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This is the first interview in a series of text-based Q&A interviews with participants of the Lido Simple DVT trials. Today I interview Metanull, a solo home staker, an Ethereum staking educator, and a fervent believer in Ethereum as a transformative force for business, community, culture, and technology.

## Transcript

Eridian:

Today I'm speaking to Metanull about their experiences in the Ethereum staking ecosystem, how they got involved in staking, and how they are finding the Lido Simple DVT trials so far. Metanull, it's great to have you here.

Metanull:

Thanks for having me. I'm happy to be here to share my experience.

Eridian:

The first question I ask everyone is "When did you get into crypto?". I speak to a range of people for this Community Staking series and I want to show that everyone can get involved, whether you're a crypto OG or have joined the space recently.

Metanull:

I think I first heard about Bitcoin in 2009 or 2010. It was very early on. There were no exchanges and it very much felt like it was still just a research project. I immediately recognized it for the innovation it was, because I didn't think that decentralized consensus was possible. I spent a day or so looking into it and then moved on, not thinking much about it again except for when bull runs came around and it was hard to ignore.

When Ethereum came out, it blew my mind even more. Turing-complete distributed and decentralized computing, and data storage too? The possible applications seemed endless. But again, I didn't get too involved.

I occasionally heard about developments like The DAO hack, but I was mostly just an observer until 2017 when hype around blockchain started to grow again in the mainstream media. There were some actual interesting applications and use cases starting to pop up. At the time I worked at a fintech company that built software for managing very specialized, illiquid assets, and we investigated Ethereum as a potential way to revolutionize the industry. Unfortunately, regulatory and legal barriers got in the way and the idea was dropped. After that I kept a closer eye on developments in the space but I was not terribly active, until staking came along.

Eridian:

I find it interesting to hear how people view Ethereum from the sidelines before they jump in themselves. It sounds like you could see the potential and even the companies you worked for had an idea of the potential, but timing and other factors got in the way.

So what is your background? Would you say you're more technical or non-technical? A lot of people assume that you have to be super technical to get into crypto, but a lot of people I speak to are not technical at all and still contribute enormously to the space. Where do you see yourself on that spectrum?

Metanull:

I definitely have a technical background. I initially learned to code in middle and high school, and followed that up with a CS degree. I worked as a software engineer in the early years of my career and moved over to the product management side of software after that. Outside of work I have almost always had a personal project I am working on.

I do agree that there are many ways that non-technical people can get involved in the space. Blockchain is fascinating technology that I believe can change industry, finance and the world, but it isn't worth nearly as much if it doesn't make the leap from techno-toy to practical applications. That leap can only be made if knowledgeable people help people bridge the gap. We need great communicators, educators, and writers to get the word out. We need business people, politicians, domain experts, and bureaucrats to understand the potential of the technology so that they can find a way to integrate it, improve processes, and remove legal/regulatory barriers. We need designers and UX people to simplify how we use it, ideally to the point where we don't even know we are using it. And you definitely don't need to be technical to get involved. You will have to learn some basics. It is a new world with new ways of doing things, but it is not inaccessible to non-technical people.

Eridian:

I definitely agree with the need for more educators in the space! How long have you been involved with Ethereum staking? What got you interested in staking specifically over the other dizzying array of rabbit holes that crypto has to offer?

Metanull: I got involved with Ethereum staking in 2019 as soon as I heard about the first public testnets. We were supposed to be able to stake on a Raspberry Pi and I had an extra one, so I tried to get Nimbus up and running on it. I think there were problems with the BLS library though, so I moved to Prysm and ultimately upgraded to an Intel NUC. At the time there weren't any comprehensive instructions for compiling and installing the software, so I worked it out and documented it so I could duplicate my results. I released that documentation on GitHub as the first comprehensive guide to compiling, installing, configuring and running a Prysm/Geth node on one of the early Prysm gemstone testnets.

As for why staking over the other rabbit holes? The short answer is that before staking, even before Ethereum, I already had years of experience self-hosting various services on Linux out of my home. Staking was just an extension of the skills and experience I already had.

Eridian:

What would you say is the biggest challenge facing Ethereum home stakers today?

Metanull:

Decreasing returns are one challenge. While I am sure there are people who would stake purely for ideological support of the network, I expect that most people originally staked to earn some income off of an asset that they already planned on holding. But the costs of staking aren't zero. At beacon genesis, the APR was glorious for a brief period, and the economics of staking were a no-brainer. But the number of active validators is now much higher than I ever imagined, and the APR is much lower. Someone running a single validator may no longer find the consensus income worth the effort. Some may still find the lottery aspect of MEV worth it though, but that is elusive. I could easily see solo validators opting out because it is just no longer economically worth it.

As Ethereum continues to evolve or as home stakers try to boost their income, I think technical barriers will start to be more prominent. More complex configurations may come into play and maybe heavier hardware or bandwidth requirements may come along. A deeper understanding of the inner workings of the network may be required just to keep up. I have non-technical friends who stake from home, and they are doing great so far, but I don't see them going down the path of DVT, re-staking, MEV smoothing pools, or any other newer developments. I think they are much more likely to shut down their server and put their ETH with a centralized staker.

DVT is a one of those potential technical barriers, but it is also a potential source of additional income that may keep some home stakers around. Luckily there are a lot of great people out there working to keep things simple.

Eridian:

My hope is that as the technology evolves it doesn't have to mean that complexity increases. With tools like Dappnode, a lot of this extra technical complexity can be abstracted away from the user. Let's talk about DVT then. You're participating in the Lido Simple DVT trial, how did you hear about that and what made you want to get involved? Have you used DVT before this trial?

Metanull: I heard about the Lido testnets from a few different sources, including the DVStakers Discord, the ETHStaker Discord, and I think the r/ethfinance daily thread. There was a fair amount of discussion about it online during the application period.

I had heard about DVT in the past, but I wasn't really following it until I got to ETHDenver 2023. It was then that I realized that I had already paid for my staking system, it had plenty of capacity, and I could possibly run validators for others and make a little extra income without necessarily having to put together a 24/7 support staff. Like everyone, the lower APR affects me, and DVT is a potential path to boost my income a little while also supporting further decentralization of the network.

After ETHDenver, I was eager to start testing DVT, but I needed a cluster to join. Fortunately, I heard about DVStakers and joined their Obol and SSV testnet clusters. Prior to the Lido testnets I was part of two Obol clusters and one SSV cluster. I then participated in the Lido x SSV testnet 1, and now Lido x SSV and Lido x Obol testnet 2.

Eridian:

How have you found the experience so far? Any thoughts you want to share or challenges that you've faced?

Metanull: So far it has been a lot of fun. This has given me a whole new dimension to explore and learn within Ethereum staking. I always like trying to figure something new out. And DVT has given me the opportunity to work more closely with others in the staking community. Prior to DVT, solo staking was very "solo". You can be a complete hermit while solo staking, never needing to cross paths with another staker, unless you needed some support. With DVT and the Lido testnets I am now working in clusters with other stakers from around the world, both home stakers and commercial node operators. Some of my cluster peers are well-known, recognizable names in the Ethereum space too.

The two main challenges I can think of off the top of my head are coordination and configuration. Many of the DVT clusters I have been involved in have required coordination across seven node operators in up to seven different time zones spread around the world. Even basic communication can have a long turn-around time, so the process can be pretty slow. DKG in particular, requires that we all coordinate our DKG clients to run at the same time, as one example. And configuration can be a challenge because hardware, software, and Internet connections are different for everyone, and everyone has different levels of knowledge and experience. Small differences or changes to configuration can create problems that require effort to resolve. And people who tinker with standard settings can find themselves in trouble sometimes. I include myself in that group.

Some mistakes have been made along the way. Just recently one of my cluster peers lost their validator passwords. This is all new stuff and we are all learning what to do and what not to do. The great thing is that everyone understands this and is supportive of each other as we learn these lessons.

Eridian:

Yes coordination of clusters can be challenging. For a permissionless systems a low/zero coordination method would be best. These trials are a great way to improve distributed validator technology and it's good to hear that it's been going well for you.

Lido is often portrayed as an existential threat to Ethereum, but the reality is more nuanced. While there are a range of improvements Lido can and is making, the one I want to focus on today is its goal of increasing the number of node operators. Simple DVT is a big step towards moving from 10's of permissioned node operators to 1000's of permissionless node operators. What are your personal thoughts on this topic? And since being involved in the Simple DVT trial has your opinion of Lido changed?

Metanull:

On the question of what I think about moving to a larger set of operators: As long as DVT operators are allowed to control their own clients and maintain their infrastructure independence, I would think their addition as operators cannot be negative and would likely help mitigate some of the risks of Lido's staking dominance, at least at some minimal level. If nothing else, a larger number of operators increases decentralization of validator operations, hopefully providing more resilience to those validators. It does not and cannot solve all of the concerns about Lido, but it does give more operators a role in ensuring that the network is run well and with the network's best interests in mind.

As a DVT operator, particularly with SSV, I see myself as an independent party offering validation services, and anyone who likes how I run my services is welcome to select me as an operator for their stake. If it is my family, my friends, someone I don't know, or Lido, it does not make a difference. I cannot control how many validators any of those groups have or how dominant they are. I have no power there. But I can be an objective, independent operator running my nodes in the interest of my values for Ethereum. If those become a problem for any of the parties that stake with me, they can move their stake elsewhere.

I did not go into the DVT trials with a negative perception of Lido, just an awareness of the concerns. I can say that I am impressed with all of the Lido preparation for the DVT trials and with the support of the Lido team. Everyone has been great to work with. Everything is professionally orchestrated and well run. It has been a very positive experience.

Eridian:

As a solo staker running machines from home you are a small subset of the total participants in this current trial. What would you say to other solo stakers who might not have heard about the opportunity to become a node operator with Lido? There is another trial coming up in early 2024 and my personal goal is to significantly increase the number of home stakers, so I'd love to hear your thoughts on this.

Metanull:

Get involved! DVT is one direction for the future of staking. It is easy to get involved in Lido's testnets or the testnets of specific DVT clients. Particularly for Lido, the commitment isn't longer than a couple of months, and you'll get to meet other professional and home stakers along the way. Start your own DVT clusters on testnets. Reach out to find peers on social media, Discord, or Reddit.

Eridian:

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me today and share your thoughts and opinions. Home stakers are a crucial part of the Ethereum ecosystem and it's inspiring to hear your story. In sharing your thoughts today, you are inspiring the next generation of home stakers. And finally, is there anything else you'd like to talk about? Any projects or communities you're involved with that you'd like to share here?

Metanull:

Thanks for having me. I'm happy to share my story and this discussion has given me a lot to think about.

As for the projects and communities that I particularly enjoy, checkout ETHStaker for some of the best staking support out

there. For DVT, check out DVStakers and the cool things going on there. And though I don't use it regularly myself, check out eth-docker for running your node. I have tried a number of projects that try to make staking easier, and I found eth-docker to be the easiest to use so far.

Also, check out the Stake Local Dashboard. It is my attempt to create a multi-client Grafana dashboard for staking. It is a bit of a proof-of-concept and rough around the edges – particularly configuration-- but I plan to continue iterating on it in the future.

Eridian:

Thanks again for taking the time today. Good luck with the Simple DVT trial and I hope we can catch up again in the future when mainnet validators are up and running through Simple DVT!

## Links

- [Metanull x.com](https://metanull.x.com)
- [Metanull GitHub](https://github.com/metanull)

## About Eridian:

I'm [Eridian](#), and I'm an Ethereum staking enthusiast. I wrote and maintain the [EthStaker Knowledge Base](#) and I've worked on a number of Ethereum staking-related projects such as [DVStakers](#) and [Staking Directory](#). While participating in the Lido DVT trials, I decided to apply for the role of Community Lifeguard. The role is outlined in [this forum post](#) and the TLDR is that I don't work for Lido, I'm a community participant who is compensated via a [LEGO grant](#) for my contributions to the Lido community. All opinions are my own, I simply want to support the diversification of the Lido node operator set, enabling thousands of solo stakers to participate in validating Ethereum.