

THE BOY WONDER IS A MENTAL CASE!

大神是大神經病！（上）

Shy college student Shih Yi-Yu is invited to an exclusive VR summer camp by the class heartthrob. At camp, she's put into a virtual-reality game based on trashy romance novels, in which she has to accumulate favor from other characters in order to advance. But something about the plot is unnervingly familiar....

Shih Yi-Yu is a shy college student would rather eat than talk to people – especially to Feng Yueh, the class heartthrob. Thus, when Feng Yueh approaches her before class with an invitation to the exclusive “Recall” VR summer camp, she refuses to believe her ears.

Summer camp turns out to be a much more immersive and more fraught experience than she expected. She is repeatedly placed inside a virtual world designed like a cheap romance novel, in which she is the female protagonist – the powerful executive's cute secretary, the warrior's younger sister, et cetera. To survive and advance, she must recruit as many other characters as she can while avoiding the subterfuge of her enemies. Yet the more the environment changes, the more it stays the same, and a chilly sense of foreboding gradually overtakes her....

In this highly engaging and easily relatable tale, author Ping Hsu sends familiar protagonists into uncharted territory. Follow along as personalities you thought you knew – the diffident male love interest, the repressed female lead – come into their own in new, untried worlds in which imagination is the only limit.

Ping Hsu 憑虛

An experienced online fiction writer, Ping Hsu has several titles to her name already, including *You, On the Other Side of the Internet* and *Peach Blossoms, Peach Blossoms, When Will They Bloom?*



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THE BOY WONDER IS A MENTAL CASE!

By Ping Hsu

Translated by Mary King Bradley

“Hey, that’s her, that’s her! The one who’s with Feng Yueh.”

The voice came from behind, like a cold arrow fired dead center into Shih Yi-Yu’s back. She resisted the urge to turn her head. *The guy’s mental*, she told herself. *Don’t get into it with him.*

“Yeah! I heard she and the boy wonder have been an item for two weeks. He declared his love in front of the fountain. Romantic surroundings. Handsome guy, beautiful girl. They could have been filming an idol drama.”

The other person spoke in a whisper, but every idiot knew whispers were the best way to be heard clearly.

Yi-Yu rolled her eyes. Why didn’t *she* know about Feng Yueh professing his love to her in front of the fountain? Who exactly had seen him do this? It would have been a scene horrifying enough for a supernatural thriller.

“Apparently Boy Wonder Feng won’t even look at anyone else because of her. He’s got it bad.”

Hang on, the “boy wonder” must have cataracts! What was up with this “got it bad” stuff?

Yi-Yu shuddered, took a deep breath, and told herself that she and Feng Yueh were two parallel lines. No way would they ever intersect. As long as she didn’t deny anything or go wading into these muddy waters, it wouldn’t be long before everyone lost interest.

After all, Feng Yueh was legendary for skipping ahead two years. He was the same age she was but about to graduate ridiculously ahead of schedule. They were in two different worlds. Other than supposedly having once been in the same high school scout jamboree, they had zero relationship.

Yi-Yu nodded vehemently to show her certainty of this. She did not expect the sudden shriek a moment later, which was about to leave her overruled.

“It’s Feeeeeeeng!”

Feng?

Yi-Yu, usually oblivious to her surroundings, was a bit sensitive to the surname Feng just now. She turned her head to see a figure enter the lecture hall, emerging from the dramatic backlighting of the door with a calm face and billowing windbreaker. All eyes were drawn to him like a magnet.

What the hell! Did this guy think he was in some campus romance flick? He’d even brought his own background music.

It wasn’t until Yi-Yu finished mocking him that she realized something.

Not once the entire semester had she ever seen Feng Yueh in this lecture hall. Now, at the end of the term, the boy wonder showed up for class?

Think the teacher doesn't dare fail you just because you're the boy wonder? I wouldn't bet on it!

With everyone's eyes on him, the boy wonder ascended the stairs step by step, showing no obvious signs of exertion. Yi-Yu, like everyone else, followed him with her eyes as he mounted the steps.

Huh. Apparently the boy wonder preferred to sit at the back of the classroom, like she did.

Yi-Yu's opinion of Feng Yueh went up a notch but dropped back to zero when he stopped directly in front of her.

Confused, Yi-Yu looked at him. All she could see was the boy wonder looking down at her, his gaze crystal clear. It was spooking the hell out of her.

Hang on, what did Feng Yueh think he was doing, looking at her like that? This seat didn't have his name written on it.

Maybe he wasn't looking at her, but at the wall behind her?

Yi-Yu shifted feebly in her seat. The boy wonder's gaze followed her side-to-side shuffling, precise as a GPS.

She swallowed, sensing the stares of everyone in the classroom as her scalp went numb. For someone who liked being invisible, becoming the focus of gossip was profoundly uncomfortable.

Yi-Yu made a quick decision and flashed Feng Yueh a brilliant smile. When the corners of the boy wonder's mouth curled slightly, she pointed to one side.

"Classmate Feng, aren't you at the wrong seat?"

Yi-Yu wasn't expecting Feng Yueh, the legendary, aloof boy wonder, to smile at her. It was only for an instant, but she was certain she'd seen it.

While she sat there in a fog, Feng Yueh clearly and distinctly said, "No, this is the right seat."

"Huh? But this is my seat."

Yi-Yu stared blankly at him, finding that her brain, so clever for twenty years, was currently less than useful.

Okay, she had to be hallucinating. Why else would she think the boy wonder looked like a refreshing spring breeze? Yup, she was definitely overdoing the homework. Her eyes were blurry.

"That's right. I've come to find you."

Feng Yueh's voice wasn't loud, but loud enough to be heard clearly in the quiet classroom. The last few words echoed in her ears.

Come to find you.

Oh, he must have said *I've come to class*, she just thought he'd said *come to find you*.

Yi-Yu's thoughts came to a halt for three seconds, then exploded.

What? Feng Yueh was here to find *her*? But they didn't even know each other!

As if he sensed Yi-Yu's doubt, the corner of Feng Yueh's mouth crooked upward. He placed the piece of paper he held on the desk in front of Yi-Yu. She eyed it, saw in one swift glance the heading at the top —

Recall Experience Camp Project

"I'm here to extend an invitation to you on behalf of the camp organizer."

Feng Yueh drawled his next words as he gave Yi-Yu a meaningful look.

"Only selected students can participate."

"Classmate Feng, are you playing *Digimon* right now?"

Yi-Yu blurted out the thought before she remembered she was in class, surrounded by listening ears. She swapped her expression for a smile as she said to Feng Yueh, "I'm sorry, I don't usually do summer camps."

What a joke. She was so lazy that a summer camp was *exactly* what she should be doing.

"Why? Because of someone else? Like a boyfriend?"

Feng Yueh narrowed his eyes. Something flashed briefly in their depths but disappeared before Yi-Yu could catch whatever it was. She blinked and nodded. Feng Yueh regarded her in astonishment, but Yi-Yu kept her tone breezy, pointing at the mobile game advertising poster next to them.

"Yes. Liang Chen."

Liang Chen, one of a new generation of young male idol-drama leads, a.k.a. the nation's boyfriend. Probably half of all Taiwanese college students called themselves "Mrs. Liang."

Feng Yueh's brows relaxed as she finished speaking. "Sign up for the experience camp," he drawled. "You get a year's worth of barbecued meat coupons when you're done."

Yi-Yu gasped. When she recovered, she realized she'd already signed the registration form. As her eyes met the smiling eyes of Feng Yueh, Yi-Yu was gripped by gloom.

The tragedy of being a foodie was that one's body reacted faster than one's brain. If that barbecued meat wasn't delicious, she was definitely going to break Feng Yueh's neck.

*

"Miss Shih."

Yi-Yu shivered violently and looked up.

A fashionably dressed woman stood looking coldly down at her. Yi-Yu gaped at the woman and was just about to say "Who are you?" when a voice suddenly spoke inside her head.

The game has begun! The lead player is asked to do her best in this world. If you succeed in beating the game within the time limit, you'll have as much prime beef for dinner as you can eat. If you lose, you will have only instant noodles.

Yi-Yu felt like she had been struck by lightning and was about to protest when the voice chirped an addition:

Oh, and one more thing. The instant noodles will not be Imperial Feast brand. They will be Science noodles.

If she ever found out who had created this system, she was definitely going to kill him! Yi-Yu's brain went into overdrive, running through every aspect of her situation, including why she was here.

Shortly after Feng Yueh had brought her to the experience camp's base of operations, she had been talked into a large gaming chair with zero time to prepare, on the pretext of "familiarizing herself with the system."

After she was inside the system (called "Momo") it told her that the purpose of the experience camp was to test the newest virtual reality technology. Those selected would enter the virtual game world together, but only one — the lead player running the story — would keep his or her original memories. The others would have temporary amnesia and play supporting roles.

The lead player's goal in each round is to accomplish the mission assigned by the system. A mission has no fixed time limit or narrative, and the goals will likewise vary.

Yup, the goddamn game was a total unknown.

Oh, I forgot to tell the lead player. The game's storyline for this round is "Mr. CEO, no one loves you." Lead player, please give your best effort and strive to improve!

Yi-Yu's expression went dead for a second. Why the hell did this game's theme sound like a romance novel she'd read once?

The instant she spaced out, someone rapped forcefully on the desk. A sarcastic voice followed: "You're planning to seduce Hsiang Yun this way? Go look in the mirror and come back later."

Damn it all to hell! Hsiang Yun! You just had to hear this crazy, arrogant name straight out of a local drama to know it belonged to an overbearing CEO!

Yi-Yu felt a swell of excitement. A great name like that right at the start made her feel like she could get into this game. Although, mention a CEO, and her first thought was...

Pausing her train of thought there, Yi-Yu cast her eyes over her immediate surroundings. She was unsurprised to find a nameplate at the edge of the desk bearing her professional title: private secretary. There it was, laid out clear as day in two words.

Her lips thinned. For a moment she didn't know if she should feel happy or sad to find herself in such a classic setup. The overbearing executive and the charming secretary, was it? The quintessential romance-fiction trope.

In all likelihood, the woman in front of her had a good face, good figure, and good background. What a shame that she was fated to be the tragically not-so-good second female lead.

“I’m talking to you. What are you looking at?”

The second female lead, evidently none too happy with Yi-Yu’s wandering attention, rapped forcefully on the desk again, her eyes full of loathing. Yi-Yu had no doubt whatsoever that this woman would pick up the coffee on the desk and dump it on her if she ignored her for another second.

Yi-Yu hastily put on a professional smile and addressed the woman. “You’re simply too beautiful. I don’t dare look directly at you.”

This statement rendered the second female lead speechless. She looked at Yi-Yu with narrowed eyes for several beats, then grunted softly. “Don’t think a bit of sweet talk makes you any less of a man-eater,” she snorted. Then she turned on her heel and left.

Yi-Yu breathed a small sigh of relief. At this point the door beside her opened and an extraordinarily handsome individual strode through it. One look at the man’s face left her stunned as he walked up to her.

With a sudden bang, the man brought both hands down on the desk and thrust his too handsome face up close to hers. Yi-Yu instinctively pulled back, causing the corners of the man’s mouth to turn upward in a devilishly charming smile that made her brain reel.

Hang on, no one had told her their school’s super popular idol-drama lead Liang Chen was participating in the experience camp!

A moment later, the man’s words turned Yi-Yu to stone.

“Woman, you have succeeded in attracting my attention.”

She utterly loathed this CEO’s romance-novel style.

“Sir.”

A languid voice from behind Liang Chen ruined this insufficiently ambiguous, wholly embarrassing interlude — of course, the embarrassment was all on Yi-Yu’s side.

The “trapped with two hands on the desk” maneuver! She felt sick to her stomach.

Yi-Yu thought the voice, which had delivered her something like a reprieve, sounded familiar. When Mr. CEO finally removed his hands, she locked eyes with a young man in a suit standing ramrod straight. For an instant she almost collapsed.

Impossible! The revered, the admired boy wonder Feng Yueh – how could he be playing the role of the CEO’s sycophantic assistant?

The young man, completely ignoring Yi-Yu’s shock, gently pushed his wire-framed glasses back up the bridge of his nose, his attention fixed on his boss.

“Your online conference with Mr. Lyon in Germany is in ten minutes.”

“I know.” The CEO moved to the side of the desk as he spoke, loosening his tie with one hand. To Yi-Yu, who was trying to sneak out, he said, “Woman, don’t even think about leaving without permission.”

Oh for the love of God! *Again* with the “woman”! She had a name, dammit, and it wasn’t *woman*!

Yi-Yu experienced the irresistible urge to stand up and let loose on the boss but was surprised to see him walk out the door. Just then, Momo’s cheerful voice spoke in her ear once more.

Yi-Yu has added ten points. Oh, no, I mean the CEO's favorable impression has added ten points!

“Wait a minute! I didn’t do anything just now, so *what* favorable impression? Besides, why would I want to make a favorable impression?”

Ah. Didn't I tell you? The game world has a favorable impression setting. Making a fully favorable impression on a character improves the odds of accomplishing the goal!

“You mean you want me to go around sucking up to important people? That’s insane!”

Yi-Yu grumbled, momentarily forgetting someone else was in the room. When he spoke, she started violently.

“Secretary Shih, allow me to escort you home.”

Feng Yueh was standing next to her, exuding his superior quality from head to foot. The guy who had once stubbornly acted like he knew her now seemed a total stranger. Yi-Yu experienced some complicated emotions.

Boy wonder, boy wonder, why aren’t you the lead role in this game? Instead you’re this little footman who doesn’t even qualify as the second male lead? What a waste.

“Uh, I think I can make it home on my own.”

“Unacceptable,” replied Feng Yueh, his eyes following Yi-Yu’s movements. The second she reached for her purse, he had it in his hands. Yi-Yu gaped at him. Feng Yueh’s lips twitched.

“You and the CEO were attacked a few days ago. Having saved his life, you are currently a thorn in many people’s sides.”

“Holy hell, I was attacked along with that chauvinist pig?”

The words tumbled out of Yi-Yu’s mouth. Feng Yueh’s eyebrows rose slightly. Yi-Yu smiled brightly and shook her head at him. “I think I’ll be okay.”

“The appearance of safety does not guarantee it, Secretary Shih. Allow me to escort you to the Liang residence so we can avoid sending someone to collect your corpse.”

Why had she never realized how utterly despicable Feng Yueh was?