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# Zenon Network: A Zenocracy in Peril

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...



*After the events of Zenon Network: A Noir Story, our detective's journey isn't quite over yet ...*

Disclaimer: This is a fictional short story and does not constitute financial advice. It may also contain speculation.

## I: Zoge Inu

*The call from Vitalik. Discovering Zenon, entering a whole new world. Sleepless nights of investigation and study, jaw-dropping possibilities, each question leading to three more questions ... the anonymous message promising the on-chain*

*analysis with addresses proving x-stakes ... the setup, holding Professor Z in my arms ... hand hovering ... about to unmask him ...*

I awoke abruptly, heart pounding before I settled down. My subconscious was clearly still churning everything over. Rather than continue playing it on a loop, I decided to get dressed and make myself some coffee. The kettle was just finishing boiling when I heard sharp knocking on the door. When I opened it I came face to face with two police officers.

“Zyler? We received a tip about a shooting last night, your car was seen fleeing the scene. We’re gonna have to take you in,” he said, hand resting on a baton dangling from his belt.

“Oh really? A shooting? What happened?” I asked.

“We’re gonna have to take you in,” he withdrew his baton.

Had I been set up by Vitalik? “Hang on, hang on — I was about to collect some staking rewards. Can I just finish that first?”

“I said, we’re gonna have to— ” he began angrily, but his partner cut him off.

“Which coin are you staking?” she asked with a smile.

“It’s umm, ah,” I was caught off-guard. “Well it’s a dog coin, a really cute one, its name is ... I forgot.”

Her eyes lit up. “I *love* dog coins! What does your one do?”

“It’s utility, ah ... it barks,” I gave my best smile.

“Haha! That’s so funny. Hey, go and collect your stakies, we’ll wait right here,” she gave a stern look to her partner who nodded grudgingly. “And check its name! I’m always looking to add to my canines collection.”

“Will do,” I said and made my way back to the kitchen. Should Zenon rebrand? *Zoge Inu*. An extraterrestrial pet on the logo could be just what we need. I quietly unlocked the door to my yard and slinked outside. I hurried to the back wall and hoisted myself over.

I couldn’t allow myself to be taken in with them, V could be setting me up. Washing his hands of the whole thing by chucking me to the wolves. Unfortunately for the coppers, I knew the back streets here like the back of

my hand — tracking me down would be like following me through Tornado Cash. I took off running and didn't look back.

## II: Den of Degens

Though I knew my area well, I went to a part of the city I didn't usually frequent. Exhausted and feeling exposed, I scanned for a discrete place I could rest. I noticed some homeless people trickling into a building which was obscured by large trees.

That'll have to do.

Once inside, I saw it was quite minimalist. Some benches, a soup kitchen and a bathroom. The people were dressed in rags, unshaven and dirty looking. It was enough to make me stand out. I took a seat at the nearest table; three guys were already sitting there, but they seemed harmless enough.

The guy opposite me looked up from his watery soup as I sat down.  
“Greetings friend, how are you? You look like you've just ran a marathon.”

“I like to start my day with cardio. How are you guys going?”

The homeless man scoffed. “We were just discussing the *audacity*, the *delusion*, the *stupidity* of what’s out there. There’s still people saying: an algorithmic stablecoin is an idea we may re-visit at a later point in time ... jeez, just admit you were lucky that luna blew up before yours would have. Gas-lighting of the highest degree, seems to be a dark art that everyone is practicing these days. You hear a recession is no longer two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth? Unbelievable what these wannabe master manipulators are trying to get away with saying, they’re just asking to get punched in the face with crap like that.”

I was stunned. “Really ... right,” I looked around. “Dumb question, is this place a –”

“It’s not a homeless shelter, if that’s what you’re wondering,” he said with a grin.

“Right, what is this place? The trees were blocking the sign.”

“It’s an Orange County crypto club — but it is the bear market. Looking to be a very tough winter from what I can see,” he said gravely. “We go by screen names. I’m CelciusLovah, this is ShibTarrd and that’s LunaMaxi69.”

“Nice to meet you guys,” I said. Of the other two, LunaMaxi69 looked in significantly worse shape. He was an older man, but it was more than that; his shoulders drooped, head hanging. Like his pride was utterly evaporated from the loss, like he was incapable of holding himself up. He stared into space, not really seeing where he was looking. His eyes were hollow and sad, the windows to a soul hung out to dry under a desolate martian sun. As I observed up close the effects of an international financial crime, I felt a mixture of sadness and anger myself. Not every Bitcoiner was an extremist, but of those who were, I kind of wished they were just a bit more toxic. Maybe through education and passion they could have gotten through to LunaMaxi69 ... even if they didn’t fully convert him, maybe they could have converted half of his crypto into Bitcoin. Yes, BTC has its ups and downs, but it had a special kind of safety net: fundamentals.

Before I could introduce myself, a man sat down next to CelciusLovah. He was met with a warm welcome, and from his sports bag he pulled out some loafs of bread. He handed it around the table for people to enjoy with their soup. He wore grey jeans and a brown leather jacket. His shoulder-length dark hair was swept back, some distinguished specks of silver evident.

“You must be Zyler,” he said. “I’m Tapwoot.”

CelciusLovah laughed. “Ask him again tomorrow, he’ll have another username guaranteed. He changes it as often as Solana is down.”

Shibtarrd took a break from scoffing down his bread.

“MercatoxCustomerSupport69 was a favourite of mine.”

“Tapwoot? You’re the pillar who’s always supporting people, it’s an honour,” I said and shook his hand. “How do you know who I am?”

“Running your own embedded node brings many benefits. Security, uptime, censorship resistance, decentralisation — and don’t forget privacy.”

“Ah, that’s where I slipped up.”

“It also helps that someone is looking for you. There’s a ZNNAlien party, at the Bored Aliens Club. Here,” he said and handed me an envelope. “Take my invite, I won’t be going.”

“Who’s looking for me?”

“You’ll see,” he said. “Just please be careful, I’ve heard some troubling rumours about a plot to overthrow the pillars and seize control of the DAO.”

“That’s terrible, but what does that have to do with me?” I asked.

“Word on the street is that you were the last person to see Professor Z alive. And he chose to meet up with you — he saw something in you. You may have a role to play in stopping whatever is coming.”

“You think this bad actor may be at the party?” I asked.

“Probably. Infiltrate the group, take em’ down from the inside. Makes sense, right. But look, I have to get going. Riding my motorbike down to Mexico, I’m planting trees with my church group. Take care, Zyler,” he stood up and said his goodbyes. With a whiff of cologne and flash of brown leather — he was gone.

I turned the invite over in my hands. Tonight, eight o’clock at the club. As new as I was to Zenon, I found I already cared a lot about it. If there was any way I could help, I’d simply have to go.

### III: Bored Aliens Club

Entering the club was both surreal and disorienting. Music from the Island Boys was booming. The people were dressed in colourful outfits, mostly alien-themed and all having a silly-goose time. Many of the women were

outright cosplaying as attractive aliens; I saw skin painted green, blue, purple; inventive and wild hairstyles; even characters from Star Wars.

It wasn't long before someone greeted me. "I hope you like deeznnutz, cos they jingle baby, woot!"

"Hi, hello, I am—" way too sober for this, apparently, as he cut me off.

"Need some QSR bro?! You gotta talk to my man over there!!" he pointed at the bartender. "You know why? Cos he's a *liquidity provider!* Haha!" he started busting out some 80s dance moves.

I awkwardly excused myself and meandered over to the bar. I overheard two aliens drunkenly arguing.

"Did you see the SpencerSchiff pillar enter the top 30? Bro, last month they rugged their rewards to 0/0 without warning. No one remembers or no one cares?"

"C'mon man! Just let it go dude — "

“Don’t tell me to let it go Apu, we should all be mad as a cut snake! What, why — *how* are people still delegating to that clown? Those yield-chasers are utterly cringe!”

“Okay Captain Green Underpants, why don’t you set up a pillar and show us how it’s done?”

“That QSR burn is f\*cked bro! I’d rather die!”

Apu scoffed. “You’re way over-reacting, you’d make an amazing ROI in the longterm from running a pillar. Think of your kids, your grandkids, it’s *generational wealth*. That’s hard to come by these days, only gonna get harder. Soon they’re gonna take away our assets, our steaks and our houses. We’re gonna be living in pods, eating bugs and even the clothes on our back won’t be owned, just rented.”

“What we need is wealth they can’t confiscate, wealth they can’t inflate away. Raise a glass to Bitcoin, the NoM and Dyddy’s Hales!”

“Hear, hear!”

I was about to ask what a Hale was, but there was suddenly a commotion. A purple-haired hooligan was screeching obscenities at some peaceful aliens who were clutching their drinks in fear. Two bouncers quickly apprehended him, roughly dragging him out.

As crazy and amazing as all this was — I needed a moment.

I looked around for the bathroom. Once inside I went into the nearest stall and closed the door, sitting down on top of the lid. All the ZNNAliens, here at a Zenon party? I was nervous, excited and in disbelief ... finally meeting the people behind the screen names? Wow. I was trying to figure out my next move when I heard some people talking in the stall next to me.

“Yeah, baby, just like that. Take the whole pillar, and play with the sentinels a little too, there’s some plasma coming your way zoon!”

I couldn’t help but snort at that.

The guy next door paused a moment. “Is that an alien next door? How rude of me not to introduce myself.”

We both emerged from our stalls at the same time. A Korean man in a luxurious purple suit approached me. Behind him was an alien girl cosplaying as a blue Star Wars twi'lek. She gave a coy smile and I felt myself blushing.

I realised who he must be. “No way, you’re Jing Dong?”

He threw his head back and laughed. “It’s pronounced with a ‘Y’ you tool,” he said and did a little dance where he thrust his hips.

“Sorry — Ying, nice to meet you,” I said.

“And I know who you are! You’re Zyler, and rumour is you’re the last person to see Professor Z alive.”

“How did you –”

“I know everything, I’m the ying to the yang of ignorance,” he started doing a shuffling dance.

Oh god, he was high as a kite.

He wasn't done there. "My name is Ying Dong, my pillar is 12 inches long, I'm partial to smoking a bong and I *damn sure* do the hoes wrong!" he slapped the twi'lek girl full across the face.

For a moment I was stunned into silence.

"The dual-ledger needs a dual slap," he raised his left hand, but I caught his arm and held it firmly.

"Leave her alone man, or you'll have me to deal with," I death-stared him, but he seemed amused. I turned to the girl. "Hey, get back to the party, you deserve better than this degen."

As she went she brushed her hand across my back, and at the door looked back to mouth a thank-you.

Ying shook me off. "Zyler, you're a real gentleman, Valerie must be in love with you now. But let's forget about this; we have much bigger fish to fry. Come with me," he said, sounding suddenly much more serious and sober.

I hesitated for a moment, but ended up following — maybe this had something to do with Professor Z?

I followed him across the dance floor and up a spiral staircase. He led me into a private booth that was more sheltered from the music, and whether he was friend or foe was still to be decided. Ying had a shifty, untraceable vibe, like a duffel bag full of cash apt to be stowed away somewhere.

Ying leaned in, suddenly all business. “Take a seat. I’ll cut right to it — you were the last person to see Professor Z alive. Do you know where he is?”

“I was set up, and I didn’t like leaving him there but I heard sirens coming, I assumed an ambulance would have reached him. So he’s not dead or in the hospital?”

Ying shook his head. “No one knows where he is. This is a problem, Zyler. We need the Z-man more than ever.”

“How come?” I asked. Was he about to tell me what Tapwoot alluded to?

“This needs to stay between us,” he looked around first. “Word is, the same guy who tried to kill Professor Z is looking to destroy Zenon. You seen the most recent lot of pillars: I, H8, B, L, I, Zz, A, R, D? Those 9 pillars were all erected in the last week, and it spells out: I hate Blizzard. Who does that sound like?”

“Vitalik,” I said at once. “It’s even on his wikipedia. He said that back in the day he loved playing World of Warcraft, until his wizard character got nerfed. Blizzard’s callous, one-sided decision-making broke his heart. It made him realise the ugly side of centralised services, and was a pivotal moment in determining the trajectory of his life’s work … ironic considering the monster he created.”

“You may have noticed that those pillars are blocking the funding for every worker we have and fighting against every ZIP put forth.”

“It’s only 9 hostile pillars though, aren’t there enough good guys to overcome that?”

“Pillar apathy is growing, we’re now barely reaching the quorum for our key decisions. We’re desperately trying to contact the silent and apolitical majority of pillars, but with the way things are going — Vitalik may not even need to vote no. It may be more effective to not vote at all, so we fail to reach the quorum and we defeat ourselves. That said, myself and the other OGs are concerned about what could happen if he accumulates more coins.”

“Is there anything I can do?” I asked.

“There is. With wQSR about to list, we could see him slurping up massive amounts of it. We need to encourage staking to lock up some liquidity. Second, we need to fight fire with fire — we need more pillars that are producing momentums and voting in good faith. That’s where this comes in handy,” he pulled out a folded piece of paper and slid it over to me. “Don’t open this here.”

“What is it?”

“Among the OGs, it’s common knowledge that Professor Z hid his seed phrase in the draft whitepaper. Except for the first five words — and for those we have five hints. Solve the clues, find the words and you can unlock Professor Z’s SYRIUS wallet. There’s enough tokens in there to set up roughly 10 pillars to fight for the future of the NoM.”

“I’m honoured, but why me?”

“I’ve tried, we all have — we couldn’t solve the clues. But Professor Z has never met up with anyone before. He saw something in you.”

“I guess I can try,” I said.

He stood up to leave. “One more thing. Find the one they call Zashu, he should be able to help you in your quest. He’s gone off the grid though. Last possible sighting was in the Black Rock Desert … that’s one of the most remote places in America, and certainly in Nevada. God willing, when you’re done we can meet back here and consult with the OGs. Good luck.”

## IV: Newton's Third Law

Outside the club, the night air was cold. I was leaning against a stop sign when someone approached me.

“Zyler?” it was the blue twi’lek girl from earlier.

“Hi. Was it Valerie?”

“Yes, hey thanks for what you did back there, not many people would have stood up for me.”

“No worries — but why are you with him?”

“Maybe I don’t wanna be anymore. Give me your phone,” I handed it over and she put her number into it. “And Zyler? About the seed phrase he gave

you. The sixth word is a lie. What I do know is that it's related to the number 18, and there's a reference to it somewhere in his master bedroom."

"Why would he give me the wrong word? Just a precaution?"

"I've heard him and Vitalik talking on the phone. They've talked a few times actually ... I wouldn't trust anything Ying tells you. Your cab is here," she said.

"Thanks for the heads up. I'll talk to you soon," I said. Ying was in cahoots with Vitalik? Was he just using me? Why would Ying try to hurt Zenon?

Once settled inside the cab, I unfolded the piece of paper and read it by the light of my phone. The 6th and 24th word was there, just the first 5 were missing ... in their place was five clues. I scratched out the sixth word 'naviq' and scribbled down the hint for the sixth word as per Valerie's tip-off.

### The first 6 words in order:

- A drawing. An alien with a weight chained to his ankle was holding a rock up high, ready to strike it. The rock was branded with the Bitcoin symbol. He had a third eye drawn on his forehead.

- I later heard that corruption was found in the corruption watchdog.
- Bitcoin drinks from ... question: are you a stoned ape?
- A drawing of a campfire in the woods, with a quote above it: 'To find the treasure, first you must find the map. To scale with pleasure, use must use a zApp.'
- - - - - Which letter do you hate the most? Lease answer. If  $a/b = c$ , then  $a = b \times c$  ... what is an exception? Teas consumed today is 149. When is the most embarrassing time to fart?
- Something to do with the number 18, and in Ying's master bedroom

This was gonna take a bit of mental gymnastics to figure out ...

In the meantime, I was headed to the Black Rock Desert to find Zashu. I decided to look up on google maps as well as wikipedia where I was going. Huh, the desert had a river. The Quinn River ... which ended in a sink. The Quinn River Sink ... QSR ...

I knew where to find him.

## V: Finding Zashu

The Black Rock Desert was vast and desolate. I could see why it was listed as one of the most remote places in America. There was something peaceful about the big empty nothingness. The golden-brown dirt went on for miles, rolling into hills and cliff faces. The only living thing I saw was a falcon soaring high overhead ... no sign of Zashu anywhere.

I sat down facing the sink of the Quinn River, my back to a large rock. Time to wait I guess.

I sat there baking in the sun, lost in thought as minutes became hours. Perhaps I'd been in the sun for too long, for right in front of my eyes a vision appeared. A mirage? A stoney greek statue was in front of me ... it looked like Zenocratez. He was talking to me.

*“When Zashu speaketh, make sure ye listen. Without an appreciation for nuance, one might mistake the prints of a wolf for that of a deer. Or the ethos of Zenon for that of a sh\*tcoin. Oh, he cries, what of these riddles — do they mean anything, anything at all? Is it all some big practical joke? Maybe we are crazy. Or maybe, as Nietzsche once wrote: And those who danced were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.”*

I tried to stay awake, but I could feel sleep coming inexorably ...

*What could it all mean? Zoon. Who is Publius? How did the BSC hack happen? Aphanet was just a video? Zoon. Does Kaine hate us? Independent entity. Zoon. Wen bridge? Wen open-sauce code? Runaway mega scam bro. Zoon ...*

I woke up in a cold sweat, someone gently shaking me. It was still bright out, it felt like late afternoon. A woman was towering over me, but her face was welcoming.

“You must be Zyler. If you’re looking for Zashu, he’s down there.”

I got up gingerly, sleeping against a rock was rough. I looked down to where she was pointing ... I saw a man near the sink. He was lying on his back with his pants off, legs up at the sky.

“Is he ... ?”

“Sunning his balls? Yes,” she said. “It’s part of his ritual once he’s ate his beef liver mixed with beef mince. Do you want to join him?”

“Umm, nah I’m good. I’ll wait here. That green van is yours?”

“Yes, we’ve been living out of it for the past few months,” she said and told me some stories from her travels. A short while later I heard footsteps.

“Zyler! Hello brother,” a voice said from behind.

“Zashu, it’s nice to finally meet you,” I said. His hair was long and dirty blonde, ending just past his shoulders. He wore ripped jeans and a faded pink shirt. He was barefoot. The famous Zashu was a health-conscious hippie? “What were you up to down there?” I asked.

He laughed. “I’m all about the 5 Bs bro: Beef liver, Bitcoin, Barbells, Ball-sunning and Babies,” he said and rubbed his girlfriend’s midsection. “We’re expecting our first child zoon.”

“Congratulations,” I said. “It’s beautiful to see a loving couple bringing a new life into the world. Are you gonna find a more traditional home for when the baby arrives?”

“Definitely not — fitting into a sick society is no measure of health. All the bots who wake up hungover, grind away in peak traffic for hours in their metal coffins, spend all day mining fiat for a boss they hate … all so they can live in a closet they don’t even own outright, and probably never will? The

rat-race is not something you should engage in willingly. Who cares about the destination if you're miserable for forty years getting there? What you're doing, what you're feeling, what you're experiencing right now is what life is — not some pipe-dream decades from now. In saying that, you do need goals and a purpose. Life is about balance — you must balance the destinations with the journey itself. Far too many people are unbalanced in that regard.”

“Right, right,” I said. “So you’re not too fond of the city life, is that why you’re so hard to find?”

“That’s part of it,” he said. “There was an artwork of an alien transacting in Bitcoin, made into an NFT. The style, the concept, the emotion of the piece — I had to screenshot it. Just for my own private viewing pleasure. Next thing I know, the FBI is waiting for me at my workplace, I’m now wanted for digital theft. I managed to get away by bribing the arresting officers with knowledge. I shilled them the next 100X, and opened my mouth as wide as possible to lend credibility to my investor’s thesis. I sh\*t you not, it was like I was blowing the invisible man. I managed to get away and since then I’ve been on the road, living frugally.”

I nodded. “I see. Do you know why I’m here?”

“Yes,” he said. “You ready to work on that seed phrase?”

## VI: The Zeed Phraze

The sun was setting by the time we'd gotten into it. We were chilling in the back of his green van. His girlfriend was playing some acoustic guitar in the background.

**Word 1:** A drawing. An alien with a weight chained to his ankle was holding a rock up high, ready to strike it. The rock was branded with the Bitcoin symbol. He had a third eye drawn on his forehead.

Zashu examined it then spoke. “So what features in this drawing? An alien makes me think ZNN. He's chained like a prisoner, and he's trying to free himself by smashing it with a rock representing Bitcoin. This is about the relationship between Bitcoin and libertarians.”

“The eye on his forehead though?” I asked.

“Hmm. The third eye represents the most commonly used artwork for a sentinel. Third eye, so it is three eyes in total, ie. three sentinels. So three sentinels, and the relationship between Bitcoin and libertarians. Any ideas?”

“Hang on,” I said slowly. “If three sentinels refers to three groups of sentinels ... in the consensus design, the sentinels perform a PoW calculation then send a receipt to a subsequent group of sentinels, who need to also do a PoW calculation to generate a receipt and so on. You need at least three sequential groups of sentinels to do this before a POW-LINK is generated to go to the pillars.”

“At least three groups to get a POW-LINK, and there’s a link between Bitcoin and libertarians ... POW isn’t the kind of simple, common word you’d find in a seed phrase. The word must be link.”

“Could three sentinels mean anything else though?”

“Let’s just put *link* down for now, can always come back to it later.”

**Word 2:** I later heard that corruption was found in the corruption watchdog.

Zashu began. “So the corruption watchdog is meant to be making sure there’s no corruption in any government institutions ... but who is watching the watchdog? That’s like the lightning network problem of, who is watching the watchtowers?”

“I remember there was that article about that, exploring the possibility that a decentralised network could help mitigate that centralised point of failure. Lightning is the word?”

Zashu frowned. “Why doesn’t it just say, corruption was found in the corruption watchdog? Such a concise sentence, any extra word I’d be suspicious of. I later heard ...”

“Well lightning you see it first, you hear it later ...”

“Which is called *thunder*,” Zashu finished for me. “Dayum, we’re making progress now.”

“Are you sure?” I asked. “Seems a bit far-fetched and crazy.”

“Your intuition — trust it brother. None of these clues are going to have an obvious answer, which is by design. It takes an alien to see past the doubt intentionally sprinkled with the hint.”

**Word 3:** Bitcoin drinks from ... question: are you a stoned ape?

“The stoned ape theory is talking about how humans evolved their language, consciousness and intelligence from eating magic mushrooms. Bitcoin is such a unique invention, Satoshi was shrooming it up while he was coding?” I postulated.

“The word *drinks* is important somehow.” He looked at it for a long time.

“Maybe we can rewrite this as something else.”

BTC drinks from ... q: r u a stoned ape?

BTC drinks from ... quasar.

“You take plasma from quasar. I’m not sure what BTC has to do with it, but this does remind me of an old Zenocratez poem ...” I said, thinking back to when I first followed the green rabbit and lost touch with the outside world for about a week.

Zashu flipped his long hair back over his shoulders. “So we’ve transformed the second part of this sentence into QSR. Bitcoin can be spelt as BTC. It can also be done with emojis; a bee, a teacup and the sea. A Bitcoin transaction requiring plasma, drinks it from QSR like a bee does nectar from a flower.”

“Its plasmic nectar,” I said. “Plasma is the less common word, it’d have to be *nectar* is the word. Now we sound like a couple of stoned apes. Am I going to be locked up after this?”

Zashu laughed. “You won’t be locked up, but you will need a carer to enforce strict med-taking.”

**Word 4:** A drawing of a campfire in the woods, with a quote above it: ‘To find the treasure, first you must find the map. To scale with pleasure, you must use a zApp.’

“That first sentence is from Publius’ bio,” I said.

“What about the second sentence, or the campfire drawing?”

“Treasure and pleasure, map and zApp. The clue is a rhyme, and it’s referring to Publius. The answer may be in one of his poems. Possibly related to a campfire in the woods.”

“I’m off the grid, it’ll have to be your phone,” Zashu said.

I quickly brought up Publius' page. 139 tweets, much of it poetry. A true work of art, a modern day masterpiece. The beauty of it was that it's out there ... in cyberspace, suspended from an invisible thread, just waiting to be discovered. Already familiar, I had a sixth sense about where I was looking

...

"Here is a tweet about a campfire. It's predicting a future where ZNN OGs will one day tell their kids an incredible story around the campfire, on the grounds of their sprawling mansions."

"While that does fill the reader with warm hope, replenishing their conviction to hold, it doesn't rhyme," Zashu pointed out.

I went scrolling further. There was mention of a fire somewhere ...

"Here," I said. "*Beneath the smoke and our collective desire, there lurks the ultimate hidden giant, for where smoke, there's often fire.*"

"Wow," Zashu said. "The rhyme is aesthetic and it articulates the wishful thinking of our hearts ... *desire* is the word that completes it. I'm vibing with *desire* for this one — you agree?"

“I can see that line of reasoning. I’ll write that down.”

**Word 5:** \_ \_ \_ \_ Which letter do you hate the most? Lease answer. If  $a/b = c$ , then  $a = b \times c$  ... what is an exception? Teas consumed today is 149. When is the most embarrassing time to fart?

Zashu began again. “So it’s a four-letter word, they’re really holding our hand here with this one. Lease answer must mean please answer, lame joke. The letter P. This next one, you knew about the POW-LINK, how’s your maths ya nerd?”

“So  $10/5 = 2$ , therefore  $10 = 2 \times 5$ . Yep. An exception to this? Well *i* denotes an imaginary number, the square root of negative 1. That seems over the top though, and I’d need to brush up on complex numbers.” Lost in thought, I had a flashback to a moment years ago. In the process of proving a long, complex mathematical proof, I’d arrived at a contradictory answer ... but the teacher couldn’t figure out why. It took the genius kid in the class to glance over it. “*You can’t divide by zero,*” he said after just thirty seconds of browsing it, even though I hadn’t written zero anywhere on the page. God, such talent ... I wonder if he wasted it. Probably, the system is so flawed it fails exceedingly at funnelling people to where they should be. He probably said no to working on something meaningful and yes to chasing fast cash and poon.

“You still with us?” Zashu asked.

“Yeah. You can’t divide by 0. If you try to divide 10 by 0, and you get a number which is say 5 ... therefore,  $5 \times 0$  should equal 10, but anything multiplied by 0 is 0 ... as conceptually having no lots of something means you have nothing. So the number it refers to is 0.”

“I’ll trust you on that one,” Zashu said. “Next, 149 teas consumed today ... that’s a lot of teas. I think they’re just giving us the number for this one.”

“And the worst time to fart? Hmm, during a job interview? A funeral?”

“Bragging rights if you still manage to get the job. We’re seeing numbers here though, so can we relate that to a number?”

“The number is 69. Unless they’re into that,” I said.

Zashu frowned. “So we have the letter P, 0, 149, 69. P is the 16th letter of the alphabet ... but least favourite letter could mean it’s a negative? So we’d have the numbers -16, 0, 149, 69.”

“Could be coordinates?” I said. “I’ll input (-16.0, 149.69) and see what comes up. Huh, it’s somewhere in the ocean. Switching to satellite view though, it looks like a footprint, or shoe-print, from the sandbanks or something? And it’s meant to be a four-letter word? A foot would have toes, it’s got to be a shoe then. *Shoe* is the final word.”

Zashu grinned. “I’m impressed, I’ve found someone almost as crazy as me.”

“A great philosopher once said that there are no facts, only interpretations. So sanity is just a majority consensus — and it’s a logical fallacy to automatically equate the majority with the truth.”

“Now we sound like a couple of stoned apes,” Zashu said. “The real final word though, something to do with the number 18, and in Ying’s master bedroom. You need any help getting in there?”

“No — I’ve got this. Your wife and baby need you to be here,” I said.

Zashu held out a sun-brown hand. “May we meet again, brother.”

## VII: Thus Spoke Zarathustra

I crouched in the shadows, waiting for the guard to Ying's mansion to look away. Valerie had texted me the security code for his back gate, I just had to make it past this point ...

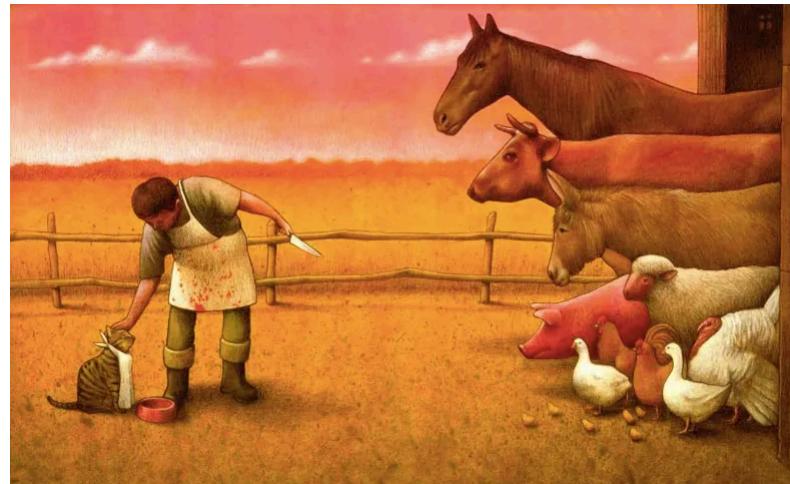
Suddenly the guard stopped, seemingly talking to himself. "Damn it Dan! Why did I have to ape into that? I'm gonna be stuck in this job forever ... oh well, beggars can't be choosers." He stormed off, deserting his post. I checked coingecko ... ah, Bitcoin had dipped 5% in the last hour. He must have checked his sh\*tcoin and seen it getting rekt.

I crept to the gate. I input Valerie's code and it worked a charm. I circled round a luxurious backyard pool and found my way through an unlocked glass door. She said the master bedroom was upstairs ... I hated that she knew where that was ...

Once up the grand staircase I found the place was adorned with artworks and artefacts. Long, glorious Persian rugs, suits of armour ... against the wall were swords, maces and oil paintings.

I quietly pushed open the double-doors to the master bedroom. Inside the medieval theme continued. There was also a balcony, a huge bed, and above

it a grand painting. Surely, this was had to be the hint. Something to do with the number 18 ...



The artist was definitely a free-thinker. Humanising and loving our pets while inhumanely slaughtering our livestock. Growing vegetables required killing pests and insects, true. But I understood the desire to be vegan. The piece was about unrealised hypocrisy. But 18? 18 ...

“What does this have to do with 18?” I wondered aloud.

“Man is the cruellest animal,” Ying spoke from behind. “The 18th animal in that picture is a *human*. There’s the final word you pleb.”

## VIII: Ying's Tale

I whirled around. "Ying? I have to get going," I said. "Sorry about barging in, I was told it would be cool."

"I can't let you leave, Zyler. You wouldn't have risked coming here unless you'd solved the other clues, which you're going to hand over now."

He knew.

"I have eyes and ears everywhere. I know Valerie betrayed me."

My blood ran cold ... if he was working with V, he'd conspired to kill Professor Z. The guy was dangerous. But maybe I could reason with him, or at least keep him talking while I thought of something.

"So what's the plan Ying? What happens if I hand this over?" I put the piece of paper back into my pocket. Why did I have to scribble the answers down?

"I couldn't solve the clues on my own, I needed Zashu's help, but he would never help me. Good work on finding him, even better work with getting his help.

“With Professor Z’s keys, I’d have enough pillars to pass whatever I wanted. First I’d remove the limit for funding an AZ application, next I’d fleece the entire treasury with a bogus proposal, stunting the viability of any devs working for Zenon. I’d then use those coins to set up even more pillars ... then use them all to block every ZIP. I’d keep the network archaic and dysfunctional. Celebrate as it dies a slow death over time.”

“But why Ying? Why would you try to hurt Zenon?”

“Of all the alts, Zenon is the one that is different, that is special. Its ethos and values reflect those of Bitcoin’s. Of all the alts, it would be tragic if Zenon fell. And so it was Zenon that I wanted to elevate into performance art, to prove a point: That all alts are sh\*tcoins. I wanted to take their champion and delegitimise it, degrade it and destroy it.

“You remember how you received your invite to the Bored Aliens Club? Tapwoot gave you his invite. Why was he there, if he had no way of knowing you would arrive? He was checking on my father for me, who you met ... you know him as LunaMaxi69.”

I had a flashback of the old man, hunched over and emotionally, physically, mentally destroyed — a listless shell of a person. “Ying ... I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t! It’s alt coin shills like you that destroyed my family. After he lost our life savings, he degenerated into a violent alcoholic my mother and I had to flee from. It was all because of crypto twitter … the memes, the moon-boi videos, the threads. It all seems like harmless fun, but there is danger on every page. The risk of developing a gambling addiction is real, and so is the risk of getting rekt by these scammy sh\*tcoins. Somebody has to wipe them out once and for all.” I blanched when he grabbed a sword from the wall.

“Now for the last time — hand over the keys.”

Looking around, I saw a comparable sword nearby; I grabbed it to be armed as well. “Ying, I understand where you’re coming from, but can’t Zenon’s success accomplish your goals better? By becoming the DAO of DAOs, by giving Bitcoin wings — it will revolutionise money and web3 and make the other alts obsolete. If you kill Zenon, that’s only going to empower the sh\*tcoins to fill the void. You have it all backwards!”

“Zenon’s ascension will inevitably give hope to other degens that their alt could be the next big thing … it’s a cycle of degeneracy that has to end. Someone has to save the kids out there from their fathers falling to pieces. Someone has to take control — and here I am.”

I tightened my grip on my sword. “The cycle needs to end, sure. The Network of Momentum’s success is the comet to kill the dinosaurs — nothing

else will be able to compare. Please Ying, use Zenon as the one to bring balance to crypto.”

He shook his head slowly. “The tragedy of my father was a lesson to stay away from alts. If Zenon moons, it will have been for nothing. I’m sorry Zyler, but I can’t let his degeneration be a waste. All alts must die. The others will naturally collapse, and with a bit of help Zenon can meet the same fate.”

“But don’t you realise? There’s fathers involved with Zenon — you’d be becoming the very thing you swore to destroy.”

“From my point of view, Zenon is evil!” he said with a deranged expression.

“Only a no-coiner deals in absolutes,” I raised my sword up high in a defensive posture. “I will do what I must.”

## Z: Duel of the Fates

The clash and clang of steel echoed as we went blow for blow. Ying was the more skilled fighter, I had to compensate with my athleticism. I gritted my teeth against the cuts and lacerations he landed.

I blocked a strike from above and took the opportunity to aim a kick at his exposed knee. He cried out — evidently he was still to realise that he wasn't in daddy's fencing class anymore. This was a street fight.

His sword sang through the air with grace and speed, almost finding its lethal mark time and time again. I realised it was only a matter of time until my jock-like reflexes weren't going to cut it. But wasn't the best defence a good offence?

I took a wide swing at his midriff — his blade was already there to meet mine, but I was looking to do damage another way. I threw an elbow which caught his nose. He staggered back, blood streaming.

I hesitated, which gave him time to right himself. “So my girl Valerie let you in. Very cute, you guys have a bit of a love story going on?” he taunted.

“A degen like you wouldn't understand the meaning of love, or the connection we have. She deserves someone so much better than the likes of *you*.”

“I've had her a thousand times before — I hope you're happy buying a second-hand NFT,” he smirked.

I absolutely lost it. “ARRRGHHH!” I screamed and charged him.

Like a magician he redirected most of my attacks, his viper-like blade biting and slicing between efforts. I was starting to feel the effects of the bleeding cumulatively now.

Ying rushed in and our swords became entangled and locked together.

“#TheAliensKnow *absolutely nothing* will be the last of that cringe hashtag! You’re all so delusional its beyond belief! Just give it up, how many bull runs do you alien clowns have to miss before you rope? Before you learn? All you have is your precious colours and shapes, I hope that pays the bills you mentally insane copers! Oh look, there’s Satoshi Nakamoto himself, he’s here to save your sh\*tcoin from going to zero! Hahaha!”

I tried to push him back, but I felt sick. My vision was blurry and tinged with red. The power of his FUD was sapping me of life energy. It was poisonous — I felt the sudden urge to capitulate and sell. Mentally I scrambled desperately for some hopium. 100X is just the beginning, I told myself. Smart contracts is steroids for the Bitcoin ecosystem; amidst the euphoria Zenon will almost certainly pump with it. In 10 years: 500B market cap! That got the adrenaline pumping again.

I realised his back was to the stairs — if I could just ... I shoved him backwards. I unleashed a flurry of strikes to pressure him backwards. He deftly fended them off, moving fluidly like a dancer. I almost had him, he was there, one big push and I could knock him down the grand flight of stairs. I guess I should have been watching more carefully for the counter, but to the sorrow of all I was too fixated on manoeuvring him.

I gasped as he thrust his sword through my stomach, skewering me like a roast hog. With a sickly, evil smile he twisted the blade until I cried out.

“In the game of crypto, you win or you die,” Ying said. “Game over.”

I dropped to my knees, one hand covering my wound, the other dangling to the floor when ... I felt something. The edge of a midnight-blue Persian rug.

“Hey Ying,” I said as he had just started walking away. “In the bear, I held Zenon through a 97% drop. I worked a second job to accumulate more. And I never gave up hope. Never underestimate the strength of a hodlr!”

I grabbed the rug with both hands and yanked it with all my might.

“Noooooooo!” Ying wailed as he was flipped off the edge. He tumbled and crashed down the stairs, ending with a final sickening crunch. I got to my feet and staggered to the balcony railing. Looking over, I saw him lying there with his neck bent at an impossible angle, totally still.

“Rugged,” I said. I pulled out a cherry vape to savour the moment.

## Epilogue

I was cruising down the coast in a green and black convertible I recently bought. Zenon had mooned ... and I still couldn't quite believe it. The skipping meals, the working a second job, eschewing a rental to sleep on my mother's couch — all so I could accumulate as much of the NoM's assets as I could. It took discipline and an iron-will to suffer through such a cheap and frugal existence ... but in the end, it had been the pro-gamer move all along. When the prophecy came true, when the mother of all green candles arrived ... I remembered dancing all night in my room, not an ounce of alcohol in my system, just giddy with joy. I had my “When Zenon Moons” playlist going. There was a mix of high energy songs in there, but also a few sad ones. The night ended with me sobbing on the floor of my room.

And now Valerie was by my side, the picture of perfect imperfection. I'd handed the keys over to the council of OGs, and they'd air-dropped Professor

Z's pillars to the most prolific sh\*t-posters in telegram. Being online so much, and being so keen they basically wore green underpants, they were never tardy to the party of Zenon's governance.

The future of Zenon safe, my financial future secure and the woman of my dreams by my side, I couldn't help but feel like the luckiest guy in the world. All my needs met as we took our joyride out in the sun.

*Zoon* had been been put behind me ...

I was finally living in the now.

**See how the story began with Part 1 ...**

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**Take care and WAGMI!**

- Zyler



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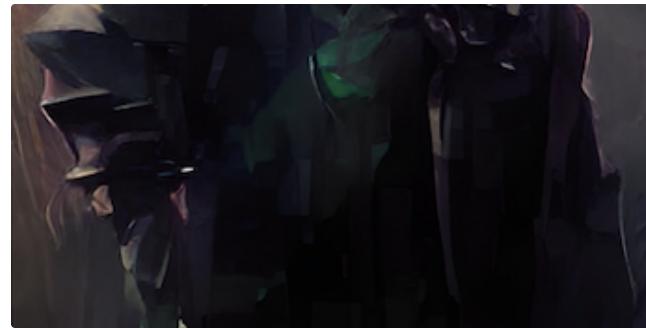
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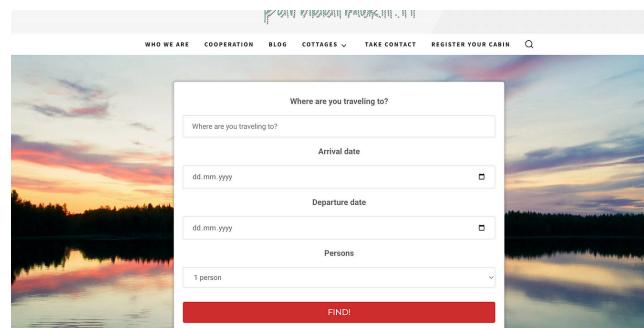
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