



Not Actually Jenny ([jennyanydots21](#)) wrote in [mdmfans](#),
[2012-11-01](#) 20:27:00

Mina de Malfois and the Death of the Author: Part 1

Well, I might be a bit late to the party, but here in honour of Halloween is an AU murder mystery. Hope you enjoy!

Disclaimer: while Minaverse happenings typically may or may not allude to real events, the murder in this case is **entirely fictional** and owes more to Agatha Christie than anything that ever actually happened, as I hope will be apparent from the text.

Of course, I never intended to go near the blasted con in the first place. It was entirely Warr1or's fault, as I'm sure you'll agree when I explain. And I assure you that it is me, explaining that is, and that any "other" versions you may have heard are quite overblown and inaccurate. Honestly, the waters surrounding the whole matter have been so muddied that I wouldn't even have ventured to put stylus to tablet if it weren't for Charlotte's reading public demanding a full and frank account. I suppose, after avidly consuming *The Case of the Disappearing Nanny* and *the Strange Affair of the Million Sockpuppets*, they'd become accustomed to her meticulous information-gathering methods and incisive analyses and felt entitled to know the full story of the affair at ConFanLitCon. And of course I was in the best position to know all of the sordid details. When Charlotte eventually IM'd me to say "Mina, old bean, you might as well go ahead and do one of your write-ups for the polloi," or words to that effect, I thought that really there was no reason not to. Even if I'd retired the old pseud... but you can judge for yourself how well that went.

I had other issues on my mind the night all the troubles decided to kick off. Josh, as was his wont, was being... importunate.

He'd turned his intense gaze to full intensity and had trained it on me, stroking my right hand over the crowded tray of scones and jam, and smirking, no doubt in the full knowledge that in another second he'd have me agreeing to his scheme. In an attempt to break the tension I grabbed the nearest of the afternoon tea delicacies – it was a chocolate caramel – and attempted to gnaw on it in a nonchalant manner. The band played on, wildly and distractingly. I couldn't for the life of me work out why Josh had decided to have this conversation here in the front row of a traditional music session in an Irish pub. We'd already been shushed twice by aggrieved world music appreciators.

"So," Josh said meaningfully, leaning forward and showing off his new blond highlights to their best advantage. "Do we have a plan, then?"

“Plan?”

“You’ll let me bury the corpse in your back yard?”

Thankfully, we were interrupted by the highly irritating chiming of my newish smartphone thingy. I was only partially conversant with its many features and couldn’t figure out how to silence it straight away, which garnered us some further “Shhh!”-ing and glares from the assembled. Fumbling with it, I rolled over to find myself tangled in the sheets. Extricating myself and the confounded phone, I noted the name “Warr1or” flashing on its screen, along with the time, which was 3:42 AM. Well, this was unlikely to be anything good.

Vainly hoping that Warr1or had merely found a new target in his ongoing crusade against fannish immorality, and for some reason had chosen to ring me, on the number he wasn’t technically supposed to have, in the middle of the night, instead of emailing like a sane person, I managed to answer the thing. Of course his anguished cry of “Mina!” disabused me of that notion straight away.

Quite a few people have asked me exactly what I was thinking, getting involved in the whole affair. This is the point in my tale that I’m not proud of, and so I’ll just run over it quickly, if you don’t mind. The fact that Warr1or was downstairs outside my apartment, and that he insisted on my leaving the house and getting in the truck without so much as stopping to put on proper clothes, should have been a clue as to how things were going to go. Really, I should have agreed to no such thing. I blame exhausted befuddlement, and a lingering if ridiculous feeling of relief at having had a narrow escape from Josh’s latest escapade. However, as we drove deeper, or perhaps “further” is the word I’m looking for, into the night, I began to have serious and profound misgivings.

My case of the old s. and p. m.’s was not assuaged by Warr1or’s refusal to tell me exactly what was going on. He did go so far as to disclose that it had to do with a notorious RPFiccer I’d lately had a run-in with, which was not good news, and ConFanLitCon, which was definitely bad news. But I’d already guessed that that that den of inanity must have had something to do with the present sitch; Warr1or and half of our mutual online acquaintance had upped sticks to the convention (if the term even applied; I wasn’t convinced) that very weekend. A hope briefly arose in me that Arc would appear once we got to the con and sort out, I mean help sort out, whatever the mess was, but I knew she wasn’t going to be there. Not that she’d told me where she’d disappeared off to; it just wasn’t ConFanLitCon. She was very definite on that point.

Speaking of points, I may unavoidably need to clarify one or two at this juncture. A year or two previously, the denizens of Fandom Gossip had been highly amused when one of their number unearthed a whole series of RPF imaginings written from “my” POV, supposedly to give the huddled fen an idea of what life as a BNF was “really” like. Highly fictionalised, of course; obviously written by someone with a serious case of addiction to Fandom Gossip and, more worryingly, access to certain friendslocked posts made by yours truly – among others. I’d skimmed a few and I won’t deny the RPFiccer had a talent for mimicry and a few amusing turns of phrase, but really, some people have a lot of cheek. (You’ll forgive me if I don’t mention her real name. I feel that it’s better even at this juncture not to give her more Google hits than is

absolutely necessary; I'll just call her That Author.) Of course, my loyal fans rode out and defended me to the hilt, while equally predictably, others took the opportunity to have a good laugh at my expense. At the time, though, I'd let it pass by without comment. Being a BNF of considerable stature, it wasn't as though I was unused to being the subject of other people's bizarre conjectures; there were all too many cringe-inducing examples archived online as proof, as That Author herself had gleefully pointed out, perhaps in an attempt to be meta. (Regrettably, some of my friends in the Tented Tartan had recently decided to honour me with a barrage of drabbles, featuring a series of increasingly unlikely and frenzied pairings between myself and a variety of gentlemen of textual origin and unmistakable masculine credentials. "Astral Speed Dating" was what Mrs Sev. had called it; apparently they hadn't yet given up hope of my coming in line with their het agenda.)

Attractive Bronze Age warrior types aside, RPF featuring me was really something I felt it best not to acknowledge. Besides, at the time the so-called "Mina Diaries" were being foisted on the public, I had more pressing concerns. I had naturally been quite pleased, if not remotely surprised, to observe the blossoming of a fan community dedicated to my original published fiction, and had judiciously encouraged it on its road toward becoming the vibrant and dynamic fandom that it is today. After all, with my fannish and educational background, I would hardly be likely to make the mistakes of so many other misguided copyright holders, and attempt to intervene in good healthy shipwars or issue decrees in contradiction of fanon. I maintained my stance as a dignified outsider, descending into fan territory on rare occasions, and then only as a benign observer, really. So I was aware that certain individuals were achieving MNF status, and even edging toward BNF-itude, on the various boards and communities. All very natural, I thought, and not something that should be interfered with. However, I hadn't foreseen the extent of the perfidy that was lurking in the wings, and that would stretch my authorial patience to its utmost limit – although I should have done.

The scales were removed from my eyes, as they so often are, by Fandom Gossip. They and their satellite communities had been slaving to find something chronicle-worthy from the fandom ever since my book first came out, as the many posts on ClairvoyantGossip demonstrated all too clearly; I'd been careful to ensure that there was nothing to connect the name of Mina de Malfois with my new pseud, but somehow they appeared to have sensed that a rich vein of gossip was near. Anyway, after a time I became vaguely aware that a fic titled *Defender of the Secrets* had done the rounds rather more times than your average fanwork. When I wandered over to the Pit of Voles, purely to satisfy my curiosity, it turned out to be a bloated multi-chapter epic in two parts, and as far as I was concerned it just proved once again how forgiving the fen can be of awkward prose and iffy characterisation, when copious amounts of hardcore (if ethically debateable and occasionally baffling) pr0n is at stake. I shrugged and went about my business.

Well.

The scandal, when it broke, was also in two parts. The increasingly celebrated author of *Defender of the Secrets* was none other than my old frenemy, Ciyerra of Tyana. And worse was in store. Ciyerra, after participating in a charitable fandom effort (reluctantly, might I add), and discovering that a rather large number of chumps were prepared to pay money for her fevered scribblings, had decided to run the gauntlet of ridicule and denouncement by her peers and all

right-thinking people, and offer the thing for sale. The serial numbers were duly filed off, during which process the characters lost their last remaining vestiges of personality, to the point of resembling not cardboard cutouts so much as cheap unlicensed knockoffs of inflatable sex-dolls based on second-rate manga. The thing was wrapped in a cunningly stylish and understated cover, and flogged to the public by a vanity press with ideas above its station. And they bought it.

So you'll understand that I had more serious things to worry about at the time than That Author. Selling thinly-disguised, canonically inexact interpretations of my life was one thing. Selling thinly-disguised, canonically inexact interpretations of my book was quite another.

My state of mind when the hotel that was playing host to ConFanLitCon hove in sight should be hardly difficult to imagine, under the circs. The latest "book" in Ciyerra's pornastic series (now a three-parter, complete with wedding-and-baby fanservice of the most slavish and obvious kind) had just come out, and consequently the fandom was humming. Ciyerra was tipped to appear as a special guest, and devotees of the newly-renamed *By The Power of Grey* had not only put a plenary two-panel session on the (admittedly sparse) schedule, but were following it with a full evening presentation of tribute works, including fan-made videos, poetry and interpretive dance based on the series. I had planned a nice vacation, possibly an Antarctic cruise, to coincide with the gushing descriptions of the event that would no doubt shortly be flooding my friendslist, but my publisher had rung up and given me a stern lecture on deadlines and authorial PR.

Warr1or parked and hustled me through the bland, impersonal hotel lobby and up two escalators. It was now nearly 7 AM and I was bleary-eyed. "Where, exactly, are we going?" I asked, for the umpteenth time.

"Just keep your wits about you, Mina," he said tersely as we passed a large poster displaying yesterday's ConFanLitCon event listings, now peeling sadly at one corner. With one hand on my back he steered me towards a large set of double doors. Inside of what must have been the main ballroom were gathered a surprisingly large number of exhausted con attendees, clearly identifiable as such by their none-too-fresh-looking costumes, and clutching paper cups of coffee.

Across the room I spotted a familiar face. PrinceC was impeccably dressed in a double-breasted dark grey wool coat and soft navy scarf, despite the fact that the room was rather warm. Unlike the assorted dejected-looking figures in fursuits and sailor garments that were slumped in the folding chairs about him, he looked alert and focused, if serious. Waving, I idly wondered which cop drama had provided the large number of cosplayers in evidence. Then I realised that the uniformed member of the constabulary he was conversing with, brow furrowed, was in fact the genuine article.

I stopped waving, but I had already caught PrinceC's eye. He didn't look pleased to see me; in fact, quite the reverse. He levelled a brief but blistering glare at Warr1or, shook his head almost imperceptibly, and then returned his full attention to the police officer, who was writing in a small flip-top notebook. I turned to Warr1or with a glare of my own.

“What,” I asked once more, politely but firmly, “is going on?”

Behind us, the ballroom doors closed. A tall, besuited and ponytailed blonde strode to the front of the crowd. “Ladies and gentlemen,” she began, and then cast a shrewd eye over the audience, possibly recalling some form of cultural sensitivity seminar. “Gentlebeings. We apologise for keeping you waiting; I realise this has been a difficult experience for everyone. However, as the crime scene has now been secured, you’re free to return to your rooms.”

I elbowed Warr1or sharply. “They’ve secured the what?”

Officer Ponytail continued. “You may continue with your planned convention activities if you prefer, although obviously the room next door is off limits; however, I must ask that you all refrain from leaving the hotel until we’ve had a chance to complete our investigation. This shouldn’t be more than a day or so, but until such time as we inform you further, please be aware that we are considering this to be a murder investigation.”

“A what?” A background hum of worried chatter had broken out, and PrinceC was sidling across the room towards us, hampered by the large number of folding chairs. Warr1or, still avoiding my gaze, had removed his hat and was carefully examining the brim for signs of loose stitching. I momentarily considered doing taking it from him and doing something vindictive and implausible with it.

“Warr1or, have you involved me in an active murder investigation?”

“It was imperative that you came, Mina,” he said, without looking at me. “The fans needed your guidance. You’ve been gone from your fandoms for far too long. This crisis never would have come to pass if you hadn’t left. “

PrinceC had made his way over to us, and my initial surmise had been correct; he wasn’t pleased to see me, although he was doing his best to conceal it. “What in the name of Stovokor are you doing here?” he hissed. Only his momentary lapse into Klingon had betrayed his agitation, and he recovered himself quickly, I’ll say that for him. He did look surprisingly well in all that wool.

I gave him the Cliff’s Notes. He looked appalled. “Well, that’s just great. Warr1or, do you realise Mina’s now most likely a suspect?”

“Surely not. She’s far too prominent and well-respected a member of the fandom community.”

PrinceC eye-rolled, clearly frustrated with Warr1or’s ignorance of criminal detective practice. “Well, they’ve no proof she wasn’t here at the time, do they? I’ll bet she’s got no alibi whatsoever. I mean, we know she hasn’t been here, but the police don’t. And they’ll just use her fandom background to come up with a motive! I mean, something completely trumped-up and unlikely, of course,” he added hastily.

“What, exactly, am I now under suspicion of?” I ventured.

PrinceC sighed and shook his head again. By way of an answer, he took me by the arm – that was getting rather old, I must say – and steered me out the double doors and across an expanse of grey hotel carpet, and towards another doorway, this time leading into a much smaller room with no windows. This was guarded by further uniformed personnel, who wouldn't let us within feet of the crime scene tape, but we could just about see inside. The place was set up for the inevitable panel presentations, AV equipment complete with trailing cables still forlornly in place, and a number of persons in full-body white suits were milling around looking for fibres or prints or whatever one does after graduating from CSI school. On the floor in front of the top table, looking for all the world like an outline laid out in dental floss on a bathroom floor, was a human shape drawn in white chalk.

“It was the author of the Mina Diaries,” said PrinceC grimly. “Happened right in the middle of the Q and A for the round table session on *Fan Fanon vs. Canon Fanon: Authorial Intervention, Fan Intention and Problematizations of Competing Realities*. They're saying it was poison.”

With a title like that it wasn't surprising that someone had felt driven to commit murder. A serious headache was threatening, and not just because of the acababble. I was sleep-deprived; I was stuck indefinitely in the last place on earth I would voluntarily have chosen; I was possibly a murder suspect; and I was in my jammies. Once I had worked out some form of solution for my current predicaments, I vowed to have a few well-chosen words with Warr1or.

PrinceC stuck his hands in his coat pockets and looked regretfully at the scene transpiring before us. “I told her not to publish, you know,” he said. “Those stories... well, they didn't go down well in certain sections of the fandom.”

This was news to me, but I felt it was hardly the time to be considering his hurt feelings. You know, I may have legions of fans, but that doesn't mean anyone necessarily listens to my advice on the subject of going public with ill-chosen fic, or not. Whatever sage counsel you provide, they mostly seem determined to publish and be damned anyway. Or is it publish and perish? I suppose given the situation both of those were somewhat inappropriate. Anyway, I didn't have a suitable response, so I contented myself with sulking. Not that that made much impression on PrinceC, who was clearly on a roll.

“Yes,” he continued, looking into the middle distance with a touch of the old dramatic Shakespearian profile. “I always said that if anyone found out who'd written those diaries, there'd be hell to pay.”

Tags: [fanfiction](#)



Not Actually Jenny ([jennyanydots21](#)) wrote in [mdmfans](#),
[2012-11-23](#)

Mina de Malfois and the Death of the Author: Part 2

The next couple of days, I don't mind telling you, were somewhat strained. Initially at least, being confined to barracks did nothing for the general morale of the convention, and neither did the likelihood that we were all sleeping under the same roof as a cold-blooded poisoner. It rather took the joy out of one's morning coffee. At least, however, I had somewhere to lay my head. PrinceC had solicitously offered me a bunk, as had Warr1or (not that I would have accepted; I wasn't speaking to him just at that moment), but upon submitting myself to the hotel's front desk, I found to my alarm that there was already a room booked in my name, and paid for. With my own credit card.

"Yes, Mina de Malfois," said the harried-looking receptionist. "You checked in yesterday afternoon at 2pm, according to our records. Is there a problem with the room?"

I shook my head mutely. PrinceC was giving me a very strange look. Warr1or, however, who was still loitering in a hangdog fashion, broke in and assured the receptionist that I had only arrived in the small hours of the morning. The conversation went around in a circular manner for a while, until someone had the sense to summon the staff member who had checked in "Mina de Malfois". Thankfully, he recalled both the circumstances and the short, dark, curly-haired individual in a leather jacket who had shown up at the front desk yesterday afternoon.

Receptionist Number 1 was almost as unimpressed as I was. "That's identity fraud," she pointed out frostily, as though I had arranged it myself. "Do you want to make a report to the police? There are certainly enough of them hanging around."

"No, no, that's fine!" I gabbled. The last thing I needed at this point was to have to explain Jen's involvement to the authorities, assuming I could work out myself exactly what that was. "She's my roommate, or rather, she's my former roommate... I'm sure she, ah... This is all probably just a misunderstanding. Or something. Look, I'll sort it out, please don't worry about it."

The receptionist, who was rather of the same mould as my old house mistress at St Scholasticas, seemed unconvinced, but the queue of befurred and cranky hotel guests assembling behind me persuaded her to wrap things up. I collected a key-card and attempted to gather my wits together. PrinceC was still looking at me with that funny expression, and I wanted nothing more than to hide under the covers for an extended period while somebody else, preferably, sorted the whole business out. I made my escape and located room 404. Pausing only to determine whether Jen had left any clothes behind (she hadn't, of course) and to see what sort of shower gel-type things were in the bathroom (I defy anyone to pretend they don't do this when they arrive in a fresh new hotel room), I got between the relatively crisp sheets and put the pillow over my head.

Two hours of somewhat refreshing dozing later, I emerged and ran a bath. The hot water cleared my mind somewhat, and mulling things over among the suds, I saw that Jen had most likely stolen my identity for some form of scam or another, and disappeared when the police unexpectedly arrived to investigate the murder. Well, it had been years since she'd perpetrated a con at a con. One more for old times' sake, I suppose. The idea was comforting, really; I had never really given much credence to the possibility of Jen as a murderer, aside from that one brief moment of confusion over the whole who-killed -Razzberry-Martini incident. Still, there was definitely something strange afoot. This was no random act of violence; this was a cold-blooded, premeditated crime, and I was willing to bet that it had something to do with fandom. You see, one doesn't get to be as experienced and well-travelled a BNF as I am without becoming all too familiar with the darker side of fan territory. Fan communities tend to wear their crazy on their sleeves, admittedly, but the top layer only serves to disguise deeper undercurrents percolating away beneath the surface. Frankly, I really didn't think that the police would get anywhere at all without help from someone with insider knowledge. Getting out of the tub with a new sense of purpose, I donned my pyjamas and dressing gown – I really was going to have to do something about my sartorial problems – and formulated what I have to say was rather an excellent plan. I would leave my hotel room, unobtrusively locate the storage space for the generic white uniforms I'd seen on a number of staff members, steal one, and conduct my investigations incognito. In a detective novel, that'd be just the ticket.

Real life is so badly paced and awkwardly plotted, though. The first part of my plan went off without a hitch, and I was just conducting a preliminary reconnoitre around the kitchens in my new catering-employee disguise, when I got nabbed by some form of senior chef and forced to wash dishes for three solid hours. My only consolation, while I fretted about the simultaneous possibilities of my cover being blown and someone else solving the case, was that my previous employment history fitted me admirably for the role. I blended in among the other workers like a charm. Still, at the first possible opportunity I made good my escape, fleeing to my hotel room and bundling my stolen uniform out of sight under the bed. I was beginning to feel somewhat out of my depth.

Seating myself behind the hotel room desk and cranking up the old laptop, I mulled over my options. I needed somebody knowledgeable to bounce some ideas off of. There was still no word from Arc, and I rather thought I'd like to clear up one or two potentially ambiguous circumstances before getting in touch with her. You know, just to make absolutely certain there weren't any... misunderstandings. Xena would no doubt be *willing* to help, but perhaps was also best left out of police matters for the time being. I wasn't entirely sure there were no outstanding warrants in her name, for a start. Josh, or possibly Jen, certainly owed me a number of favours, the most recent being the free hotel room and whatever else he'd charged to my credit card; I reminded myself to cancel it at the earliest opportunity. However, he'd no doubt be lying low for the next while. I drummed my fingers on the table thoughtfully, and then dug out an email address I hadn't made use of for quite some time.

I was heartened at receiving a response within ten minutes of pressing "send"; perhaps my good friend Charlotte wasn't quite so retired as she claimed. I accepted her invitation to meet in a particular chatroom – goodness, that part of the internet might as well have had boarded-up windows and burnt-out cars strewn about the place – and two minutes later was regaling her with the whole sorry tale.

“There are certainly one or two intriguing details,” she mused, in a businesslike navy font. “I don’t suppose you’ll have managed to get a photograph of the crime scene when you were there last night?”

I admitted I had not, and accepted her inevitable dressing-down. She was an investigator of some renown – no doubt you’ll be familiar with her work on *The Case of the Racist Icons* or *The Strange Affair of the Alleged Firing* – so no doubt she knew better than I did how the situation should have been handled. Besides, I particularly wanted her on-side; I couldn’t really afford for her to say no. The game, as they say, was afoot.

“I suppose I could consider it a bit more closely,” she acceded. “You’ll have to do the legwork for me, though, as for obvious reasons I won’t be able to be there in person. First of all, go and speak to all of the prominent figures from the *Mina Diaries* who were present on the night of the murder. And for heaven’s sake, Mina, don’t miss out any of the details. I want dates, locations, timestamps, witness names, IP addresses, and screencaps where possible. The smallest details could be relevant to the case.”

I knew better than to question her methods of detection, unorthodox though they might seem in an offline setting. We spent a confusing half hour synchronising our devices; Charlotte has a regrettable penchant for cloak-and-dagger subterfuge, which meant that we couldn’t just talk on the phone like normal people, but I suppose one has to accept the little idiosyncrasies of genius. Then I made my way downstairs into the warm, vaguely musty embrace of the con.

It was an interval between sessions, and the public areas of the hotel were abuzz. Murder or no murder, many of the con’s attendees seemed determined to enjoy themselves; in fact, those who had come for the CSI panels were probably thrilled to their jaded, unshockable cores. I did a brief circuit of the main areas, ignoring the few odd looks I received, and really, it takes away somewhat from the effect of a pointedly raised eyebrow, when the person raising it pointedly is dressed as a Smurf. (Had I missed a gritty *Smurfs* reboot somewhere along the way?) Still, it was gratifying to know that even in my semi-retired state, I was still a fandom personage of some standing. Although admittedly it could have been the purple fluffy dressing gown that was drawing glances. Spotting PrinceC perched on a high stool in the bar, moodily scribbling, I made my way through the throng.

“You know I can’t talk to you, Mina,” he said, without a trace of his usual good humour. “Much as it pains me to admit it, you’re a suspect now, and as an adjunct to the investigating team, I can’t be seen fraternising with you in a non-official capacity.”

I could have pointed out that he didn’t look pained, but decided that it would be better to adopt an air of lofty unconcern at his impertinence rather than to admit to any hurt feelings. “I assure you, I didn’t come here with the remotest intention of fraternising,” I said frostily. “You can confirm my whereabouts at the time of the murder with Warr1or, anyway. What do you mean, an adjunct to the investigating team?”

“Officer Ponytail has asked for my insights into the case, as a well-known and respected member of the fan community,” he replied, raising his nose higher in the air than my own by a degree or two.

“Technically, you could call me a consultant. Now if you’ll excuse me, I do in fact intend to speak to

Warr1or; we're by no means convinced of his 'alibi', either. His whereabouts at the time of death may be accounted for, but if it was the room service meal, then that doesn't mean much."

"Room service, eh?" I said, pleased to see his obvious annoyance with himself at letting that detail slip. "Well, I'd hate to keep you from your ... investigations. All my best to Officer Ponytail, and do let her know that I'm willing to be interviewed whenever it's most convenient. For her."

Officer Ponytail, by the way, obviously isn't her real name – it was a sort of authorial conceit of mine, calling her that, since we hadn't been introduced, but as it happens she's been in touch since the first chapter of the write-up came out and asked if I'd mind keeping her real identity secret, so as not to prejudice an ongoing investigation. So Officer Ponytail it is. Anyway, PrinceC stalked off, glowering and officiously shuffling his papers. One scrap fell to the floor by the entrance to the bar, and I surreptitiously scooped it up and stuffed it in a dressing gown pocket. I didn't hang about to read it, though; I knew where Warr1or was, and I was damned if I was going to let PrinceC debrief him before I'd had a chance.

Not too long previously, I had spotted Warr1or in the main exhibition hall, loitering by the first-aid stand in a yellow hi-vis vest and a blue funk. I now made my way back there as quickly as possible, coming up from behind and grabbing him by the arm. "Warr1or, take fifteen," I hissed, ignoring his hoarse bark of surprise. "Come up to my hotel room. I need to debrief you."

Warr1or looked appalled, eyes darting every which way. "Mina, think of your reputation!"

I sighed impatiently. Between Warr1or's obsession with the wrong sort of morality, PrinceC's determined imitation of a socially-inept genius detective, minus the genius part, and the CGI fen gleefully promoting the ConFanLitCon Murder Tour, I was apparently the only person on site concerned with *actually* getting the case solved. Apart from the police, I suppose. "Never mind my reputation," I snapped back. "You're the one who besmirched it by bringing me here in the first place. Now get a move on!"

Deciding that discretion in this case was *not* the better part of valour, I announced to Warr1or's scandalised-looking medical colleagues, and hopefully a large number of bystanders, that we were going upstairs to my hotel room. "That's number 404! In case anyone should happen to be looking for Mina de Malfois later!" I successfully managed to hustle the heavily-sighing murder suspect out of the exhibition hall without encountering PrinceC, and while we were in the lift, I took out my purloined note and smoothed the crumpled Gryffindor-headed notepaper. Well, I no longer felt quite so threatened by PrinceC's detective skills.

Poison: trademark of the Cult of Nice??

Some details resemble Klingon honour killing – query with Trek reboot fen. NB: Upcoming sequel may have fuelled lust for violence, glory.

Last month's drama in demiromantic pangender transethnic otherkin Tumblr comms. Related?

Pseuicide, gone horribly wrong? Or faked by con committee to divert attention from financial irregularities? QUESTION ADAM BALDWIN ABOUT NON-ATTENDANCE

Note: Recent Achan disturbances. The Bronies are revolting.

I made a mental note to scan the document and submit it to the next BNFSecrets, with a pointed caption. The final entry on the list caught my eye, however.

Cause of death: Strychnine, most likely in room service meal delivered at 2.30pm. Administered how? Fan disguised as member of catering staff? Fen with food industry background: Warr1or. Mina???

Oh. Well, that might explain some of his hostility towards me. I thought nervously of my morning's escapades; it was true that I'd had no trouble getting into the kitchens. Then I thought more nervously of my companion in this enclosed space. I mean, Warr1or generally meant well, but nobody would describe him as... stable. How long did it take an elevator to travel four floors, anyway? It was too late to conceal what I was reading, though; he was already peering over my shoulder.

"Nonsense!" he said sharply, as the lift doors pinged and slid open; I tried not to look overtly relieved. "Quite apart from the frankly ludicrous suggestion that I'd violate my Hippocratic Oath, no matter how offensive and libellous the provocation, whoever wrote this has the timing all wrong. If they're right about it being strychnine poisoning, That Author died more than six hours after this room service meal was delivered. That's much too long for it to be strychnine. If that's how she was killed, it must have been administered within a couple of hours of the time of death, which was at 7.45, and I can confirm that because I was there."

We stepped out onto my corridor and I eyed him thoughtfully. He did have the requisite medical knowledge for such an assertion; on the other hand, it could be a clever bluff. I gave him the benefit of the doubt, and sure enough, he made no attempt to murder me when we reached my hotel room, although I logged on to Charlotte and enabled my webcam the minute we got in, just in case. Judicious application of Google confirmed his views on the poisoning, too.

Happily, Charlotte took over the interviewing duties, and grilled Warr1or to her satisfaction while I stood well back and avoided any criticisms of my detecting that she might have felt compelled to make. No, Warr1or hadn't murdered anyone. Yes, he had been present in the room at the time. No, he had no idea who it was, although it was characteristic of the sorry state of fandom, if you asked him (not that we had). Both the fact of the murder, *and* the fact that That Author's works had been so widely circulated, to the detriment of everyone who featured in them.

"You understand," he said, regrettably wild-eyed, "how much poor Mina suffered from those noxious RPFs. She was treated appallingly! The allegations! Plagiarism, fraudulent charitable appeals, self-interested manipulation of fandom to her own ends... Really, she was quite misconstrued. And," he said, voice lowering, "I won't even mention the *immoral* things she's been accused of."

I was not particularly happy with this line of argument, for more than one reason, and wondered if I should interrupt. Charlotte, however, remained in charge. "Quite," she said. "Let's discuss immoral acts. I understand that there were one or two things alleged about you that you were equally unhappy about... particularly as regards your relationship with PrinceC."

Sputtering ensued, but Charlotte kept the interrogation on track, and it transpired that yes, Warr1or was

not at all happy about the totally false and baseless accusations that there had been more than a purely professional relationship between himself and his chief moderator at *Princely Plots*. Particularly as said archive was supposed to be a haven for the godly and slash-fearing. Charlotte wrung a few more details from Warr1or, and then dispatched him back to his first-aid post.

“Well,” I said excitedly, returning to my spot at the keyboard. “What do you think of the poisoning theory, eh? Apparently we know something the police don’t!”

“Or they’re feeding PrinceC misinformation in order to keep him out from under their feet,” she responded. “Anyhow, it’s too soon to develop any theories, but I’ve found some additional eyewitness reports on LiveJournal, and I want you to interview their authors. We’ve got one hobbit, one Avatar National and one furry; go round up the usual suspects.”

I sighed, and resumed my purple fluffy dressing gown; once more into the breach.

TBC