

Cardinals

—James Zhao

For a little while, Eddie and Charles make a token effort of trying to beat each other up, but their swings at each other rapidly become feeble, and soon they are completely puffed out. The crowd's cheers turn into jeers, and you feel like you've just been robbed. You check your watch: a little before 11 o'clock, and exactly five minutes and seven seconds since you checked it last. For the fifth time in three days, you've been stuck with these foul-smelling ogres, and you are absolutely sick of it. Couldn't they at least fight a little for your entertainment?

The shouting stops when a scientist calls for silence. You can just see its owner through the crowd, and though the voice sounds somewhat feminine, it clearly belongs to the lecturer with the large moustache from a few days ago. With the authority of a magic eight-ball, he orders that Eddie, Germaine and Charles be captured. With new-found courage and coordination, the swarm surrounds the perpetrators and grasps them firmly with many hands.

They make way for the lecturer, whom you now deduce to be their leader, as he walks over to the captives, looking them up and down with contempt. He then turns towards you and the rest of the scientists, and with one swift motion, pulls off his thick moustache to reveal a thinner moustache. He completes the job by wiping the thick makeup from his face, sending gasps through the congregation of lab coats—for standing before you, looking a little flushed from the heavy cosmetics, is none other than Charles' mum, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Apart from a pair of scientists who suddenly have to leave for the hospital for something they did nine months earlier, the crowd bends one-by-one to kneel before Her Majesty, causing many sharp cries of back pain. She waits for complete silence, then addresses the crowd: "Fellow scientists, we are gathered here today to witness a great experiment. I have shown you all my brilliant new theory, and for the last two days, I have been walking amongst you, refining my ideas to perfection. With my new—"

At this point, you tune out, partly due to boredom and partly out of disbelief that the Queen could be such an utter geek. All these years she's been calmly tending to her royal duties, shaking hands and occasionally tapping people on the head with a sword; has she been thinking up all sorts insane experiments at the back of her head? Why has she waited until now to come out? Why couldn't she have been a scientist herself, as well as being Queen?

Ten minutes later, still asking yourself questions you know will never be answered, you notice that Her Majesty has stopped talking, but not willingly; it seems that there is some unrest within the crowd. Standing out among the plateau of bowing backs is a single lab coat, fluttering in disobedience. It slowly slides off the shoulders of its wearer, revealing a bright red robe underneath. Noticing heads suddenly turning, you look in the other direction to see another lab coat fall to the ground in a flurry of red. A third one joins, then a fourth, and before long, you count six bright red buoys floating upon the sea of white, strategically dotted around the Queen.

As if responding to an silent call for mutiny, scientists rise from everywhere and remove their lab coats in defiance; the loyalists rise too, and before two seconds have passed, you let a little smile escape your face as you finally get to witness the fight you've been waiting for. There are kicks and punches landing everywhere around you; the sounds of broken spectacles and crushed pocket protectors fill the air. However, the six red-robed mutineers remain untouched, well-protected by their followers, and slowly make their way inwards towards the Queen and her three captives.

Now you understand what is happening: after all these years, the Pope has finally decided to take back the Anglican Church; as a first step, he has sent in a pack of his elite cardinals to kidnap the Queen. Standing reasonably close to them, you can just hear them mumbling things about each of the eight Henries being worse than the last over the muffled cries of scientists putting up pathetic attempts at fighting.

The cardinals suddenly halt as the inevitable occurs—the scientists and Catholics-disguised-as-scientists have stopped punching and kicking to argue about birth control. All hell breaks loose, and, seeing their chance, the three very relieved figures of Eddie, Germaine and Charles manage to sneak away. With their supporters out of control, the cardinals back off, slipping surprisingly inconspicuously into the crowd despite their bright red costumes.

It's quite a bit past eleven now, and with the Catholics having slowly disappeared, the argument turns once again to the familiar "It's one part silver bail to six parts perspex pillar!" "No, it's three parts, you have to add them twice!" You are about to head off for lunch when you notice movement out of the corner of your eye, and turn around to see none other than Shane Warne push his way through the crowd, stopping and kneeling before Her Majesty, a well-worn Three mobile phone popping out of his back pocket as he bends.

He looks up to her and says, "Oh Lizzie, I'm so sorry, please take me back. Please, give me a second chance." As the crowd suddenly hushes to stare at the Queen's impeccably executed act of ignoring him, a voice pipes up from the edge of the swarm, calling out, "No Lizzie, marry me, then you can be Lizzie McGuire!" With countless groans echoing through the air, you rush off to find the Ashes.