



Is there balance?

By Christine Li

Simon opened his eyes, the pain somehow non-existent. The last thing Simon could remember was the pain of the spears through his body. Why had Jack done that? He slowly became aware of the people walking around everywhere, and the long queue that he was in. The place seemed to be a busy town. There were all kinds of living things, humans, dogs, cats, animals of all kinds. A great big, white wolf especially caught his eye. It was sitting down on a bench not too far away from the queue, watching the people. Everyone had an aura around their bodies. Some were red, some were green, some were blue, the people and creatures in the line he was queueing in all had white auras. What did that mean?

Simon tapped the person in front of him and asked, "What are we lining up for? Who is doing this? Why is this happening? Where are we?"

The person turned around, and Simon gasped. There were bullet wounds in the soldier's chest. He realised, around him in the queue were soldiers, hundreds and hundreds of them, as far as the eye could see. All of them had some sort of injury: bullet wounds, bayonets in their chest, burns, cuts, you name it.

He realised the man was talking to him. "None of us know, mate. All I know is that I died, and that we are in some kind of afterlife." Simon was silent after that.



After what must have been...half a day? Simon finally reached the start of the line. In front of him was a golden scale-balance.

"Tell me your name," boomed a voice without a source.

"Simon."

"Tell me where you lived."

"England, then a plane crashed and I lived on an island."

"Did you like Jack or Ralph more?"

Hub, this thing knows them...?

"Uh...Ralph."

On the scale, two mini figures of Jack and Ralph formed, on opposite sides. While Ralph began to grow in size, Jack began to shrink. Ralph's side became heavier.

The voice boomed. "Your consequence has been decided."

What consequence? On what?

"You are to wait here until Jack dies and arrives, and you are to make sure he does not destroy anything. If he does, you have to help him fix it. There will be a journey with four people with you involved."

Simon walked away from the scale and sat on a bench nearby. He spotted the white wolf that he had seen earlier looking at him. Simon became quite scared as the wolf walked over to him.

"Who are you? You look...somehow familiar...?"

The wolf spoke with a low, booming voice.

"Uhh...Simon?" he answered, somehow not knowing his name. "What's yours?"

"Moro. Where are you from?"

"England. You?"

"Japan". Who killed you?"

"This horrible boy called Jack. Wait...how do we speak the same language?"

“I don’t know...but are you waiting for someone?”

“Yes! Let’s wait together!” *Surprisingly, this Moro guy is quite nice...*

“Sure...I’m actually waiting for a lady called Eboshi. She killed the Forest Spirit. For doing that, she was punished with 600 years of hard labour. I am waiting for her next consequence.”

“Oh, so will the scale tell you what happens next?”

“Scale? Oh, you mean the tree...that judgement object will change based on where you live. Look, Lady Eboshi is up now.”



Simon saw that the scale had been replaced by a bonsai tree, and that a lady with a red kimono covered by a dark-blue haori stood in front. Simon could not hear what she was saying, and could not hear a booming voice, but the tree started to grow, only by a little bit.

Moro was watching the tree and told Simon, “The tree grows based on how many good moral values you have. Before, Lady Eboshi’s tree shrunk. Now, it’s better.”

Lady Eboshi’s conviction was done. She moved to a nearby bench

and seemed to be waiting for something.

Suddenly, Jack appeared in front of the judgment object. It turned into a scale immediately. Like Simon’s there seemed to be two mini figures: Jack and Ralph. However, instead of Ralph becoming heavier, it was Jack. The real Jack began banging the spear he had kept from his past life onto the scale, and the scale started to balance to the other side. Simon could tell that the scale was being forced that way. Suddenly there was a loud crack, and the hinge at the top of the balance had a split across it. *Oops, I forgot...I was meant to keep Jack from damaging things...* Simon hurried across to Jack, and snatched the spear out of Jack’s hand. He then grabbed Jack’s arms and held them in a handcuff.

“Stop it Jack! You’re breaking everything.”

Jack stopped and looked around in surprise. It quickly turned to a face of regret. “Why are you here...”

Simon quickly explained that it was the afterlife, and that everyone had some sort of task to do based on their morals during their life.

“Then what do I have to do?” asked Jack.

“I’m not sure, but seeing as you just broke that scale, you have come with us to fix it.”

Then, the loud booming voice said, “Simon, Moro, Lady Eboshi and Jack will go together to The Cave to retrieve the magical grease to mend the balance. The Cave is on the other side of the Forested Mountain, to the north.”

So that’s what Lady Eboshi was waiting for...

“I guess that’s us, then,” said Moro.

So, the four of them headed north to the tall mountain before them. After a week of hiking, they reached the bottom of the mountain. In front of them was a tall steep mountain.

“Reminds me of my homeland,” breathed Moro. It reminded Simon of the mountain on the island too.



They entered the dark forest, it somehow seemed empty but also full of life. A pig snorted in the distance, and Kodamas creaked, reminding the four of their past lives, positive and negative. This continued for a few days, going up the mountain, and also down. They tripped over stones, fallen tree trunks and vines, but living in a forest and on the island allowed them to quickly adapt. Sometimes they bickered, sometimes their past lives got into the way of the mission. Somehow, Simon was never hungry. He guessed this was part of what happens in the afterlife. Along the way, they continued to hear the pigs and kodamas, along with other animals. It was dark most of the time, even during the day due to the tall trees and the dense leaves overhead.

As they came to the edge of the forest on the other side of the mountain, Simon saw a big cave with a gaping hole.



In the cave, there was less light than the forest. As their eyes adjusted, they realised that there were small luminescent rocks in the walls. They used this to guide them to the magical grease. At the end of the tunnel-like cave, there was a genie lamp on a natural pedestal, like it was waiting for them. Jack ran for it.

“It’s mine!”

Lady Eboshi ran after Jack.

“NO! It’s mine!”

They fought for the lamp, luckily not touching or dropping it on the way. There were screams and yells, Jack’s spear was even split after that.

After Lady Eboshi and Jack had stopped fighting, Moro and Simon decided to keep the lamp out of the others’ reach. They went out of the cave with no issues, then back over the mountain. The four finally returned to the small village with the long queue and the broken scale.

The place was messy, the people in the line were sitting down, tired of waiting for the judging object to be fixed. Simon walked up to the scale and poured the grease onto the scale. Immediately, the crack in the scale began to close up. It was like the grease became liquid-gold and melted into the cracked spots. It was amazing. After the scale had been completely mended, the lamp disappeared. Moro and Lady Eboshi turned around and returned to the end of the line. Simon followed suit. *Well, it’s time to go back into that long queue and be given consequences. I wonder how long it will take this time.*