

Harûah: Breath of Heaven
A Magazine of Inspiration

Too Shy

by **Bill Snodgrass**



Issue 10, February 2007

Jeff Rogers lived a double life.

By day, he was a project manager for DynaServe, a Memphis, Tennessee based Fortune 500 Company that provided global logistics services. He led the International Integration team responsible for setting up satellite offices around the world and finding ways to get them looped into the company database without compromising security. It was a high-tech job, which suited Jeff just fine. At the core, he was a technophile.

That, however, was a fact that, to look at him, would never be guessed. He was handsome, tall, and fit. He was picked to manage the project, not so much for the technical expertise that he certainly had, but more for his ability to interact with people. The integration process meant talking to people in all walks of life – not just the hyper-geek programmers, but also packers and movers and everyone in between. Jeff's charisma and exceptional people skills made him the perfect choice to lead the team.

The others on his I-I team agreed. Seven others in all—five men and two women—and to the person, they loved working for Jeff. The I-I team's experience in the intramural co-ed four-on-four basketball league pretty much summed it up. Jeff was the unanimous pick as team captain, not so much because he led the team in both scoring *and* assists, but because the others liked him.

"Here's to a great season," Doug, one of the others on the team, said at a dinner to mark the end of the season. "Second place is pretty good for us, considering not one of us was ever picked in PE class before dead last!"

"And then only when the gym teacher *made* them take us," added Meredith.

When the laughter subsided, Tom added, "Hey, for a bunch of geeks, we did pretty good. The only team to beat us was the cable crew, and look at them.... All a bunch of ex-jocks. Thanks to Jeff, we had a great season!"

But in his ever-humble way, Jeff waved off the compliment citing the whole team's effort instead of his singular contribution. Yet, when the I-I team looked proudly at the trophy sitting on top of "Gandalf," their team's primary file server, everyone knew it was Jeff who put it there.

By night, however, Jeff was a RPGer, a multi-user Role Playing Gamer. Not just any RPG, but Sword Dynasty, the latest massive RPG to hit the 750,000-user mark, averaging 10,000 simultaneous users most every hour of every day and 15,000 on the weekends. Players worldwide logged in to test their mousing skills against the designs of the game.

By most standards, Jeff would have been considered an avid player. Although he had never been to a convention, didn't wear glasses—much less horn-rimmed ones—and didn't own a pocket protector, his four or five hours of playing every night and usually more on weekends certainly qualified his playing habits as high.

His RPG character name was Igor and his best on-line buddy was Hack-master. They were both nightly players, but neither would use the “A” word to describe their *own* playing habits.

IGOR: HEY MAN, HOW ARE YOU?

HACK-MASTER: ME GOOD, M8. WHAT ARE U UP 2?

IGOR: PASSING TIME, AS ALWAYS. GOT THE CABLE ON WATCHING THE BRAVES.

HACK-MASTER: U LOVE YOUR BASEBALL.

IGOR: YEA, THAT’S WHY I GOT INTO THIS GAME IN THE FIRST PLACE. HAD TO FIND

IGOR: SOMETHING TO DO TO KILL TIME WHILE I WATCH THE GAMES.

HACK-MASTER: HOW U LIKE THAT MLB ON DEMAND THING?

IGOR: LOVE IT. NEVER MISS A GAME.

HACK-MASTER: :-)

HACK-MASTER: EVER GO SEE ANY LIVE?

IGOR: SOME. TRIPLE A TEAM IN MY TOWN.

HACK-MASTER: I HAD YANKEE V SOX TICKETS LAST WEEK. BEHIND 3RD BASE.

IGOR: NO WAY!

HACK-MASTER: I SWEAR.

IGOR: HOW WAS IT?

HACK-MASTER: LOL. I GAVE THEM AWAY.

IGOR: NO.

HACK-MASTER: I DID. I HAD TO MEET ICEQUEENIE TO DO THE BROKEN ARROW QUEST.

IGOR: MAN, NOW I KNOW YOU ARE ADDICTED! YANKS V SOX! DUDE!

Jeff a.k.a. Igor told himself that he would never have passed up a chance to see such a prime baseball game to play Sword Dynasty. In truth, Sword Dynasty was really pretty boring, but it was the people he met around the world that kept him coming back. The people who played Sword Dynasty helped him pass his solitary nights.

The few people at DynaServe who knew him were surprised that he was so solitary, but it was a calculated decision—as was most things Jeff did. He had taken the DynaServe job thinking his girlfriend of three years would also move to Memphis. They had talked about getting married a number of times over the last year, and the nuptials were tentatively planned for some undetermined date after the move. She had interviewed with a prestigious private school to teach math and been offered a contract, so Jeff assumed their plans were on track.

Out of the blue, however, she declared that she was not moving.

“I don’t think I am ready for that,” she said.

We date for three years and you're not sure? Jeff had thought. *What would it take?*

“I see,” he said, trying to sound understanding.

A week after settling in Memphis, his old roommate called to tell him the bad news.

“Jeff, she’s already dating someone else.”

“Is it Tom?”

“Yea, man. I am really sorry.”

Jeff wrote off the terminated relationship as a chance to take an appraisal of his life. At thirty-six, he felt no rush to jump into another romance, so he settled into his work, organized the I-I group basketball team, and enjoyed his MLB On Demand. And played Sword Dynasty while he watched the innings and weeks roll by.

Jeff quickly figured that the computer game was challenging more from an endurance perspective than anything else. He decided to pick one of the skills that required the least concentration and “train” that skill to the maximum level the programmers allowed—level 100.

As the innings passed by, Jeff clicked away on the screen developing Igor’s “Enchantment” ability while occasionally chatting with on-line friends like Hack-master. Every rare now and then, he would try some other aspect of the game besides working on the Enchantment skill. It was on just such an occasion (while the Cardinals plastered the Cubs) that Igor sauntered into the lair of the infamous Frost Giant.

IGOR: DUDE, ARE YOU SURE I CAN GET LEMBLY BREAD HERE?

Lembly Bread was a magic loaf that temporarily raised players’ strength, which was a good thing.

HACK-MASTER: YEA M8. U HAVE TO KILL FROSTY THOUGH, THEN SEARCH HIS TRUNK.

IGOR: HOW LONG AFTER I KILL HIM TILL HE RESPAWNS?

HACK-MASTER: ABOUT 30 SECS. WHEN HE REAPPEARS, HE’LL BE OVER BY THE FIRE PIT

HACK-MASTER: IF U HAVE TO RUN, U CAN GO TOWARD THE BONE PILE.

HACK-MASTER: HE CAN’T CROSS THE BONES.

IGOR: K

Jeff moused his character carefully into combat. Killing the Frost Giant once was not too bad, but Igor was not the best fighter around, so after one battle, he had very few “hit points” left. His goal was to collect a dozen or so Lembly Breads, so he had come prepared with a pack

full of healing potions. Though he was ready for the recycling stream of Frost Giants, he was not ready for what actually happened.

Just as he got his first Lembly Bread from the trunk, another player entered the lair. It was a female character, so Jeff assumed the player was also female, though that was not necessarily the case. The programmers had devised the images for the females to be obviously female, but barely half a notch past conservative in design.

Routinely, he moused over the newly arrived character to see her name and combat level.

ALLSHY (87)

Not bad, Jeff thought. Ten levels higher than me.

He clicked away such that Igor drank a healing potion and made ready for the Frost Giant to appear once more.

Any place where monsters spawned regularly attracted numerous players—especially those that granted access to useful items like Lembly Bread. There were a few tactics that could be used when two players wanted to fight the same creature.

One was to whine something like, “I was here first. Go away.”

Jeff attributed this tactic to be a sign of the most immature of the early teen players sharing the world of Sword Dynasty with a fair population of adults.

Another tactic was to say nothing and just try to be the first to attack.

There were other tactics as well, but then there was...

ALLSHY: TAKE TURNS?

IGOR: SURE. YOU GO NEXT.

ALLSHY: OK.

Jeff half thought to strike up a conversation, but could think of nothing to say. He figured something would come up soon enough, so he waited. Looking at her name, Jeff tried to figure out how to say it.

Al-le... Al-ilsh-ee... Al-ilsh-eye.... He could make no sense of it. Just then, a third character entered the lair.

BORIS: HEY SHY. FOUND U.

ALLSHY: HI BORIS. DIDN'T KNOW I WAS LOST.

BORIS: LOL.

BORIS: IGOR FRIEND?

ALLSHY: JUST MET. HE'S COOL. TAKING TURNS.

BORIS: HI IGOR

IGOR: HI.

BORIS: I' LL HOP SERVERS.

Hopping servers was another option when more than one player wished to share the game resources. The programmers had made the game so that all the character information was stored on a single data server, but the game engine ran independently on one of many game servers. Thus, if too many people were in one location, someone could “hop” to another server.

About the time Boris hopped out, the giant appeared and Alilshy waded in. Jeff watched, scanning the conversation still pasted over the graphics on the game screen. He smiled at the part where she said he was cool. He laughed at her “didn't know I was lost” remark.

Obviously pretty witty and a fast thinker, Jeff thought.

Finally, his eyes played over Boris's first remarks.

He called her shy... hmm... Al-il-shy...A-lil-shy...

Finally, it hit him. “A lil' shy!” he said out loud. “Very nice!”

Jeff was very pleased that he had deciphered the name, but more impressed that she had thought it up.

IGOR: A LITTLE SHY – NICE NAME!

ALLSHY: YOU FIGURED IT OUT PRETTY FAST! MOST HAVE TO ASK.

IGOR: :-)

Though he wanted to chat on while taking turns with the frost giant, he couldn't think of anything else to say that wouldn't sound stupid. He knew that far too often, hormone-drunk teen boys tried all sorts of dumb things to win the favor of female characters. Jeff was not so much impressed with her for being depicted as a set of pixels with a vaguely female form as he was the wit she had displayed with Boris and in selecting her game name.

How he could communicate that to her further without it sounding like some lame pick-up line, he could not determine. It was his turn to fight the giant, anyway, so he attacked.

ALLSHY: BRB... TELEPHONE IN RL.

After about a minute, her character blinked away, as the player directing it apparently left the game to talk on the phone in “real life” and failed to move the mouse before the server automatically timed out her account. Jeff acted on an impulse and added her to his “buddy list” so he could see the next time she logged in.

Maybe, he thought, I'll figure out something to say to her that doesn't sound stupid.

Long after Jeff had put a dozen Lembly Breads in Igor's pack and returned to the near-endlessly repetitive process of getting another Enchantment level, a blue system message appeared at the bottom of his screen.

SYSTEM: YOUR BUDDY, ALILSHY, HAS LOGGED IN ON SERVER 5.

Good, thought Jeff. She doesn't have Buddy Chat blocked.

Players who only wanted to receive Buddy Chat from players on their own lists could set a system preference to block anonymous messages.

Or.... He smiled. Maybe she added me to her list, too.



That was how they met. Jeff continued to pass night after night playing Sword Dynasty and pressing Igor's Enchantment level ever higher. Although he never got around to actually speaking to Alilshy, he always smiled when he got notice from the server:

SYSTEM: YOUR BUDDY, ALILSHY, HAS LOGGED IN ON SERVER 5.

Jeff's calculated approach to the game and his relentless mouse clicking resulted in something of an emerging fame. As months rolled by, Igor became well renowned for his Enchantment level, hitting the top twenty of all players just as Jeff marked eight months in Memphis.

He didn't take much credit for it though.

IGOR: THE DIFFERENCE IS I ONLY DO THIS ONE THING 90% OF THE TIME.

IGOR: IT COULD BE ANYONE

HACK-MASTER: BUT IT IS U, M8. YOU'RE THE ONE.

IGOR: IT'S NOT SKILL. JUST HOW MANY TIMES YOU CLICK THE MOUSE.

HACK-MASTER: YEA, WELL, SO WHAT? WE ALL PLAY BY THE SAME RULES, BUT

HACK-MASTER: YOU'RE THE GUY WITH LEVEL 95 ENCHANTMENT.

Though he told himself it was just something to pass the time, when he reached number six on the Enchantment high score list and realized that he could, with about three hours of clicking, pass Hex Queen into the number five spot, he did get pretty excited.

All day at work, he was tempted to blow off memos and other things related to his job, log in to Sword Dynasty, and work on Igor's skill. He didn't, but he was tempted. Jeff resisted the enticement all day, but as soon as the clock flipped to 5:00, he headed for the door.

He exited the building, for the first time that day stepping outdoors. It was a rare Memphis day, the weather just right to truly enjoy a top-down ride in a Jeep. Since that was exactly what car Jeff drove—a soft-top Wrangler—he smiled at his good fortune and started unbuttoning the top.

He truly enjoyed the ride, but reaching his apartment and realizing that he had to take extra time putting the top back on—precious time away from his pursuit of Hex Queen—Jeff rolled his eyes impatiently.

I guess it was worth it. What's five more minutes?

He was almost done when he was distracted by the approach of another car with the top down—a Sebring coming into his parking area.

The driver was a woman, late twenties, early thirties maybe, with flowing brunette hair, stylish sunglasses, and nice features. She swung the car around the Jeep into the empty space beside it where Jeff stood, almost hitting him.

Slamming on the brakes at the last second, she stopped and waved a gesture of apology. Jeff returned one to say, “No problem.”

Awkwardly, she gathered her purse and headed for her apartment. Only then did Jeff recognize her as his across-the-breezeway neighbor.

Not even a hello or a friendly glance, Jeff mused. She must be shy.

Shy. That reminded him of Alilshy in Sword Dynasty and *that* reminded him that Hex Queen was probably about to log off, eight hours ahead of him in time zones. With all possible haste, he buttoned up the last of the Jeep top, then rushed into his apartment.

Wonder if getting to number five in Enchantment would be something I could use to strike up a conversation with Alilshy? Then, again, how could I do it without coming off like I am bragging? Ah... Forget it.

He passed Hex Queen that night, smiling as always when the System alerted him of Alilshy's logging in and out, but saying nothing. Not that he ever had.

Something, however, that night bothered him. Maybe it was seeing the shy girl in the convertible that had been the catalyst. Maybe it was finally passing Hex Queen and feeling that

he actually had earned some standing in the game. Whatever it was, he went to bed that night bothered by his paralysis regarding Alilshy.

Why can't I speak to her? he asked himself.

Because you don't know her, he replied. *She'd think you were a psycho stalker if she knew you had kept her on your buddy list all these months and never once said a word. She surely won't remember meeting you.*

So what, he retorted. *It is just a game.*

Yes, it is just a game, he said back, *but there are real people who play it. You can't just be helter-skelter about it.*

After a fair bit more internal debate, he resolved to just type the words, "Hi Alilshy. Do you remember me?" the next time she logged in, and just see what happened. He turned over and pounded his pillow into a more comfortable shape and drifted off to sleep.

The next night after work, he set up his laptop in front of the TV on the sofa as always, praised the inventor of wireless networking, and made himself ready to watch the Braves and the Cards play, his two favorite teams. He took a quick look at the high scores and saw that Hex Queen had passed him, but that did not matter.

Time zone effect. I'll outdistance her again tonight.

He took a deep breath and prepared to say hello to the character in the game whose name alone had brought a smile so often to his face. He logged in, scanned his friend list and was halfway relieved to see she was not online. His friend Hack-master was, though.

HACK-MASTER: HI M8. HAVE U HEARD?

IGOR: I JUST LOGGED IN.

HACK-MASTER: O. HEX QUEEN HAS POSTED A MESSAGE TO U ON THE B.B.

IGOR: ON THE BOARDS? WHAT DID SHE SAY?

HACK-MASTER: CONGRATS, BUT WATCH OUT.

HACK-MASTER: CHALLENGING U TO A RACE FOR NUMBER 1 RANK.

IGOR: NK?

HACK-MASTER: DO I KID ABOUT THIS KIND O STUFF?

IGOR: BRB

Jeff logged out of the game and into the message boards. Hex Queen was very gracious and extremely light-hearted, but there was, indeed a challenge to Igor—all in good fun—to see which would be the first to knock Blue Devil out of the number one rank.

Blue Devil had already posted a reply saying good luck and best wishes. He was done with Enchantment until he could get his Combat skill up to level 98 too. He also said that Hex and Igor had better watch out for Dream Blizzard who was currently level 97 and ranked third.

Everyone knew that the players at rank two and four had quit playing Sword Dynasty pretty much completely so it was a three-way race. Dream Blizzard did not bother to tender a reply, but no one expected him (or her—no one knew for sure, though the character was male) to comment anyway.

The last post in the thread was from Hex Queen. It was short: “Igor, add me in game.”

Jeff logged back in to the game and added Hex Queen. Sure enough, she was still on line. Jeff was surprised by a lot that night, but more than anything, by Hex Queen’s savvy at Sword Dynasty.

Through many chat interactions, she finally convinced Jeff that Igor and Hex Queen could compete and work together at the same time. She convinced him to agree to pay no more and no less than certain prices for raw materials they both needed to develop their Enchantment skills. She also convinced him to sell his skill—highly desired by the fighter types to make their weapons and armor magical—for certain prices.

She was delightful, witty, but more than anything, she demonstrated great insight into the game’s economics.

HEX QUEEN: WHEN WE GET TO LVL 99, WE WILL BE THE HIGHEST 2

HEX QUEEN: ENCHANTERS IN THE GAME.

HEX QUEEN THEN, WE CAN SET OUR PRICES AND BE ON EASY STREET.

IGOR: SUPPLY AND DEMAND.

HEX QUEEN: YEP. YOU’RE AMERICAN. IT SHOULD BE EASY FOR YOU.

After that night, they talked often, but briefly. The time zone difference was a big barrier in them developing much of a friendship, but sincere and mutual respect grew between them.

The race, however, distracted Jeff totally from his notion to start up a conversation with Alilshy. Still, as the nights rolled by, he smiled every time he saw the system message.

SYSTEM: YOUR BUDDY, ALILSHY, HAS LOGGED IN ON SERVER 5.

By the time the DynaServe co-ed four-on-four league started back up, Jeff had pushed Igor not only to the number one rank as an Enchanter but he had managed to become the first ever to reach level 100, the max level possible.

Being number one ranked had resulted in fame enough, but being the first ever to attain level 100 resulted in acclaim that exceeded anything Jeff had imagined. Hex Queen's reaching 100 a week or so later was hardly noticed, but she did not mind.

HEX QUEEN: COMING IN 2ND IS LIKE DANCING WITH YOUR BROTHER.

Jeff had to laugh at that. The race had been fun and Hex Queen had proven a good sport. But for that one skill, her character was far superior to Igor in every way, so in truth, the victory, in Jeff's mind, only served to show that he could do one thing for a long time. He admired Hex Queen for her great spirit and fun attitude, and wished they could be better friends, ruing the eight-hour time difference.

HACK-MASTER: HI M8. WHAT U GOING TO DO NOW THAT YOU'RE #1?

IGOR: I THINK I'LL DO SOME OF THE QUESTS.

HACK-MASTER: I FIGURED U TO HAVE DONE THEM ALL.

IGOR: LOL WHEN WOULD I HAVE HAD TIME?

HACK-MASTER: GOOD POINT.

At that, Jeff set out to complete the many quests programmed into Sword Dynasty that he had for a year ignored. Free of the race and able once more to play the game relaxed, he began again to think about Alilshy. Leaving DynaServe one Monday a few weeks later, he made up his mind that he would, next chance, say hello to her.

What's my problem, he thought. According to her name, she's supposed to be the shy one. What could the harm be?

Jeff sat down, situated his computer, mouse pad, and water glass, and then went to the Sword Dynasty web site to log in. As per his norm, he moved the mouse over the server 2 button then paused. For no conscious reason, he moved it to server 5—the one Alilshy always used—and clicked the mouse.

The game started loading and he tried to recall where he had left off. He had started a very long quest that had just been released the previous week. The Lost Shaman Quest, it was called. Thus far, he had managed to work his way past what was considered the first phase of the quest reaching the demon chamber.

He would have to battle the demon and win, and then collect the key it would drop to get through the door. Anyway, that is what the dwarf in the previous room had told him.

The status bar on the game load window was nearing 100% and Jeff knew he would soon face a huge fear. Not the demon he was about to battle. Speaking to Alilshy, as he had pledged to do.

Too Shy

The game-load finished and the play interface appeared. Jeff clicked to his buddy list and noted Alilshy was in fact logged in—on server 5 as he expected. He swallowed hard. A quick scan of the play window indicated that another player shared the demon room with him.

Beyond all probability, against 10,000 to 1 odds, it was Alilshy.

Jeff swallowed hard again. His hands became ice with tension as his fingers hovered over the keys.

IGOR: HI ALILSHY. DO YOU REMEMBER ME?

That was what he had planned to type months back, before the race with Hex Queen, and that was exactly what he typed.

ALLSHY: SURE I HAVE HEARD OF YOU. EVERYONE HAS.

IGOR: NO, I MEAN, DO YOU REMEMBER MEETING ME A LONG TIME AGO?

There was a long pause before she replied.

ALLSHY: TO BE HONEST, I DON'T. I WISH I COULD SAY I DID, THOUGH.

IGOR: I DIDN'T THINK YOU WOULD.

ALLSHY: BUT YOU REMEMBER MEETING ME? WHY?

IGOR: I THOUGHT YOU HAD A GREAT NAME. I STILL DO.

ALLSHY: THANKS.

IGOR: TO BE HONEST, I ADDED YOU TO MY BUDDY LIST. MUST HAVE BEEN 9 MOS AGO.

ALLSHY: YOU'RE KIDDING.

To prove his statement, Jeff switched to buddy chat and typed.

IGOR: NO. I REALLY DID.

The words he typed, as buddy chat and not just regular location chat, appeared red in Alilshy's game window proving that she was on his list.

ALLSHY: WOW! THE MOST FAMOUS ENCHANTER IN SD HAS ME ON HIS LIST AND

ALLSHY: I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER MEETING HIM. DUMB ME.

IGOR: I WAS NOBODY WHEN WE MET. YOU WOULDN'T HAVE REMEMBERED.

ALILSHY: BUT NOW YOU'RE SOMEBODY?

IGOR: I DIDN'T MEAN IT THAT WAY.

ALILSHY: WHAT WAY?

IGOR: LIKE I WAS BRAGGING.

ALILSHY: NO! THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT EITHER. I MEANT THAT

ALILSHY: YOU HAD TO WAIT UNTIL YOU WERE FAMOUS TO SAY HELLO TO ME.

ALILSHY: TO ME, JUST A NOBODY.

Sometimes, Jeff really hated the limits typing put on conversations. This was one of those times. It seemed the whole interaction was spinning out of control.

IGOR: I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. I DIDN'T WAIT ON PURPOSE. NOT LIKE I PLANNED IT

ALILSHY: SO WHY DID YOU WAIT?

Jeff thought hard before typing.

IGOR: I WAS AFRAID OF WHAT YOU WOULD THINK. I GUESS I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.

ALILSHY: YOU MUST BE A LITTLE SHY.

IGOR: ME? I DON'T THINK SO. I JUST DIDN'T WANT TO OFFEND YOU.

ALILSHY: OH. I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU WERE SHY.

ALILSHY: I AM SHY, IN REAL LIFE. I'D UNDERSTAND.

IGOR: I JUST DIDN'T WANT YOU TO THINK I WAS COMING ON TO YOU. I JUST THOUGHT

IGOR: YOU WERE CLEVER AND FUNNY THAT ONE TIME WE MET.

ALILSHY: FUNNY? ME? WHAT DID I DO?

Jeff recounted the incident where Boris had said, "I found you," and she had replied, "Didn't know I was lost." After that, the conversation seemed to take off, and they kept chatting, long after each had killed a demon and earned the key needed to pass the imposing door.

A few dozen other players came and went, but still Igor and Alilshy chatted away. She could not believe he had been afraid of her, and he could not believe how easy it was to talk to her.

Too Shy

The hours rolled by and Jeff realized he had no clue who won whatever baseball game had been on that night. Nor had either of them passed out of the room in which they had started. Finally, Alilshy called it a night.

ALLSHY: WELL, IT'S GETTING LATE. 11:44 HERE (CST, USA YOU?)

IGOR: SAME.

Central time zone. Jeff smiled. That makes it easier to be friends.

ALLSHY: I HAVE TO BE AT WORK EARLY IN THE MORNING, SO I NEED TO GO TO BED.

IGOR: WORK? SO YOU'RE AN ADULT? I FIGURED.

ALLSHY: DID WE NOT DO THAT SOMEWHERE? I AM S, F, 31. YOU?

Single, Female, 31. Nice to know. Though Jeff was not inclined to Internet romances, and it was often for such purposes that marriage status, gender, and age were swapped such information was a handy thing to know in order to gauge the other person.

IGOR: S, M, 36.

ALLSHY: LOOK, DON'T TAKE THIS WRONG, OK? DO YOU WANT TO MEET TOMORROW?

IGOR: HOW COULD I TAKE THAT WRONG?

ALLSHY: WELL, I WAS SORT OF AFRAID YOU'D THINK I WANTED YOU TO GIVE ME

ALLSHY: FREE ENCHANTMENT SERVICES OR SOMETHING. YOU ARE FAMOUS AND I

ALLSHY: BET YOU GET ASKED FOR STUFF ALL THE TIME. I JUST THOUGHT WE

ALLSHY: MIGHT ACTUALLY USE THESE KEYS AND SEE WHAT COMES NEXT?

IGOR: I'D LOVE TO MEET. SAME TIME? SAME SERVER?

ALLSHY: :-) SEE YOU.

IGOR: I'LL BE HERE.

ALLSHY: ONE LAST THING...

IGOR: ?

ALLSHY: I'M GLAD YOU TOOK A CHANCE TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF.

IGOR: I AM TOO.

ALLSHY: :-) SLEEP WELL.

IGOR: GOOD NIGHT.

SYSTEM: YOUR BUDDY, ALILSHY, HAS LOGGED OUT.

Jeff logged out too and looked at the clock. The night had flown by and he had made a new on-line friend. He went to bed pleased that he had finally said, "hello." Of course, beating the incalculably small chance of actually bumping into her again in the game helped him with his courage, but after that, things had gone pretty well, by his estimation. Jeff slept well that night.

The next day at work, he thought the world had fallen into a time warp and everything seemed to be moving so slowly. The rational part of his brain reprimanded the rest of him that so eagerly awaited the end of the day and a chance to hang out on-line with Alilshy. The irrational part won out and Jeff hurried home as quickly as his Jeep could carry him.

That night, they used their keys, moved past the demon chamber, and freed a Non-Player Character, "PollyWolly" from where she had been locked in a cage. She "told" them what to do next.

IGOR: THAT WAS EASY.

ALLSHY: :-) IT WAS.

IGOR: WELL, OFF TO THE CAVERN MOSS PATCH, WHATEVER THAT IS.

Unlike many players, Jeff refused to look at the walk-throughs that inevitably were posted on the bulletin boards within forty-eight hours of a quest release. Jeff liked to play it through, making his share of mistakes, but ultimately feeling satisfied with the success.

ALLSHY: YOU DON'T KNOW EITHER?

IGOR: ?? NOT YET.

ALLSHY: SO YOU'RE NOT USING A WALK-THROUGH EITHER?

IGOR: !! HATE THEM. :-(I NEVER USE THEM. YOU?

ALLSHY: NOPE. TAKES THE FUN OUT.

Like-minded. Nice, Jeff thought.

Even without their players using a walk-through, the characters Igor and Alilshy made good progress on the Lost Shaman Quest that night. But more to Jeff's liking, their budding friendship continued to grow.

This is why I play Sword Dynasty, he reflected that night in bed. Meeting people like Alilshy and Hack-master.

Over the months he had been playing, Jeff had learned a lot about his friend Hack-master. They had even swapped Hotmail addresses and kept in touch outside the game that way. Hack-

master was the same age as Jeff, but married with two little children, so he turned to Jeff for a sympathetic ear when facing life's little bumps and bobbles.

Jeff was hoping that time would evolve a similar relationship with Alilshy. So far, most personal details had been guarded—just the safe thing to do—and their delightful off-game talk had been rather global: favorite places in the world, favorite foods, likes, and dislikes. That was fine with Jeff, and seemed fine with Alilshy's player too. Jeff fell asleep very satisfied with his new friendship.

The next morning at work, Jeff ran into Doug in the break room. It had been Doug who introduced Jeff to Sword Dynasty.

“Hey Jeff.”

Jeff nodded and scanned the offerings of the vending machine for the Trail-mix Bars without the chocolate chips.

“Did you see that spaz memo from the office manager about turning off lights?” Doug commented offhandedly.

“I saw it,” Jeff answered.

“I was here late last night and went around. There are only four people in the whole office with incandescent lamps on their desks.”

“Only four?” Jeff replied punching “C-11” into the machine. “I told Maddie she should have just emailed the guilty parties directly and not yelled at the rest of us...what's that...about a hundred and eleven people get yelled at for what four people are doing?”

“That's how it goes sometimes.” Doug said. He shook his head and moved toward Jeff. A noticeably degree quieter, he added, “Hey, I know you are in the middle of Lost Shaman, but when you get out of the cave, do you think we can meet up? I have about two dozen buyers lined up for the Enchanted Dynasty Swords. All going to pay top dollar. My commission on the sale alone is going to make me rich.”

“Sure thing. So that Sword Dynasty auction web site you built is working out?”

“Dude, I get about 50 emails a day!”

Jeff smiled. “That's crazy.”

“Man, you have made *me* famous! Just knowing Igor and being your exclusive seller has made Death Lance famous. You know that new girl in the other wing? The Unix sys-admin for the Ops-Research group?”

“Tall? Blond hair?”

“Yea, real pretty. The kind of girl that would never give a dumpy guy like me time of day?”

Jeff frowned and shook his head, as if to tell Doug not to put himself down. “I know who you are talking about.”

“Well, she plays SD too, and someone told her that I was Death Lance. She walked all the way down here to find me yesterday at lunch to ask me if I had got her email from the web site about the sword.”

“No kidding?”

“Jeff, I never thought selling swords would make me a babe magnet.”

“Oh brother!” declared a female voice from the doorway. It was Carol, the four-on-four team’s nominal point guard (though everyone knew that if the defense was too hard to throw the ball to Jeff). “It’s going to take a lot more than some RPG to make *you* a babe magnet!”

Doug and Carol were best friends, so her insult was only fodder for a good laugh.

“You watch,” Doug said. “You just watch.”

Jeff smiled and shook his head. “Well, we better get back to work.”

“I just walked in,” Carol protested with a smile.

“Not you, us.” Jeff returned her smile.

“Oh sure, leave me all alone. You’re going to sneak into the wiring closet and kill some dragons in that game, I bet.”

Jeff and Doug knew she was kidding and that, coffee cup filled, she’d be back in her cube in half a minute, so they walked on, ignoring her remark.

“So you’re selling the sys-admin one of my swords?”

“Yea, she said she’d get it in a few days. I have three in storage, and I told her I’d save her one.”

“A few days? Is she getting up the money?”

“No, she’s doing Lost Shaman. Hey, you two should hook up! That would be cool.”

“She’s doing the Lost Shaman quest? What’s her game-name?”

“Umm... Well, now, I forgot. I have the email. I’ll tell you later. Her *real* name is Janis. Extension 4547.”

“She gave you her extension number?”

“Shoot no. I looked it up! Later boss.... Oh, I’ll have the new application’s CPU hits down about two hundred percent by lunch. I found some really bad logic in one of the routines we imported from the Interstate Logistics group that can be cleaned up pretty easily.”

“Great. You should do a White Paper on it and send it up channels. Help the whole company, and get some credit for your skills.”

“Yea, I’ll think about doing that.”

Driving home that night, Jeff’s thoughts turned away from CPU efficiency, memos about desk lamps, and almost all things to do with DynaServe. Almost all things. At one particularly long red light, he recalled Doug’s mention of Janis, the sys-admin who was a Sword Dynasty player and was in the middle of Lost Shaman too.

Too Shy

What are the chances? Jeff mused. Having an analytical mind, Jeff, unlike most asking themselves such a question, went on to answer it. *If she is actually doing the quest that means she was playing last night. There were about 10,000 people on-line, so that makes the chances one in 10,000.* Jeff shook his head. *No way. It couldn't be. Then again, I already beat 10,000 to one odds just meeting Alilshy in the demon chamber.* He smiled at his luck as the light changed.

When Jeff got home, he went through his ritual of getting ready for a night of gaming, but suffered a momentary panic. For some reason, his wireless router was not working, and he was frantically looking for an Ethernet cable long enough to allow him to sit on the sofa before he had the thought to reset it. That worked, and he logged in to find Alilshy on line and waiting for him.

ALLSHY: HI. I THOUGHT YOU HAD PUT ME ON YOUR "BLOCK" LIST AND USED A

ALLSHY: DIFFERENT SERVER.

IGOR: WHY WOULD YOU THINK THAT?

ALLSHY: NO REASON. JUST SOMETHING MY REAL-LIFE PERSONALITY WOULD THINK.

IGOR: I HAD A HARDWARE PROBLEM. I COULDN'T GET AN INTERNET CONNECTION.

ALLSHY: I THOUGHT YOU HAD CABLE?

IGOR: I DO. IT WAS MY WIRELESS. NOT THE CABLE COMPANY.

ALLSHY: NOT THIS TIME AT LEAST. I HAVE CABLE. I GET KNOCKED OFF

ALLSHY: ABOUT ONCE A MONTH FOR NO REASON.

IGOR: JUST THEY WAY IT IS WITH COMPUTERS.

ALLSHY: YEA, I DEAL WITH IT ALL THE TIME AT WORK. DON'T WANT TO AT HOME.

Jeff dared not think what crept into his mind. He dared not let his thoughts go there. Internet romances were not on his list of acceptable things, but inter-department romances were—and not even prohibited by company policy.

ALLSHY: WELL, NOW THAT YOU ARE HERE, WHAT SHALL WE DO?

IGOR: *CHECKING NOTES*

ALLSHY: OK. ME TOO.

IGOR: BRB

Jeff flipped through his papers he kept just for Sword Dynasty looking for the notes he had taken the night before. He remembered some dwarf—another dwarf different from the first—telling them what to do with the talisman. He was sure he wrote it down.

Just then, the family that lived upstairs came in and the kids were screaming wildly. Jeff thought maybe they were hurt, slipped to the door, and peaked out through the little window beside it. He didn't see anything suggesting other than pouting children, so he hurried back to his papers.

However, between rifling through his notes and trying to be a good neighbor, too much time had passed and the games inactivity timer had deemed him "away from keyboard." The last two entries on the chat window stared back at him.

SYSTEM: YOUR BUDDY, ALILSHY, HAS LOGGED OUT.

SYSTEM: IGOR, YOU HAVE BEEN LOGGED OUT FOR INACTIVITY.

Jeff muttered some guttural growl and moused into the userID field, typed "Igor," then tabbed to the password field and completed his login.

SYSTEM: WELCOME BACK IGOR, YOU HAVE BEEN AWAY FOR (0) DAYS.

Jeff smiled and wondered if that zero would ever be anything higher than a one. He took a sip of water and waited, notes found, for his friend to log back in.

SYSTEM: YOUR BUDDY, ALILSHY, HAS LOGGED IN ON SERVER 5.

IGOR: HI THERE. WB.

ALILSHY: SORRY. TROUBLE FINDING NOTES. GOT DISTRACTED. ALL GOOD HERE, NOW.

ALILSHY: READY?

IGOR: LET'S GO.

The night passed quickly. Igor and Alilshy collected the necessary items to complete the next phase of the quest. They stayed up longer than usual to get it done and kept most of their conversation focused on the quest.

Jeff crawled into bed very satisfied, still wondering if Alilshy might be—might just possibly be Janis, the sys-admin in the other wing.

I'll have to get Doug to tell me her game name.

He thought about asking Alilshy, but feared to violate the taboo. There was nothing wrong with asking a real-life person about their make-believe RPG identity. But going the other way—asking the character about a real-life identity was treading on thin ice. Over time, things would slip out, as with Hack-master, but Jeff did not want to push it.

I'll ask Doug, he decided, then rolled over and drifted off to sleep.

Too Shy

Walking into the office that next morning, it was immediately obvious that there would be no talk of Sword Dynasty. Their wing was in chaos.

“Virus,” Doug said as he hurried for the server room with a stack of back-up tapes.

He need not say more. If Doug’s one word announcement wasn’t enough to tell Jeff what was happening, the smug looks of the Unix and Macintosh people were. Windows had been once more attacked.

Jeff’s I-I group *had* to write their applications for Windows (though they kept data on a Unix platform) because they relied on their international partners to supply their own hardware. Thus, a Windows virus was a scary thing to their group, whereas other groups could stand around stoically sipping their coffee watching.

About three-fourths of the groups in the wing with I-I relied on Windows for project development, so a breach in network security, a virus, or other threat to their systems was a big problem. Suffice to say, Jeff never got around to talking to Doug about Janis (who he assumed was sipping her coffee smugly watching the Windows teams in her wing).

An hour later than usual, Jeff rolled into his apartment. He rushed to his sofa, downloaded that day’s Windows patch, installed it on his laptop, and logged in to Sword Dynasty. Alilshy was already on line.

ALLSHY: HI. I WAS AFRAID YOU WEREN’T COMING.

IGOR: PROBLEMS AT WORK. SORRY. HAD TO STAY LATE.

ALLSHY: OH. I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU HAD GROWN TIRED OF ME.

IGOR: THAT’S CRAZY. YOU’RE A GREAT FRIEND.

There was a pause that followed this statement that seemed far too long, and Jeff wondered if something had happened. He looked at what he had typed to make sure no strange twist of meaning had slipped in as a result of some typo, but found nothing. He scanned for possible double meanings, but everything he said seemed straightforward. He could only guess by the silence that either his “friend” remark had unsettled her, or something in real life had distracted her. Finally, her reply came.

ALLSHY: DO YOU REALLY THINK OF ME AS A FRIEND?

IGOR: OF COURSE I DO.

ALLSHY: :-)

There was another long pause. Jeff wanted to say something to assure her of his high regard, but feared saying more would give her the wrong impression.

Of course, if this is Janis, then maybe that is the impression I want to give. The other side of his brain quickly responded. Shut up. You're being bad. Alilshy seems moved by your calling her a friend. Don't spoil it.

ALLSHY: WHAT HAPPENED AT WORK?

Jeff concluded that she was passing on to a safer subject, so he let her.

IGOR: THE NUKE-U VIRUS. MY TEAM GOT HIT BAD. THANKS FOR BACK-UPS!

ALLSHY: SORRY TO HEAR THAT. SOME OF OUR OFFICE HAD IT TOO.

IGOR: DID YOU LOSE ANYTHING?

ALLSHY: NOT ME. UNIX GIRL HERE. AND MACS. ONLY A FEW MACS, THOUGH.

Jeff could not believe his eyes. *I have to talk to Doug tomorrow!*

Later that night, when they were facing a particularly cerebral challenge, Alilshy came up with the answer, seemingly out of the blue. Jeff was amazed, for the solution seemed connected only by way of distant and obscure logic.

IGOR: WELL DONE! THAT WAS BRILLIANT.

ALLSHY: NOT BAD, IF I SAY SO MYSELF. NOT BAD FOR A SOUTHERN GIRL.

Jeff stared. He shook his head, smiling as he typed.

IGOR: SOUTHERN GIRL?

ALLSHY: YES. CITY BIG ENOUGH TO TELL. MEMPHIS.

Jeff dropped his mouse. The odds that Alilshy was Janis just got much, much better. He fumbled to recover his pointing device and smiled.

IGOR: I AM FROM MEMPHIS TOO! SMALL WORLD!

ALLSHY: CREEPY. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO STALK ME AND COME

ALLSHY: KNOCKING ON MY DOOR ARE YOU?

Too Shy

Her reply was certainly not what he expected. He had thought they were becoming closer, that she considered him a friend too, though she had not said so, unless “:-)” counted as an affirmation. Before he could reply, though, she was typing again.

ALLSHY: THAT DOESN'T LOOK THE WAY I MEANT IT. SORRY.

IGOR: ?

That was his stand-by reply when he wanted to hear more before saying something out of context.

ALLSHY: NOT THAT YOU WOULD BE A STALKER. I JUST DON'T THINK YOU'D LIKE ME

ALLSHY: IN REAL LIFE.

IGOR: WHY WOULD YOU SAY THAT?

ALLSHY: JUST THE WAY I AM. I AM NOT VERY POPULAR. I GET WEIRD AROUND PEOPLE.

IGOR: I'M SURE YOU'RE GREAT. YOU ARE WITTY. SMART. FUNNY.

ALLSHY: THAT'S JUST ALLSHY. IN REAL LIFE, I'M NONE OF THOSE THINGS.

IGOR: I DON'T MEAN TO OFFEND, BUT THAT IS SILLY. ALLSHY IS YOU.

ALLSHY: :-)

IGOR: I MEAN, WHAT COMES OUT OF YOUR CHARACTER HAS TO COME FROM YOU.

IGOR: YOU MUST BE A GREAT PERSON.

ALLSHY: YOU'D CHANGE YOUR MIND IF YOU MET ME.

Jeff wished that he had pressed Doug about Janis, despite the virus. Though Jeff had only seen her in passing a couple times, from how Doug described Janis in the break room, he did not intuit her to be anything but likable. But Jeff had to admit that, given Doug's social experience, attention from any pretty woman would be a positive thing.

Jeff typed, “I'd like to meet you and see for myself,” but never hit the send key. *Too forward*, he told himself.

IGOR: I'M SURE YOU'D BE GREAT.

ALLSHY: I AM SURE YOU ARE WRONG. I CAN'T EVEN TALK TO MY NEIGHBORS.

ALLSHY: I HAVE ONLY A COUPLE OF FRIENDS AT WORK IN MY GROUP, AND THEY

ALLSHY: LET ME HANG OUT WITH THEM AT LUNCH OUT OF PITY. NOT REALLY FRIENDS.

ALLSHY: JUST NICE GIRLS WHO PUT UP WITH ME. IF IT WEREN'T FOR THIS GAME

ALLSHY: I'D HAVE NO SOCIAL LIFE.

IGOR: DO YOU WANT ONE, OUTSIDE THIS GAME? I TOLD YOU ABOUT MY EX GF AND

IGOR: THAT, BACK THEN, I DECIDED TO TAKE TIME OFF SOCIALLY FOR A WHILE.

IGOR: WOULD YOU RATHER HAVE A SOCIAL LIFE IN THE REAL WORLD INSTEAD OF A GAME?

A long pause, once more followed. Jeff imagined her typing one sentence, then erasing it and typing another. Finally the chat window scrolled a line.

HACK-MASTER: HEY M8! I AM BACK FROM VACATION! SUP?

It was a red buddy message, not chat from other characters nearby. Jeff buddy-messaged back.

IGOR: DOING LOST SHAMAN. HOW WAS THE BEACH?

HACK-MASTER: WET AND SANDY. KIDS LOVED IT. WIFE HAS KILLER TAN LINES.

I can't have this conversation with Hack, now. The one with Alilshy is too serious. Jeff shook his head.

HACK-MASTER: WEATHER WAS HOT, THOUGH.

IGOR: HEY, I CAN'T CHAT. QUEST IS HARD AND I NEED TO CONCENTRATE.

HACK-MASTER: COOL. HOOK ME UP WITH A SWORD WHEN U GET DONE? LOST MINE.

IGOR: SURE THING.

ALLSHY: YES. I'D LIKE TO HAVE REAL LIFE FRIENDS. NO OFFENSE.

HACK-MASTER: COOL. BYE.

Jeff almost missed Alilshy's reply in the middle of Hack-master's. He was glad he saw it before it scrolled away.

IGOR: WHAT'S STOPPING YOU? I'D MISS YOU IF YOU DIDN'T PLAY,

IGOR: BUT WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM MAKING REAL FRIENDS?

ALLSHY: I AM SHY.

IGOR: BUT, JUST A LITTLE? :-)

ALLSHY: LOL! ROFL. IGOR...

There was plenty of room left on the line to type more. That she put in the ellipsis suggested to Jeff that she intended to keep the next thought together. Jeff waited for the next line to follow.

ALLSHY: YOU ARE A GOOD FRIEND. YOU MAKE ME FEEL GOOD WHEN YOU SAY I

ALLSHY: AM SMART AND SUCH. IT IS EASY TO TALK TO YOU—TO ANYONE WHEN

ALLSHY: I HAVE THE COMPUTER TO HIDE BEHIND. IN REAL LIFE, I CAN'T DO IT.

IGOR: I AM SURE YOU COULD, IF YOU TRIED.

ALLSHY: I BET IT COMES EASY FOR YOU. NOT FOR ME. THERE IS A GUY...

ALLSHY: HE LIVES IN MY APARTMENT. HE IS ALWAYS PLEASANT AND SUCH.

ALLSHY: HE WAVES, SMILES.

IGOR: I SEE.

That was another thing Jeff typed when he didn't know what else to type.

ALLSHY: I DON'T EVEN KNOW HIS NAME. NEVER HAVE ASKED. NEVER COULD.

ALLSHY: I MEAN, HERE I AM LIVING NEAR A NICE, ATTRACTIVE, SINGLE GUY AND

ALLSHY: I CAN'T EVEN SPEAK TO HIM. SAME AT WORK.

IGOR: YES?

ALLSHY: I HAD TO ASK A GUY IN ANOTHER DEPARTMENT SOMETHING AND

ALLSHY: IT TOOK ME HALF A DAY TO WORK UP THE COURAGE. I EVEN

ALLSHY: ASKED ONE OF THE GIRLS I EAT LUNCH WITH TO DO IT FOR ME, BUT

ALLSHY: SHE MADE ME DO IT.

Jeff could hardly take his eyes off the “guy in another department” line. His mind, again, turned to Janis.

If this is what it seems.... Jeff smiled.

IGOR: I AM SURE THAT IF I MET YOU, I'D LIKE YOU.

Oops, Jeff thought immediately after he sent the message. That sounds a lot like I am suggesting we meet. I might have crossed a line, just now.

ALLSHY: MAYBE.

Her answer did not tell Jeff how she felt about his remark. Jeff was glad that her response wasn't negative, at least.

ALLSHY: LET'S GET ON WITH THIS QUEST. WE'LL FINISH TOMORROW NIGHT IF

ALLSHY: WE STICK WITH IT.

IGOR: OKAY. LET'S GO.

By the time they had called it a night, they had recovered the Shaman's scepter, and needed only to escape from the vast catacomb, and use it to free him.

ALLSHY: WELL, LOOKS LIKE TOMORROW NIGHT, AND WE WILL BE DONE.

IGOR: LOOKS THAT WAY.

ALLSHY: CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?

IGOR: SURE.

ALLSHY: WILL YOU STILL WANT TO HANG WITH ME WHEN WE FINISH THIS QUEST?

IGOR: OF COURSE! WHY WOULD ASK THAT?

ALLSHY: PROMISE YOU WON'T BE MAD?

IGOR: PROMISE.

ALLSHY: WELL, I NOTICED THE FIRST NIGHT THAT I AM TEN COMBAT SKILLS HIGHER

ALLSHY: THAN YOU AND THOUGHT MAYBE YOU WERE BEING A FRIEND JUST SO I

ALLSHY: COULD HELP YOU WITH THE HARD CREATURES WE HAVE HAD TO FIGHT.

IGOR: NO WAY. DOING THIS QUEST WITH YOU HAS BEEN THE MOST FUN I HAVE HAD

IGOR: IN GAME EVER. REMEMBER? I WAS THE ONE TOO SHY TO SPEAK TO YOU FOR

IGOR: ALMOST A YEAR!

ALLSHY: :-)

ALLSHY: WELL, SEE YOU TOMORROW.

IGOR: GOOD NIGHT.

SYSTEM: YOUR BUDDY, ALILSHY, HAS LOGGED OUT.

Jeff could hardly sleep that night thinking about the Unix girl from Memphis who had to work up her nerve to ask something of a guy in another department at work. No matter what, he told himself, he planned to pin Doug down and find out Janis's game-name.

But Jeff did not count on Doug having food poisoning and staying home from work. Jeff rolled his eyes and bit his lip as he listened to voice mail, hearing Doug explain his negative reaction to some gumbo he had eaten.

Shaking his head, Jeff resigned himself to the fact that he'd have to wait to find out if Janis was indeed Alilshy. *I'll call him at home in the morning. Hopefully, he'll be feeling better by then.*

The day passed and Jeff hurried home. As he set up the laptop, filled his water glass, and made ready for another night of Sword Dynasty, Jeff thought about Alilshy and his conversation with her the night before. It truly saddened him that she would belittle herself so.

If she is anything in real life like she is in the game, then she'd be a great friend, he thought.

He settled down and logged in. Not too long later, he saw the message he expected.

SYSTEM: YOUR BUDDY, ALILSHY, HAS LOGGED IN ON SERVER 5.

IGOR: GOOD EVENING. HOW WAS YOUR DAY?

ALILSHY: NOT BAD. SAME OLD THING. YOURS?

IGOR: IT WAS FINE. A GUY AT WORK WAS OUT SICK. HE PLAYS TOO.

IGOR: DEATH LANCE.... DO YOU KNOW HIM?

ALILSHY: EVERYONE KNOWS HIM. HE IS YOUR SALESMAN AND HAS A WEB SITE.

ALILSHY: HE'S ALMOST AS FAMOUS AS THE FIRST PLAYER EVER

ALILSHY: TO GET LEVEL 100 ENCHANTMENT. :-P

IGOR: YOU EMBARRASS ME.

ALILSHY: AW, YOU'RE BEING MODEST, AS ALWAYS.

ALILSHY: BUT REALLY, BEING FIRST TO 100 ENCHANTMENT. THAT'S COOL.

IGOR: I THINK BEING YOUR FRIEND IS COOLER. LOTS MORE FUN. LESS CLICKING.

ALILSHY: OH THAT'S IT, IS IT?

IGOR: ?

ALILSHY: YOU LIKE ME 'CAUSE CHATTING IS EASIER ON THE WRIST THAN

ALILSHY: CLICKING A MOUSE TO GET ENCHANTMENT EXPERIENCE.

IGOR: BAH. :-P RIGHT BACK AT YOU!

ALILSHY: I'M JUST KIDDING WITH YOU.

IGOR: I KNOW YOU ARE. :-)

Jeff scanned her answer about Death Lance, but could not infer anything desirable from it. He sighed and turned back to the game. They plunged in to the last phase of the Lost Shaman quest with determination and finished it a few hours later.

SYSTEM: CONGRATULATION, IGOR, YOU HAVE COMPLETED LOST SHAMAN QUEST!

IGOR: WE DID IT!

ALLSHY: YAY!

IGOR: YAY! OH!!! I GAINED A COMBAT LEVEL!

ALLSHY: :-) GOOD FOR YOU! YOU NEED IT!

IGOR: HEY NOW!

ALLSHY: JK.

IGOR: :-)

ALLSHY: WELL...

Despite the ellipsis and waiting a sufficient time, Alilshy added no other remarks. Jeff finally breached protocol and replied.

IGOR: WELL WHAT?

ALLSHY: WELL, WHAT NOW?

Jeff was about to suggest they pick another quest and start it together, but instead, all he typed was gibberish.

IGOR: AEPORIH

Outside Jeff's apartment, someone had discharged a pack of firecrackers. Jeff jumped, inadvertently sending the strange message. The exploding Black Cats were bad enough, but the disruption they caused set off a car alarm that sounded just like the one on his Jeep.

Jeff jumped up and dashed for the table by the entry where he kept his keys. He grabbed them and rushed out the door while someone upstairs was yelling, "Cut it off! Cut it off!"

Stepping into the breezeway, he joined his across-the-way neighbor who already stood there, key ring in hand pushing the button that would turn off her alarm, but nothing was happening.

"I think it's mine," Jeff said with a smile.

He pushed the button on his key ring and the alarm stopped.

Too Shy

“Oh,” said the neighbor. “Mine sounds like that too.”

“Yea,” Jeff said. “Both are from Chrysler. They must sound the same.”

“Yea,” she said sheepishly, then waved awkwardly and turned back inside.

Jeff turned too and raced back to the laptop, just beating the logout timer. He clicked his mouse to tell the server he was still there, and looked at the screen.

Aeporih? he thought. *Oh boy, that's weird.*

ALILSHY: THAT WAS STRANGE.

IGOR: SORRY. I HAD A STARTLE AND I GUESS I JUST POUNDED THE KEYS.

ALILSHY: OH, NO, NOT WHAT YOU TYPED (BUT THAT IS STRANGE TOO)

ALILSHY: I MEANT WHAT JUST HAPPENED WAS STRANGE.

ALILSHY: AND LIKE ALWAYS, EMBARRASSING.

IGOR: WHAT HAPPENED.

ALILSHY: WELL, SOMEONE JUST SET OFF SOME FIRECRACKERS AND A CAR ALARM

ALILSHY: WENT OFF. I THOUGHT IT WAS MINE AND I WAS STANDING THERE

ALILSHY: TRYING TO TURN IT OFF, BUT IT WAS REALLY MY NEIGHBOR'S.

ALILSHY: THE NICE GUY. I WAS SUCH A DOPE.

Jeff stared at the words. He scrolled up and down reading them again, and again.

So Alilshy's not Janis after all! He laughed out loud and shook his head, his face lit up with a huge smile. He did not note how long he stared at the screen, but it was long enough to worry Alilshy.

ALILSHY: ARE YOU THERE? LOST CONNECTION?

IGOR: I'M HERE.

ALILSHY: WHAT HAPPENED?

IGOR: GO ANSWER YOUR DOOR. SOMEONE IS GOING TO BE THERE.

ALILSHY: WHAT? ?????? !!

IGOR: YOUR DOOR....

Jeff jumped up from the sofa too fast to even put down his laptop. He carried it to the door, placing it on the entryway table at the last moment. He pulled open his door, stepped across the breezeway, and knocked.

His neighbor opened the door, a look of utter shock on her face.

“Hi. My name is Jeff and we have been neighbors for a long time. I’ve never introduced myself to you.”

“Jeff?” she said, her shock still pervasive. “Yes, I have seen you around before. A lot, I guess. I didn’t know what to say though. I never meant to be rude or anything.”

“That’s okay,” Jeff replied. “I guess you’re a little shy. Do you mind if I ask, what’s *your* name?”

“Sarah...”

Jeff saw her eyes fix on something behind him, and a look of understanding finally settled on her face. He followed her gaze through his open door to his laptop sitting on the entry table.

On the screen, a message had just appeared.

SYSTEM: YOUR BUDDY, ALILSHY, HAS LOGGED OUT.

Then, a second later, another.

SYSTEM: IGOR, YOU HAVE BEEN LOGGED OUT FOR INACTIVITY.

Sarah’s face relaxed then lit up with a huge smile. “I’m glad you took a chance to introduce yourself. You got it right. I am *a lil’ shy*.”

Special thanks to Gina for allowing the use of Alilshy, her character’s name from Jagex’s® RuneScape® on-line role-playing game.



Copyright 2007, Bill Snodgrass. All rights reserved.

Too Shy

Bill Snodgrass is a Christian, husband, father, writer, editor, web-developer, student. No spare time!

Bill Snodgrass began writing during his high school days. In the winter of 2003, however, he embarked on the journey to become a published fiction author. Bill writes fantasy, science fiction, and other fiction, all grounded in Christian values and appropriate for readers of all ages.

In addition to his writing, Bill, along with Cameron Walker, founded Double-Edged Publishing, Inc. and works directly on the editorial staff of *The Sword Review*.

All material on this site is copyrighted and cannot be reproduced without permission.

©2006, 2007

Haruah is a publication of Double-Edged Publishing, Inc.

ISSN 1932-7609