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(FIC) Mina de Malfois and the Present Crisis

Author's Note: Written with full permission from the lovely [mina de malfois](#). Loosely based on this [dea](#) from [delurker](#): Mina agonises over what to get Arc for Christmas, or whether she should even give her a present.

As it's not yet even close to Christmas time in the canon Minaverse and the current canon happenings are too brilliant for me to even try to mess with in a story of my own, this fic ignores most of the newish plot points of Season Three.

Merry Christmas, everyone.

Mina de Malfois and the Present Crisis

I'd been holiday shopping for hours and was thoroughly exhausted—Amazon can take a lot of out of a girl when she doesn't know what she's shopping *for*, I was finding. And it didn't help that I was in a bit of a rush. Christmas had snuck up on me so *quickly* this year; it felt like one moment we were just coming back from mid-term break and summer was around the corner, and the next day everyone was packing to go home for the holidays.

I sighed, staring at the screen for a few more seconds in utter frustration before abandoning the computer and flopping down on my bed. The ceiling didn't hold any answers either, but I'd been clicking my way through all manner of ridiculous things for what seemed like days, and it was maddening. One person shouldn't be so hard to buy for; it just didn't seem fair.

Everyone else had been easy. Fandom acquaintances were once again getting fandom-related things (anyone who was anyone had paid accounts on *Sanguinity Online* by now, so that option had failed me, but there were still game points to be given and old fall-backs like extra LiveJournal userpics), my family was receiving cards, and most of my not-just-online friends had either been dropping hints for weeks or made their interests so well known that it was simple to pick out something they'd like. The only person that I couldn't seem to find a present for was Arc.

I couldn't just get Arc any random gift, you see. And I'd never given her a Christmas present before, so I had no frame of reference for this sort of thing. It would have been easier if our relationship were still simply that of author-and-archivist, but the fact of the matter was that I considered Arc a dear friend, and I felt it was important that any present I give her reflect the

depth of that feeling.

The familiar sound of my instant messenger alerting me to a new message chimed quietly from across the room, and I only let myself wallow in despair for a few more seconds before dragging myself back to the desk. I was hoping PrinceC was responding to my earlier message; I'd been waiting all day for him to show up so that I could tap into his RL-Arc knowledge. Instead, Warr1ors's name appeared on the screen.

"Hello, Mina. Are you going home for the holidays?" he asked.

"Not this year." Even though I hadn't been to my mother's for Christmas the last two years in a row, I just didn't feel up to a visit with her or my sisters this year either. "I'm just finishing up some of my shopping," I added, hoping to nudge him toward the point of this conversation in a hurry. My inability to find the perfect present for Arc, or even a remotely suitable one, had left me with little patience for *anyone*, to be honest.

He completely ignored my hint. "Do you have plans on Christmas Eve?"

Deciding it probably didn't matter much what he thought at this point, I shrugged and typed, "No, I'll just be catching up on some reading."

"PrinceC's parents have decided to take a trip to Europe over Christmas this year, and he wasn't able to get away long enough to go with them," he said suddenly, and I frowned, wondering how we'd made the leap in subjects so abruptly. Then he continued, "I'll be spending most of the week at his condo—no one should spend the holidays alone... You should come with me. He's having some friends from fandom over on Christmas Eve for a party."

I wasn't sure whether to be annoyed that this seemed to be a pity-invite, disappointed that PrinceC hadn't invited me himself, worried that I would be sucked into Trekkie Christmas traditions if I agreed to go, or thankful that I could at least spend *part* of the holiday somewhere besides my dorm room. I settled for thankful because, after all, Christmas is supposed to be a time of happiness and joy or something, right?

"Can I get back to you on that?" I asked. It wouldn't do to seem too eager.

"Of course," he agreed amicably.

"Warr1or..." I hesitated, already regretting giving in to the sudden impulse to broach the subject with him. "What do you think Archivist12 would like for Christmas?"

He seemed to consider this for a moment, then answered quite sensibly, "Something practical. She doesn't seem like the sort that would appreciate frivolous things."

He did have a point. "You're probably right," I said, and signed off.

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The following morning found me wandering the mall and hating every moment of it. Not that I have anything against malls, mind you. But frantic last-minute shoppers had descended in swarms and were angrily shoving their way through aisle after aisle of red and green crap looking for something that they'd actually consider giving a loved one for Christmas, and that was quite a bit past the point of un-fun. Most of the good stuff had disappeared from the shelves days ago, apparently, and I couldn't help but feel that I was wasting my time.

I was window-shopping outside yet another department store when I heard a cheery voice behind me exclaim, "Mina!" I reluctantly turned around to find myself face-to-face with Mrs. Sev.

"Aren't these sales wonderful?" she asked, an enormous smile spreading across her face as she brandished six or seven shopping bags at me. Crafting supplies, notepads and books made up most of it, from what I could see—every overzealous fan's dream.

I nodded half-heartedly. "Yeah, but I think they're out of everything I wouldn't be ashamed to give someone as a gift." *Or that I can afford*, I mentally added, feeling dejected all over again.

"Oh, that's why I always finish my shopping months ahead of time," Mrs. Sev said, a noticeable lack of sympathy in her voice. "Some of this will end up being presents *next* Christmas." She again indicated the bags, and I found myself hoping and praying that I didn't receive anything from her that was coated in glitter. At least the hair-bracelets had faded from popularity. "Who are you shopping for, dear?"

"Archivist12," I glumly replied. If Mrs. Sev thought it odd that I was frantically gift shopping for Arc, she didn't let on.

"Well, why don't you make something for her?" she asked. "I make all of my presents, and my friends just love them!"

"I... don't think so." I tried to keep the incredulousness I was feeling out of my voice, but wasn't overly successful. It wasn't my fault, really; I couldn't get past the horrifying image of myself handing over a card to Arc that was covered in felt, glue and macaroni.

She seemed oblivious to my discomfort at the idea, though, and continued, "Maybe you can write something for her. Everyone just *loves* your fics, Mina, and Archivist12 is just as much a fan as anyone."

"Maybe," I said noncommittally, and quickly excused myself.

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The next night, after expending all of the Amazoning energy I'd been able to muster, I wandered across campus to the Cath and Chris. I wasn't really in the mood for a drink, but figured the walk couldn't hurt when it came to clearing my head. And besides, I thought, maybe a change of surroundings would give me some much-needed inspiration.

I was *almost* surprised to see Xena there. I'd thought she was on yet another one of her mysterious trips, but then reasoned that she'd probably returned to spend the holidays with Arc.

She noticed me walking in the door and waved me over with one hand, the other never setting down her drink. I picked my way through the bar to take the seat beside her, and placed my order with the ever-attentive bartender. Xena nodded at him approvingly as he scurried away.

"So, kid, what are you up to lately?" Xena asked as I turned my attention to her, and I shrugged.

"Nothing really," I said. "Finals are over, so... feeling relieved, I guess."

She laughed and signalled the bartender to bring her another drink. I sipped slowly at mine. "I was invited to PrinceC's Christmas party tomorrow," I added nonchalantly. "Are you going?"

"No, I'll be spending Christmas Eve with Judy. I have other plans Christmas day, so I'll be leaving early that morning."

"Oh." It hadn't occurred to me, for some reason, that Xena might leave so close to Christmas. I wondered for a moment how Arc would be spending her holiday, with PrinceC's family so far away and now Xena going elsewhere. Maybe she had her own family she'd be visiting?

"You should go, though," she said, drawing my attention back to the conversation. "I hear there are going to be quite a few of the local fen there."

"Maybe," I said with a shrug. Even though I was just finishing my first drink, the alcohol must have been affecting me in some way because I then confided in her, "I still haven't gotten Arc anything for Christmas... I have no idea what to buy."

"I always get her a book," she responded.

I blinked up at her in surprise. "Just a book?" I instantly regretted how rude the statement sounded, but she grinned good-naturedly.

"Judy is impossible to buy for. She has the means to own pretty much anything she wants, and she never really needs anything. And her hobbies haven't changed much in the last fifteen years or so, so there's rarely a new interest to indulge... So I get her a book." She paused and took a sip of her drink, looking privately amused. "Well, as far as presents that can be wrapped go, anyway," she added a bit smugly, and I blushed a brilliant shade of red.

"Besides, I'm terrible at gift-giving. She stopped expecting thoughtful presents from me years ago. It's just not... me. If I got all sentimental or something she'd probably have me committed," she said, rolling her eyes. "Or exorcised."

~

On Christmas Eve I spent most of the day agonizing over Arc's gift. Nothing seemed right, nothing at all. I'd even surrendered myself to what seemed to be the inevitable around one in the morning and began to put through an order for an Amazon gift card so that she could at least pick out something that she'd like, but then stopped myself just before clicking the Place Your Order button. It just seemed so... impersonal. Besides, the dollar amount of any gift card I could get for her would just be embarrassing.

I'd almost decided not to go to PrinceC's party, but then reasoned that at least there I could talk to him about Arc's present, and it was beginning to seem that he may be my last hope. I put my foot down at spending the night there, though, and when I mentioned taking the bus to and from, Warr1or wouldn't hear of it. He picked me up right on time, regaling me with the latest fandom goings-on that I'd apparently been oblivious to over the last few days. Of course, it was all tainted with Warr1or's particular brand of bias and crazy, but at least I wasn't walking into a group of fans without any sort of forewarning.

I milled around the party for over an hour before I got my chance to corner PrinceC. Unfortunately, he was of no help at all.

"Giving presents to Aunt Judy is like giving presents to my grandma," he told me, and I had to fight to keep my mouth from hanging open in shock. The last mental image I wanted to associate with Arc was that of a grandmother. "She likes anything I give her," he went on to explain, "and tells me that I shouldn't have given her anything at all."

He noticed my wide-eyed, horrified expression, but obviously completely misread it, because he patted my arm as if to reassure me and said, "Don't worry, I'm sure you'll think of something," before moving on to greet some newly-arrived guests.

While the party was actually quite fun, I couldn't help feeling anxious and miserable the entire time. I put on a cheery smile and got through the rest of the evening, but was beyond relieved when it finally came time for Warr1or to take me back to my dorm.

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Christmas started with a phone call—my mother, who, true to form, couldn't possibly have wished me a Merry Christmas at a more reasonable hour—and once I hung up, I couldn't go back to sleep. Not wanting to spend my entire day just sitting in my room moping, I got dressed, pulled on my coat and went for a walk. I sunk down onto a bench near the library and hung my head down unhappily, watching snow collect on the toes of my boots. I didn't even realise I wasn't alone until a gloved hand came out of nowhere and brushed the snow off the bench directly beside me and Arc sat down, holding two styrofoam cups of coffee.

"You're too young to look this sad on Christmas," she said very matter-of-factly, "and it's too cold out here not to have coffee." She offered me one of the cups, and I accepted it gratefully, giving her a questioning look. "I could see you from my office," she explained. "Is your holiday not going well?"

I shrugged, wincing as the coffee burned my tongue. It had occurred to me more than once over the last five days that usually I would go to Arc with this sort of dilemma, but in this instance that was hardly an option. Or... was it?

"It's just..." I hesitated, choosing my words carefully. "I've spent most of the last week trying to find the perfect present for a friend. She... well, she means a lot to me. I care about her a great deal, and I couldn't just get her *anything*."

I glanced over at her out of the corner of my eye and found her watching me with a patient smile. Looking down into my coffee, I went on. "But I couldn't think of anything. I asked *everyone* for advice, but that wasn't much help, and I've been to every store within thirty miles of here, and... well, now it's Christmas. All the stores are closed, and I don't have anything to give to her."

Arc looked thoughtful for a moment, then said, "I'd imagine that if this friend knew how much trouble you've gone to, and how much you seem to care about her, the present—or lack of—wouldn't matter quite so much."

"You think?"

"I'm certain of it," she assured me, and then gave me a knowing look that had me feeling simultaneously self-conscious, embarrassed, and warm all the way to my toes despite the snow still falling around us.

I grinned and took a sip of my coffee, then frowned down at the cup in my hand. "Arc," I said, ignoring her raised eyebrow at the real-life use of her online pseudonym, "have you been hiding a coffee maker in the library?"

"Of course not. Don't be ridiculous," she said, pursing her lips and narrowing her eyes in mock irritation. "I just know where my *assistants* hide theirs."

I blushed, averting my eyes, and she shook her head and smirked. "There's more in my office," she continued. "And it's probably still hot, which is more than can be said for this." She poured her coffee out into the snow and stood up. "You're welcome to join me."

"I won't be keeping you from your work?" I asked.

"It can wait."

I pretended to contemplate her offer for a second, looking hesitant. "I don't know... I hear the librarian has some very strict rules concerning coffee in her archive."

"I think she'll look the other way today—it is Christmas, after all," Arc pointed out, dropping her cup into the nearby trash bin and heading down the sidewalk, somehow walking on the icy concrete in stiletto heels without so much as slowing down. She paused about fifteen feet away and looked back at me. "Well, are you coming?"

I nodded and stood, unable to hold back a grin as I fell into step beside her. "Arc?" She unlocked the library door and then paused, waiting for me to continue. Feeling silly and ridiculous, but not really caring, I said, "Merry Christmas."

Arc's smile crept all the way up to her eyes as she turned to open the door, and a wave of warmth washed over me that I wasn't sure could be entirely attributed to the library's heating system. "Merry Christmas, Mina," she said softly. "Now come inside. It's freezing out here."

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[mina de malfois](#)

December 24 2008, 07:09:14 UTC

Oh *Arc*. *melts*

I can't tell you how much I love seeing them wandering around loose, in a story I didn't write, being all touching and sentimental. ♥♥♥

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[jackiejlh](#)

December 24 2008, 07:16:41 UTC

:-D I'm glad that you like it! Hope you have a Merry Christmas!

