that no one could read her mind and see some of the junk stored there. ‘Honestly, Sage Montgomery, you are an idiot sometimes,’ she scolded herself. ‘You’re perfectly equipped to go live in a romance novel, but you can’t manage a simple trip to the mall with friends.’

But since she had ducked out on the Friday night revels, she might as well enjoy herself alone. Rummaging in the top drawer of her desk, Sage withdrew a beeswax candle and a box of matches--strictly forbidden in the dorm as per fire regulations, but everyone did it anyway--and, once it was lit, set the candle in front of Sir Rakehell's picture. 'If only I could meet a man like that,' she thought wistfully. She lay back with one of her novels, but mostly she gazed through the page instead of reading it, lost in pleasant thoughts of the Regency version of herself. For some reason the self of her daydreams was always impeccably dressed in the fashions of the day, even though Sage herself was bewildered by fashion. Fantasy Sage was also a crack shot and a skilled rider, though Sage owned neither gun nor horse, and was a graceful dancer and an accomplished flirt. MarySage, in other words, had an altogether better life than Sage did.

At the very moment that Sage decided she was too tired to try to read any longer, and reached over to switch off her bedroom light, a gentleman several years older than herself was disembarking at the nearest airport. His passport and various identifications were all in order, and his wallet well supplied with both ready cash and with all the promise, in the form of credit cards and comfortable balances, of further depths of abundance easily to hand. His was not a handsome face, exactly, but his features were strong and memorable, and his black hair and blue eyes were pleasing to the observer. For just a moment his hair shone as if reflecting candlelight.

His passage through the airport was unremarkable, or nearly so: the Customs officers did remark, to themselves, on the oddity of his costume. But airports, at least the busier ones, see all sorts of passengers nowadays, from the very vulgar rich to the strangely tasteful student-poor, and neither of the officers wished to betray any lack of sophistication by appearing startled by the appearance of one who was rich, tasteful, and bizarrely historical.

If they had bothered to search his luggage they might have been unable to hide a certain astonishment. Nearly every item within looked to have been purchased for the sake of historical reenactment. The single modern, casual outfit was still new enough to have all its tags intact; it had patently obviously never been worn, and until its owner had reconciled himself more fully to the idea of the zipper it was destined never to *be* worn. More strangely still, at the very bottom of one leather trunk there were documents which seemed, impossibly, to

contradict all those he carried on his person. But the concealed documents could not possibly be real: the dates on them were impossibly old, while the paper and ink were as fresh and unfaded as if they had been plucked from the ether, untouched by time. Even an unsophisticated employee at a very small rural airport would have had sense enough to dismiss them as some sort of prank--which would have been an entirely sane judgement, but also an entirely incorrect one.

2.7 Mina de Malfois and the Brides of Fictionstein (continued)

I wasn't sure I was *happy* to learn that the Tented Tartanists were willing to bunch up and make a place for me in their vigil around the book display. I mean, it's one thing to spend time with them in *Sanguinity*, and quite another to risk being taken for one of them right there on campus.

But I couldn't bring myself to pull away and bolt, either. Mrs. Sev, or whatever her real name might be, was giving me the shyest friendly look, or possibly the friendliest shy one, I'd ever had directed my way. And several of the women who'd been sitting with her had also turned towards us, faces filled with geekish welcome. You'd have had to be a damned sight more callous than I can manage to be to reject them in cold blood. They might be freaks, they might be--hell, they *were*--an assortment of nuts, they might be generally less than up to par physically and sartorially than their own avatars, but...well...they were part of my tribe. My sinking sensation continued its downward trend as I realized that, common sense to the contrary, I liked these people. I couldn't just not sit with them.

Besides, Seldom had been right about their being fannishly fascinating. I confess myself intrigued by the vigilantes and their paraphernalia, and full up with empathy for Seldom's urge to commit them to a well-footnoted paper. Mrs. Sev--whose friends were addressing her as 'Lily,' but I suspected that was another layer of pseudonym¹²⁷--commenced enlightening me the moment we sat down. From the proprietorial pride in her voice I gathered she'd been one of the creative forces behind this gathering and these artefacts. She showed me several of the little prayer scrolls, explaining that a true het adept would be able to guess from the colour of the ribbons which fictional male the prayers and poems were intended for.

Untying a green ribbon, she unrolled one such epic madness, and I

¹²⁷ Mrs. Sev calling herself 'Lily' does rather suggest, as Maddyriddle noticed, that she ships Snape/Lily.

bit my cheeks to keep from shrieking with laughter over the lyrically expressed wish to be tied to the bedposts and flogged by a character in a children's book series. While I was strangling on unexpressed mirth Mrs. Sev showed me how her green prayer beads,¹²⁸ studded with appropriate silver charms, and her green candle all also proclaimed her devotion.

A handful of cultists near her cheerfully displayed their own beads and announced their own idols. I concentrated on not swallowing my tongue. Their props, I realized, really did reflect their obsessions. The be-caped and well-cleaved ladies were phans, ever-loyal to their hideously deformed, genital-free¹²⁹ masterful lover. The girl in the 80s clothes and tweed jacket, who proudly informed me that her prayer beads were made of 'the most precious gems in the world: Royal Lavulite,'¹³⁰ obviously fancied herself the one true Mrs. Steele. Doubtless there were clues encoded in every costume beneath the white robes, if only the observer were well enough versed in the fandoms to read them.

'But why,' I interjected when I'd regained enough self-control to speak, 'here, and why now? Are you students here?'

'Oh, no,' said Mrs. Sev, and most of the others were shaking their heads as well. 'A couple of our members are local to the area, and found out about the display. And as soon as Rose and Piper¹³¹ let us know that there'd been a spontaneous breach, we all travelled here to celebrate. It was a sign that our recent disappointments had been witnessed and acknowledged, and that our chosen fictional males supported us in our struggle against slash!'

She was, I saw, remarkably true to her avatarial self in some ways. I hadn't expected her to trot out the impassioned lunatic speeches in real life, and I wasn't sure how to respond. 'A spontaneous breach?' I

¹²⁸ Alas, I haven't really seen fannish prayer beads. Green candles, yes. Prayer beads, no, not yet.

¹²⁹ C'mon, the missing nose has to be symbolic of something--why else does Erik ask after the state of Raoul's nose? Jealous men don't *generally* compare *noses*.

¹³⁰ 'The most precious gems in the world: Royal Lavulite' are lifted directly from Remington Steele: Licence to Steele.

¹³¹ Rose and Piper are a small shoutout to Doctor/Rose fans.

said weakly, seizing almost at random on a particular detail to query.

She nodded, eyes, gleaming with impassioned tears. ‘We’ve suffered setbacks lately,’ she confided in a whisper, and a nearby cultist patted her gently on the back. ‘Slash is *everywhere*, Mina, and the pro-slash faction use *our* men in their perverse fics, deliberately, to taunt us! And recently a lot of our members had focussed a lot of energy putting together the perfect het wedding, and when that fell through, they were deeply discouraged. But then this book display appeared--just *appeared*,¹³² Mina, not one of us had a hand in creating it! It was a sign to restore our faith! I just know the Dark Schoolmaster reached through from the Astral Plane to give me a tangible, public demonstration of his love!’ Her voice had risen to normal speaking levels and beyond, acquiring a worshipful ringing tone and an embarrassingly *carrying* quality. Around us, the devout clutched their beads and called out their thanks to various fictional love-objects. But at least Seldom had provided me with the perfect excuse for being here amongst them. Research, I could claim unblushingly. *Research for a friend*. That sounded plausible, right?

‘And now *you’re* here,’ Mrs. Sev said, squeezing my arm. I smiled nervously. ‘It can’t be a coincidence, Mina dear. You write het beautifully--your youthful experiments don’t affect that--and everyone knows you’ve set your *Sanguinity* fic aside. It must mean that you’re ready to unite with your fictional male, Mina! And we’re here to guide you to his side!’ She clasped her hands together and raised her prayer beads to her lips.

‘Maybe,’ a goth-looking matron suggested enthusiastically, ‘Mina’s presence here is a portent that the wedding isn’t doomed after all!’ I’d have thought that my presence here was a pretty obvious portent that I was a registered student intending to exercise her library privileges, but I didn’t argue the point. It’s useless restating the obvious to people determined to explore nonexistent levels of meaning. ‘After all, she *does* know both the bride and groom!’

‘She’s a friend of Warr1or’s,’ offered a third lady lunatic, which was rather overstating the point. Was that what the masses thought, that I must necessarily be friends with my gardener, just because we’d

¹³² Contrary to what Mrs. Sev claims, it didn’t just appear; someone created the book display, and quite deliberately, too.

spent time together?¹³³ ‘Her presence among us must be a symbol that we’ll succeed in our efforts to resist slash. It might not have anything to do with the wedding at all.’

‘Whose wedding was it?’ I asked, belatedly noticing a theme here.

‘It would have been the most romantic wedding in all of history,’ sighed a frighteningly thin cultist, and several of her pixie-sized friends nodded. They didn’t *look* as if they necessarily had any thorough in-depth grasp of ‘all of history,’ but I got their point: it was to have been a very romantic wedding indeed. Well, but aren’t all weddings, or at least most of them? I put the question to Mrs. Sev.

‘Of course they aren’t, darling girl,’ she said, sounding simultaneously matter-of-fact and sorrowful, which can’t have been easy. ‘Think about it, Mina. Most weddings involve real men, and *those* are the least romantic creatures on earth!’ The cultists all nodded in agreement.

‘So you can imagine how excited we were,’ said the matronly goth, ‘to have been offered the chance to plan a wedding that *almost* seemed to live up to the standards of a Celestial Marriage with a fictional male!’

‘I admit I was sceptical at first. But the groom was nearly perfect,’ Mrs. Sev said wistfully. ‘I could almost have believed he *was* fictional.’¹³⁴

‘Lily, I said the very same thing myself. Didn’t I?’ enthused one of the others. ‘The heart and soul of romance, or as close to it as any incarnate *I’ve* ever seen. No wonder that poor girl was so devastated when he had to postpone the wedding indefinitely! Up until that moment she must have thought herself the luckiest girl ever to settle for a real man!’

‘For an incarnate, he *is* lovely,’ said one of the terrifyingly thin bunch dreamily. ‘Almost perfect.’

‘Don’t stare,’ Mrs. Sev whispered sharply, close to my ear. ‘They have dollforexia, poor things, and too much attention makes them self-conscious.’¹³⁵

¹³³ I think Snorkarkcatcher was the only person who saw the Constance Chatterley reference lurking there.

¹³⁴ Mrs. Sev is more accurate than she knows, in this instance.

¹³⁵ Dollforexia is not, as far as I know, real. Not yet, anyway.

“I do not have this "ideal" body, and often, when cosplaying or looking at

‘They have *what?*’ I asked out loud, and earned a sharp elbow in the ribs.

‘Of course,’ Mrs. Sev said loudly, returning to the subj. at h., ‘when the wedding had to be called off she was *shattered*. None of us had the heart to remind her to return the gifts. Personally I couldn’t even bear to think of all their gift lists, much less to mention them.’

‘Nor could I,’ said someone else tearfully. ‘I was on one of the committees that raised money for the reception and the honeymoon. I don’t think they returned any of the deposits, but there they were, already *heartbroken* at having to delay their marriage. Who could bring up money at a time like that?’

‘So this couple will still get married, then?’ I was still trying to grope my way towards some sort of clarity.

‘They already *have*, in all but real life,’ Mrs. Sev assured me, which wasn’t really a clarification *per se*. I must have looked lost, because she patted my hand and explained further. ‘They exchanged vows in a live-chat IM session, and they got livejournal-married. It’s only the legal *incarnate* part that had to be postponed.’ There were murmurs, mostly of the sympathetic variety, but a few catty remarks questioning the groom’s faithfulness could be heard, and I saw a couple of the younger cultists assume slyly knowing looks that were *obviously* intended to make us all think they’d been in on the faithlessness.

‘It just goes to show you,’ proclaimed one of the dollforexics, ‘that incarnate weddings can never be quite as perfect as a union with a fictional male.’ There was a chorus of general agreement, and shortly thereafter the circle broke apart into smaller, informal groups and started helping themselves to tea and cakes from a table that had somehow materialized nearby.

‘But what *is* dollforexia?’ I asked Mrs. Sev--‘Call me Lily,’ she’d insisted--having observed that those afflicted with whatever it was were sticking strictly to green tea and no cake.

‘The poor things,’ she repeated sadly. ‘They develop an overattachment to their chosen representations of their fictional partners, you see. I mean, the *benefits* of having such a representation are obvious--’

gorgeous EGL outfits (or even regular clothes) I really regret what I look like. Su is my alterego, kinda.”

[<http://www.denofangels.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-39297.html>]
(accessed 17 March 2008).

‘They are?’ I thought in some alarm.

‘It lets you take your lover to bed,’ she said, blushing deeply, ‘and some particularly lucky women have found it increases the ease with which their fictional partner can touch them.’ I tried very hard not to picture that.

‘But I always say,’ said Mrs. Sev, betraying not the slightest awareness of how mad a thing this was to say even once, let alone *always*, ‘that lifesized representations are *safer* than dollfies.’¹³⁶ Their dollfie boyfriends are so tiny and perfect that some women start to feel hopelessly inadequate, you see. They want to be tiny and perfect themselves, and they just *aren’t*. It’s disastrous for their self esteem, and some of them go too far.’

‘Ah,’ I said numbly, resisting an urge to scream loudly and run far, far away. I tried to direct the conversation back to less terrifyingly deranged behaviours. ‘So...about that wedding. I feel absolutely out of the loop. I didn’t even get invited to a cyber-reception, much less any real-life events.’

‘I’m surprised,’ said Mrs. Sev, sounding it. ‘You know them both, after all.’

‘I know them both?’ I echoed weakly. She was already rummaging through the pockets of her robe.

‘Here,’ she said triumphantly, hauling out a photograph. ‘I was in on the fundraising for the dress, the tux, *and* the session with the professional photographer, so they sent me copies of some of their favourite pictures.’ She handed it to me proudly.

It was a picture of Josh, with a blonde who *had* to be Rabbit.

‘And they said they were going to get married?’ I asked carefully. Light, or a dimmish approximation thereof, dawned. ‘And ‘he’ had to call it off for some reason?’

Lily nodded. ‘Yes,’ she said. ‘He couldn’t say why for security reasons. It was *tragic*.’

Well, Mrs. Sev might call it tragic, but what it really was was *predictable*. Of course Josh hadn’t been able to go through with the

¹³⁶ You heard it here first: RealDolls (<http://www.realdoll.com/>; NSFW) are less hazardous than Dollfies (<http://www.denofangels.com/forums/showthread.php?t=121112>), at least according to Mrs. Sev. They’re probably also less talkative (<http://www.denofangels.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-31409.html>).

legal, incarnate end of things: in incarnate form he was Jen, and she wasn't suitably equipped. But I could hardly say so to any of the Tented Tartanists. Jen deserved my loyal-roommate silence, and anyhow, St. Schol's would have been down on me like a tonne of bricks if I'd breached confidentiality in the slightest.

Besides, it was probably not in the best interests of Mrs. Sev's mental health that anyone tip her off that the ideal bridegroom was, in a sense, fictional. She was more than far enough gone down *that* path already, without any supporting evidence. In fact, just contemplating the whole tangle made me feel a bit unbalanced myself, as if reality had spun around and tilted slightly. What did it *mean* that the perfect romantic male was actually Jen?

I pulled myself together pretty swiftly with a stern reminder that all it meant was that Josh had conned a bunch of well-meaning, if somewhat deluded, fellow fans out of a lot of money and gifts.¹³⁷ Good *heavens*: I was rooming with a con artist.

And when you added this in with Xena's report of Josh and Rabbit's behaviour at KawaiiKon, the whole thing started to be a tad un-overlookable, really. I mean to say, fandom forgives a lot, but it probably has its limits. If Josh was consistently behaving *that* badly in public, it might be wise to make a point of avoiding him online, particularly within *Sanguinity*space. Now was probably the time to take a nonchalant step backwards, remind everyone we'd been on opposing sides since the earliest days of *Sanguinity Online*, and steer well clear of any future forays he might be planning to the youth section or wherever. I made a mental note to inspect the guest list and the banned list for Malfois Manor, just to be absolutely sure Josh Amos was not merely not on the first, but quite definitely on the second.

'Will you be joining us, Mina?' Mrs. Sev asked, reaching the evident conclusion of some speech I hadn't been listening to.

'I'm sorry, what?' I asked, but tried my utmost not to hurt her feelings by adding, 'Sorry, Lily, my mind seems to have wandered for a moment there at the end.'

She patted my arm reassuringly, which wasn't, and said, 'Yes, that

¹³⁷ I think Miladyhawke said it best: "Clearly the money they huckstered out of those poor Tartanists will be used to run away to LA together, buy costumes, and cosplay in front of Grauman's." (<http://mina-de-malfois.livejournal.com/20409.html?thread=758713#t758713>)

can happen as you become more attuned to the Astral Plane. I was just saying we're about to begin an intense prayer session, asking that a hero be sent forth from the Astral Plane to help us in our struggle against slash.'¹³⁸ Sure enough, Tented Tartanists had begun to set aside the tea things and were reassembling around the book display with expressions which could, I supposed, be described as 'intense and prayerful,' although 'fixated and delusional' fit the bill just as well.

'And are you expecting someone to actually show up?' I asked, keeping my tone carefully neutral. 'I mean, physically?' A pity I didn't have Warrlor on speed dial, I was thinking; if he were in the area, he'd have done admirably.

'Oh, yes,' she said, supremely confident. 'Our fictitious heroes will send an incarnate to our aid!' She dropped her voice to a near whisper. 'My theory is that the bridegroom might show up'¹³⁹ --he's an incarnate, after all, and ideally suited to stand in as an allied representative of our loved males.'

But not, I thought silently, ideally suited to lead the charge against slash, much less to mingle freely with people whose pockets he'd emptied. 'I'm sorry, but I really can't attend,' I said insincerely. 'I have to go upstairs to meet someone.' I pointed firmly in the direction of the actual stairwell as I spoke, lest she misinterpret me as meaning I was crossing over to the Astral Plane, and Mrs. Sev clasped my hand, tearfully wished me farewell, and hurried away to join her fellow

¹³⁸ *An intense prayer session, asking that a hero be sent forth from the Astral Plane* might sound delusional, but the Snapewives aren't unique, or even original, in using simultaneous prayer to strengthen bonds of female friendship. To quote from Sharon Marcus' *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*: "Loving the faraway friend echoed the human love of a Christ simultaneously distant in his divinity yet proximate in his humanity, and prayer thus became a medium of friendship as well as worship. As a form of religious communication that addressed an invisible deity, prayer lent itself to maintaining connections with friends who were similarly abstracted by physical separation. [Mary Lundie] Duncan maintained contact with a close friend she never saw after leaving school by rising early to compose regular letters to her, and by arranging simultaneous prayer sessions that linked the two women when they were apart...." (Marcus, p. 65).

¹³⁹ I seem to have been channelling a medieval Christian mystic for a moment there. Bernard of Clairvaux, maybe.

cultists.

I made my way upstairs, and found Seldom and co. hanging about watching the goings-on below. They'd set up the percolator right there on the landing this time, which was pretty bold. One of the females poured me a cup when I joined them. 'We have to stay where we can watch them,' she explained, having obviously caught my startled glance at the bold percolator placement. 'The women downstairs, I mean. They could start a fire or something'¹⁴⁰ if we don't keep them under constant surveillance.'

'So we saw you,' Seldom said, somewhat enviously. '*Mingling*. They let you sit with them! They almost seemed to know you, Mina.' I avoided his eyes, but felt myself blush slightly. Luckily he went on smoothly, 'So what are they doing, exactly?'

I tried my level best to explain, though I sidestepped my own connections to the group *obviously*, and I made sure not to use the phrase 'Cult of the Tented Tartan' so that there was no chance of Seldom googling it and seeing the name 'Mina' in conjunction with it. I'm well versed in maintaining my mundane cover, believe me. It was rather enjoyable, really, talking to the student librarians--for one thing, they knew what I was talking about. Oh, not the particulars, but I mean they didn't need to have perfectly simple terms, like 'slash' or 'Astral Plane,' defined at tedious length. They *understood*, even if in a somewhat dry, arm's-length kind of way.¹⁴¹

'It's fascinating,' Seldom said when I wound to a close. 'Did you get the impression that they really expect this hero to show up? Or do you think they'll just imagine that he's here?'

And almost as if on cue there was a slight rise in the volume of the babbled discussion going on down below us, and a chorus of shocked gasps from the library staff around me--most particularly the female staff. I'd been standing with my back to the rail, so I didn't immediately see what they were reacting to; instead I saw Seldom's

¹⁴⁰ *They could start a fire or something*, and so many of Mina's flist seemed concerned about this that I edited in the watchful grad student just to appease them. See? I love you guys.

¹⁴¹ Oh, acafen.

Henry Jenkins,

[http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/06/forced_simplicity_and_the_crit.html] (accessed 17 March 2007).

eyes widen as he looked over my shoulder. ‘*Who*,’ asked Seldom, sounding awed, ‘is *that*?’ I whirled around to look.

And I gasped myself, in sheer awe at the knee-weakening sight. It was little wonder that the cultists’ chatter was rising to hysterical levels. I felt ever so slightly hysterical myself for half a sec there. Their hero had appeared, and he was utterly, shockingly, dazzlingly handsome. His pictures, I saw at a glance, didn’t half do him justice.¹⁴²

Say what you will about historical re-enactors, there’s simply no denying the visual impact of period military costume. This was a veritable broad-shouldered vision in scarlet.¹⁴³

‘He looks like the bridegroom!’ shrieked one of the dollforexics, and burst into overexcited sobs.

‘He looks like the bridegroom, but *even more handsome*,’ said the goth matron in disbelief, and collapsed.

‘He must be the bridegroom’s Astral Self,’ Mrs. Sev said fervently, and many of the Tartanists dropped to their knees in reverent lust.

The hero himself was shaking his head, and holding up his hands for silence. He began to speak to those cultists who were still on their feet, but unfortunately for those of us leaning breathlessly over the landing railing he spoke calmly and quietly. We couldn’t make out what he was saying--though one couldn’t help but notice that his voice was deep, melodic, and thoroughly appealing--but it had a marked effect on the cultists. Those capable of pulling themselves together did so, and began to converse with him eagerly. Soon all but the unconscious ones were trailing behind him, following him meekly out of the library and leaving the lobby littered with the swooned heaps of such of their companions as had been overcome by the sheer het-ness of their hero.

¹⁴² As Xwhomeverx pointed out, this line is meant to echo part three of Young Blood.

¹⁴³ This is, of course, PrinceC dressed as James Morrow Walsh. Jackiejlh’s unnamed-as-of-this-moment fanfiction (<http://jackiejlh.livejournal.com/22411.html>) is responsible for creating the fanon-that-is-now-canon of PrinceC’s real name being James. And then, thanks to a spontaneous conversation (<http://jackiejlh.livejournal.com/22411.html?thread=44683#t44683>) between Ankaret and Scifantasy, his middle initial was settled on, which means PrinceC’s real name is now officially James T. Hamill. The Minaverse: where fanon can suddenly become canon.

Not that I blamed them. PrinceC in the flesh, even if he did apparently go about in public costumed as a figment of his own imagination, was enough to reduce anyone to Tented Tartanism. Hell, given how perfectly that uniform fit him, I was newly convinced of his right to believe himself the reincarnate of whomever he chose, as long as they came from a well-dressed corner of history.

I feigned ignorance regarding what had just happened, but I'm not sure Seldom believed me. He didn't go so far as to accuse me directly, but his eyes held a mix of curiosity and knowingness. As soon as I decently could I slipped away, and wandered dreamily across campus back to Tia House.

Jen wasn't home: probably out robbing an orphanage, but still, I was glad of her absence. Someone had slipped a note under my door. For one heartstopping instant I thought it might have been PrinceC himself, but the handwriting wasn't his, and the rose-scented pink envelope rather suggested a feminine correspondent. 'I can't live without you,' the note claimed, 'and no matter how you try to deny it, our forbidden love will never fade.' I had too much on my mind to even *try* making sense of that right now.

Instead I logged on and checked my *Sanguinity* reading list, hoping that PrinceC had updated with something explanatory. He hadn't...but there *was* a post from Warr1or.

'I am pleased and excited to announce that I have persuaded PrinceC to join me in my manly endeavor,' it read. I blanched, and then blushed over my keyboard, unable to entirely suppress a momentary prurient speculation as to what Warr1or was on about, but the rest of the post proved entirely innocent. 'As the right minded among you already know,' the update continued, 'I have, for some time, struggled manfully and valiantly against the takeover of our noble fandom by the slash brigade. Too, far too often, their brand of wilful perversity has been allowed to creep, unchecked and unopposed, into a fandom until the vast majority of fans accept it as "the norm." It has been my firm intent that *Sanguinity* fandom not fall into that abyss. I have, to that end, designed an impregnable fortress: a fanfiction archive, to be run and maintained entirely by valiant, stout-hearted, reliable men, though of course fans of either sex may *submit* fanfiction for consideration: I am not at all sexist, no matter what lies my enemies may choose to spread. To that end, the worthy and admirable, even (dare I say) noble fanfiction author, PrinceC, has at long last agreed not only to archive some of his work behind these

stout but metaphorical walls, but has also promised to “pitch the idea,” as I believe the modern phrase has it, to a group of assuredly het-only writers.’

I had to read that through twice to get the gist of it, but if I read the thing correctly, Warr1or wanted to set up a kind of fanfiction safehouse for the more easily perturbed amongst the fanboys.¹⁴⁴ I couldn’t see *why* PrinceC had agreed to help him, especially after that friendslock betrayal, but at least it had cleared the cultists out of the library. Now Arc could come back.

Although the cultists’ vigil had, I reminded myself, achieved one thing: it had clued me in more completely to the morally ambiguous sitch re: Josh. I adjusted the Malfois Manor settings accordingly, with only the *slightest* pang of guilt. After all, it was hardly likely that Josh spent much time wandering the estate or anything, right? He probably wouldn’t even notice he’d been barred. I’d just be extra careful not to host any parties or anything for a while--I didn’t want to be *hurtful*. And tomorrow was the first day of our between-terms break, so chances were we wouldn’t have to see each other face to face until summer term started up.

I was awoken quite abruptly that night, from a tangled dream in which PrinceC slowly unbuttoned the brass buttons of his scarlet coat while Arc took aim at him with a silver duelling pistol. I sat up, gasping, and for a confused moment I thought PrinceC was standing next to my bed. Then the shadowy figure sat down beside me, closer than was strictly necessary, and I realized it was Jen. She was still dressed boyishly, though, in jeans and a white t-shirt and that black leather jacket. She smelled like leather and soap, and by moonlight she really *did* look a lot like PrinceC, or at least a lot like she was trying to look like him. This, I thought, going all goose-bumpy, was Josh in the flesh. At that moment it was impossible to believe there was any such person as Jen.

‘Cara Mina,’ said Josh, leaning even closer. His voice was husky in my ear. His breath tickled my neck. ‘You’ve shut me out. Do you intend to renew our enmity of old? Is that what you *really* want?’ I didn’t have any idea what he meant, except he’d obviously been in-

¹⁴⁴ Weirdly enough, I had already decided that Warr1or would create a *fanfiction archive, to be run and maintained entirely by valiant, stout-hearted, reliable men* before the whole FanLib thing happened. And no, I'm not going to link directly to FanLib.

game and somehow learned that he'd been banned from my extensive property. I couldn't answer, anyway. My mouth had gone dry. Josh put one arm around my waist, holding me close. 'Don't you know what they say about me?'

'They say *lots* of things about you,' I managed to snap, sounding way braver and more sarcastic than I felt. 'Which particular thing did you have in mind?' He laughed.

'They say, Mina,' my roommate said coolly, 'that I'm madly popular, badly behaved, and dangerous to disown.'¹⁴⁵ He stood up abruptly and stepped away, which came as a bigger relief than I can express, and I didn't say a word for fear he'd sit back down again. Not that I felt *threatened*, exactly. I can't quite describe *what* I felt.

In the morning Jen--Josh?--was gone when I woke up. So I didn't get to ask any of the pointed questions I'd thought of afterwards, like where the admittedly cool quotation had been stolen from, much less what 'old enmity'¹⁴⁶ we were supposed to have in common. Which left me, as I'm sure you can imagine, *seething* with frustration.

¹⁴⁵ As Angua9, Drakynadra, and Ap_aelfwine all spotted, Jen/Josh is mangling a perfectly good Caro Lamb quote there: she called Lord Byron "mad, bad, and dangerous to know," then went on to develop dollforexia after their affair ended. No, not really: I made up the dollforexia part. Tree_and_leaf noticed that Josh/Jen self-identifying with LB brings up the issue of incest, which leads rather smoothly into the next footnote...

¹⁴⁶ Mosellegreen was the first to see that this confirms that Razz Martini was Josh/Jen's old pseudonym.

2.8 Mina de Malfois and the Outburst of Grief

I'd been expecting a leisurely, recuperative between-term break, what with Jen gone away to do who-knows-what to who-knows-whom. I was glad of her absence: whatever damage she might be doing to persons unknown, at least for now she wasn't jacking *my* stress levels into the stratosphere. It was restful, having the room to myself. My pulse, I confidently predicted, would probably stop racing any day now.

But fandom immediately got busy producing enough chaos to entirely cancel out my real-life calm. It always does.

No matter how one strove to ignore it--and believe me, I strove--one couldn't help but be aware that a new groundswell of hysteria had commenced swelling. A Very Important Date, according to the chatter, was fast approaching. One of *Sanguinity's* foremost and most iconoclastic artists was Planning Something.

I'd forgotten, I'm proud to say, the upcoming anniversary, at least until the internet rumour reached me, which of course was fairly early on, what with my legions of fans and readers rushing to keep me abreast of every current sitch. I mean, I can't be expected to remember every date that some pseudo-BNF thinks is important, can I? Half the time I can't even remember their bloody names. It happens to me all the time: some well-intentioned person, utterly unknown to me but doubtless well thought of in their own teensy, specialized corner of fandom, will chat me up out of the blue, clearly expecting me to be conversant with their bizarre theories, obscure pairing, or the semi-deranged meta they imagine they're famous for. I always try to humour them, but it's not an easy task when sometimes I haven't even heard of their daft fandom, let alone their precise position within it. Still, these small courtesies betwixt BNFs are an essential part of the mechanism that keeps fandom ticking along, aren't they? And as one of the better known names, I feel obliged to politely acknowledge these littler apogees.

Of course, another e.p. of the old m. of fandom is that ability, often utilized but seldom remarked, which the well-placed and truly *popular*

BNF possesses to squelch certain ideas utterly and to gently redirect other ideas into new and different channels. The time had come, I saw at once, to deploy this ability. You see, the one-year anniversary of BalletChic's psequicide was upon us, and it had reached my ears--or rather, my inbox--that Ciyerra was secretly organizing her own Annualia.

That would *never* do. Another prolonged outburst of praise and mourning in honour of BalletChic would pretty well finish me off. It had been bad enough having to sit through the first one.

But what also wouldn't do, I realized, was to be seen to be too obviously hijacking 'her' day for selfish purposes. The fen might guess my intent, and turn scornful or mocking instead of adoring or supportive. I didn't want to ruin my reputation; I wanted to retain my good name as a caring, giving fan. So none of the usual stratagems--roasting select badfic; posting a new fic; hosting an anon meme--would work in this case. What I needed was to come up with a huge, selfless gesture, something that would benefit fandom as a whole and not just me personally.

The difficulty was in thinking up something that would appeal to a broad cross-section of fandom. There's not an awfully long list of things they agree on. Also, I didn't have a lot of time to pull this thing together, so I couldn't do anything labour intensive, like starting a new archive--not to mention that imagining Arc's reaction if I tried *that* one on gave me the cold chills. No, what was wanted was something that could be set up quickly and easily, utilizing already-available tools, and to which all of fandom, or at least a representative portion thereof, would feel compelled to contribute.

And then it hit me with perfect clarity. *I* could host a site for cross-fandom mourning, a moving, noble monument on a scale guaranteed to knock Ciyerra's *personal* sorrows down to a mere footnote. After all, all of fandom has things to mourn: missing fen, defunct fandoms, lost and unrecoverable fanworks. Many fans and communities were lost just in the transition from mailing lists to LJ.¹⁴⁷ So I logged in to

¹⁴⁷ That line was more-or-less lifted from Cordelia_v, although she was talking about the problems that could arise if fandom were to move from livejournal to other sites; she was not, I'm pretty certain, implying that anyone died. It did have a 'many men died along the trails' kind of sound to it, though, so I shamelessly stole it.

Sanguinity, and got to work immediately. My idea was to use some of my land and a lump of game points--and I'd tell you how many it cost, but frankly the sum was so huge as to be vulgar and unmentionable--to set up a permanent in-game mourning site, accessible to all. I linked it to an outside BBS as well, for fans unable to handle graphic-intensive mourning or, for whatever reason, unregistered at *SO*.

I worked for days setting up a temple which fronted onto Dread Lane and which led, via a dark and winding stone staircase, to a vast underground chamber. The chamber went on for acres and acres, echoed with the sound of an unseen river and a faint, sibilant hiss,¹⁴⁸ and was deeply and meaningfully symbolic, as well as slightly more affordable than buying an equally vast above-ground tract would have been. The temple itself could be entered freely, at least as far as the vestibule, where visitors could post notes of mourning on the bulletin board (which would naturally appear simultaneously on the BBS).

For a very small donation--really a *miniscule* amount of tithing points; I'd be lucky to break even, and I was waiving the entrance fee altogether for the first week and on subsequent important dates--mourners could move through the rest of the temple, light virtual votives, lay wreaths and flowers, gather for prayers or readings, and mount memorial plaques dedicated to fandom's lost. Belowground there would be larger monuments, cached fanworks, and secret tombs and ossuaries; anyone who purchased one of *these* could use it at their own discretion, to exchange addresses for APAzines or forbidden fics or what have you.

I doubt I'd have gotten finished in time for its unveiling, but after three days without much sleep or nourishment I IM'd Arc for assistance. She was supportive enough ('Any fan's death diminishes me, because I am involved with fankind,'¹⁴⁹ she messaged me solemnly), but too busy, she said, to render much direct assistance. She did, however, pass my request along to some sort of *Sanguinity*

(accessed 17 March 2008).

See also: [http://www.umanitoba.ca/canadian_wartime/grade6/module1/].

¹⁴⁸ Mina is lifting rather extensively from the Greeks. Borrowed: one river (Styx), one Sybil.

¹⁴⁹ A slight rearrangement of John Donne's Meditation XVII.

coder,¹⁵⁰ who must have been awfully good; the whole thing, Temple and Fandom Underworld and all, just sort of materialized suddenly, nearish the BalletChic statue. Simultaneously a *frightening* amount of my in-game stockpile vanished, of course, but the end result so far outstripped my wildest hopes that I didn't so much as murmur at the expense. Arc knows some pretty damned talented people, you know.

I'd been all set to raise high the banner ads¹⁵¹ and make some sort of announcement, but as luck would have it, I wasn't called upon to exert myself at all. A handful of BalletChic's old friends, having felt called to express their admiration for Ciyerra's art by burning incense at the 'grave' site, saw the temple shimmer eerily into existence. They came over to investigate at once, 'lured by a strange glamour' according to one of them, while I was still inspecting the specs myself, so I was on hand to explain the temple's high and noble purpose. They were suitably impressed, and could hardly wait to get started grieving.

'Mourning's at seven,'¹⁵² I informed them, and sure enough they were there early the next day, veils and armbands in place and handkerchiefs at the ready. Bless them, they must have spent every intervening moment online, talking up a storm. The lines of eager bereaved stretched all the way down Dread Lane, and feelings were running high. Whoever it was said there's no rivalry among the dead¹⁵³ obviously never observed fen debating the merits of vanished fanfiction and long-GAFIAted authors. They were as sullen, petulant, unseasonable, alienated and excited as anything: a right horror.¹⁵⁴

A parliament of femmefans,¹⁵⁵ garlanded with willow blossoms and clutching quaint and curious downloads of nearly-forgotten lore,¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ That would be Case, on whom I have the most massive crush.

¹⁵¹ *Raise high the banner ads* is a misquote of Sappho, only Sappho was talking weddings, not funerals: 'Raise high the roof-beam, carpenters...'

¹⁵² *Mourning's at seven* should be 'morning's at seven.' Robert Browning, 'Pippa's Song.' Connie Willis made brilliant use of Browning's Pippa in Bellwether.

¹⁵³ *Whoever it was said there's no rivalry among the dead* was Lord Macaulay in his essay on Lord Bacon (July 1837): "With the dead there is no rivalry..."

¹⁵⁴ More of good old Lord Macaulay. Mina is basically accusing the fen of being all the things Macauley said dead authors weren't.

¹⁵⁵ A parliament of femmefans must be something like a parliament of owls.

¹⁵⁶ Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore.'

were heatedly disputing the sociopolitical impact, or lack thereof, of writing slash. At several strategic points around the temple canon had been rolled out to settle--or, more likely, prolong--disputes of long standing as to who, exactly, had poorer reading skills than whom. The dead horse of authorial intent was being duly flogged, and the precise legal standing of fanfiction was destined never to be buried. Clothing was being torn and breasts beaten as the significance of online sexualized feedback was subjected to a close reading, and the grave implications of emoticons were being carefully unearthed. I beamed at the crowds and offered myself silent hearty congratulations on having united such a cross spectrum of fandom.

They were all possessed of similar nostalgia, though no two seemed to agree as to which departed BNF was most sorely missed, which epic fic most deserved resurrection from wayback, or which con in which yesteryear had had the best all-night filk session ever. But these were minor details, mere quibbles, which faded to insignificance next to the rising sense of a shared history. Enthusiasm crested and affection frothed, and here we all were, riding the fandom wave. The mourners trooped in to mount plaques and set urns in place, and picturesque crowds gathered, fluttering fic-inscribed fans and, in the more creative cases, wearing an updated version of the *pouf de sentiment*, with tiny characters from their fandoms positioned among the curls.¹⁵⁷

The only fly in the ointment was PrinceC, and I know 'fly' isn't the *mot just*, but 'Mountie in the ointment' just sounds obscene. A reasonable fan, assuming any such creature could be found, would have expected him to be pleased for me. One would have thought that my smash cross-fandom success would have been ample cause for introducing the congratulatory note into the conversation when next he IM'd me, but that wasn't the case. Instead he sounded faintly, though obliquely, censorious.

¹⁵⁷ To quote from Kate Berridge's Madame Tussaud: "The 'pouf de sentiment' required the wearer to use her hairstyle to display her individuality in the best Jean-Jacques fashion by incorporating as many personal references as could be fitted on her head. Objects used to achieve this effect included stuffed birds, small dolls, flowers, and foliage--all carefully arranged and attached with pins, gauze, and pomatum (a strongly scented paste)."

Can't you just picture the fannish equivalent?

‘I’ve always thought,’ he told me, apropos of nothing at all, ‘that the deepest, most meaningful fandom experiences are the private ones between fan and text that change our perspective and how we live in the world. The moments, I mean, that shape our souls, not our reputations. Don’t you agree, Lady Mina?’

Well, no, I didn’t bloody agree, and I felt it a gross impertinence for him to be hinting that my normal, healthy enjoyment of my status within fandom was in any way lacking. The *nerve* of some people’s children. Still, I couldn’t very well openly upbraid him when he’d been so very circumspect that I couldn’t be absolutely certain he’d even meant it as a criticism. Maybe I was being oversensitive.

Ignoring the tiny pang of guilt that, really, I had no reason at all to feel, I tried to shift the conversation into more appreciative channels. ‘Monkish virtue’s all very well, I’m sure,’ I replied, ‘but I think fandom’s at its best when we all come together on things that matter to us. People are really enjoying this chance to reminisce about fanworks of yore.’

‘I mean,’ I went on, warming to the subj., ‘think of the memories older fen have. Can’t you just picture your mother as a n00b, sharing zines with a young Archivist12? Only I suppose she wasn’t Archivist12 back in their pre-internet days; she was probably just Archivist, untroubled by any inkling there were other Archivists in the world.’

‘Actually,’ PrinceC confessed, ‘my mother says that when Arc first came down from Canada to attend St. Ursula’s,¹⁵⁸ they all had completely different nicknames.’

‘What was Arc called?’ I asked, diverted.

‘They called her the Ringmaster,’ he informed me.¹⁵⁹ Well, that was cute, and I suppose a lot of young girls do like circuses.

I excused myself politely, and soon found myself heading over to the Red Cross page to make a donation. Gritting my teeth, I made that

¹⁵⁸ Feeder school for St. Schol’s. Very elite. Accepts Canadians amongst its boarders, apparently.

¹⁵⁹ Well, to quote from an earlier episode, ‘Arc is so serious minded, she naturally gravitates towards the most boring ends of fandom’ (<http://mina.sapphireisle.org/fiction/viewstory.php?sid=5&chapter=5>). Although thanks to Julietofarcadia I am now picturing Arc ‘in one of KT Tunstall’s circus video costumes.’

an *anonymous* donation, and resisted the urge to tell anyone, including PrinceC, even though it was his fault really. Damned moralistic Tolkienites: they always manage to introduce that unwanted serious note.

2.9 Mina de Malfois and the Kindred Spirits

Fandom_Gossip, I saw over my morning coffee, had been almost entirely eaten up with arguments for and against Warr1or's proposed het zone, *Princely Plots*.¹⁶⁰ Everybody who was anybody, and a great many people who weren't, had posted an essay or rant. The list of links went on for simply miles. Even Rabbit, I noticed with amusement, was partaking of the heady joy of cross-fandom discussion, although I couldn't think *why*. She probably couldn't *read* het, let alone post it, so I couldn't imagine *any* fanfiction archive being amongst her usual hangouts. Not to be harsh, but she hardly came across as a literary genius, unless BOO YUU H0R¹⁶¹ counts as Dadaist poetry or something.

But it all came clear--clearish, anyway--in a day or two. Rabbit had been merely Getting Her Name Out There, the way those harried in their pursuit of internet fame *do* when they've something going on in their personal lives to which they badly want attention paid. For a certain species of internet denizen, nothing in their personal lives *counts* unless a bunch of strangers can be compelled to look at it and talk about it. They seek to hold the mirror-sites up to nature, for reflection but not for criticism. That's why there are so many coily

¹⁶⁰ Warr1or's proposed het zone, *Princely Plots*, is named after Dick Plotz of early American LotR fandom, and of course also after Gandalf's Garden.

¹⁶¹ BOO YUU H0R isn't really copyrighted.

"It apparently all starts when a Sailor Moon cosplayer at cosplay.com named Usagi Dumpling posts a picture of herself holding a straw with the words "I SEE YUU" and "I EET YUU" photoshopped onto it. Apparently, this is 'stealing' the phrase of another Sailor Moon cosplayer named Usagi Kou (sailor-moon at c.c), whose friends unleash the fires of hell upon the poor girl for daring to infringe upon her 'copyrighted' pose and phrase and get the girl's picture removed from the site."

Schoenschan, 29 January 2005,

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/619175.html] (accessed 17 March 2008).

unflocked posts which, inevitably, respond to any dissenting comment with, 'This is PERSONAL, not a fandom thing!'¹⁶²

Rabbit's own public personal post dealt with the Otakukin Awakening. She had, she informed the world at large, left the group. She would not, she assured us, ever be returning, and what is more, she intended her post to stand as a warning to any newcomer or young fan who might be in danger of involvement with said group. The Otakukin Awakening, she explained with a complete absence of self-awareness, was less a group of friends than an 'insidious,' leeching, destructive cult composed of crazy people. She regretted ever having allowed them to support her for those six months or so she'd been out of work. If they had been real friends, they wouldn't have thrown it in her face by bringing home job applications.¹⁶³ And, even more deplorably, the group had been sadly unsupportive of her recent unveiling of the High Truth that she and her dearest friend were channelling, and embodying, people she called Princess Rose Red and Rosebud, and that, furthermore, it had been revealed to her that Josh Amos was The Disguised Prince of Charms.¹⁶⁴

I was impressed in spite of myself. It isn't often you find someone so utterly impervious to irony, and I'd never have guessed Rabbit

¹⁶² This is an allusion to that mysterious, undisclosed Glossing thing. [http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Femslash%2C_Patriarchy%2C_and_the_Evils_of_Glossing] (accessed 17 March 2008).

¹⁶³ "Despite her promises of trying to find a job, Usa refused to look seriously for one. According to Ender, she only put in 3 applications, and she told me that she hadn't even filled them out with important information such as references."

[<http://www.sm.mypockybox.com/frame/UsagiKou017.jpg>]

"She never bothered getting a car or a license... or even a job, but we made her get a job eventually. However she only requested part time, and quit after three months. During that time though, she was forced to take a NJ transit bus to work because both myself and my parents were working full time and we couldn't take her."

hanyouinuyashav, [<http://www.sm.mypockybox.com/frame/UsagiKou-Scott.php>]

¹⁶⁴ The Disguised Prince of Charms, aside from indicting Josh Amos' desire to imitate PrinceC, points to Hermes ('giver of charm').

knew words like ‘insidious,’ even if she had spelled it wrong.

Very much against my better judgment I began to look into this unfolding saga of fictitious channelling, and a good thing I did, too. The ‘dear friend’ whom Rabbit had cast as fellow imaginary-schoolgirl--and, at least if I were reading her hints correctly, possible romantic interest¹⁶⁵--was none other than Stasia. Good heavens: my housemaid’s name was being bandied about. I’d seen no actual posts or comments *by* Stasia, so either she preferred personal personal matters to public personal ones, or else she didn’t know what Rabbit was saying. I ever-so-casually summoned the Manor staff to a meeting, and once we were seated comfortably around the kitchen table--Liz, I noticed, looking as worried as I felt, Warrlor looking predictably alarmed, and even Ciyerra showing faint traces of concern--asked them if any of them had anything interesting to share. I aimed for a note of ‘friendly interested employer who has no reason to suspect anything in particular,’ and by Jove, I think I hit it.

‘I do,’ said Stasia excitedly, and we all visibly braced ourselves to sit through a long explanation of soulbonding whilst maintaining expressions of helpful, but not overly intrusive, interest. Which was not at all the frame of mind required, as her next sentence made clear.

‘I’ve left my husband,’ she announced.

We all stared at her blankly for a moment. Personally I spent several futile seconds trying to recall who she was married to in-game before it finally dawned on me that she wasn’t talking about a *Sanguinity* spouse. This was the first I’d heard of her being married. I’d known she had a boyfriend, but hadn’t heard about any actual *nuptials*. Oh, well: too late for congratulations now.

‘You mean...in real life?’ Liz said slowly.

‘Divorce is *deplorable*,’ Warrlor burst out, and then seemed to regret the harshness of this. ‘Oh, you poor young woman,’ he said, awkwardly patting Stasia on the hand.

‘Oh, don’t feel *sorry* for me,’ Stasia said, beaming. ‘I’ve found the love of my life! You should all be happy for us.’

‘The love of your life?’ I repeated doubtfully. Liz and Ciyerra and I exchanged knowing looks.

‘You know her as Rabbit,’ Stasia said with dignity, ‘but of course that’s not her *Astral* name. We are kindred spirits.’

¹⁶⁵ Rabbit is taking her inspiration from Maria-sama Ga Miteru or Oniisama-e.

There seemed nothing we could say. I mean, one hesitates to come right out and state the obvious when a friend or acquaintance presents an obviously-doomed affair for one's inspection, but none of us was far enough gone in hypocrisy to cheerfully congratulate her, either. We settled for making ambiguous embarrassed noises and melted away from the table as soon as was decently possible--slightly sooner, even. I for one was shocked to the core that Stasia had left a real-life spouse over an online delusion, and Warrlor looked rather as if he'd discovered the Forces of Het were more sorely beset than he'd imagined in even his darkest moments.

Only Liz remained unflapped. Catching up to me in the hall, she grimly but calmly expressed her belief that Rabbit was using Stasia for some end of her own, and that she'd drop Stasia without qualm once her objective was achieved.

'But that's *horrible*,' I said, 'and probably true. Oh, poor Stasia. What the hell do you suppose Rabbit is playing at?'

'Probably something to do with Josh Amos,' said Ciyerra shrewdly, materializing out of the wall to join our confab uninvited. 'Notice she was careful to include a role for him in her new thing.'

'True,' I said thoughtfully, so struck by this insight that I didn't bother snubbing the Manor ghost for eavesdropping. I couldn't say this in front of Liz and Ciyerra, of course, but that raised the question of whether Josh--or rather, Jen--might be involved. Was this what she was doing between terms? Causing mayhem and divorce?

Not a thing I could do about it at the moment, though. Back in our room, I glared futilely at her empty bed for a while and decided I needed to get out and relax for a bit, preferably over some non-roommate-related pursuit. I headed for the campus bar feeling adventurous, having never been there before noon, and was promptly hailed by Xena, whom I bet had. She pushed a chair back from her table, and shot me a suggestive look, so I blushingly made my way over and sat down. She nodded approval and summoned a waiter by some means I didn't catch, possibly telepathy.

'A martini,' Xena said to the waiter firmly, and then, 'Or two¹⁶⁶--are you having one, Mina?'

'What is a martini, exactly?' I asked cautiously. I meant to inquire as to the ingredients of the thing, but Xena interpreted my question

¹⁶⁶ Possibly Xena is a fan of Dorothy Parker.

more broadly, in a sort of existentialist sense.

‘A martini, Mina,’ she said fervently, ‘is proof God loves us.’

The waiter, still hovering, was of a more practical turn of mind. ‘It’s gin and a splash of vermouth, miss,’ he informed me, causing Xena to eye him coldly, and thus coldly eyed he amended that to, ‘Just a *trace* of vermouth, I mean. A hint. Barely any.’ Xena relaxed her gaze and beamed at him, like a lion tamer whose favourite beast has finally stopped gnawing on the spectators and started performing adequately.

‘Martini,’ I echoed thoughtfully. ‘Gin.’ That almost reminded me of something, but I couldn’t think what.¹⁶⁷ It slipped away entirely while I pondered the matter, leaving me wondering if I’d just imagined that fleeting sensation of something *almost* but not quite recalling to mind something else.

The waiter was still hovering, and Xena was beginning to look amused. ‘She’ll have one,’ she told the waiter, who promptly moved towards the bar. ‘Really, Mina, it’s not usually a difficult decision. If you don’t like the taste, we’ll order you something else and I’ll finish yours.’

‘Yes. Quite. Thanks,’ I agreed, and the elusive thought that had been niggling me gave up the chore and vanished. Whatever the thing was, it clearly wasn’t due to be *acu tetigisti*’d this morning, or not by me at any rate.¹⁶⁸

‘What news, youngling?’ Xena asked, and I filled her in on my latest domestic staffing crisis while our drinks arrived. Xena looked impressed, as well she might.

‘And Stasia’s really left her boyfriend?’ she asked, and whistled.

‘Husband,’ I corrected. ‘And yes. She says it’s an irreversible decision; she’s not going back, no matter what. And Rabbit said the exact same thing about the Otakukin Awakening.’

‘Quoth the raving, nevermore,’ Xena mused.¹⁶⁹ Aside from Arc, Xena is the quotingest person I know. I wondered briefly what it must be like to have an extended conversation with the two of them. A

¹⁶⁷ ‘Martini,’ I echoed thoughtfully. ‘Gin.’ Mina is almost but not quite getting it.

¹⁶⁸ As Atthis_uk said, this is very Wodehousian of Mina. *Rem acu tetigisti* is one of Jeeve’s things, as Bertie might say.

¹⁶⁹ Poor Poe: I really need to stop misquoting him.

concordance was probably required.

‘Mind you,’ I said, returning to the Stasia affair, ‘if she married the same guy she was dating when I met her, it’s just as well she left him.’

‘Horsefucker?’ Xena asked blandly, as though that were a common problem.¹⁷⁰

‘Uh, no,’ I said. ‘Not that I know of. But he’s a polygamist, and Stasia isn’t.’

‘Or wasn’t,’ Xena pointed out. ‘Rabbit’s new game sounds highly...groupish. Share-y. Probably meant to keep multiple options open for Rabbit, in case J...Josh proves interested.’

I’d heard that hesitation, and I gave Xena my very best betrayed-and-indignant face. ‘You *know*,’ I said accusingly. ‘You know Josh and Jen are the same person.’

Xena shrugged, and sipped her martini. ‘I do,’ she admitted, not even bothering to look guilty. ‘I’ve known for a while. And excuse my pointing out the obvious, kid, but if you and Jen are chummy enough to share that info, you should just approach her directly and pump her for information about Rabbit’s plans. See what she knows.’

It made, I admitted, sense, but Xena couldn’t possibly know how scary a prospect a head to head with Jen was--or could she? She was grinning slyly, almost as if she suspected she was advising the inadvisable.

Xena escorted me firmly back to the dorm the minute she noticed I was on my third martini, which was dashed unfair of her, as I felt I was really only just beginning to acquire a taste for them. Her legs were too long to keep up with, which is why I kept tripping up in my own feet and having to be held up; I tried explaining that, but she shot me rather a stern, silent look, and brought me all the way up to my room. I felt a brief thrill of something or other, but she discarded me

¹⁷⁰ Listen my children and you shall hear, of the midnight ride of Darkhorseman...on second thought, that story's not fit for children. (My apologies to HWL for this footnote.)

‘You see, darkhorseman has a usericon that first led the community to believe he was a furry. Turns out, though, that according to posts he’s made in other communities, he’s a zoophile.

His "wife"? A horse.’

Lottelita, 02 January 2007,

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/otf_wank/519621.html] (accessed 17 March 2008).

without further incident, dropping me in an undignified heap on my bed.

I shut my eyes, to rest them, and when I opened them Xena had just succeeded in jimmying open the top drawer of Jen's desk. 'You shouldn't be doing that,' I said.

'Probably not,' she agreed cheerfully, riffling through the contents. She picked up a small framed photograph and frowned at it thoughtfully. 'What do you make of this?' she asked, tossing it at me. I reached out and caught it automatically, and I don't even play Quidditch. It was a picture of two young girls, obviously twins, although the one in shorts appeared to have hacked off her own hair¹⁷¹ - or perhaps, I thought shrewdly, the demure looking sister was responsible; she looked the type to subject innocent victims to games of hairdresser. She was smiling sweetly at the photographer, her own long ringlets in perfect order, while her half-bobbed sibling glared angrily.

'I have to be going,' Xena announced, and stood up. She scanned me critically and asked if I was feeling all right, and once I'd given her a coherent answer, laden with wounded dignity, she smiled and left. I lay around contemplating life for a while, and then realized that for all I knew Jen could return at any moment, so I'd better replace that pic. Except I couldn't. Xena had shut the desk drawer, and it had relocked itself. I had to settle for shoving the photo under my pillow, although dropping it down a garbage chute also came in for consideration.

Knowing I had that Horrible Artefact¹⁷² in my possession cast rather a pall over the next few days. Mind you, I wasn't the only one having a pall cast over them. Mrs. Sev dashed up to me the next time I logged in, and she was sobbing so hysterically¹⁷³ it took a while before I could even understand what she wanted. I waived the fees gladly, and

¹⁷¹ It was a picture of two young girls, obviously twins, although the one in shorts appeared to have hacked off her own hair, and those of you who've read Josh Amos's 'Squid and Squickability' will doubtless find this strikingly familiar.

¹⁷² Y HALO THAR HORCRUX REFERENCE. Thanks to the accomplished John1987 for correcting my spelling of 'THAR.'

¹⁷³ Mrs. Sev is in mourning for reasons which will be instantly clear to anyone who has read Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.

gave her my full permission to hold as long a wake or vigil or whatever as she felt was necessary under the circumstances. Judging by the way she was carrying on when I extricated myself from her dampish embrace, it would be a lengthy mourning indeed. Lily and her fellow-travellers might well disappear into my temple of grief and never be heard from again.

That was a vaguely depressing thought. I'd miss them if they went away; I'd grown unexpectedly fond of them and their brand of harmless crazy. Luckily a contagious outbreak of exaggerated friendship¹⁷⁴ was sweeping the net, which was cheering if mildly perplexing to watch. I turned happily to this latest distraction.

Best friendship had made a comeback. Vying to outshine each other in their displays of BFFness and Ethereal Friendship, these pairs of kindred spirits feverishly wrote poems, drew portraits, dedicated fics, created birthday comms and 'Just 'cuz I love you!!' comms galore, and bought a veritable vault's worth of iconspace and virtual gifts. As the level of chumly devotion and competitive love increased, the gift-giving burst its virtual bonds, and soon the *real* measure of friendship was whether you'd quested long and hard to find her wishlist (though none of these was terribly well-concealed, to be honest, and most were coyly displayed right there in the beloved's userinfo) and bought her an actual, tangible gift.¹⁷⁵ Or gifts. Or one gift from every wishlist. The friendships rapidly grew ever closer, ever more fiercely displayed, and ever more expensive.

Sanguinity's modest contribution was the newly created Friendship Park, so when I next logged in I landed there, just to take a look. There were tasteful signs indicating the particular bond which had caused each tree, flowerbed, and bench to be created. There were named names and proclamations of fondest friendship on every stone of the paths. There were, slightly less tastefully, bunches of BFF balloons tied everywhere, and brightly coloured proclamations of new friendships pinned to the bulletin boards.

I didn't immediately realize what had prompted all of this. I mean,

¹⁷⁴ Like a friending frenzy, only more so.

¹⁷⁵ As Julietofarcadia understood, this behaviour owes much to the Victorian friendships explored in Sharon Marcus's *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*.

maybe the internet was just having a particularly friendly week. That could happen, right? Maybe. And the fad seemed sourceless--no particular canon was being cited, and the friendships spread across several fandoms. But the various signs and notices were all using a catchphrase: Friendship is the Highest Truth. I recognized that from somewhere. Memory failed me, but my cache didn't, and it leapt off the screen at me. 'Friendship is the Highest Truth' had been the title of Rabbit's post announcing her, um, newly 'revealed' Astral Relationship with Stasia. So *she*'d started this, and infected everyone else.

That made me feel better, actually, about not having had a BFF of my own step forward to claim me in this latest friending frenzy. I'd been beginning to feel left out. Of course I didn't *want* some lunatic proclaiming devotion to me and making public displays of excessive affection. I'd have had to turn down anyone who'd *asked* for single-minded ethereal friendship. But...no one had asked. Oh, during the past week I'd had a few things bought off my wishlist by fangirls, but they weren't people I really *knew*. And I'd had the usual anonymous donations of paid time and icons and sparkling virtual things, but these anon intangibles had lost a little of their shine, somehow. Maybe I was missing out. Stasia had looked so happy the last time I'd seen her.

Of course, my irrational moment of envy ended abruptly when I walked into the Manor and found Stasia sitting on the stairs, crying inconsolably. 'What happened?' I asked, hurrying to sit beside her. She was too upset to tell me, though she did shake her head 'no' when I asked if this was about the Dark Schoolmaster.¹⁷⁶ My next guess was that this was something to do with Rabbit. She sobbed harder in confirmation. I sat there making soothing noises and handing her avatar tissues, wondering if maybe I should persuade her to come over onto IM or something, where there'd be less verisimilitude but more actual communication. We were still sitting there when Liz walked in a few minutes later. 'Liz,' I said, tremendously relieved. 'Help. Something's upset Stasia. It's relationship stuff, I think.'

'I'll make tea,' Liz said. 'Come sit in the kitchen.' Several sips of

¹⁷⁶ The Dark Schoolmaster is of course the hero of the Tortured Tutor series. Note that in the Minaverse, the Snape-centric version of reality seems to be canon, as his Minaverse equivalent really is the main character of the series.

hot, sweet tea¹⁷⁷ later Stasia had pulled it together enough to use words to communicate, and I marvelled at the degree of internal consistency between *Sanguinity*'s avatar action and embedded temperament settings.

'It's Rabbit,' Stasia confided. 'I thought things were going so well. I just paid for her registration at *Wands Across*.'

'Wow,' I interrupted, unable to keep silent. Liz whistled.

Stasia waved a dismissive hand. 'Oh, everyone's doing that,' she said. 'After all, what kind of friendship would it be if you weren't willing to pay for a chance to meet up, right? Of course, I had to put it on my credit card, but I totally didn't mind. But then,' Stasia sniffed, and Liz reached for the teapot. 'But then I saw people discussing how in the old days Rabbit always used to go to cons with the same person, and how they were probably *real* BFFs, and Astrally Entwined, and she's probably just lying to herself about me because she misses her--' She broke off abruptly to cry into her teacup for a bit.

'There, there,' said Liz. 'Try not to worry about it. So Rabbit's had boyfriends; so what? Who cares, really? Everyone has pairings in their past. What matters is who you end up with.'

'I wouldn't mind if she'd been BFFy with a guy,' Stasia said scornfully. 'I know she used to date Josh Amos. But everyone's saying she used to have a famous *girl* BFF, and that they were *really* Kindred Spirits.'

'Who?' I asked. 'I mean, who was this female BNF BFF supposed to have been?'

'Razzberry Martini,' Stasia wailed.¹⁷⁸

I confided some of this to Arc via IM, naturally, but she wasn't on all that often. She was busy packing, and when I politely inquired further she said she expected to be away from campus for the rest of the summer. I plunged instantly into several abysses' worth of glumness.

Heedless, she went on callously, 'Of course, I'll be at *Wands Across* in August.'

'Yes,' I IM'd back miserably. 'A lot of people will be.' Dignity forbade my adding that, had finances permitted, I'd almost have

¹⁷⁷ Hot tea can cure, or at least render bearable, almost anything.

¹⁷⁸ Of course it makes sense that Rabbit used to go to cons with 'Razzberry Martini,' since she's been known more recently to show up with Josh.

considered going myself.

‘And in the fall we’ll have to see about finding you some part-time work,’ she messaged back. ‘I thought perhaps a position at the library might suit.’

‘I’d *love* a position at the library,’ I responded eagerly. ‘Any position.’

‘Ta for now, then,’ she said, and logged off. She’d brightened my spirits considerably, giving me something to look forward to in the fall--but that still left the summer to get through. My spirits dimmed again.

I jumped nervously as the lock clicked and the door swung open. In breezed Jen, wearing a St. Schol’s shirt, and looking youthful and collegiate--but probably Leopold and Loeb had looked youthful and collegiate, back in the day.

And here I was, with that damned picture under my pillow.

‘The housemother was holding this for you, so I said I’d deliver it,’ Jen was saying. She tossed a large envelope at my feet, and then looked at me more closely. ‘Are you all right, Mina? You look pale.’

‘Probably sickening for something,’ I said. ‘Could be horribly contagious. Lethal, even. You’ll probably want to keep your distance, or quarantine me utterly, really.’

She looked amused and un-put-off. ‘What, abandon you in your hour of need?’ she drawled, flopping down on her bed. ‘I wouldn’t dream of it. I’ll be here to stroke your fevered brow, and all that.’

My brow grew markedly more fevered at the thought. To hide my agitation, I picked up the envelope. It was from Arc. I tore it open happily. It was full of tickets and flyers and instructions and receipts, and a map, and schedules.

‘Oh my god,’ I said out loud when it finally sunk in.

‘What?’ asked Jen lazily, not opening her eyes.

‘It’s *Wands Across*,’ I answered, breathless with delight and terror. ‘I’m registered. And it’s all been paid for.’

Jen stopped trying to nap and sat up. ‘Wait,’ she said, looking delighted. ‘*Wands Across*? You’re *going*? You’re going to a *con*?’

I stared at her, momentarily speechless. *Was* I? Should I?

The Dark Schoolmaster: Chavalrous or Chivalrous?

Warning: My betas have told me that this essay contains possible spoilers for Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. I don't even see how that's possible, unless this J.K. Rowling person has been ripping off *The Tortured Tutor*, but just in case you'd better not click if you don't want to be spoiled.

Title: The Dark Schoolmaster: Chavalrous or Chivalrous? A Prince's Mirror of Aspiration.

Fandom: The Tortured Tutor series

Acknowledgments: I am, as always, deeply indebted to the Clives for their input and feedback, and for their research skills. This couldn't have been written without them. A handful of them deserve writing credits, really, although they seem reluctant to *claim* credit. They're sweetly modest that way.

Dedication: For my friend Mrs. Sev., who is understandably distraught, and for those of you who share her distress, even if only to a lesser extent. I don't usually do meta, but I know you need something to smile at, so consider this my tribute.

The Dark Schoolmaster is, his friends and detractors agree, an ambiguous character. After all, he himself is a hybrid, but he shares many of the tastes of the *pur laine* Sages. When we first see him at home, the contrast between the squalid poverty of the public rooms and the luxury of his boudoir is striking. And, of course, he is a masterful virgin, an expert in the *ars amor* even though technically innocent of real, soulbonded satisfaction. He stands at many thresholds, defying easy categorization. Obviously one framework for contemplating the magnificent contradictions embodied in this man is that of chivalry and courtly love. Is he, as superficial readers might assume based on his poverty and lank hair, a *chav*? Or is he an embodiment of the chivalric ideal?

Common conception links chivalry with the moneyed, but this association followed from the ‘over-elaboration of chivalry into costly fantasies (playing Acadia, paseos de honor, etc)’¹ and not from the lofty *literary* ideals which are the more suitable guide to the Dark Schoolmaster’s personality. Scaglione² describes the essence of chivalry as ‘the need for self-sacrifice, the devotion to a distant ideal, and the satisfaction in chastity and frustration,’ and devotees of The Tortured Tutor series will recognize that description. The Dark Schoolmaster’s devotion to his unobtainable beloved--foolish girl!--is legendary, and now, alas, so is his final act of self-sacrifice.

In the Sage Society of The Tortured Tutor series, the nominal ‘elite’ are the *pur laine* Sages, and of course our Byronic hero cannot be counted amongst them. His ancestry casts a wide net, and *so many* of his attributes--his unerring taste in food and wine; his instinctive grasp of the intricacies of any number of languages; his cool analytical logic and prodigious feats of memory; his innate musicality--are reflective of his mixed Italianate, Russian, French and Romany heritage. As a hybrid Sage with a complex ancestry, he is barred from easy access to his deserved place in the top ranks of society, but this injustice only adds to his scornful pride. Perhaps it is his haughty demeanour and supreme self-confidence in his countless abilities that make him the envy of other men, and the secret desire of women.

The Dark Schoolmaster is noted for his apathy towards these women. He appears not just totally self-controlled but indifferent towards the lady Sages, and most fans and readers agree he is a virgin in spirit if not in the flesh. Oh, there may have been any number of fortunate and willing offerings to assuage his powerful physicality, but this is surely the author’s way of pointing us towards the parallel use of peasants by knights, and is a clue that chivalry is the key to the series. It doesn’t undermine the essential purity of his devotion to his one true love.

And that devotion is essentially courtly. We now know the name of the woman he has loved for his entire life. His devoted fans knew it long before this point, because they saw the clues the rest of us missed. And this steadfast but unrequited love follows the chivalric conception of courtly love. To quote at length from Barbara Tuchman:

Courtly love was understood by its contemporaries to be love for its own sake, romantic love, true love, physical love, unassociated with property or family and consequently focused on another man's wife, since only such an illicit liaison could have no other aim but love

*alone. ...The fact that courtly love idealized guilty love added one more complication to the maze through which medieval people threaded their lives.*³

The Dark Schoolmaster's life was shaped by unrequited love. His worst memory is of being goaded by circumstance into betraying that love with careless words. He indirectly upbraids himself for a life steeped in rather sad memories, even while his devoted readers sob their assurance that these sad memories are the source of his strength. The readers are right, as they so often are. His love is what has led him to strive for continual improvement of his natural abilities.

*As its justification, courtly love was considered to ennoble a man, to improve him in every way. It would make him concerned to show an example of goodness, to do his utmost to preserve honor, never letting dishonor touch himself or the lady he loved. On a lower scale, it would lead him to keep his teeth and nails clean, his clothes rich and well groomed, his conversation witty and amusing, his manners courteous to all, curbing arrogance and coarseness, never brawling in a lady's presence. Above all, it would make him more valiant, more preux; that was the basic premise.*⁴

Disloyal readers will argue that the Dark Schoolmaster is not, in the *The Tortured Tutor* series, shown to be particularly well groomed or clean. Admittedly his skankiness worsened following his lady's death, but he disdained middle-class standards of tidiness early on. Most likely he took his inspiration from Templar Knights, who used to wear sheepskin breeches in all weather and never bathed or changed them. His outer disorder is a contrast, and probably a necessary balance, to the perfect control and order he has established over himself in the realms of mind and soul.

The Dark Schoolmaster's self-control is notorious. Only now have his worshipful readers been offered a glance at his private indulgence of his romantic side. The wooden trunk in his room, symbolic of treasure and of secrets, has been flung open in the latest instalment of *The Tortured Tutor*. His devotees have been allowed to learn that it was his practice, each evening, to write love letters to his lost lady, wringing tortured drops of emotion from his overburdened soul. More touchingly still, he wrote his unsent love letters with a punishment quill, allowing the words, already etched in his soul, to etch themselves in his flesh. His heart's blood poured freely from his hand while his tears spilled. What potent potion could be brewed from such elements! Certainly it has enchanted and enslaved his readers, who

mourn him sincerely. May he be resurrected in their hearts and in their fanfiction.

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2.10 Mina de Malfois and the Horror of it All

Warr1or had been pestering me via every means at his disposal: IM, comments at all my mirror journals,¹⁷⁹ even grass-stained notes slipped under the door of my study in Malfois Manor. He wasn't being threatening, exactly. He was more the friendly kind of stalker, and evidently very concerned for my moral welfare, if not for my mental health. But nothing I did or said seemed adequate to convince him that I wasn't under imminent threat from Josh Amos. I even stepped across the employer-gardener social divide long enough to assure him Josh was still barred from the Manor, and I'm not normally prone to bending over backwards to reassure the outside help.

It was his burgeoning friendship with PrinceC that really set my nerve ends jangling. Not just the perplexingness of it, though that was pronounced, but the dire possibility that PrinceC might casually let slip my whereabouts. I didn't *think* PrinceC was prone to fannish faux pas, but he had been strangely quick to forgive Warr1or's friendslock breach, so there was really no telling how deep the roots of their comradeship had penetrated.

And I couldn't, right this moment, afford to be indifferent. I'd tried my hand at a spot of next-generation wizardfic, and the thing was up at a couple of archives before I'd fully considered what effect my foray nearish the borders of slash might have on my hettish acquaintance. It was having its expected effect on my readership in general, who were torn between wanting me flogged and wanting me canonized, but they were several degrees to the sane of poor Warr1or. He was fully capable of showing up in person to berate a near-slasher.

I idly flipped open the wind-up pocketwatch that had arrived in

¹⁷⁹ Mina seems to be following fandom's practice and preparing to exit LJ. This is as good a point as any to mention that `mina_de_malfois` is her username at both InsaneJournal and JournalFen, and you can use her email (mina_de_malfois@yahoo.com) to find her on Facebook.

PrinceC's most recent, and oddly mechanical, package.¹⁸⁰ Nearly midnight. I headed in-game, feeling pensive, and strolled along the front edge of my property, gazing out through the elaborate wrought-iron fence at Dread Lane.

I hadn't been out in wild gamespace at night--my allegiance to Lord Henri Antoine Silvestre de Gravina notwithstanding, I have no wish to be set upon by flocks of undisciplined vampire NPCs--and I didn't really know much about *Sanguinity* after hours beyond the obvious. I mean, everybody knew that the gothic bartending school ran its classes at night,¹⁸¹ and naturally that elitist American Association of Horror Film Lovers held nightly screenings of the latest Japanese¹⁸² movies, but what else went on?

And then I noticed Rabbit, pacing back and forth on a patch of sidewalk at the lower end of the hill. She was showily removing and replacing her long scarf, and coyly rearranging it around her neck every few seconds. I rolled my eyes. Honestly, *some people*.

She must have heard me pushing my way through the night-blooming jasmine (and incidentally disturbing a white peacock, a recent addition to the grounds, and a small flock of ornamental bats¹⁸³), because when I disentangled myself she'd come over to stand beside the fence. 'Hey, Mina,' she said, with entirely unwarranted familiarity. 'Staying safely shut in, are you?'

¹⁸⁰ Evidence of PrinceC's newfound interest in steampunk.

¹⁸¹ You all knew that already, right?

'And the #1 reason why he should be sorted into Slytherin?

"I work in a goth club. Bartending. In the dark."

Welcome to my fandom.'

Prettyveela, 07 June 2005,

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/726096.html] (accessed 17 March 2008).

[http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Bartending_In_The_Dark] (accessed 17 March 2008).

¹⁸² Many American horror fans are heavily into JHorror and KHorror.

¹⁸³ The *white peacock*, a recent addition to the grounds was inspired by Malfoy manor, of course. The small flock of ornamental bats, the Clives have decided, are Siamese-point bats, with silver fangs. Some of them have curly fur.

‘You know, Stasia’s extremely jealous and upset,’ I said frostily.

‘Because of the dance we shared?’ Rabbit asked, and then laughed loudly at my outraged expression. ‘Oh, Mina, your *face*,’ she gasped when she’d finally recovered from her own joke. She wiped her eyes and reached out to support herself against the iron thorns and roses of my fence, but only for the splittest of seconds, snatching her fingers away satisfyingly quickly from their icy bite.

‘Because of your relationship with Razz Martini,’ I said frigidly. ‘Reports are that it was rather *heated*.’

‘Your own relationship with Razz was rather heated, back in the day,’ Rabbit said. I opened my mouth to argue, but she raised one white-gloved hand. ‘I remember the nasty emails you used to send each other.’

‘She showed you my emails?’ I asked, wrinkling my nose with distaste.

Rabbit shrugged. ‘Sometimes, yeah,’ she said.

‘Were you...?’ I began, but bit off the question. Really, why was I even curious? It was beneath my dignity as a BNF.

‘Lovers?’ she finished.

‘That *isn’t* what I was going to ask,’ I said, as chillingly as poss., though it fell a bit flat when I couldn’t immediately think of a convincing lie as to what I *had* been going to ask. ‘Where is old Razz, anyway?’ I asked, by way of changing the subject. ‘Still struggling to operate a dictionary?’

‘She’s dead,’ Rabbit said. I thought for a moment I’d misheard her. She went on angrily, ‘Josh Amos got religion or something and killed her.¹⁸⁴ And now he thinks he can just walk away from me--.’ She stopped abruptly, glaring at me as though it were my fault she’d said too much.

I stepped away from the fence, wondering if she were mad, while back in the dorm room every hair on my body stood on end. Wait, what if she *weren’t* mad? I glanced involuntarily over my shoulder, even though I knew perfectly well that my roommate was out. Was this the real reason no one could talk about Josh’s whereabouts?

‘Are you sure?’ I asked Rabbit idiotically.

‘If you had a twin sister you’d been incredibly close to all your life, how would *you* feel about the person who did away with her?’ Rabbit

¹⁸⁴ When it comes to religion, Josh can be considered a child of Hermes. I don’t know how more obvious I can make this.

demanded, and then chose to share her own bizarre feelings by adding, ‘And he’s so damnably attractive, too,’ and stamping her foot.¹ My eyes bugged out a bit at the sheer callous self-absorption required to be *attracted to your own sibling’s murderer*. Rabbit was nearly as scary as Jen, with one crucial exception: she didn’t have a key to my room. Horrible suspicions were crowding in upon me. Rabbit had lost a twin, and Josh--I mean, Jen--had that photo of twin girls. Life had taken a sudden turn for the gothic.

Whoever it was first came up with that ‘The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak,’ line, you can tell her¹⁸⁵ for me she has a pretty thorough insight into human frailty, because even though my own spirit fully intended never to sleep again, I dozed off at some point that night. I don’t even remember stepping away from the computer, but I must have done, because sometime in the pre-dawn hours I woke up, cramped and chilled and fully dressed, lying on top of my covers.¹⁸⁶ I thought immediately of warm pyjamas, but when I sat up to undress there was a slight problem.

It was my Norman Bates of a roommate. Jen was sitting on her own bed, smoking--in defiance of several rules, but I guess fire codes look pretty petty once you’ve done murder--and watching me.

I’d felt chilly on awakening, but my blood positively iced over at this point. And then it got, against all odds, worse.

‘I hope I didn’t wake you,’ my roommate said politely.

‘Not at all, no,’ I babbled, wondering if I should scream shrilly or just bolt for the door.

‘It’s just that I noticed you had something of mine,’ she went on, gesturing vaguely towards the head of my bed. My pillow, I saw, had fallen to the floor. I looked slowly from it back to Jen, who held up one hand to show me the framed photograph Xena had removed from her desk. Okay, forget the door: maybe I should just make a leap for the window. We were only on the third floor, after all.

‘I can’t imagine why you’d want it,’ she went on. ‘It’s a lousy picture. But I’m deeply flattered, Mina.’

‘Oh, good,’ I said, barely listening. Why on earth hadn’t I had the foresight to keep a rope next to the bed? If I survived this, I was

¹⁸⁵ *The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak* wasn't said by a she, but by Matthew (Matthew 26:41).

¹⁸⁶ Elucreh pointed out that this suggests the disturbing possibility that Mina fell asleep at her computer and Josh picked her up and put her to bed.

seriously going to make an effort to be better prepared in the future.

‘I can’t let you keep it,’ Jen said.

‘No, no, I quite see that,’ I babbled. Aside from the whole evidence factor, she was probably attached to it. CSI had led me to believe killers often kept that sort of minor trophy.¹⁸⁷

‘But I promise I’ll bring you back something even better,’ she said, and even in my alarmed state I noticed she was gazing at me with unprecedented fondness.

‘Oh, well, thanks,’ I said. ‘Jolly kind of you to--wait, what? Bring me *back* something?’

‘Absolutely,’ she said.

‘So you’re going somewhere?’ Hope was, as it so often does, springing.

‘Sorry, but yes,’ she said, and consulted her watch. ‘*Right away*,’ she said more urgently, standing up and heading for the door. I’d glanced at my own watch out of a sort of automatic empathy, and couldn’t help but wonder what sort of appointment one could *have* at four in the morning. Still, who cared what it was, as long as she left.

‘Don’t let me keep you,’ I said, with a more perfect sincerity than even saints generally manage.

‘I’ll be back as soon as I can,’ she said, sort of goopily. She was giving me a queerly sentimental look. I naturally assumed she was imagining how best to dismantle me and bury me under the floorboards,¹⁸⁸ but it was much more awful than that.

‘You know,’ Jen said, before vanishing into the night, ‘I wanted to be close to you even back when I was writing as Razzberry Martini. I never *guessed* you felt the same way. I’ll steal you something *gorgeous*, I promise.’

¹⁸⁷ Finally, a CSI reference.

¹⁸⁸ Poe, The Tell-Tale Heart, and nothing, *nothing*, will ever beat seeing this read out loud on Beauty and the Geek (by a geek with an exquisite sense of rhythm).

Fanfiction: **Afters**

Author: Mina de Malfois

Summary: In which the epilogue of GH is slightly re-imagined.

Warning: Spoilers for the ending of Ghastly Hallows.

Characters: Original Female Character, Original Male Character, Other Female Character, Other Male Character, Severus Snape

Disclaimer: the author doesn't own any of these characters or settings, and has no intention of profiting from their use.

Chapter One: Snogging

Teddy and Victoire broke apart, and he immediately wiped his lips of their kiss, unable to repress a small shudder of disgust. Victoire, more perfectly in control of her reactions, betrayed nothing, even though she prided herself on being nearly a gold-standard lesbian (her one deviation had been a brief cross-generational fling with Kingsley Shacklebolt, undertaken as a schoolgirl dare to prove she had mistressed her fear of the establishment). 'Do you think that did the trick?' Teddy was asking.

'That revolting James is probably already reassuring his ghastly breeder family that we meet their narrow-minded 'norms',' Victoire sneered.

'Go easy on the kid,' Teddy protested. 'He's kind of cute, in his way. Pity he's so resolutely het.'

'That just proves my point,' Victoire replied, but her mind was already elsewhere. Tonight's top-secret meeting of Snape's Non-Hierarchical Anti-Militaristic Support Group was an important one; the lecture on the plight of Polish muggles, and the discussion of how best to enlighten dairy farmers on the inherent sexism and humancentricism of their work, would set the tone for the whole term. It was so bloody hypocritical of their parents' generation that SNHAMSG had to keep their meetings secret. 'If they weren't so rigidly homophobic, they wouldn't have turned the poor kid straight.'

'Maybe he was born that way,' Teddy offered loyally. Victoire rounded on him impatiently.

'Honestly, Teddy, I've said all along you spend too much time with

them! Look at the nonsense they've indoctrinated you with. 'Born that way'--really, Teddy, you should know better! No one is born straight. At birth all babies are naturally healthy polygamous bisexuals; it's only society's intolerance that warps them into heterosexuality.'

'Probably you're right,' Teddy agreed, gazing at Victoire with profound, though entirely non-sexual, admiration. Of course all womyn their age were the intellectual superiors of men, but Victoire, he often thought, far exceeded even *that* high standard. Her views were so much more correct than those of anyone else of their generation. 'Breeders are obviously painfully repressed, that's for sure. Although...' he hesitated.

'What?' asked Victoire, sounding bored.

'I'm almost certain,' Teddy confided, dropping his voice to a whisper, 'that your Aunt Hermione and Uncle Harry have cast off the chains of their sexual oppression--not *fully*, you understand, but somewhat.'

'You mean?' prompted Victoire, slightly interested in spite of her entirely correct disinterest in standardized heterosexual relationships, particularly those of old *married* people.

'I think they're having an affair,' Teddy confirmed.

Chapter Two: Snooping

Albus gazed from the Hogwarts Express until the station had disappeared from view, shutting out as best he could both James' teasing and Rose's gentler urgings that he sit down and talk to her properly. When he finally did relinquish the view to sit down, he found her gazing at him with a particularly knowing concerned look that both annoyed him and brought him that much closer to tears. That would never do. He glanced at James, who sure enough was watching Albus closely, all the while lecturing them both loudly on the advantages of Gryffindor versus Slytherin.

'I don't believe a word you're saying,' Albus finally said, annoyance luckily making him sound braver and firmer than he felt. 'And I don't care if I do end up in Slytherin, James, so shut up. You've never been a Slytherin, so what makes you such an expert?'

'Well, strike me dead and count my winnings, I've found a mythological beast: a fair-minded Potter,' said a voice from the carriage door. They all looked up, even James, to see who'd spoken. It was the pale, sharp-featured boy from the platform, now lounging in the doorway and smirking as if at some private joke. Albus felt

annoyed to have been caught bickering with his family; however much they got on each other's nerves privately, he preferred they put up a united front in public. He also felt slightly guilty at being credited with fair-mindedness towards Slytherin when he'd only meant to rebuff James, and it was this that made him give his full, polite attention to what the boy said next, as if trying to repay the surplus fairness he'd been credited with. 'But sadly, Slytherin isn't what it was, Potter, not what it was at all. Perhaps you should reserve judgement for a while. Pity for the first open-minded Potter to make up his mind before he's had a chance to see what we're capable of.'

'Another bloody first year, and a damned mouthy one at that,' James grumbled, and then narrowed his eyes at the sight of the boy's emerald-studded silver ring. 'Hey--where do you get off, wearing Slyth colours? You lot haven't been sorted yet!'

'It was a gift from my father,' the boy drawled, affecting a bored look. 'Some fathers do give gifts, you know. They don't all wait until you filch stuff out of their desks on your own time.' He laughed in satisfaction when James blushed and scowled at him. 'Oh, yes, Potter, I've heard rumours about your last term here--something about a map, wasn't it?'

By now Rose and Albus were gazing at James worriedly, perplexed and alarmed by this. He shook his head slightly, trying to signal them not to ask any further questions in front of this blond pest.

'Move along, Malfoy, before the prefects spot you,' said a crisp voice from the corridor. A boy, dressed impeccably in billowing robes in various inky shades of grey, passed by without breaking stride or even seeming to glance at them.

'Who was that?' asked Rose, sounding slightly awed. 'Another Slytherin?'

But Scorpius shook his head, looking uneasy. 'Not in those robes,' he said, and his eyes involuntarily met James' as if seeking confirmation. Just as unwillingly, James nodded.

'That's Dominic Zabini, second year,' he said.

'What house, then?' Albus persisted, curious at finding both James and this Malfoy person so visibly unnerved.

'No house,' James said reluctantly. 'He's what they call an Unsortable.'

'Is it true they sleep in the corridors?' Scorpius asked, for the first time truly sounding as young as Rose and Albus. 'And hold meetings in the Forbidden Forest?'

James nodded solemnly. ‘They doss down wherever they find space--if you go out at night you’ll see them.’ Scorpius grinned slightly at that, so James hurried on before the subject of the Map could be raised again. ‘And yeah, people say they meet in the Forest, and that they can do magic off-grounds. The Ministry can’t trace them; no one can. They’re truant half the time, anyway. And none of them are of age yet, of course. Everyone says they’ll be a blot on wizarding society when they graduate, but no one says why.’

2.11 Mina de Malfois and the Fictional Decks¹⁸⁹

I couldn't reach Arc, and I rather had the feeling Xena would only laugh at me, so I found myself online and looking for PrinceC. He hath a sympathetic ear, that boy. I had to leave out the 'roommate' part, because I accidentally began by saying I was having offline problems with Josh Amos, which left me having to edit any 'Jen' references out of the story, but I managed to get some of the gist of the thing across.

'Stay in my condo,' he offered promptly, and I wondered if he'd misinterpreted this as an in-game problem, but no.¹⁹⁰ 'There's no one there at the moment, so you'll have to fend for yourself, but that's no big deal. I'll call the concierge and tell her to give you the key.'

'Are you sure?' I asked, unable to believe a solution, and an upscale solution at that, had so readily dropped into my lap.

'Of course I'm sure, Lady Mina,' he said. 'I'm doing the con circuit

¹⁸⁹ Fictional Decks contain additional suits of cards. Those of you paying close attention will have spotted several of these. Scifantasy deserves credit (or blame) for bringing this (<http://unseenllc.com/core.php?archive=20050124>) to my attention, thereby compelling me to add [underage love] monkeys, aliens, and robotic zombies to the pirates and ninjas. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suit_\(cards\)#Fictional_decks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suit_(cards)#Fictional_decks)]

¹⁹⁰ Way back when PrinceC first made his appearance, several people speculated that PrinceC was inspired by Copperbadge. I'm not sure why they thought this, but he wasn't; I don't even know Copperbadge, but as far as I know he isn't underage, and has neither a mock-courtly manner nor a congenital brain disease. (I hear rumours he's cute, which I choose to believe even though I have no actual proof). However, since it was recently brought to my attention that Copperbadge thinks Mina is *cruel*, I felt morally justified in appropriating his much-memed-about condominium and bestowing it on PrinceC. I hope this doesn't inconvenience Copperbadge in any way--as far as I know, fictitious persons don't take up much space, so he should find PrinceC easy to live with.

from now until the start of fall term--until three days past the start of term, actually--and I'd like to know the place is occupied. You'd be doing me a favour, really.'

Of course I didn't buy that for a minute, but it was a gallant lie, and my relief at finding a Jenfree space to hang my hat was considerable, not that I wore one--hat, I mean. There was just one teensy problem remaining: when he gave me the address, and started in with the detailed directions, it emerged that I was looking at a drive of about an hour, and I don't have a car. If Jen were here I suppose I could have had her steal one, but that would defeat the purpose, wouldn't it? So I essayed a few questions about public transit, and found PrinceC willing but unable to continue being helpful: it was immediately clear he had no idea how to use p. trans. to get from my place to his. I thought a few thoughts about the sort of person who doesn't have to use the transit system, but I squelched them all unspoken the instant I realized how ungrateful I was being. He couldn't help it if he had a car, or all his friends had cars, could he? And who could blame them: public transit carried its own threat level, especially at this hour. But escape was my primary goal, and this was merely a temporary difficulty, instantly solvable if I could just find some clearheaded plebeian soul to give me reliable direction.

'I can take you, Miss Mina,' Warrlor broke in, and I jumped. I hadn't realized anyone else was logged in to PrinceC's chatroom.

'Um,' I said doubtfully, groping for words. 'That's...that's very kind, but I wouldn't want to put you to any trouble, Warrlor.' Was he living nearby? I wondered, a little alarmed at the possibility I was residing at Stalker Junction.

'It's no trouble at all,' he said firmly. 'The important thing is to make sure you're safe.' I was in full agreement there.

'Do you live *near* me?' I asked.

'I'm about two hours' drive west of your campus,' Warrlor said, 'so you start packing, and I'll start driving.' Two hours *west* of me? Goodness, there could be *cows* where he lived. Or corn. 'Do you feel safe waiting for me in your lobby?'

'Absolutely,' I assured him. 'We have a housemother; nothing untoward goes on under her steely eye. But, Warrlor, are you sure about this? It'll be a three-hour drive for you and, well, it's the middle of the night.'

'It's no problem,' he repeated.

'You know, Warrlor, you're welcome to crash at the condo too,'

PrinceC said, causing me to blush crimson with sudden embarrassment squick. ‘My bed’s made up, or you can use the couch.’

There was a pause, during which I found myself hoping for at least two conflicting outcomes. It sucks when my curiosity is exactly equal to my common sense.

‘Perhaps,’ Warrlor said eventually, ‘it would be best if I stayed to guard Miss Mina from harm. The impropriety is less important than her safety.’ He reminded me again to pack my things, and logged off before I could dither or change my mind and take my chances with hitchhiking or something.

‘That worked out well, didn’t it?’ said PrinceC, all male and oblivious. I rolled my eyes.

‘Yes, super,’ I said, reminding myself that I *did* have spiffy Jenfree accommodation to look forward to, after all. ‘Where are the rest of your family going to be, while I’m in your condo?’

‘At home,’ he said, and I quirked one eyebrow. ‘They don’t visit me at the condo very often--I only have the one guest room, and anyway, I like spending time at home. My old room is still there.’

‘Well,’ I said, anxious to get offline before my gratitude gave way to snippy, or worse yet palpably envious, remarks about his privileged accommodations, ‘it’s very kind of you. I really appreciate this. I should start packing, I suppose, so I’ll talk to you next time I’m online--’

‘Which will be tonight or tomorrow, if I know you,’ he said smugly. ‘There’s a guestroom desktop, so feel free. Not that I’m demanding conversation as board or anything, but you know: let me know you’ve arrived safely, okay? And what it’s like living with Warrlor,’ he added, his emoticon seeming to smirk.

For some reason I’d been expecting Warrlor to turn up outside the dorm in a rusty truck, but his vehicle, though firmly in the truck category, was immaculately maintained. It almost gleamed. I stepped shyly outside, and Warrlor immediately leapt out to take my bags. He was wearing a battered brown cowboy hat, which fit my preconceived notions, but also what looked like--I squinted slightly--a jacket rescued from Navy Surplus, complete with gold braid.¹⁹¹ There was a yellow

¹⁹¹ The Admiral’s jacket is a Vanceone reference. Those of you who’ve seen the Harmony Forever (<http://www.harmonyforever.com/>) website will know that Vance is an Admiral of the Harmony ship.

rose¹⁹² on his lapel. I head-tilted in perplexity. It looked good on him, but it wasn't quite what I'd been expecting.

Having stowed my luggage, he came over to stand beside me, and awkwardly held out his hand to shake mine. Seeing him up close, I could tell he was quite a bit older than me, thirty-something for sure, and he had a kind of outdoorsy charm. Going solely on appearance, I'd have been willing to bet he knew his way around a tractor, and possibly a ship. His grip was firm, but his palm was sweating slightly, and I felt less nervous myself when I realized my rescuer probably shared my slight social awkwardness. That would be why he wasn't talking, I guess.

'My hero,' I said with heavy irony, but he responded with full seriousness as he helped me up into the cab.

'I couldn't leave you to face Josh Amos on your own,' he said, 'and besides, I've been waiting for a chance to talk to you.'

Oh hell, I thought, what now? If he was going to try to convert me to Resonance, I was going to have to fling myself from the truck regardless of speed.

We drove in silence for a while, and I watched him out of the corner of my eye. His hands were huge, and relaxed on the wheel and gear shift, and he drove with that kind of easy confidence, not showing off but simply highly competent, which is so strangely attractive...Stop that, I told myself firmly. Sleep deprivation was no excuse for that sort of thing.

'So what's up with the Captain's jacket?' I asked, by way of breaking the hush.

'Admiral's jacket,' he corrected me, but too mildly to have really been much offended. 'I couldn't resist buying something to reflect my new status in fandom.'

'It looks good on you,' I said truthfully. 'What new status in fandom?'

'I'm an Admiral in La Armada de los Cañones,'¹⁹³ he said proudly,

¹⁹² Clearly Warr1or is one of the Rosefen (this is a Doctor Who thing, for those of you feeling bewildered). It's also, as I didn't realize until afterwards, a possible 'Yellow Rose of Texas' reference, given Warr1or's cowboyish leanings.

¹⁹³ La Armada de los Cañones is a canon/cannon reference, obviously, and I owe Princessdot for helping me with that--and by 'helping' I mean 'letting me copy it word for word.'

and when I continued looking politely blank he explained further. ‘We monitor fanfiction and other fan activities for canon compliancy, and we offer support and protection to fans whose canon pairings or readings are under attack.’ I felt a growing sense of dread. This sounded *exactly* the sort of thing Warr1or was bound to become unhinged over. ‘As a matter of fact, Mina, that’s why I wanted to speak to you,’ he went on. Yes, the growing sense of d. had been accurate, I could see that already. His eyes were sort of glowing in the moonlight. ‘Mi General,’ he said reverently, ‘that is, Almirante General Medina Sidonia--’

‘I’ve heard of her,’ I interrupted. ‘She’s the one they say is the single most arrogant person in fandom.’¹⁹⁴

‘She is not,’ he said, giving me a stern glance. ‘She has to issue fiats and decrees, Mina: it’s the only way to get things done. We’d be awash in poor readings and non-canonical interpretations without her.’

I personally saw no harm in us being awash in ‘poor readings,’ but I wisely held my tongue. He was behind the wheel, after all. I didn’t want him running us into the base of a tree in his agitation; however strongly I feel about the death of the author, it’s not enough to warrant my own.

‘You’ve come to the attention of the Armada recently, Mina,’ Warr1or said. He sounded as if he was trying hard to be kind and comforting, and I had to bite my tongue to keep from telling him that I absolutely didn’t care. After all, it was obvious that *he* took all this very much to heart, and I didn’t want to hurt his feelings when he’d come dashing through the night to rescue me from a situation I hadn’t even been able to explain fully. So I settled for making a non-committal noise.

‘Some of our people thought that that essay of yours on the Tortured Tutor was too favourable, given his treatment in the series,’ he went on. ‘Mi General called it ‘sickening adoration’ on first seeing it. And then there’s that wizardfic of yours. Mina, you probably didn’t even realize this, but a lot of people are reading it as pre-slash, and saying you’re obviously going to hook up at least two of the male characters. I won’t say who; it’s not important, since obviously that can’t be what you meant. What *is* important is that I assured them

¹⁹⁴ For reasons I'm not at all clear on, Baranduyñ has this reputation. I've no idea why, but anyway, it's earned her a place at the head of my fictional fleet, defending canon against loose interpretations.

you'll stay canon-compliant even if I have to help you do a close reading for context myself.'

I fought down a contrary urge to wrench the wheel from his hand and put us off the road. 'How kind of you,' I said coolly. 'I'm sure you've saved me from a fate worse than death.'

'Oh, it wasn't that serious,' he said in perfect seriousness. 'But in *Sanguinity* the Armada does own, well, an armada, and you could have found yourself blockaded or captured or fired upon. There's just one thing.'

'Yes?' I said impatiently, after a handful of seconds had ticked by in silence.

'We have an assignment for you,' he said, making this sound like a rare treat. 'A group of OTP ficcers have been besieged by hostile, mocking ninja hordes,¹⁹⁵ and we're sending the Dread Pirate Roberta¹⁹⁶ to their hideout to smuggle out their underground radio broadcast. It's an important podcast, and they deserve to be heard. She's a bit of a loose canon, Roberta; usually fights on our side, but she freely admits to not having an OTP in any of her fandoms. Makes me wonder if she's a real fan at all. But she's well-canoned, and a superb asset in these covert operations.'

'What does that have to do with me?' I asked, well and truly baffled.

'We want you to go along on the mission,' he said cheerfully. 'I'll give you the sign and countersign, and you can make contact with the enclave and help them out. They've heard of you, Mina, and they know you're on their side. And their OTP *is* canon, so this will bolster your reputation among my superiors for canon compliancy.'

PrinceC's condo, when we got there, proved distressingly posh. Not that I allowed that to intimidate me--after all, I *am* a BNF--but it is a bit *quelling* when one notices that the concierge is more expensively dressed than oneself. Warr1or looked unimpressed, maintaining a calm

¹⁹⁵ To steal a phrase from Drakyndra, 'nijas are quite fitting for oppositional or non-preferred readings of text. Those sneaky bits of subtext, lurking around where you can't see them...'

¹⁹⁶ The Dread Pirate Roberta is, obviously, named for the Dread Pirate Roberts in *The Princess Bride*. You also may have recognized Pyratejenni. I should add that rabid canonicity is not a particular trait of Pyratejenni's, although I'm sure like all of us she's experienced moments of it.

which, though no doubt born of obliviousness and ignorance of class distinctions, I somewhat envied. It was a relief when Warrlor unlocked PrinceC's door and we stepped inside. At least here we had privacy, so no one could observe my mild distress at the implied expense of our achingly tasteful surroundings. I schooled myself to remain expressionless with the stern reminder that really, there's nothing impressive about sponging off one's parents, is there?

And it *was* rather interesting to poke around a bit and see how PrinceC lived. Not that I looked through his medicine cabinet or anything, but I *did* peek into his bedroom just long enough to notice the gold-and-red striped pyjamas with the lion crest¹⁹⁷ that lay neatly folded on his bed. And I couldn't help but admire the antique computers¹⁹⁸ lying about the place--the desktop in the study was *particularly* well-restored to its Victorian elegance, though the one in the guest bedroom was almost as striking, and had the added distinction of a black-bordered handwritten note assuring guests that it was entirely at their disposal.

The place was remarkably neat for a bachelor pad. There were, to be sure, tools and cogs scattered across a lot of the available work surfaces, as though a tribe of watchmakers had been squatting there just prior to our arrival, but otherwise all was shipshape and well-ordered. Warrlor had brought in our luggage, and after leaving mine in the guest room he took up residence on the largest sofa, clearing a space on the long, low table that stood in front of it. From his battered leather knapsack he pulled a shockingly state-of-the-art laptop, and I stared. It was very fifteen minutes from now, that laptop. I'd been vaguely expecting agricultural implements or perhaps camping gear, and now I was seized with a sudden urge to go through the rest of his luggage and see what else it revealed. Maybe I could offer to unpack

¹⁹⁷ Those are, obviously, Gryffindor PJs. Less obviously, they're a reference to Copperbadge. During a bout of on-meme BNF sorting, someone (okay, me) sorted Copperbadge as 'a squib in Gryff pajamas,' and then I couldn't resist giving the PJs to PrinceC.

¹⁹⁸ The 'antique computers' originally came about because Mosellegreen brought my attention to this gorgeous creation (<http://steampunkworkshop.com/lcd.shtml>). Later Tmartian42 showed me the laptop model (<http://www.techeblog.com/index.php/tech-gadget/video-steampunk-laptop-is-turned-on-with-key>). PrinceC is going through a steampunk phase--hence the cogs.

for him? No, that would only make me sound like the most insipid, girliest member of the Famous Five, and next thing you knew I'd be saddled with the cooking or some ghastly thing.¹⁹⁹

'Miss Mina,' said Warr1or politely, interrupting my train of thought, 'if you could step into the bedroom and log on, I could introduce you to the Dread Pirate Roberta and get the mission underway. Then,' he added apologetically, 'I need to crash for a while.' I felt a pang of guilt; he'd been awake all night on my behalf. The *least* I could do was help him out with his in-game mission. I hurried to the vintage keyboard, and quickly located Warr1or in *Sanguinityspace*.

We picked our way through the docks, Warr1or carefully steering me around or over the zombies. There seemed more of them than ever, and in worse shape, too. One jittered robotically towards us, pointing and stuttering, 'No U. No U. No U,' before collapsing in a sparking, oozing heap. 'Has there been some sort of massive outbreak?' I asked, revolted.

'Cat mac fever,' Warr1or said grimly.²⁰⁰ 'Very virulent. Yet another reason, Mina, you should be careful who you associate with.'

I rolled my eyes at that, then clutched his arm and shrieked at the creatures crowding the docks. Honestly, I thought, what was wrong with me? I resolved to recheck my avatar's settings at the next available opportunity; I didn't fully approve of this shrieking and clutching.

'Those are aliens,' Warr1or said calmly, and *quite* unnecessarily. I could *see* that. Most of them were classic greens and greys, with long rubbery fingers and huge black eyes. Mildly eerie, but not worth shrieking at, and certainly not necessitating those condescendingly

¹⁹⁹ Apologies to any Anne fans here, but, well, she did get all the least interesting chores.

"What does it say?" said Anne, who was hand-feeding her older brother Julian with fresh lettuce hearts and delicious freshly baked bread that she had made at four o'clock that morning as girls should.'

Lucy Mangan, 22 December 2005,

[<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/childrenandteens/story/0,6000,1672558,00.html>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

²⁰⁰ Cat mac fever is a combination of LOLcats and cat scratch fever. Dreadful. Probably incurable.

reassuring arm pats Warrlor was bestowing on me.

'I can see that,' I said through gritted teeth. 'Why are they here? How do aliens fit into *Sanguinity*?'

'They don't,' he said, shrugging. 'They're from some other MMORPG. It crashed, and someone patched them over here until it's fixed. Entirely illegal, and I don't know why the creators haven't put a stop to it. But to be fair,' he added scrupulously, 'they're well-behaved, and they're not disrupting gameplay.' He was right about that. Now that I'd stopped shrieking, I could see they were chatting away amiably with the regular players, and signing up for quests and things.

'We *do* have a huge amount of bandwidth here at *Sanguinity*,' I told Warrlor, sounding, I hoped, as if I knew what I was talking about.²⁰¹ 'We might as well host them here. It never hurts to be hospitable, right?'

'Sure,' he said agreeably, and stopped walking. A freshly painted pirate ship bobbed gently at the dock. Warrlor took my avatar's arm and helped her up the gangplank, and she *allowed* him to, which revolting behaviour made me wonder again what was wrong with her. Perhaps, I thought with a particularly shrewd burst of insight, it isn't my settings that are skewed at all. Maybe Warrlor's settings are configured too high on something-or-other, and it affects the way other avatars react to his.

As we were going up the gangplank a number of young persons of assorted sexes and genders were making their way reluctantly down. The Dread Pirate Roberta, masked but unmistakable in her captain's hat, was brutally shoving them off. 'Go on, *leave*,' she said, herding the last ones off even as they tried to fawn on her and cling loyally to their canons.

'Bit hard on the callow youth, aren't you?' I remarked.

'Those are under-age love monkeys,' she said, and I made an appalled face.²⁰² 'Not *mine*, other people's,' Roberta said crossly. 'I

²⁰¹ 'We *do* have a huge amount of bandwidth here at *Sanguinity*,' which almost makes you wonder why *Sanguinity* doesn't host the meme. ...Oh, right. Because it isn't real. Bugger.

²⁰² Oh, dear. There was an unfortunate bit of synchronicity to this update. *Just* after PrinceC evinced an interest in steampunk, so did a best-left-unnamed formerly underaged person on journalfen. I'll just add, for the sake of those of you who may have wondered, that there's *no connection here*; I didn't have *anybody* in particular in mind when I mentioned the underaged love

don't mind rescuing them from their tormentors, but I don't really like them and I don't want them hanging around forever. Can't you fucking *read?*' she screamed at a pair of nearby stevedores who were wrestling a large and unwieldy metaphor off the ship.²⁰³ They rolled their eyes and ignored her, even though they were clearly in danger of herniating themselves the way they were going at it. There's just no *helping* some people.

Warr1 or stiltedly introduced us, wished us every success with our mission, and remembered to turn back at the bottom of the gangplank and rush up to hand me a slip of paper. 'Memorize that,' he said sternly before logging off, and I duly committed the sign and countersign to memory. The note burst into flame and vanished when I tossed it aside, and Roberta snorted, as though underwhelmed by this display of secrecy. She shouted a few instructions to her crew, and as we set sail I clung to the railing and looked around. Aside from the extraordinarily well-maintained canons, the most noticeable feature was the collection of treasure chests clustered near the door of the captain's quarters. Some of these had been thrown open to display the burnished gleam of heaps and heaps of old, but evidently carefully polished, pennies.²⁰⁴ Odd.

We were well out to sea when a bizarre noise assailed my ears. At first I naturally thought we'd sailed into a flock of onomatopoeic ducks, because it sounded like a chorus of voices saying, 'quack, quack, quack,' but when I listened more carefully this resolved itself into 'wank, wank, wank.' I peered curiously over the railing, and found a pack of ninjas grappling up the side of the ship.

'I say, you should probably do something about this,' I said to Roberta helpfully, but she gestured impatiently for me to be quiet. A tactical what-d'you-call-it, clearly, because she and her crew let their

monkeys. I was just trying to fit monkeys in (see footnote one for this section).

²⁰³ *Wrestling a large and unwieldy metaphor*. Story of my life, I swear.

²⁰⁴ The *burnished gleam of heaps and heaps of old, but evidently carefully polished, pennies* should put you in mind of Bad Penny, which belongs to Pyrate Jenni, of course. That's the third reference to her, really, if you count the carefully-capitalized-PJs.

[http://www.journalfen.net/userinfo.bml?user=bad_penny]

assailants climb all the way up before neatly stepping forward, drawing their swords, and chopping them off at the black-clad elbows. The ninjas plummeted gracefully backwards, leaving grotesquely realistic trails of blood drops, and sank tidily out of sight. They fell silently, too, not screaming or anything, which just goes to show you how stealthy those ninjas can be. 'Ship wars are so tiresome,' Roberta said, coolly unperturbed.

Soon enough we were anchored alongside a well-concealed dock. I could see a short but twisted path leading through a garden of yellow roses and up to the door of a sort of fortress; presumably Warr1or's sign and countersign would get me in. I said as much to the Dread Pirate, and she snorted again, even more derisively.

'If it doesn't, step back and I'll blast a hole through the wall,' she said impatiently. I saw the problem: caught up in the heat of battle, her blood fired and whatnot, she'd forgotten these people were on our side. I reminded her, as tactfully as poss.

'Side?' said Roberta, rolling her eyes. 'What part of 'mercenary' are you unclear on? I don't give a damn about either of their stupid sides.'

I was taken aback, but tried not to show it. 'Is it true, then,' I asked cautiously, driven on by morbid curiosity, 'that you don't ship *anybody*?'

She shrugged. 'I can stomach canon pairings, but I'm not interested beyond that,' she said.

'But,' I groped for a way to express the fundamental *wrongness* of this, 'pairings are *essential*, aren't they? They're a part of what shapes our response to a text. They're one of the things that determine what we want to see happen in canon, and in fandom for that matter.'

'Canon unfolds as it should,' she said crisply. 'And as for fanfic, what I'd like to see is for fandom to take its hands out of its collective pants and stop scaring the horses and children.' She curled her lip in positively *Lucian* scorn.²⁰⁵ 'Other than that, I can't say I care.'

I couldn't help but take some of that speech personally, and I left in something of a huff. The Rose people, however deranged they might turn out to be, were at least doing fandom in a sense I recognized.

When I got up to the door I found a keypad and a small screen. 'Sector door/?' it blinked, and I typed in the countersign, 'Codo

²⁰⁵ That's a Malfoy reference, obviously.

restor/.²⁰⁶ The door swung open beneath its rose-carved lintel to reveal a gently sloping tunnel of rose quartz, which I followed to a well-lit burrow.²⁰⁷ It was filled with comfortable chairs and tables, and a number of perfectly ordinary-looking people--and one markedly familiar humanoid alien,²⁰⁸ who gave me an abashed smile--were taking tea and chips.²⁰⁹ Well, I say 'perfectly ordinary-looking,' but in point of fact I could tell at a glance that they were probably slightly barking and at least halfway around the nearest bend. Fannish, y'know, and of the squeeful delirious type. Obvious candidates for the fandomcult wiki. Still, the room rang with amusing conversation and good cheer. 'Mina!' said a couple of the ones nearest the entrance. 'How nice to see you.'

'Warrlor sent me,' I said, not a phrase I'd ever expected to catch myself uttering. One of them laughed.

'Poor mad dear,' she said affectionately. 'But he does mean well, the darling, and it was thoughtful of him to volunteer to deliver our podcast. Unnecessary, but thoughtful.'

'But...but you're *besieged*,' I reminded her.

'Oh, yes,' she agreed happily. 'Isn't it fun?'

'Fun?' I repeated. 'Isn't it a ship war?'

'Those are fun, though, aren't they, once you soothe your feelings with your shipmates and get over being hurt?' she said, smiling. Dotty, obviously.

'But you've gone underground, and you maintain strict secrecy, and

²⁰⁶ 'Sector door/' and *Codo restor/* are both anagrams of 'Doctor/Rose,' which is of course the ship being besieged in this update.

²⁰⁷ *The door swung open beneath its rose-carved lintel* because the Rosefen are meeting *sub rosa*, that is, in secret.

²⁰⁸ And now that we've established that this is a Doctor Who-inspired episode, it's obvious Who the *one markedly familiar humanoid alien* is, right?

²⁰⁹ The shippers are taking tea and chips because of the livejournal community [time_and_chips](http://community.livejournal.com/time_and_chips), and they're in a tunnel because of the SPDN. [http://community.livejournal.com/time_and_chips/profile] [http://community.livejournal.com/the_spdn/profile]

now you're putting out a covert podcast,²¹⁰ I pointed out, 'so *obviously* you take the ship war too seriously, and feel threatened.' This time a bunch of them laughed hysterically.

'Once we got here, we found we preferred it this way,' one explained, waving her hands vaguely. 'We like hanging out with each other, and talking nonsense, and being frivolous. It's *fun*. It's like curling up with a stack of romance novels and a box of chocolates: restorative, and nobody else's business. The privacy turned out to be a good idea, in the end.'

I strode back to the ship, podcast in hand, feeling disconcerted by the contentedly besieged, and when Roberta cheerfully accepted a clutch of sodden ninjas as passengers on the return trip, first pocketing a hefty fee, I felt even more deeply d. 'Moving right along?' she asked, to a silent chorus of nods. The ninjas proved, to quote one of them, 'armless but earful,' whatever that meant.²¹¹ Once they'd gotten outside a vast quantity of rum and sandwiches, they started being half-decent company. They were almost likable, blast them, and adept at intriguing analysis. The only thing more irritating than a ship war is a ship war that has two somewhat sympathetic sides, at least one of which can't really be arsed to fight, and as soon as I was safely back at Malfois Manor I logged off and stormed out to confront Warr1or. He'd gotten me all side-y for nothing.

He was asleep on the sofa, still wearing cowboy boots but not, the audacious slippage of the blanket revealed, very much else. He could catch a chill like that, I thought distractedly, and considerately but gingerly began covering him up. I'd never tucked in a fully grown cowboy before. I stepped back to admire my handiwork, and made an alarming discovery: his eyes were open, and he was giving me a puzzled smile. I glared back. 'You *completely misled* me,' I said, remembering my initial grievance.

²¹⁰ I wish more people would put out covert podcasts, and preferably invite me to them. I love fannish podcasts.

²¹¹ *The ninjas proved, to quote one of them, 'armless but earful,' or 'charmless but cheerful,'* depending on how you feel about them. Like their opposite numbers, they're obvious candidates for the fandomcult wiki. [<http://fandomcult.pbwiki.com/FrontPage>]

'I'm sorry to hear that,' he said, his voice rough and sleepy. 'Is there anything I can do to clarify matters?'

2.12 Mina de Malfois and the Significant Paralepsis

I won't dwell on the *precise* manner in which the barely-awake Warr1or proceeded to discomfit me.²¹² Suffice it to say that I fled to my room *fairly* soon after wakening him, and that for the next several days we avoided each other as far as was possible within the confines of PrinceC's condo. What conversation we had was stilted and embarrassed, though I must in fairness add that it was also informed by a newfound respect on both sides. I won't bore you with the details. He did give me a lift to *Wands Across*, though. That was nice of him.

And to tell you the truth, I was a bit apprehensive about *Wands Across*. No doubt I was worrying needlessly, but still. I'd tried delicately hinting that I needed up-to-date info on congoing behaviour standards and etiquette, but the most informative and least acrimonious response I'd gotten was a perplexing communique from a kindly-intentioned LotR fan:

Actually, my usual reference The Practical Guide to Fandom Participation, published by the World Fen Association in 2001 (it was the revised version of the Fandom Resource Guide published a decade or so earlier) which one got free with many fanzines (which hardly suggests it was aimed at the wealthy fan) has a section headed "Moots and Conferences" beginning with SciFi Cons (which include horror) and which has eight subheadings, Worldcon (otherwise known as The World Science Fiction Convention), Philcon (the first of the local cons (held in Philadelphia, clearly (in 1936))), Galaxyfest (which takes place (appropriately enough) in Vulcan), DragonCon (which is one of the 'popular culture' cons spanning a range of fandoms) and finally GenCon (which is a gaming con - and many of these events are inexplicable owing to the subcultures involved being somewhat twitchy about the things they get up to in private). Specific issues involving pros at events (and while I've always thought angstfic takes the issue of prostitution to absurd extremes I'd say this current debate takes the

²¹² As Ave_eva noted, this is one of the two significant paralepses framing this episode; there are minor ones as well, and an analepsis or two.

*cake on that matter) have included death threats²¹³ (rescinded in a dramatic redirect), actors wearing matching clothes at conferences, scary security guards (possibly heavily whiskey-soaked), and venom cocks (debated and defended in an endless circle of logic (or lack thereof) for weeks afterwards, so that even those who hadn't been present came to loathe the book, the author, and the editors associated with it).*²¹⁴

²¹³ Speaking of scary security issues, Mercedes Lackey (always a delight at cons [<http://jet13.hasweb.com/~paulcas/misty.html>]), once demanded that Dragon_Con provide her with a professional bodyguard because she claimed to have received death threats. Of course, Ms. Lackey also once believed she was being thwarted by evil occult powers (http://www.mercedeslackey.com/features_laststraw.html), so take that for what it's worth.
Mina's own bodyguards, if she could afford to hire any, would naturally be Dorsai Irregulars (<http://www.di.org/>).

²¹⁴ *The most informative and least acrimonious response I'd gotten was a perplexing communique, which I shameless stole from Legionseagle's comment to the Great Frosting War. I'd been meaning to appropriate her parentheses for a while, and this was too delicious to resist, since it allowed me to kill two birds (parentheses and frosting) with one quote. She even used the phrase 'takes the biscuit,' which allowed me to use 'take the cake' to link this more firmly to the cake wank. I am indebted, although she probably didn't do that with me in mind. Bless.
I should add that as far as I know Legionseagle doesn't go around telling people about cons, though I think she is a LotR fan.
Angua9 helped me with the phrasing of *You can see how that wasn't quite what I'd been looking for (however helpful it'd been (meant) to be)*, and by 'helped me' I mean 'had to write it for me.'*

'Actually, my handy stand-by The Dairy Book of Family Cookery, published by the Milk Marketing Board in 1983 (it was the follow up to The Dairy Book of Home Cookery published a decade or so earlier) which one got cheap with milk-bottle tops (which hardly suggests it was aimed at the idle rich) has a section headed "Icings and Frostings" beginning with Butter Frosting (which contains milk) and which has eight variants, Fudge Frosting (which contains cream), Whipped Cream Frosting (which contains nothing requiring explanation), Butter cream (which contains egg yolks), glaze icing (which contains "edible food colouring, optiona;" and if you've read as much as I have about uses of arsenic in green colouring you'll see why "edible" is specified) and finally Royal Icing (contains egg whites and glycerine - many of these recipes are now un-makeable owing to chemists becoming twitchy about the things they are actually prepared to sell to you). Specific recipes involving butter cream on top (and while I've always thought slash fic takes

You can see how that wasn't *quite* what I'd been looking for (however helpful it'd been (meant) to be).

Arc had, I learned once I arrived, arranged for me to share a room with a fellow BNF. It must have been insight rather than thrift which had informed her decision,²¹⁵ because just then I really *needed* the level of comfort and understanding that can only be found among one's own kind. I need hardly tell you what balm it was to my weary fannish soul to be in the company of one who, when told I was being plagued by petty fandom jealousies, nodded knowingly *at once* without demanding a tedious account of specific instances. I know I've said I try to avoid close friendships with other Big Name Fans, but the BNF in question was delightful, really, and I expected great things from our voluntary co-incarceration. Enthusiasms would be shared, BNFs would be shaved, and probably at the height of things clothing would be burnt.²¹⁶

The first person I saw when I wandered downstairs was Mrs. Sev., and I confess I cringed a little when she hailed me. Hers is not the sort of company that increases one's public cred. But I'd have *died* rather than let her see I felt that way, so I made my way over to her fairly promptly though with some trepidation. Who knew what fathoms of

the question of who tops and who bottoms to absurd extremes I'd say this current debate takes the biscuit on that matter) include Balmoral Almond Cake (piped in fancy rosettes), dark ginger cake, toddy cake (you put whisky in the butter cream on this one), chocolate fudge cake (decorated piped butter-cream ring around chocolate covered cake, so that the half-dipped in chocolate almonds can be stuck into it, coffee praline gateau and coffee fudge sandwich.'

Legionseagle, 25 September 2007,

[http://community.livejournal.com/hp_britglish/355512.html?thread=7271608#t7271608] (accessed 17 March 2008).

²¹⁵ *It must have been insight rather than thrift which had informed her decision*, or else Arc was trying to protect Mina from the debauchery and excess which one can more easily partake of if one is rooming alone.

²¹⁶ Alas, BNF shaving

(<http://www.fanhhistory.com/index.php?title=Bnfshavemorefun>) is now a thing of the past, but there's nothing to stop us burning clothing any time we feel like it.

[<http://news.livejournal.com/102095.html?thread=54781391#t54781391>]

madness she was currently plumbing? I entered the conversation tentatively, careful to avoid such delicate subjects as funerals or the lack thereof, the probability of corpses being left to rot in tourist sites frequented by schoolchildren, and just how badly one's inner child could be *hurt* by works of fiction.²¹⁷ As it turned out I needn't have bothered, because not long into the conversation she shared her personal Good News. The Dark Schoolmaster, she informed me breathlessly, was alive and well and living in Windsor, Ontario, Canada.²¹⁸ 'How nice,' I said weakly. 'I'll have to mention that to

²¹⁷ Mina is being advisedly *careful to avoid such delicate subjects* as funerals or the lack thereof, the probability of corpses being left to rot in tourist sites frequented by schoolchildren, and just how badly one's inner child could be hurt by works of fiction.

"Severus, however, got no body retrieval, no funeral, no tomb, no Headmaster's portrait, no final say, and no farewell. It doesn't take much close reading at all to wonder if, after Harry left the Shrieking Shack, the Potions Master managed to patch himself up and fly away to finally live in peace. (He certainly had the technical knowhow to do it, and we've seen it done before by lesser men.) Canon will never tell us exactly what happened to Snape after that point, so his ending now belongs to every one of us who mourned him. He could be a starving artist in Greenwich Village, or the conductor of the Knight Bus, or a Nobel Prize-winning biochemist, or the reigning Hogwarts Headmaster, or J.K. Rowling's annoying next-door neighbor, or a retired gentleman living on a tropical island surrounded by bikini-clad blondes. Rowling never settled his destiny, so if we want to see our man given any semblance of peace, we have to provide it. We can't control Harry's reaction to Snape's sacrifices, but we can control our own. It's up to us now to keep Severus Snape alive."

Missstudymss, "On Severus Snape: A Call For Hope," 29 September 2007, [http://community.livejournal.com/we_trust_snape/178235.html] (16 October 2007)

"Even Voldemort's body was moved to a separate location to keep it away from the "good" corpses, while Snape's is left in the Shrieking Shack to rot?" Subtlescience, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Plot-holes," 27 September 2007, [<http://subtle-science.livejournal.com/92921.html>] (16 October 2007); quoted by Snapesforte,

"Snapesforte's Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Ranting Review," [http://www.half-bloodprince.org/snape_deathlyhallowsreview.php] (16 October 2007)

²¹⁸ This good news is brought to you courtesy of Snapecast. [<http://snapecast.com/2007/09/01/snapecast-episode-22/>] (20 October 2007).

Archivist12. Maybe she can keep an eye out for him the next time she's visiting family, or something.'

I hurried the conversation away from the location of the fictional dead man as soon as I decently could. I mean, far be it from me to trample on the *complex* feelings of determined non-mourners, but I had an important message of my own to impart, and it was this: I was attending the con in as incognito a fashion as I could manage. Mrs. Sev, and any of her fellow hetfen as might be present, must on no account identify me to the congoers at large. Obviously nothing could be done about those attendees who had already, in one capacity or another, met me in the flesh, but if the thing were at all possible I wanted to avoid having my general readership gawking at me. I have a firm enough grasp of the behaviour of fen-en-masse towards BNFs to be leery about publicly outing myself as anybody they'd heard of, and so following a discussion with my conference roommate I was sporting a carefully-chosen pseudonym on my ID badge, and I hadn't a single emblem of any of my known fandoms anywhere on my person. It made me feel a little odd, being dressed as a mundane. As soon as I could get to the hucksters' room I intended to buy myself a few t-shirts or something from fandoms I don't actually belong to--though I won't name them here; I don't want any fans feeling I'm singling them out just to snub them, poor dears.

Mrs. Sev agreed readily, seeming to enjoy the prospect of secrecy, and of course my roommate had already pledged she'd maintain the utmost level of discretion she could manage. So that was bound to be all right. But it wasn't easy, pretending to be nobody in particular, especially when readings of my own works were being performed.²¹⁹ I mean, I suppose there was a level of amusement inherent in pretending not to be present while various volunteers took the place of 'Mina, who can't be with us,' but I felt a bit wistful. Not quite wistful enough to risk exposure, mind you, but I will say that I was enjoying the private meet-ups with my personal friends rather more than I was enjoying sitting at the back of various lecture rooms wearing the wrong clothes and feeling invisible.

Thank heavens there was a continual parade of Mina-aware visitors

²¹⁹ Mina stole this trick from JT LeRoy. Thanks are due here to Notmonica, who read for Mina at Phoenix Rising. [<http://www.thephoenixrises.org/programming/accepted>]

to our room. The most noteworthy of these was PrinceC, whom I'd only seen at a distance before now, but whom I'd been more than eager to see up close.²²⁰ When I swung open the hotel-room door to find that he was touchingly young, somewhat shy, and, most reassuring of all, *very* slightly marred by acne, my feelings were indescribable. The perfect *darling*--and what utter silliness on my part to have ever been intimidated at the prospect of meeting him! He did manage to discombobulate me *slightly* by inquiring, and more than once, whether I'd be participating in the con's charity fundraiser. No one had seen fit to inform me that BNF kisses were being auctioned off, and a rather stunning but self-evidently *very young* man wasn't necessarily the messenger I'd have chosen for that bit of news. I honestly can't say whether I was relieved not to have been invited to participate, or disappointed.

Anonymity's not an easy trick to pull off for a fanfiction author as well known as I am, you know. I suppose it was only a matter of time before someone slipped up. As it turned out, it wasn't some giddy fangirl who let the cat out of the bag, but my fellow BNF and roommate--odd, because she's usually the very soul of discretion. I can't imagine what led her to say, right in the middle of introducing a reading of one of my works by a dear friend, 'Though of course, Mina herself is--but I'd better not say anything about that.' Naturally, within hours the rumour that I was attending *Wands Across*, and that, indeed, I'd been present at that very reading, was simply *everywhere*. I went all dithery, torn between stepping forward and leaving altogether. Arc, I decided, would know what to do. If I could find Arc, that is.

That night I went along to the hotel bar with Mrs. Sev and a pack of her fellow-travellers, none of whom had the slightest notion of who I was and all of whom therefore assumed I shared their particular mania. One of them kindly equipped me with a sprig of dittany, which I dutifully fastened to my collar, as was the fashion amongst their set. I spent several hours well-steeped in the lore and legends of the Dark Schoolmaster, and the only thing that kept me from leaping to my feet and blaspheming against their credo was the hope, to which I clung with increasing desperation, that Arc would show up and rescue me. I

²²⁰ *The most noteworthy of these was PrinceC*, whose visit to Mina's room is shown from another angle in Chapter Four of Scifantasy's Case Study. [<http://mina.sapphireisle.org/fiction/viewstory.php?sid=14>]

mean to say, it's one thing to love a character, but quite another to be consumed by fictitious passion to the point where innocent bystanders worry they're about to be subject to carnal displays of your devotion. It was a far, far madder pash than one is usually exposed to.²²¹

And there was no sign of Arc from first to last, though somewhere past midnight I blinked with astonishment at the sight of Xena hand in hand with my least favourite profic author. I wondered briefly if hallucinations were a side effect of con-going, but heads were turning and gasps gasping, so other people saw it too. She caught my eye and ploughed her way through the crowds to our table, slimeball still in tow. He was making eye contact with her chest, and was slack-jawed and pop-eyed as a result. 'Hail,' she said to me grimly when she got within shouting distance. 'How goes the music, the service at the feast, and etc.?'²²²

I couldn't hear the music, hadn't tasted the food, and tried for several futile seconds to find something worthwhile to say about the service before giving up and shrugging. 'Where's Arc?' I bellowed.

'I have no idea,' she said, 'but she's left me to see to it that our guest of honour makes it to his reading tomorrow, so I'll be locking him in his room soon. Or tying him to his bed.' I looked suitably horrified by every bit of that communication.

'Should I take a cold shower first?' the guest author asked Xena, with a stunningly vulgar leer.

'No,' she told him witheringly. 'Can't you just have a second martini? That usually has the same net effect.' She released him long enough to pull an envelope from somewhere inside her jacket, a procedure which I honestly expected to cause him to expire from apoplexy. 'Arc left you a message,' she said, handing it over to me. It was still warm.

She re-clasped an authorial hand in hers and started leading the hack towards the bar, prompting a fresh outbreak of startled glances and conspiratorial nudges from the crowd. One eager young podcaster

²²¹ *It was a far, far madder pash* sounds oddly Dickensian.

²²² Looks like Xena also knows something about paralepsis.

'The music, the service at the feast,
The noble gifts for the great and small,
The rich adornment of Theseus's palace . . .

All these things I do not mention now.'

(Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales*)

approached in full-blown interview mode, and his first question coincided with a perfectly-timed lull in the general uproar. 'Why are you holding hands with *him*?' the kid asked, and I leaned forward to hear her response.

'Because this way I know where one of his hands is,' she said irritably, and continued barwards.²²³ The whole thing was beyond

²²³ *Because this way I know where one of his hands is* reminded Atthis_uk and Etrangere of Harlan Ellison's groping Connie Willis, and rightly so, because that's what I had in mind, although without them I'd probably have forgotten to footnote it. While we're on the topic of Harlan Ellison, I'll just mention that he came to the rescue when Mercedes Lackey was going to cancel her appearance at Dragon*Con, and that in his spare time he's staged at least one intervention for the bereaved partner of a sockpuppet.

'Some hasty phone calls resulted. One was to Harlan Ellison, who was able to convince Misty not to cancel out and deprive her fans of her appearance at the con: since Dragon*Con had already hosted a Misty-related track of programming for several years, many of her fans had made elaborate and expensive plans to attend. Three cheers for Harlan and two for Misty.' [<http://jet13.hasweb.com/~paulcas/misty.html>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

'Audrey and Tania arrive at Harlan's, and he sits them down in his living room and tells Audrey that he had lied. Josh is fine. Then he lays out the whole messy truth, with all the information Tania and Will have dug up.' Josh Olson, 10 October 2007, [<http://www.laweekly.com/news/news/the-life-and-death-of-jesse-james/17427/>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

'No; it was the way Josh Olson told the story which left me feeling - well, the way one's hands feel when one's washed up after lamb chops with not enough detergent and rather tepid water. The article - to me - reeks of a nasty mixture of one-upmanship, misogyny and infantilising Audrey, the victim, which - by a tangent - got me thinking about the whole issue of truth and lies, both on the Internet and before it was even thought of.' Legionseagle, 13 October 2007, [<http://legionseagle.livejournal.com/26014.html>] (accessed 17 March 2008).

'This is, in a nutshell, about screenwriter Josh Olson, his met-on-the-net pal, "Audrey", the woman she met on Deadwood boards who created a hot poet/firefighter out of thin air for "Audrey" to fall in love with, Harlan Ellison hosting an intervention, and singer/songwriter Dan Fogelberg, whose middleaged lady fans apparently also had an imposter in their ranks. Also: llamas.' Meyerlemon, 13 October 2007,

strange. Xena was on martini-drinking terms with Mr. Vicksburg?²²⁴ Arc was micro-managing guest authors? They'd never said anything about it to me.

I waited until I was back in my room, and took the added precaution of locking myself in the bathroom, before opening the note from Arc. It's funny: I'd somehow allowed myself to hope that she'd have magically deduced that I was having qualms about whether or not to remain incognito for my last day at *Wands Across*, and would have accordingly sent me some kind of helpful advice. And I was *almost* right. What she'd sent me was advance warning that tomorrow night's final event, the auctioning-off of BNF kisses, would include *me*. She'd put my name up for bidding, that is; a place was reserved for me at the BNF table, and for those last few hours of the con I was assured of my full share of notoriety and, incidentally, of any residual humiliation that might be attached to having to publicly kiss the highest bidder. My name, she'd pointedly added, was on the already-printed list of those up for grabs, and I quickly calculated that the humiliation of kissing some strange fan would almost certainly be significantly less than that of having everyone deduce I was a coward. There could be, in other words, no chickening out, not unless I wanted to be a laughingstock.

There's not much more to say, really, aside from reassuring those of you who must be *weak* with dread on my behalf that nothing terrible happened. As it turned out? My own personal highest bid didn't come from a stranger at all. And, oh...that *kiss*. But, really, I don't think I'm ready to elaborate further on that. Some things *are* private, you know.

[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/1115089.html]
(accessed 17 March 2008).

²²⁴ Mina's *least favourite profic author* is named Vicksburg because, as you know, he's largely inspired by Lee Goldberg (<http://www.leegoldberg.com/>). Vicksburg was, as I'm sure many of you know, of great strategic importance to Robert E. Lee.

2.13 A Letter to Case

I cannot tell how the truth may be;
I say the tale as 'twas said to me.

Sorry, Case. Habit. I'm quoting because I'm in a bad mood, and I'm in a bad mood for one of the best of all possible reasons. I strongly suspect I'm going to have to fork out money I don't want to spend on a person I don't even know well. And no, I can't get out of it. It's a debt of honor. Don't laugh. And don't leap to the obvious conclusion, because for once it's not that.

Back in our dorm days, Eva once said that honesty and openness weren't among my virtues, and I've remembered that ever since, because she came very close to being right. She just missed one thing: I don't consider them virtues. But all the same, I would never intentionally lie to someone I like and trust. I know you know that about me, even if some people don't. So play Father Confessor for a while, will you, old friend? I have a horrible feeling I've accidentally lied to Val. It's almost making me feel guilty. Worse yet, I've involved Judy.

Judith's already headed over to convey our suspicions to Val in person, naturally. You know our Ringmaster: she loves subterfuge and subtlety, but under that she's the same old straight-arrow Arc, perpetual girl scout and model citizen. Okay, to be fair here, I agreed someone needs to tell Val, stat. It's bad enough we let her foot so many of the bills. We certainly can't let her continue to pay for someone who isn't as advertised, at least not without letting her know.

But damn it, Case, it leaves me in a hell of a position. Don't tell anyone this, but I nominated my candidate because I felt a pang of sympathy. The young person in question reminded me a little bit of myself. I like to see clever, criminally minded girls succeed and make something of themselves. It gives me faith in the future of humanity. So this is going to cost me, and I mean that literally. If Val pulls funding on this one--and she might--then

I'm going to have to foot the bills for Josh myself. I couldn't live with myself, knowing I'd let the little bastard count on a few years of financial stability and then yanked it away. I may not have scruples, but I have a heart.

All right: I have a few scruples too. Not many. Just a few.

Initially I threw some time at Josh in-game, and then later on at Jen in the flesh, to amuse myself. It's not often I meet ambitious young con artists, you know, and I couldn't resist enjoying my discovery. Get your mind out of the gutter--I didn't *touch* the discovery, just chatted her up. Don't wreck my street cred by telling anyone else, Case dear, but St. Schol's fall term was half over before my instincts kicked in and I decided I needed to do more research into Jen's background.

I won't bore or incriminate you with the details of the connections I pulled to get my info. Let's just say they produced a fascinating story. Jen's one of a twin--you've seen "Rabbit" online? That's the sister. But, and this is the weird part, no one could get me a definite answer as to whether Jen was Rabbit's sister or brother. The family had moved a lot, and the former classmates we found scattered across the country told conflicting stories. They agreed on some points, though. Like how Jen and Rabbit--or Josh and Rabbit--used to lie about being triplets instead of twins. That's an odd twist on the imaginary friend thing, isn't it? And every informant was in complete agreement that you couldn't trust either kid as far as you could throw them. They've lied, scammed, and robbed their way through life since daycare. Color me impressed.

The whole thing worried me enough that I knew I'd have to bring it up when Judith and I met up at *Wands Across*. Turns out she was already suspicious too; some of what Mina had relayed to her had put her guard up. Judy was in full Arc mode at the con: ice cold, efficient, organized. Mouthwatering, you know? Between that and my unaccustomed sense of guilt I ended up taking charge of that godawful Vicksburg for her. There aren't enough martinis in the world to make that palatable, but if it made Judy's life easier, so be it....Shut up. You've made the same kinds of decisions and you know it, Case.

And then that auction happened. Were you there? I have to hand it to you, Case, if that's a sample of your tutelage, Eva's spawn owes you big time. He's about a hundredfold more

assertive than he used to be--not that he was ever shy or lacking in confidence, but he's acquired more swagger and lost some of his head-in-the-clouds air. His toe-to-toe performance against that cowboy at the auction was damned impressive--not that Judy looked impressed. For a moment I thought she might thaw out long enough to murder one of them, but I doubt anyone else saw any hint of emotion. Priceless. I couldn't resist tweaking her a bit. "Eva gives that kid way too much allowance," I said, as casually as I could without laughing. She just gave me a look--didn't answer, and didn't tip her hand by raising her own bid.

Anyway. Afterwards she told me she'd already summoned Jen and sent her to Eva's townhouse. They'd let her cool her heels there all weekend, closely watched by Eva, who isn't exactly stressed by difficult young women. I don't know how she puts up with the packs of kids at her camps--personally I'd rather do time than supervise crowds of children. Jen sat it out graciously, according to Eva. She'd been told she was on notice and under review, and thank heavens she has enough sense not to screw up when something as pricey as a university education is on the line. Judy and I drove down there as soon as we could. I felt like the fucking gender police, but what else could we do? Val's paying to educate young women; we can't, in fairness, be complicit in subverting that.

I was the one, as usual, who cut to the chase. Only fair: if I'd screwed up, I wanted to know. I tossed the last of my drink down my throat, set the glass down on the table, and looked Jen in the eyes. "Show us your tits, then, lad," I said, not smiling.

Jen looked unruffled and unoffended. I think she'd been expecting my request. She crossed her arms, took the bottom of her sweatshirt in both hands and calmly pulled it up, flashing a pair of small but perfect breasts. Beneath them her waist was slim and straight, and her abs had the kind of hard-edged definition marines would kill for. I looked her up and down, leaned across the table for a better look, even prodded at her chest with one finger. Behind me Eva was hissing my name in her shocked-and-disapproving voice: het squad, represent. I turned around and gave her my best amused look, and told her I was just checking for scars. And no, I went on, answering the unspoken question: no scars. Not a hint of a micro-scar. Nothing. Those were organic, I'd stake my reputation on it.

“Get dressed, Jen,” Judy told her, and she did.

“Can I go?” Jen asked, polite but bored, as though lifting her shirt for a committee was an uninteresting everyday affair. I nodded, and she left.

“Those were definitely breasts,” Judith said thoughtfully, later on when we were alone.

I agreed. “No problem with the breasts, none at all. I quite liked the breasts. It was the stomach I didn’t like,” I said. “And the waistline.”

“I know,” Judy told me, looking as worried as I felt. That flat, muscled stomach had looked all wrong, somehow, for those youthful, delicate, round breasts.

“I think,” I said cautiously, “I may have made a mistake in choosing this candidate, Judy. A highly *unusual* mistake.” She didn’t argue.

And that’s how matters currently stand. Do you think, Case, I can possibly have had the bad luck to find an actual, genuine hermaphrodite? Is there even any such thing? Christ, no wonder I drink.

More to the point, do you think Judy blames me?

~N

Fanon

Just to reiterate: Minaverse fanfiction and fanart has the author's full support. In the Minaverse, fanon is canon.

Minaverse/Sanguinity fiction can be found here:

<http://mina.sapphireisle.org>

Other links:

1. Cesario has written At Her Grace's Behest:

<http://cesario.livejournal.com/187641.html>

<http://cesario.livejournal.com/190463.html>

2. Mutecornett has drawn Mina

<http://mutecornett.livejournal.com/10349.html?view=307309#t307309>

3. Dreamer_marie has written Resting On His Muscled Shoulders:

<http://dreamer-marie.livejournal.com/109160.html>

4. Narcissam provided the Mina entry for the fandom wank wiki:

http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Mina_de_Malfois

5. Tmartian42 is keeping a list of characters roaming around outside of the stories:

<http://community.livejournal.com/mdmfans/9858.html> I approve wholeheartedly, though it is a tad disturbing to see how many innocent people (the real ones, that is) have accounts that fit in. I can only hope they're pleased by the accidental inclusion, rather than appalled, if they ever find out about it. (Sadly, I don't own or operate any of the in-character sockpuppets. I do love them, though, and applaud their creators.)

6. Invidereliana runs mdmfans at www.livejournal.com for all your icon and discussion needs. Footnotes can be found there sometimes.

7. Temaris, the official voice of Mina, has podcasts available at her livejournal:

<http://temaris.livejournal.com/434963.html>

<http://temaris.livejournal.com/446700.html>

<http://temaris.livejournal.com/483288.html>

<http://temaris.livejournal.com/519322.html>

8. Euqen has written Something Simple, Something Sleazy and I Left My Body Lying Somewhere.

<http://euqen.livejournal.com/1266.html>

<http://euqen.livejournal.com/3565.html>

9. Liz_darkheart has written Fear and Fascination and The Courty Dance, which are *Sanguinity* fanfiction:

<http://liz-darkheart.livejournal.com/592.html>

<http://liz-darkheart.livejournal.com/1160.html>

10. Gnatkip has created a sampler like the one Mina wants to make:

<http://gnatkip.livejournal.com/29500.html>

11. Thedorkygirl has written the Contender:

<http://community.livejournal.com/dwfiction/272681.html>

12. The romantic Kadorienne has written Midnight Oil:

<http://belladonna.org/midnightoil.htm>

13. Wminstrel has written and performed 'Sanguinity.'

<http://wminstrel.livejournal.com/825.html>

<http://wminstrel.livejournal.com/1408.html>

14. Vuirneen has posted a copy of her semi-private email to me, which I'm sure you'll all find instructive. Really, the things that go on at cons are outrageous, aren't they? Too Many Minas Spoil the Con is a warning to us all:

<http://vuirneen.livejournal.com/21398.html>

15. Grey_bard has written A Paen to Sanguinity (a song) by RavenKelVamp. Or maybe I should say "RavenKelVamp has written..."

<http://community.livejournal.com/mdmfans/22907.html>

16. A missing scene, courtesy of Tmartian42:

<http://mina-de-malfois.livejournal.com/16607.html?thread=540383#t540383>

17. Kyuuketsukirui has written Dream Diary:

<http://kyuuketsukirui.livejournal.com/541212.html>

18. If you have a close look at Chapter Ten of *Rose_and_lizard's* wonderful *Marlowfic*, *Term of Duty*, Miranda's aunt might look familiar to you.

<http://rose-and-lizard.livejournal.com/26093.html>

19. Jackiejlh has written an untitled *Mina* story:

<http://jackiejlh.livejournal.com/22411.html>

<http://jackiejlh.livejournal.com/23195.html>

<http://jackiejlh.livejournal.com/27885.html>

20. Nocturne has written *Rainy Monday*, which is *Arc/Mina/Xena*:

<http://nabokovnocturne.livejournal.com/1184.html>

21. *Scifantasy's Case Study* provides a fascinating look behind-the-scenes:

<http://mina.sapphireisle.org/fiction/viewstory.php?sid=14>

And *Case*, of course, has now entered canon.

¹ Josh and Rabbit are fraternal (but-superficially-very-similar, when they were children) twins; Josh is based on/related to/a worshipper of Hermes, but is physically more like (or possibly an incarnation of) Hermaphroditus. That's why, in that interview with *Dreamer_Marie* over on *mdmfans*, I mentioned a statue in the Louvre--it was this statue (<http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/S30.1.html>), and I fell in love with it the first time I saw it. In a non-crazy way, honest.

So their parents chose to raise Jen as Jen...er, raise Jen as female, I mean. That probably seemed like a good choice, at least to them, at least until puberty hit Josh. Jen and Rabbit had an adventurous, 'chaotic evil' type childhood. I see Jen as the more bookish, intellectual, long-range planner of the two (and the fanfic author, of course, using the pseud *Razzberry Martini*); Rabbit, who probably has a real name but I haven't thought one up yet, was the more outgoing one, and I think when they were young she bullied Jen somewhat. Jen, however, became more assertive and more self-assured as they grew up, and also more certain that she wanted to be able to live as the male half of herself, at least some of the time, and probably all the time--and so began being Josh some of the time.

The only reason Josh looks so much like *PrinceC* is that when he was 'creating' himself, learning how to be Josh in public, the young *PrinceC* had

already entered the con scene in a major way; Josh noted the resemblance and exaggerated it, self-consciously modelling himself on PrinceC.

Rabbit, to her probable dismay, found that the sibling she'd already been less able to control over the years had slipped entirely out from under her influence--and, worse yet from her point of view, that she needed and wanted him whereas he was annoyed by, and not terribly interested in, her. They'd already been pretending to be a couple in public for scamming-and-popularity purposes for ages, first as Jen and Rabbit and then as Josh and Rabbit, but whereas for Jen/Josh this was a game, Rabbit has an embarrassingly unshakable crush on her sibling, and wants them to really be a couple.