

ZOMBIEVERSE

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A short Halloween story written in collaboration by the PAGEDAO Metaverse Writers Guild.

CHAPTER 1: Game on... or Game Over?



(@CD) Disease had ravaged the IRL world for years and people had been forced to move their minds and their relationships to the metaverse. At first it was strange, but as the grim reaper's scythe swung to and fro - the world adapted and changed. The first year, the horrors of the non-digital world were more than anyone could bear and the time of dead souls arising and humans giddily encostuming themselves to hide their intent passed without notice. The next year, people had become awkward, they had grown uncomfortable among the breathing, living world - but they tried. The celebrants organized meet-ups and meat-ups, to eat, drink, dance and shake off the awkwardness of having to represent themselves instead of being represented by avatars and profile pics. Electrical storms rolled into every city, not all at once, but at just the right pace to be unnoticed. There was something else afoot as well - something equally dangerous and equally

unreal. On that night, friends who had never met were put on a collision course with a world they could never have known existed.

(@Dylan) Emily had always been a big fan of Discord servers, even though she'd gotten hacked once before. Ouch, she thinks, remembering what it was like to be surprised by her empty wallet. Today, her wallet held a different sort of surprise: a NEW ITEM that she hadn't even had to pay for! It had been airdropped to her by a Twitter account she followed--which meant she was a WINNER!!! She was so excited she could barely stand it. And what had she won? Why, three tickets to the scariest Halloween experience in the entire metaverse.

(@MariaVerde) "I'm so excited for this," Emily said to herself. Even though her past experiences told her something was odd, she wouldn't miss the best event that would happen on Halloween. "But, wait a second... Who am I going to give the tickets to? None of my friends like cryptocurrencies, NFT, etc. Much less an event where they're going to be naked in the Metaverse!" But she thought it would be a good idea to post on the NFT project's Discord server if there was anyone who had run out of tickets. "Hey y'all. I have two more tickets if anyone is interested. Hmu," sent.

Of course she got dozens of scam messages, but two of them caught her attention because they had the same servers in common. So she created a group for all three.

"Errr hi, Emily. I'm Charlie. I love the events in the Metaverse and more I love that there will be wearable hunts! I love adventures." "Hi folks. Chris here. I was actually encouraged to attend the event because Halloween parties IRL scare the crap out of me! I'd rather stay home." "Hi! The event is at 3:33 am. We should all three of us enter at the same time. See you there."

The time seemed a little spooky to them, but so what. It wouldn't be in real life anyway. At 3:33 a.m. the three of them log in.

(@Dylan) Charlie was a member of the college waterski team, as all the sports had been moved outdoors to keep the kids further away from each other. In his dorm room, he had the greatest piece of technical hardware he'd ever imagined he would own: his OtherWorld 9000 headset. As he was setting up his cryptocurrency wallet to work with the new device, which his parents had just barely been able to afford at the beginning of the semester, he noticed a new NFT. That's odd, he thought, I don't remember entering a contest. (@CD) Somehow he had forgotten that he'd even applied to be Emily's +1 of 2, but the memory returned and lit up his cortex just as yet another bolt of lightning smashed down outside his dorm window.

(@Dylan) Chris was the oddball of the group. He didn't play any sports, and he'd only ever touched his BasicVRKit 2211 a few times before the fateful day. The third invitation to the party came to his wallet and he didn't even notice it was there until it activated at 11:59PM. He knew he shouldn't stay up this late, but it wasn't a school night and he had to finish a project for school. Until he met his new friends in-world, Chris had seriously been considering simply removing the headset and throwing it onto the floor. He could have gotten some sleep, and who knows? Maybe the fucking thing would work the next day.

(@Dylan) Lightning struck and Charlie heard the thunder start to rumble, but then with a brief cry of surprise, he found he couldn't hear it anymore. His eyes still showed him the same image he'd been seeing before, but he wasn't wearing the headset anymore. He reached up and rubbed his eyes. He'd never seen Emily or Chris before, but there they both were too. In blocky pixels, but he was sure this was what they looked like otherwise because his own body was so close it had taken him a moment to make the connection between the blockiness and the VR environment.

I'm in the game! he thought, panicking.

For his part, Charlie wasn't as surprised as Chris and Emily seemed. The vestiges of his panic were diminished by his second emotion, shock, as Emily began to scream and Chris let out a long string of loud swear words that seemed to be primarily directed toward his headset. He seemed to think it was malfunctioning.

"What's wrong with your set, bro?" he asked.

Chris looked up and saw him, and something seemed to click for him.

CHAPTER 2: The Meta Host

(@CD) You know that feeling you get when you think you're going to throw up but then you never do? That was what it felt like - except it went on and on until they had all closed their eyes and at that moment, they were blasted out of the portal like babies being propelled from the room to a rice paddy. It took a few moments for any of them to recover, but the first was Emily. Of course it was Emily. She always had to be first at everything.

"Charlie! Chris! Get your shit together!" She said it as if her shit hadn't been scattered just moments before. The boys were used to her at this point and knew that if they didn't do what she said, there would be hell to pay. Of course, from the looks of things, there was going to be hell to pay anyway.

"Come on." Emily wasn't going to wait for them, she was already moving towards the only spot in this world that looked any different from where they had landed.

A booming voice stopped her in her tracks and caused Chris to fall onto the ground whimpering.

"Complete the mission, or die!" This was the meta host. It wouldn't be the first or last time they heard him.

"You will face three challenges based on each of your worst fears. You have ten minutes. If you fail, you will die but can know that you will suffer forever as a crappy NFT. Go!"

"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" Chris was still on the ground.

"What's wrong with you man?" Charlie demanded.

"My greatest fear is Zombies!" Chris said. This created a shocked expression on both Charlie and Emily's faces.

"Me too!" They both said at the same time.

Suddenly a wall of Zombies was flowing at them from what had looked like an abandoned farmhouse seconds before.

"Run, you fools!" Emily shouted. She was past them and on her way.

Charlie helped Chris up even as the zombies got closer and closer. "You okay man?"

Chris seemed better. He nodded yes. "We better go man, they look fast, I don't know if we can outrun them at this point."

Charlie shoved Chris to the ground hard. "I'm not going to need to outrun them because I'm sure they'll stop to snack on you!"

Charlie ran away. It was a totally unexpected asshole move.

"Zombies don't actually bother me," Charlie mused as he ran. "What I'm really scared of are women."

Emily loped ahead of him, unaware of what had taken place behind her.

They blast out of the portal into a new foreign place, while the zombies arrived where Chris was. To everyone's surprise, he managed to dodge and arrived to the portal.

CHAPTER 3: The Ogre

(@MariaVerde) After finishing the first challenge, the three pass through the portal to a new city, but none of them know where the other is. They don't know if they are alive or dead. They arrive in a cyberpunk city, many years ahead of its time. Technology overflows everywhere. That's when the three realize they are alive.

"Dude, what the... Why did you leave me alone with the zombies?", said Chris.

Charlie was going to answer, but suddenly they see a big man coming. That's when they meet the governor, a guy eager for money and technology. He's the only human alive in that city; the others were turned into robots and Bitcoin mining machines.

Here is your second challenge -he says with a wicked smile on his face- you will have to get the first Bitcoin ever created. You will have to navigate among the thousands of robots and all the hostile technology in the city. But it won't be easy; in that same search there are also the ASIC miners. Good luck, hahaha.

The challenge begins and the three of them run off on their quest. The first attack against the ASIC miners begins and they give the high voltage attack but the heroes manage to dodge it.

(@dazerine) The meta host laughs in a menacing way, clearly enjoying watching the friends scramble around to survive. They have fought terrible monsters, overcoming fears and even had to hunt down the first Bitcoin and they were now exhausted and weary. Only adrenaline propelled them on now. And the hope of reaching home alive.

"So you have made it this far" the host jeered, "possibly just by luck, but let us test that theory. Your next challenge is a maze and you must reach the center. It is surrounded by high hedges with thorns that will dig into your skin. There are also some

plants that have grown a taste for the human flesh, but this should not be a worry to you wonder kids!"

On the other side of the room they were in a door creaked open slowly. It led out into the darkness where the faint rustle of leaves on the wind could be heard. "So just a maze?" Charlie asks, thinking this is all too easy compared to the other ordeals they've had to endure.

"Yes, but there is a keeper of the maze also. You will have to be quicker than him to get to the portal!" He laughed again in a sinister way. "Bwahahaha."

The group stepped up to the door and looked out into the night. The maze seemed expansive and tall. There was no way to climb it and no way to walk the perimeter, it seemed to stretch on as far as the eye could see.

A loud thudding suddenly filled the air. Like footsteps, but louder and slower. They turned in unison to see an ogre the size of a bus lumbering toward them. "The keeper!" they squealed as they all ran into the maze. They could hear the footsteps pounding behind them.



They searched and scrambled for any path, but it was all too confusing and no path or way was evident. They hurried on more to keep a distance from the ogre who never seemed too far behind.

All the hedges looked the same and a cloudy night meant they could not use stars as navigation. They thought they could use leaves to mark where they had been, but as soon as they approached a hedge to rip one off, a giant mouth appeared from the plant and attempted to swallow them whole. They stuck to the middle of the path from then on.

They had been in the maze for what felt like ages when they closed in near the center. They could see the portal light reflecting off the leaves and hear the slow, buzzing hum of the power. But alas! They were on the other side of the hedge and were faced with a dead end.

"I have an idea," main character said and he put both his hands to his mouth and bellowed loudly "Ogre! Ogre, one of my friends has fallen in some gravy!" A distant rumbling could be heard. Footsteps as loud as battle drums came closer and closer. They could also hear the breaking down of the hedges as a hungry ogre smashed through them to find the straightest line to a quick treat.

They stood aside just in time to see him crash through one hedge, and he did not even see them as his momentum carried him through the next. Large holes as wide as small cottages where in the hedge grove now and as they heard the ogre continue to break through the rest, they stepped through one and into the portal

(@d0nim0) Courageous as he thought it sounded, in retrospect it dawned on Charlie that baiting a starving ogre, the size of a two story building, was beginning to feel like a bad idea. As they tumbled out of the far side of the portal, for a moment all was dark. It was cold. It was silent.

"Ha! We made it! We are safe" cheered Chris. He picked himself up off Emily who had served as a cushion to his fall, with a sigh of relief.

"Looks like it," Emily pondered brushing herself down as she looked at Chris.

"You are not as light as you look," she said.

Chris laughed.

"I'm a full time desk jockey, what are you going to do, eh?"

They both turned in tandem to see Charlie's face drain of blood.

"What Charli...?" Before she could even complete the word, the portal began vibrating. It flashed a bright momentary light. She turned with renewed anxiety to witness the regular sized portal morph into a giant fluid blue oval. A hand the size of the canopy of a palm tree appeared through the plasma as if suspended in mid air.

"You have got to be kidding me!" Chris exclaimed.

"RUNNNN!!!"

No sooner had the three stood and motioned back away from the portal, the hand swiped. It was close enough to snag Chris's hoodie and enough motivation for him to leap backwards, almost knocking Charlie down this time.

The room they were in was darkly, large and cavernous. A faint cool damp breeze passed across their cheeks. Charlie's trekking instincts kicked in fuelled by renewed adrenaline.

"Follow that breeze!" "It's damp, which means there is water nearby"

The three launched themselves forward along a narrow path. Their forward sight was reduced. They used their hands to feel their way along a wall. This wall became a tunnel. The tunnel was moist to the touch: sparkly as a distant ray of light bounced upon it.

The sound of rushing water could be heard. The mouth of the tunnel gave way to bright light and bright blue sky. As they emerged, the halted abruptly. There was no more ground. The entrance ended where a sheer cliff face below began. In front of them was a what appeared to be a cascading water fall on either side of the path ahead... but there was no path. It was as if the water appeared from mid air down into a never ending distance. They could see a shiny gate on the far side.

"Holy...! There is nothing here! How are we supposed to get to the other side?" Charlie mused.

"Damn if I know" Emily replied "...but we'd best think of something... fast!!" She wheeled around and gestured in the direction they had come from. A gut wrenching roar emanated from the tunnels mouth. Seismic foot steps could be heard gathering pace. Time was short.

"SPLIT UP IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS!" Charlie yelled. "...and go where?" Replied Emily. "That ogre is looking for a toothpick. Track and field was never my strength, remember? I don't run and I swear it can smell me the most!" She had faced demons, orcs and fifth level mages countless times in her time playing Dungeons 'n' Dragons for many years... as a board game. The closest thing she had ever faced to an ogre in her short life had been on the big screen during a marathon movie night.

Chris paused for a moment. As adventurous as he had been growing up, nothing had prepared him for battle with the undead, not least

a house-shaped ogre with breathe could make steel buckle. "I'll keep shouting to draw its attention"

"..you go left! Chris, you go right. I'll stand here. Press up against the ledge. "I have an idea..."

The crushing footsteps were growing louder and more rapid. Nothing that large should be able to move that fast thought Charlie. As Emily went on way and Chris the other, Charlie saw two large boulders either side of the tunnels entrance. He reach behind and drew his climbing rope from his backpack. Tying it around one boulder he fashioned a mask shift trip rope and stepped it into the ground.

Barely had he made it twice around the second boulder with the rope, when an almighty roar and the ogre with it rampaged from the tunnel. He pulled the rope. Just as the ogre lifted his right leg, it caught the rope. Charlie leaned back hard on it, to maximize the tension. The boulder shifted, just a little. It was not enough. It held it's footing while the ogre did not. It caught the rope with its foot, stumbled forwards clumsily, turning in the same motion to see Charlie beside the rock. It had such size and forward momentum, that it could not stop in time. It fell, breaking the flow of the water falling either side of the invisible expanse. Chris looked down to witness the confusion etched across the beast face as it slowly turned in to complete fear and panic.

The ogre turned as it bounced of what looked like nothing. It wheeled and spun, falling hysterically down into the abyss. It's earsplitting shriek shrinking as quickly as the ogre did. Then... nothing. Nothing but the continued rush of falling water and the pulse of beating pulses in their ear. The trio each drew a large breath, giggling at their success.

"We did it!" Chris yelled. Charlie nodded, bent over while he recovered from his exertion.

"When it fell it hit an invisible bridge" Emily pointed out. "It reminds me of the Bridge of Etheragon during one of our fire missions" "It was a bridge of faith, those that had it could pass"

Enlightened by this idea, Charlie stepped forward, sliding his foot where the bridge should be. He applied pressure and there was resistance. He turned to gave a thumbs up to the others. With renewed vigor they splashed their way over the abyss, enjoying the refreshing mist of the waters on their parched lips. When the reached the far side they collapsed under the gate.

"Could this be the final challenge?" asked Emily. "I don't think I can take much more of this".

"Ouch, we can take on anything we put our minds to!" Chris replied in a tone of confidence that was a stark contrast to the convert terror behind his eyes.

Charlie stood up "...Well... There is no time like the present to find out!"

A zombie had popped up behind Chris, and Charlie thought he should be able to easily dodge it. But Chris still hadn't taken the nonverbal hint. Emily was even following Charlie now, and still Chris just stood there, terror plastered all over his slightly pudgy face. The zombie was latched onto him now, and Emily had sped up to a full sprint.

Charlie ran away from Chris's screams until they faded away into the distance completely, following Emily into a blind alley with a locked gate at the end of it. The lock was a combination lock, but Charlie already knew it. He'd been through this way before, and he'd already earned the POAP for solving the riddle. He entered the combination without a second thought.

With a nudge he twisted the lock and the gate squealed open to reveal the final challenge: the Crucible. He pushed the gate open and Emily stepped through, then he closed it behind them and scrambled the lock to put off any would-be pursuers.

CHAPTER 4: The Crucible



(@jimhapax) Emily and Charlie hear moans behind them for a ways as they pace through the cavern to reach a surprisingly bright portal at the other end. They step through the portal and wind up at the front of a giant cave - the Zombie Dragon's lair.

Zombie Chris is not far behind - following them with a stupor; never strong to begin with, not sure whether he wants catharsis and overcoming; or to feast upon the brains of them. Emily and Charlie may need to fend him off of the hunger - perhaps squirrel brains, or anything dead or rotten scraps lying around.

"He doesn't seem hungry," Emily says. The pair of eyes in his head still looks like Chris. And though he doesn't appear to be aggressive toward Charlie and Emily, another virtual avatar walking by is not so lucky. Chris quickly devours the hapless gamer's brains, and Charlie subdues the new zombie because it might not be as friendly as Chris.

The friends sweat and glisten as they delve deeper into the cave. Gold, rubies, and animated sapphires pile up as plentiful as the skeletons of those who dared pass this way before, and a winding path snakes through the piles of abandoned treasure-cum-graveyard. At the end, there is an opening, and an enormous sombre being sleeps.

"Hello?" Charlie utters, and the beast is disturbed from his dormancy.

"WHO DARES INTERRUPT MY SLUMBER?"

The dragon's eyes pierce a glowing light; one near impossible to flee the gaze of. It occurs to the two that are yet still lucid that the dragon's mouth has not moved - he speaks with his mind.

"YOUR ENDURANCE TO BRING YOU HERE IS NOT WITHOUT VALOUR; I AM IMPRESSED. HOWEVER, FEW HAVE EVER OVERCOME THE CRUCIBLE."

"What's the crucible?"

"ZOMBIES, DRAGONS, VAMPIRES - THESE FOLK TALES HAVE SHAKEN MANY. BUT THE FEARS OF THESE TIMES HAVE DISTURBED SO MANY TODAY, THAT THROUGH DISTRACTION AND AVOIDANCE, THEY NEVER NEED TO FACE THAT WHICH SCARES THEM THE MOST."

"And what's that? We've slayed an ogre with a boulder! We've overcome hordes of zombies! All these accomplishments, and you think we haven't faced our fears."

There is a silence. And then, shaking the walls of the cave, the mighty dragon erupts in laughter.

"YOU THINK THESE ARE FEARS?"

Charlie and Emily look each other in the eyes, one last time, before turning back to the dragon's.

"LOOK INTO THESE EYES. THERE YOU WILL FIND YOUR TRUE FEARS."

Charlie is too dazed to see Emily dissolve next to him. Chris has already been taken up by the hypnotic gaze. Everything melts, and there is darkness.

(@MariaVerde) It was just an ordinary day at school. Everyone talking to their friends, playing games, boys flirting girls.... For Charlie it was the most important day of his life. The day before he had decided (after several years of not even talking to girls), that he was going to declare his love to Natalie, his classmate who stole all his attention. Natalie was talking to her friends, when Charlie walks up, sweating and shaking. "H... Hel... Hi Natalie. Um... I was wondering if... You'd like Hang out with me today." There wasn't even a word; not even a yes or no. There was only laughter, and lots of it. Instead of running away as did years before, he understood that Natalie wasn't the only girl in the world. At least he dared to talk to her.

(@jimhapax) Emily is stuck on the dragon's gaze, falls unconscious on the floor beside Charlie.

Emily's Stepdad is banging on her door but she is stranger now. "I hate you! You don't have control over me. I wish you were dead!!". Now she stands up to the memory of her abusive father - now SHES free."

They approach the scenes of their dark memories differently, because they have become stronger people.

They come back to reality, and see Chris fighting with himself...

The teacher mocks him in the school. The piercing sounds of laughter of the rest of his classmates.

"CAN'T YOU DO A SIMPLE MATH EQUATION? DO I HAVE TO BRING YOU TO THE FRONT. SO YOU CAN EXPLAIN HOW STUPID YOU ARE TO EVERYONE ELSE?"

Chris is shaking. He doesn't know Emily and Charlie are in front of him, telling him to confront his fears.

"OR WILL YOU PISS YOUR PANTS MAYBE?"

Chris shakes, and the shaking turns from fear, to apprehension, to frustration, to fury.

Chris flips the table. The teacher and the class recoil. There is silence.

Emily and Charlie look at each other. Something has changed in Chris' eyes.

"He's going to make it." she says.

"And WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?"

The teacher goes from malice to shock.

"You come in here, you hand out your textbooks, you pick on the quietest kid in the class, and you make them feel terrible. No-one likes you, Mrs Frumpsworth. No-one ever did. I'm sorry you have to do this the kids you're supposed to inspire. I'm sorry you never got over the worries and problems in your life. I'm sorry you have so little power in your life, that you can only make children miserable."

The teacher sits down, and is silent.

The children applaud Chris on.

Of course, Chris would not say this as a 6 year old. But, Chris is not 6. The memory is the same; but Chris has changed.

And everything goes dark. And then two faces appear. Emily, and Charlie.

CHAPTER 5: You Can Return Home Now...

(@MariaVerde) They all made it through the last mission. "We did it!" they said as they hugged each other. A lot of bravery was needed to make it to the end. But something inside them was not 100% happy about returning to the real world. And why would they want to return to the real world? After all, so many diseases, rivalries and hate in the real world made no sense. Maybe it was better to stay in the Zombieverse.

"Here is the magic candy that will bring you back to real life. You can eat it and never return here, or you can choose to become zombies and wait every Halloween to scare and make other Discord users to join the Zombieverse," the dragon said. The three of them take it but stare at it for quite a while. The dragon smiles because he knows what they are thinking. "No, we're staying in the Zombieverse," they say in unison. At the same time Charlie and Emily begin to change into what will now be their new look. They are now zombies. The three of them walk together into their now new home. Another player approaches, and they all grin at each other. The player enters the room and the three friends attack.

And that's how the three now friends met, perhaps in an unconventional way. But the experience was not only fear and terror, it was also a space to grow, to overcome their fears, to be who they really wanted to be. Because at the end of the day, if there were so many bad things in the real world, why not do the same but in the Zombieverse?

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