

Untamed/Mo Dao Zu Shi (MDZS) fandom starter kit

Useful links, where to watch, some meta commentary, and other things that will hopefully get you started in this fandom!

Written by Caroline, aka avawtsn, last updated January 4, 2021

Ready for part 2? [Life After the Body Sacrifice \(i.e. real fandom induction; come when you're ready\) is here.](#)

Recommended reading and references

Primers for before you get watching/reading, if you need basic overview of plot before/while getting started, and other explanatory prep/preparatory explanations

- Aja Romano's Vox article: [The Untamed, streaming on Netflix, ripped my heart out and fed it to me. I can't get enough.](#)
- Silvia Reads Books: [So, You Want To Get Into MO DAO ZU SHI \(MDZS\)/The Untamed...](#)
- Brownbetty: [A light overview of some Chinese-media fandoms](#) (includes overviews of other series and books, including the author of MDZS' other novels)
- Skygiants: [MDZS plot overview/review](#) (refers solely to the book but much applies to the show)
- [Immortal Mountain Blog](#): general Xianxia novel notes by a westerner, including a [handy glossary](#)

References and further reading as you watch/read

- [Spoiler-free Untamed cheat sheet](#), including character names, sects, and pictures
- [Spoiler-free Untamed clan posters, slightly annotated](#)
- [The Untamed Name Acronyms - Cast and Characters](#) (another doc of mine)
- [MDZS fandom wiki to look up characters](#) (useful for checking faces but tends to contain spoilers further down the page, like spouses/family, alive/dead status, etc)
- Tumblr user hunxi-guilai's meta on [historical/cultural worldbuilding](#), [specific moments](#), [themes](#), and [characters](#)
- [AvenueX's Hotpot.tv drama explainer videos](#) (eps 17-19 are about the Untamed and about, respectively, all the multiple names people have, geography and where places are today, and the names of weapons)

Post-watch bonuses

- **After each episode**, I definitely recommend the tumblr [howpeacefulislwj](#) for some shippy and hilarious commentary and appreciation. You can do this as you go through your first watch-through, it's not spoilery for upcoming content.

- **After you watch all 50 episodes**, tumblr user canary3d's [Restless Rewatch](#) commentary is... *chef's kiss* levels of good. It's Extremely Good, hilarious, and worth your time. But it's spoilery for future content and full series arcs, hence you should not dive in until you've completed all the content. Also, it's a work in progress, currently up to episode 10, part 1.

Canon and Adaptations

The Untamed, aka CQL or Chenqing Ling, aka the “web series”

I'm tackling this first because it's the most complete visual adaptation and the intro for many (English-speaking) people into the fandom at this point, but the original canon of this fandom is a web novel that's something like half a million words long and has no official translation yet. More on that later.

One word of warning I'll give about the show is that it's *going* to overwhelm you with an oblique plot and a huge cast *immediately* and **you should not expect to keep up with it**. Not the first time through. The show begins in media res during a climactic battle sequence with tons of voiceover information that *will* wash right over you. It then gives you the explicit, emotional death of the protagonist and very little context as to *why* it's emotional for these various characters. For Sherlock fans, my basic shorthand is that the story opens to a wartime Reichenbach (rooftop/waterfall) scene with lots of voiceover commentating on the political goings on in London at the time; it's *too much*. Barely one or two episodes beyond this, it then embarks on a *34 episode flashback* (out of 50 episodes) to fill in the gaps for what happened in Wei Wuxian's first life.

So. Don't expect to keep up your first time through. The cast is so huge that even through the color coding of all the clans (it's seriously like Power Rangers, the color themes) names and faces and clans run right through your brain cells and pool somewhere outside your recollection. It's actually fine. The truly interesting thing is that a subsequent watch-through will be mind-blowing for all the things you pick up on after you know what's going on. But first time through? Don't worry if you spend a lot of episodes fairly lost.

Official translation(s?)

The web series is currently the only **COMPLETE** audiovisual media adaptation, with some plot changes and the most explicitly and unambiguously gay romance (kissing, sex) written out from the novel canon because of Chinese censors, but with subtext galore *as explicit as they could make it* through ye standard visual media language and score, body language (wrist grabs, extended eye contact), and Chinese cultural cues (traditional wedding gifts, gay imagery, etc). Available in its entirety on lots of platforms **for free**:

- [Youtube](#)
- [Netflix](#)
- [Viki](#)

- [WeTV/Tencent](#)
- [Amazon Prime](#)

Unfortunately, I'm not sure that the official WeTV/YouTube version or Amazon version are worth clicking on at all (see [this spreadsheet of translations](#) if you'd like that side by side comparisons). Netflix seems to have the best translation out of these officially available ones, but I had major problems with the subtitle *timing* specifically, especially in the early episodes, which is a very particular kind of frustration. Viki has the reputation of perhaps being the most romantic translation, translating (畢生)知己 / (bìshēng) zhījǐ as (lifelong) soulmate instead of (lifelong) confidant, but...they all have issues. Truly.

Doubly unfortunately, poor translations and/or poor subtitle timing mean that it can be alienating as hell to try to watch. After I muddled through the first handful of episodes on Netflix, I definitely switched to the animated series (which is incomplete so far, 23 episodes only) before switching back to the web series. I understood the happenings of the live action series *much* better for having a secondary adaptation to get me through my gaps of understanding. If you're so inclined, you might try to do the same, especially if you're more comfortable with a format like anime than xianxia c-drama.

Gay rating: 6/10 *at least*, depending on how you feel about subtext.

Random note: I've had conversations with Yuri!!! On Ice fans about how it compares to the subtext/text situation of that show, and I'm inclined to put Untamed much higher than 6 if YOI is considered a full 10/10. But then again I, having watched YOI but not being a member of its fandom, would never have picked 10/10 for YOI anyway, so it's possible I'm undervaluing YOI's explicitly gay content when I draw these comparisons.

*how bad is the translation for Netflix/YouTube? Some examples that come up fairly often: they chose to use *childe* instead of *young master*, *Stygian* instead of *yin*, *myrmidon* instead of *servant*.

**How bad were some of the lines from Amazon Prime? "Why you chose to save me?" was an early line. "Nothing to be regret" is also a line instead of "to have no regrets." I have regrets. I have regrets reading these subtitles.

[Fan-translation by Suibian subs](#)

I highly *highly* recommend this fansub group's translation of the web series as it's a lot more understandable, with interesting translator notes (though YMMV), and better subtitle timing than what the official platform translations offer, but there are two caveats to this:

1. They aren't done with the episodes yet. Between July 2019 and October 2020, they've finished 23 episodes. That's almost 3 weeks per episode, so another year for the remaining episodes *at least*.
2. You have to jump through some hoops to actually download the episodes. Meaning that you have to join their Discord server, emote at the correct post to get access to the right channel, then find the torrent link in the appropriate channel. Lots of

people have done this, and they have troubleshooting pages for you, but basically it's just not as easy as opening up Netflix.

Is it worth the trouble? Honestly, I think so, because the official subtitles are alienating, poorly done, *and* poorly timed. It's really hard to get into things when you're just...super lost and frustrated. Is it worth the trouble if the episodes are only partially available? Also, I think yes. Because I definitely switched back to Netflix from Youtube after a dozen or so episodes because of technical problems, and by then either the translation had improved or I'd gotten a grasp on the show enough that it wasn't so bad.

The Untamed Special Edition

This is a 20 episode edition of the main 50 episode web series. How's it special? It's less plotty, **more shippy** (editor put in more reaction shots, more eye contact), and totally chronological, so no flashbacks and frame narrative. It's hard to comment on how much *gayer* it is when it's mostly a re-edit and very few additional scenes that weren't in the main 50 episodes. [Here's a side by side sample](#) of some changes they made that are just with edits. [Here's another](#). And [one more](#). Fairly minor imo but definitely for 1) the completist and 2) those wanting to relive the actual shippy moments, less so for those interested in the plot/story from start to finish.

As you might imagine, when you cut out 30 episodes out of an original 50 episode run, several whole scenes and plot points are cut for time, some of which just won't make as much sense compared to watching the original series or reading the novel (or otherwise consumed a large part of another adaptation). If this is your first experience of the story, people will just start limping randomly because you didn't see an earlier fight, or scenes will cut awkwardly from day to night to day because you needed to hear a particular line in between, that kind of thing. Just be warned.

Gay rating: well, it's got to be higher than a 6 if that's the baseline of the main 50 episodes, but is it as much as a 7? I find this a hard one to call though, and fair warning: I've not finished it myself.

MDZS animated series / donghua / anime

Official translation

Currently incomplete with another 12 episodes due to be released [in 2021](#) last I checked. Only 23 episodes (two seasons) are available, which doesn't get you very far in the story, but it's already significantly gayer than the live action show because it's a closer adaptation to the novel. They aren't rushing this adaptation, but I think it's still worth your time, especially if you're a fan of anime in general and are comfortable with its visual language (as I was) compared to the live action historical soap opera vibe. Having started with the web series first though, I have to admit that absolutely did miss Xiao Zhan's sunshine smile while watching this.

Gay rating so far: 7/10? Expect it to go higher though.

MDZS comic / manhua / manga

Fan-translated manhua (manga) by mangakakalots

Incomplete but getting published very regularly! Currently up to chapter 152 as of October 13, 2020. It's a pretty good translation and also closer to the novel than the web series. Definitely worth your time imo.

Gay rating so far: 8/10

Official translation

Available through WeComics if you'd like to support the author/artists, but the translations are behind quite a bit and aren't quite as good as the mangakakalots one.

Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation, the original MDZS novel

The book itself deserves lots of content warnings for dubcon and BL tropes/dynamics that the web series, because of censorship issues, adapted around and avoided. It's interesting how the censorship may have actually improved the story in parts, but just be aware of that if what you experienced first was the web series before diving into the book, especially if you're not well versed in yaoi, BL, etc. tropes. As for other content warnings, [silviareadsbooks has a list](#) under "The warnings" on her blog, which is also pretty complete and I would recommend as a guide to the fandom/adaptations as well.

Fan-translated by ExiledRebels Scanlations (complete)

Over half a million words and, as is common with translations in any event, it definitely feels clunky in English at certain parts. Neither of those are my caveat for this though, as it's clearly a labor of love, the source material is challenging to translate, and the breadth of the project is huge, for sure. No, my problem with this translation is some of the translator's fandom politics in the translator notes.

Spoilers for why this is; highlight to see what it is that I object to:

. This is...very much against my own fandom ethos, or translating ethos for that matter, never mind fandom. Unfortunately, this is

literally the only whole work available of the novel that I know of and the only one I can link people to at the moment. If you can find this in ebook format without *those particular* translator notes, I would recommend that, or just read on the ExR website and **skip the **LONG RANT** at the end of chapter 19**. If your politics are like mine, it will only offend and infuriate you. All the other translator notes, as far as I can remember, are fine.

Gay rating: 10/10, plus explicit sex in the extras.

Fan translation by Fan Yiyi (work in progress)

This is a very promising translation that I wanted to list here because it seems to be actively updating with several chapters a month and the quality of the writing is really quite good. (Check the [author's tumblr archive](#) for the monthly breakdown of postings so far, since the Wordpress doesn't have easily found timestamps) As of November 17, 2020, there are 28 chapters published out of 113+ chapters (plus there are about a dozen extras). It's only been publishing since May 2020, so I'm very excited about this!

Ultimate gay rating will no doubt be 10/10, let's be honest.

MDZS audio drama

Fan-translated by Suibian subs

This is the same Suibian subs group that is fan-subbing the web series, plus a number of Chinese properties. The rigmarole is the same: to get access to these fansubs, you must join their Discord server, emote the appropriate posts to get access to the right channels, and then find torrent or download links for the specific things you're looking for. More info for the audio drama can be found on their tumblr. Unfortunately you can go through their tag for [audio drama](#) or [MDZS](#), but not specifically for their MDZS audio drama. [Here's a sample post](#).

Apart from Suibian, so far as I'm aware, only random fan translations exist for the audio drama, and they're spotty and focus on THE shippiest moments, such as:

- [First kiss](#)
- [Drunk Lan Wanji](#)
- ["Everyday means everyday"](#) (one promises the other sex everyday so...)

About me and some (fic) recs

Hi, I'm Caroline, you can find me on [twitter mostly](#) or thirsting on an Untamed Sherlockians discord server. I'm a Sherlock fandom vet since s2 but since I wrote up an email to get a fellow fandom friend into MDZS, I thought in the spirit of sharing I would make it available publicly for anyone who, maybe like me, was maybe ready to jump into a new fandom. (It's been a long long time for me.)

I am by no means well-read in this fandom yet, so these are not necessarily fandom classics or anything, just things I've found or been recommended and would in turn like to shove into your hands as someone new to the fandom. As always though, do check tags. And fair warning on any of the angsty ones: I do find my capacity for angst is kind of bottomless compared to most people, so perhaps try to calibrate appropriately.

Canon/canon-adjacent fics

- [And Time Is But a Paper Moon](#) by sami, rated M, 139k [my go-to fix-it fic for post-canon]
- [The Absolutely True Story of the Yiling Patriarch: A Manifesto in Many Parts](#) by aubreyli, rated T, 19k [the juniors try to fix things post-canon]
- [seldom all they seem](#) by Fahye, rated E, 24k [arranged marriage AU, "weapons grade thirst"]
- [send my world into motion](#) by SecondSecret, rated M, 3k [PWP with feels]
- [the heartlines on our hands](#) by occultings (mishcollins), rated E, 19k [red string of destiny/soulmates AU]

Modern AUs

- [The Simplest Way Forward](#) by harriet_vane, rated E, 71k [greencard fake relationship/marriage, adoption/kidfic, college AU]
- [through a window softly](#) by impossibletruths, rated T, 14k [romantic grad school musician AU]
- [For a Good Time, Call](#) by ScarlettStorm, rated E [WWX as secret OnlyFans sex worker, nuclear-grade horny pining from LWJ POV]
- [live from new york](#), by varnes, rated E [Saturday Night Live AU, comedy, angst]

Also, below certainly isn't fic, but if you're interested in jumping into the CQL fandom complete with its wonderful cast, behind the scenes interviews and fanmeets, here's a very limited starter kit of links to get you on your way. Lots and lots more beyond this, trust me.

Fanmeets and interviews

- [The Untamed full 90 minute fanmeet](#) (90 minutes)
- [The Untamed Bangkok, Thailand fanmeet highlights](#) (many links of individual videos)
- [Bazaar interview, Mid-Autumn Festival Special](#) with 8 supporting cast members
- [Bazaar bonus interview](#) with Xiao Zhan and Wang Yibo
- Bazaar Xiao Zhan and Wang Yibo [photoshoot](#), [video behind the scenes](#)

CQL cast (incomplete list!)

- Xiao Zhan (Wei Wuxian) on [IG](#), twitter fan accounts [@hourlyxz](#)
- Wang Yibo (Lan Wangji) on [IG](#), twitter fan accounts [@hourly_yibo](#), [@hourlyibo](#), [@wybappreciation](#), this [Eng sub video resources masterlist](#)

- Wang Zhuocheng, aka Marius Cheng (Jiang Cheng) on [IG](#), twitter fan accounts [@hourly_WZC19](#), [@hourlyzhuocheng](#)
- Xuan Lu (Jiang Yanli) on [IG](#)
- Yu Bin (Wen Ning) on [IG](#)
- Meng Ziyi, aka Zoey Meng (Wen Qing) on [IG](#)
- Zhu Zanjin (Meng Yao) on [IG](#), twitter fan accounts [@hourly_zzi](#)
- Ji Li (Nie Huaisang) on [IG](#)
- Wang Yizhou (Nie Mingjue), twitter fan accounts [@dagearchive](#)
- Li Bowen (Song Lan), twitter fan accounts [@hourlylibowen](#)
- Zheng Fanxing (Lan Sizhui) on [IG](#)
- Guo Cheng (Lan Jingyi) on [IG](#)

Behind the scenes