A Virtual Zephyr

“Hey Cloud, come on! If we don’t get in line now we’ll be waiting in line forever or we might not even get a copy of the game!”

I couldn’t make out who this person was or what this they were trying to say to me. All I could make sense of was that I never wanted to leave this comfortable surface under me and uncover this soft cozy cloth that kept me warm: I was in a peaceful and blissful sanctuary. This is how I feel most mornings and although I’ve tried to change this habit, it doesn’t quite change. Thus, I’m practically late every day for school. I’m late for everything actually if it involves me and the morning.

I am now shivering wet, waiting in line outside with the sleep destroyer: Tai. Waiting in line for Zephyr; the first ever VMMORPG: Virtual Mass Multiple Online Role-Playing Game. Anything can happen in a virtual reality. You’d be able to experience it first hand through all your senses: you can see it, smell it, feel it, hear it, and taste it all.

“Aren’t you glad I got you out of bed at 5:00 in the morning on a Saturday? Huh, Cloud? We’re almost at the front of the line now and look behind us! You can’t even see the end of this thing!”

I’ll admit. I’m quite glad that he woke me up. I actually don’t mind waking up early, but it’s quite hard getting out of bed. I swung my arm around Tai’s shoulder and replied.

“Aside from the fact that it’s snowing, that you poured water on me, that my hair is still wet, and that I’m kinda cold, I’m really glad that you woke me up today for this moment, Tai.”

We laughed. We cried. We waited. These are the kind of moments in life that I deeply treasure.

By the time we got back to my house, it was around 6:00AM. We had to unbox everything as fast as possible. We ran upstairs into my room. My hair was still damp.

As seen on the ads, there’s a helmet that we wear which covers most of your head. There are also shades that pop out from the helmet to cover our eyes from light sources. We calibrated ourselves for our avatars in game by slowly touching our body. It uses sensory motions to detect and indicate character size and physical features. I was time to launch. Tai laid down on the inside of my bed and looked at me.

“Hey, Cloud. See you on the other side!” Tai yelled out.

He faced the ceiling again, closing his eyes.

“Tai Li, ready for launch!”

I called out to him to see if it worked: no response. I couldn’t help but remember that we never went through the instruction manual and user agreements that no one ever reads. I decided to take a quick glance. The back of the manual read “*You die when you are killed.”* On second thought, thinking that nothing would go wrong and not wanting to fall behind Tai, I didn’t want to bother with getting out of bed and actually flipping through the pages. We already made all preparations based on the research we had scoured through the internet anyway. I laid down near Tai and closed my eyes.

“Systems standing by…” the system announced in a robotic female voice.

I’ll just copy Tai.

“Cloud Shin, ready for launch.”

“Launching in 3…”

I closed my eyes.

“2…”

I felt myself losing all strength and control over my body as I attempted to scratch my leg because it felt slightly uncomfortable.

“1…”

I no longer felt the coldness that I always felt during that season. That might’ve been the last time we ever saw reality again: December 25th, 2023, 6:13AM.

Many luminous lights followed my sight afterwards. My senses came back to me and I was engulfed in light. This was amazing. It felt like I was being pulled through an ocean with no difficulty keeping my eyes opened and breathing.

I flew into a room and landed softly on the ground. A screen lit up in front of me. Two classes appeared on it along with animations to support it: warrior and mage. The system spoke out:

“Please enter a name you would like to be identified as.”

Though it was my real name, I entered in “*Cloud”*.

“Please select a class.”

I slid my hand across the window to view the warrior class even though Tai probably chose warrior too. Another window appeared as the system spoke out again:

“Please select your preferred weapon”

There were swords, daggers, spears and polearms, and axes. Naturally, I wanted swords.

“Cloud, you have selected warrior and swords. Confirm?”

As I tapped OK to confirm, I was equipped with a sword in my right hand. The pixel blocks that made up the area began to scatter and disintegrate into dust that floated up into the now visible deep blue sky; what seemed like millions of other players appeared before me. Not seeing Tai anywhere or knowing his in-game name, I had two choices: look for Tai, or not look for Tai. I went with option two.

After walking around the town for a bit, many new faces were seen but still no Tai. Knowing him though, he probably just ran off somewhere to look at girls. I was still a bit worried assuming that he was supposed to wait for me since he said he would see me on the other side.

A notification for a message came up. Sent from… Tao? Is this supposed to be Tai? He probably knows I would name my character Cloud. I hesitantly slid down my hand to reveal the menu. I opened the message. Taking a deep breath, hoping that nothing had gone wrong so far, I read it:

“*So either my hand was shaking really bad and I accidently selected o instead of i or this game has a lot of bugs. Accept my buddy request so I can teleport to you :)”*

As I accepted, a portal appeared before me and out came Tai. As I examined him, it appeared that he was holding a staff.

“You chose to be a mage…?”

“I swear I selected warrior but then this happened. So I’m now a fire mage. Anyway how do you log out? I can’t seem to find it in the menu.”

“Are you that stupid or-“

I opened my menu. And as I expected… it was right there.

“LOOK IT’S RIGHT HERE.”

“Ohhhhhh! So it is! But it doesn’t work. Look, error message comes up.”

“That’s weird. Maybe they’ll fix it soon. There’ll be an outrage if players couldn’t log out. Let’s go grind on Slime’s in the meantime.” I hesitantly followed behind Tai. Something did not feel right.

We started walking towards the first area with monsters. An uneasy feeling within me grew with every second that passed and every step that I took. Looking around, there seemed to be fewer players than before. Perhaps 60% of them gone within the ten minutes we had been in game. I looked at the time in the menu I pulled out as we walked: 6:13AM: it was the same time as when I entered the game. Tai looked at me with concern.

“Is everything alright? The Slime*s* are right around the corner, literally.”

“Pull out your menu time. Mine doesn’t seem to be working.”

The anxiety within me grew as I stared at Tai’s window while fiddling with it.

It read 6:24AM.

“That seems about right, right? We came in around 6:10?” Tai asked.

Putting the worry aside, thinking nothing of the malfunctioning clock I had, we kept walking.

We have now entered a forest with trees that appeared to be as tall as the C.N. Tower. The rivers and ponds contained water that sparkled. Tai opened his mouth.

“Wow. This place is um, nice.”

“Yeah, nice.” I was still bothered by the bugs in the game.

“So how does this combat system work?”

“Well neither of us bothered reading the instructions.”

“Hey. I was expecting a tutorial of some sort at least. They usually have that in like, every game.

“Yeah… I was surprised too. I thought after we chose our classes we would be taken to a tutorial, but I just appeared in a random part of town.”

“I think you can just swing your sword at them. I don’t know about my staff though.”

I ran up to a *Slime* and slashed it with my sword holding it with one hand. The algorithm of the Slime changed and its behaviour became hostile. Assuming that there was nothing wrong with the combat system, I kept hitting the Slime until it stopped bouncing towards me.

When the Slime finally stopped, it lit up and exploded into blue dust which faded away into the sky. I gained 10 experience points. Looking excited, Tai rushed towards a Slime holding his staff with two hands. Still concerned with the errors in the game, I called out to him.

“Wait. We still don’t entirely know how this works yet or how much damage they do or what happens when you die. I don’t think you should-”

Of course, cutting me off, ignoring my warning, he continued charging while gripping his staff ever so tightly as if wielding a very big long sword. Tai took Kendo so he must be pretty mad about wielding a staff right now. He can remake his character later though hopefully.

“MY TURN. HAAAAA!” Tai let out his infamous war cry.

The Slime received numerous hits from the staff however to no success did it look like it was going to die to Tai and his staff any time soon. As I stood on the side and observed, I started laughing. The uneasy feeling I had disappeared and happiness filled me for the moment; it didn’t last very long.

A slim figure dressed in complete black started approaching us from a distance. We couldn’t see his face due to his hooded robe equipment. Assessing the situation, there were only a few players in the map including myself and Tai which was odd because this should be the first map where everyone should be training at to gain experience.

As Tai continued smashing away at the Slime with his staff, the figure in black blinked in leaving a trail of light revealing a dagger in his left hand. In the split second he blinked, the blade of his dagger flashed into my eyes revealing a completely black blade that pulsed out a red ominous aura. Wielding his dagger backhandedly, he cut through the Slime shifting his entire body following the momentum of the dagger which immediately obliterated the Slime and knocked Tai back caused by the wind pressure that was released from the strength of the blow. Tai flew backwards some distance, hitting a tree and falling to the ground still gripping his staff tightly. His hit points bar decreased significantly reaching the red zone. My first instinct was to run however Tai was laying on the ground struggling to get up.

We did not know that players could deal this much damage to another player in this game. This was when I thought “What if Tai actually died?” Then I remembered: the back of the manual.

I tried to call out to Tai but no words would come out; fear has enveloped me. Tai spoke out to the figure as he stabbed the staff into the ground to support himself up.

“Hey man. I spent a lot of time killing that-“

Before Tai could finish his explanation, the figure flashed in. My whole body was paralyzed from the shock of this sight; the dagger was pierced into Tai’s forehead. Before he could mutter any words… and as he turned towards me, he dispersed into dust.

I thought that that’d be the last time I ever saw Tai again.

Players in the area began to look towards our direction. The terror on Tai’s face was still embedded in my thoughts. I could not move any of my muscles; it felt like all my nerves have been severed. My sight blurred; I could still make out that everyone around me was attempting to run but with no success as they were all being sliced off one by one by the figure. It seemed like everyone was screaming silence since I could not hear them. Dust filled the area. I was the last one remaining in the map. The figure began walking towards me from where the last player was killed.

“You’re not gonna run?” she spoke out with a higher pitched voice.

Hah. It was a girl. To be beaten by a girl. It doesn’t really matter what I say or do at this point. It doesn’t change the fact that this person was going to kill me either way; there’s nothing I can do to change the outcome of this situation. Yes, I’ve accepted my fate.

As these thoughts went through my head, she is now within arm’s length in front of me. She seems to be waiting for my response before killing me off. She asks again.

“So? You will really not run.”

“…I don’t know. Will you kill me either way?”

“Probably. Why don’t-“

I lashed out my sword at her before she could finish her sentence as her eyes closed to blink. Before the blade could reach her, she leapt back, swinging her dagger upwards immediately shattering my entire starting sword into pieces. There was a moment of silence as the sword’s dust fragments flew away.

I didn’t know what to do now. I attacked out of impulse. I don’t think there are any viable choices left for me to make at this point. The distance between us is still far too little given the speed displayed by her so far. She broke the silence once again.

“You’re an interesting guy. What’s your name?”

“C-Cloud.”

She smiled.

“The name’s Rain.”

And with that, she disappeared with the leaves as they blew by with a soft breeze; a zephyr. It felt nice. Clouds filled the sky and it started pouring.

I fell onto my knees and stared blankly into the sky. I didn’t know what to do now. I still can’t escape this death game and my best friend just died. It’s funny how it’s raining now.

The smell of rain filled the air and the sound of raindrops hitting the ground reverberated endlessly. Puddles formed, ripples formed over them. It was cold; my hair was wet again. As I continued staring into the sky, a familiar voice echoed throughout the map.

“Attention all players!”

That voice… It was Rain’s.

“This is game moderator Rain. Any problems regarding logging out should be resolved now. If you still cannot log out, simply just die!”

Over thinking everything again. Oh well. Today, is a good day.

**WORD COUNT: 2500**