Chapter 11
Threed, Zombie Central

“Woooo wee! I had forgotten how swell it is to ride in dat old junker!” Gorgeous said as he escorted Paula and I out of the van. He took a look at the surroundings before walking back to the van’s rear. “I don’t know about dis place… It’s got a pretty spooky vibe to it. You kids be careful, and if you ever get disheartened, just think of da Runaway Five, playin’ their souls out in some glorious theater. I’ll see you two some other time! Au revoir!” Gorgeous said as he hopped into the van. After a few seconds, the van once again lurched into action and took off down the dark road, followed closely by Keyboar on his scooter. Once the van disappeared from my sight, I was finally took a good look at the town of Threed.

The town was very large, bigger than both Twoson and Onett, and the whole area surrounding the town was covered in shadows casted by ominous, red-ish clouds. The buildings appeared to be vacant, and there was no sign of anybody anywhere, unlike the bustling streets of the places I had previously visited. There was barely a sound to be heard, and the air seemed traced with fear and distress.

“Hmm. Quite the atmosphere this place has. Let’s keep our guards up, just in case trouble arises,” Paula said, messing with her hair. I swallowed any feelings of uneasiness I had and began to march forward, curious to know why the town was so empty. On our miniature expedition, we passed a drug store, a pizza parlor, and a clinic. While we were walking by some silent houses, I suddenly heard a rustle in one of the nearby bushes; I quickly pulled out my bat in case of danger. I inched closer to the rumbling bush, causing it to stand still. I then pulled away the leaves of the bush, only to find an old man wearing a grey coat shuddering fearfully.
“Puh-puh-please don’t eat me! I taste like raw sewage!” the old man cried.

“Huh? Woah, relax mister, I’m not going to hurt you,” I said as the man nervously peeked up at me.

“What? Oh! Phew, you’re not a monster. That’s both good and bad. It’s good because I don’t want to be eaten by a horrible monster. It’s bad because it means that you kids are wandering out where the monsters can see you!” the man said as he stood up and wiped the dirt off of his pants.

“Monsters? I’m sorry sir, but did you say that there are monsters roaming around this town?” Paula asked with a skeptical look.

“Why yes I did. I can tell that you two aren’t from around here, so I’ll give you the lowdown. Recently, I’d say about three days ago, these red-ish clouds suddenly appeared over Threed; but that’s not the only thing that mysteriously showed up, as soon after the clouds came, monstrous creatures began to prowl the town. Ghosts, malicious insects, living garbage, and worst of all, z-z-z-zombies…” The man started to tremble and look around as if he thought he was being watched.

“Sir? Are you ok? Why are you shaking like that?” Paula said as she approached the man.

“No! S-s-stay back! You might be a zombie! Oh no, they’re everywhere! Run, run you fools! Save yourselves!” the man screamed as ran off behind a building.

“...What was that guy’s beef? He said something about zombies and then he started acting bonkers. I’ve always thought that zombies were just a fairytale, a story made-up to scare little kids. But now... I’m not so sure. Come on Ness, let’s keep going,” Paula said as she pushed me forward.

We continued to walk around the town for a bit, until we came across a huge circus tent positioned near the center of the town. There was a sign in front of the big top that read “Anti-Zombie
Headquarters - Dedicated to the Eradication of the Undead!” I turned to Paula and asked if it was a good idea to enter the tent, and got a lazy shrug as a reply; taking the shrug as a yes, I cautiously proceeded inside of the tent.

The interior of the tent was mostly void, save for a large metal cage and a few paranoid-looking people sitting at a wooden table covered by a white cloth. The small group consisted of a chubby man wearing a pink suit, a woman with blonde hair, a woman with black hair wearing a pair of glasses, and a rough-looking man wearing a sleeveless leather jacket. We walked over to the group, who were chatting with each other anxiously.

“Johnson, give me an update on the whereabouts of the horde,” the spectacled woman said.

“Y-yes ma’am. The last sighting of the zombie horde was at the large graveyard to the south of the town, ma’am,” the chubby man said.

“Hmm, alright. If my estimations are correct, the main sector of Threed should be mostly clear of any zombies. Mack, alert the townspeople that the emergency level is now at Jelly Roll 2,” the woman said, looking at the man in the leather jacket. The man gave a quick salute and hustled out of the tent, exposing our presence to the other members of the group. “What’s this? Children? Who are you two, and why are you not following Threed Emergency Protocol?!” the woman said. I stepped forward and cleared my throat.

“Um, hi there. My name is Ness and the girl behind me is my friend Paula. We have come from Twoson in search of something important,” I said.

“What?! You hail from Twoson? How did you manage to enter Threed, the tunnels are blocked by vicious spirits!” the blonde woman said.
“The famous band, the Runaway Five, gave us a ride here in their van. Because of the loud music that they play while riding, the ghosts were too afraid to bother us.”

“Of course! Music was the answer! Johnson, write that down!” the woman with glasses said to the chubby man, who pulled out a notepad and began scribbling furiously in it. “Ahem! Allow me to shed some light on our situation. My name is Priscilla Ductoir. I am the mayor of this town, and lately, we’ve been under attack by an array of dangerous monsters, the most prominent being putrid zombies. We tried to fight off the bozos, but they were too powerful for us to handle, and we had to retreat into our houses in order to save our skin. We also tried to travel to Twoson and Fourside in hopes of gaining assistance, but we found ourselves unable to get outta Threed ‘cause of a bunch of ghosts taking up residence in the tunnels out of it. For the past few days, the entire town has been holed up in their homes in fear of zombie attacks. As the leader of this town, I took it upon myself to found this organization of elite personnel, dedicated to trying to rid this town of the zombie menace; the only problem is that we suck at our job, and we haven’t been able to find a concrete way of dealing with those horrid creatures,” Mayor Priscilla said in despair.

“Hm, if monsters are your only problem, Ness and I could probably take them out easily,” Paula said confidently.

“I appreciate your generosity, missie, but I’m afraid two little kids aren’t going to be able to fend off a mob of lethal monsters,” the blonde woman said.

“Ah, but that’s where you’re wrong. You see, we are not your average kids. We possess incredible strength and special powers that allow us to defeat any foe in our path! A bunch of old dead guys aren’t going to stop us,” Paula said with smug face.

“Oh yeah? If you’re so special, why don’t you prove yourself,” the blonde woman challenged.
“If you insist.” Paula shouted as a blast of icy energy burst from her fingers, striking the blonde woman and encasing her from the neck down in a sheet of ice.

“Oh, t-t-t-that’s j-j-j-just c-c-c-cold,” the frozen woman mumbled.

“Ahahaha! Brilliant! Excellent! More positive adjectives! You two are certainly no ordinary kids! You’ll definitely be able to whip those zombies in no time! And if you defeat the zombies, you bet your sweet hide that we’ll reward you handsomely! Now, as you may have heard before, the zombies are currently located at the massive cemetery to the south of the town. That should be a good place to start wiping out those abominations! Go on, get cracking!” the mayor said as she shoved us out of the tent.

Paula and I speedily made our way over to the enormous cemetery located at the southernmost point of Threed. The entrance to the graveyard was via two tall iron gates; posted on the gates was sign that read "EXTREMELY DANGEROUS - DO NOT ENTER" in large, sloppily written letters. Being the obedient teenagers that we were, we ignored the sign’s warning and pushed open the creaky gates. The inside of the cemetery was of course littered with hundreds of tombstones of all shapes and sizes, with many names inscribed on them, such as “Mario Oiram”, “Lucas's Hopes and Dreams”, and “Bob”. Up to that point, we had not seen a single zombie; that was, until the earth in front of some of the gravestones started to pulsate. Moments later, three moldy hands shot out from beneath the ground. The hands grabbed onto some nearby grass and began to pull out from the ground three animate corpses. When bodies were fully out of the ground, they stood up and began to shamble towards us, rotten appendages hanging limply from their bodies.

“Brainssssss... I want brainssssss...” one of the zombies groaned.

“Heartssssss... Give me your heartssssss...” another zombie whispered.
“I say, what repulsive appetites you chaps have! I would much rather indulge in a nice spot of tea with a tasty salad on the side,” the last zombie said in a clear cockney accent. The two other zombies turned to the one zombie with looks of pure hatred on their faces. “Freaking really Gerald?! How many times have I told you that we only do the generic zombie moaning in order to scare away the stupid civilians! I don’t want to eat anybody’s brain! My stomach rotted away years ago!” one of the zombies yelled, now speaking in explicit Eagleish.

“Ugh, why did we even bring you along? I told Master Belch that you would just be a disruption to our plans, but noooooo, we just had to take you because of ‘equal opportunities.’ Well you know what, screw what that fat piece of garbage wants, I’m wanna actually get something significant accomplished!”

“Woah there chap, do calm down. I was only trying to express my opinion on a simple matter; there is no need to be upset,” Gerald the zombie said.

“You better believe there’s a reason to be upset! Now these kids know that we’re intelligent lifeforms, and that we can’t hold our own in a fight! Wait, they didn’t know about that last part… CRAP! Whatever, we’re wasting time by sitting here and yelling at each other, let’s just get these kids!” one zombie commanded. The other zombies turned and began to hobble at us, very slowly. Because of the zombies’ molasses pace, I was easily able to strike one of them with bat, shattering its putrid body into many pieces. Paula casted PK Fire $\alpha$ on the other attacker, disintegrating it into a pile of ash. The head zombie looked at the remains of its cohorts with a disgusted face.

“*long-winded sigh* Of course, of course, of course. Why didn’t I see this coming. What are the chances of these two completely ordinary looking kids turning out to have weird random powers? Just my freakin’ luck. Then again, Master Belch did say something about a boy and a girl with superpowers or something of the sort, so I guess
“Three down, who knows how many to go,” I said to Paula. We continued through the graveyard at a brisk pace, not seeing anymore zombies along the way. Eventually, we came to a lonely gravel path near the back of the yard. We followed it for a minute, and it lead us to a lone stone sarcophagus standing in a circular clearing. In front of the casket stood two zombies that had darker skin than the ones we had just fought. We pulled out our weapons and slowly approached the two sentries. As we moved closer, one of the zombies turned its head and looked me straight in the eyes.

“Be gone human. This path is forbidden to all except for the undead,” the zombie said in a deep, booming voice. Despite the zombie’s threat, we continued to move closer.

“You have not retreated. I will say once more, leave, or I will force you to,” the zombie uttered. Over-confidently, I took another step forward. “You are foolish. Your foolishness will spell your doom. Now, BE GONE!!” the zombie yelled as he flashed a brilliant red light from his eye sockets. My vision became black for a moment, and when it returned, I found myself lying on my back near a vacant building. I looked to my side and found Paula in the exact same position. I stood up and helped her onto her feet.

“What an odd experience. Whatever those zombies were guarding, it must have been something of high importance to them. While I would normally say to go back and try to fight them, I have a feeling that they will just flash their red light and teleport us away again. Anyways, it’s getting late. Let’s see if there are any hotels open at this hour,” Paula said as she wiped the dirt off of her dress.

“Um, shouldn’t we report our zombie encounter with the mayor and her squad first?” I asked.
“Erm... Well, we didn’t really do much other than take out three zombies, so I don’t think that they’ll be too upset if we wait until the morning to tell them what happened,” Paula replied.

“Fair enough. Let me see if I can find us a place to stay,” I said as I scanned our surroundings. My eyes eventually came across a tall brick building with the word “Hotel” written on it. I motioned for Paula to follow me as we headed towards the inn. On our way, I noticed a shady man wearing a black suit standing near the hotel entrance.

“Psst! Hey kid, let me ask you about somethin. I just saw this smokin’ hot chick walk into the hotel. If it’s not too much trouble, could you get her number for me? I think I might be smitten,” the man whispered. Although I liked the sound of an attractive woman, Paula wasn’t too keen on the idea of asking another girl for her phone number.

“Excuse me? You want us to walk up a stranger and ask them for their phone number? Get lost, creep! Come on Ness, let’s check in,” Paula said as she forcefully dragged me into the hotel.

As soon as we entered the hotel, I could immediately tell that something was off. For starters, there was no sign of anyone in the hotel’s lobby, not even a clerk behind the main desk. Secondly, the walls of the place seemed to be covered with some weird slime material. Lastly, there was a trail of the same slime leading down a suspiciously clean hallway. Out of curiosity, I suppose, Paula hauled me down the hallway to investigate the rest of the hotel. At the hallway’s end, there stood two doors; one of the doors looked normal while the other was covered in slime and scratch marks.

“I have no idea what happened in that room, and I don’t want to find out. I’m gonna see if this other room is safe to sleep in; you can stay here if you want,” Paula said as she entered the normal-looking door, leaving me by myself. While I was waiting for Paula, the door covered in scratches slowly opened, revealing a woman wearing a bikini and sunglasses.
“Hey there bad boy. I saw that you came here with another girl. Why don’t you ditch that hag and come hang out with me... We’ll have a great time,” the woman said seductively. The woman’s eyes flashed bright red for a moment, and I suddenly felt compelled to visit her room. I slowly walked over to the door, unable to see or control my actions. Still in a trance, I could hear Paula’s voice behind me, saying something like:

“Ness, what are you doing? Wake up!” After that, I felt something metallic hit me on the back of the head, snapping me out my daze. As my sight returned to me, I saw the woman from before point at me; once my vision fully returned, I noticed that the woman was actually commanding several ghosts and zombies standing near her to rush at us. Before I could pull out my bat, I felt another hard impact on the back of my head, and I once again started to fade to black, all while hearing a faint voice cry out:

“Two kids gon’ die tonight!”

When I eventually regained my consciousness, I found myself lying on back in a damp, strange-smelling room. The room was pitch-black, and I was unable to see anything through the thick cloud of darkness. After I gained the strength to stand up, I began to walk about the room; I was able to touch the walls of the room, which felt damp and jagged just like the ground. Frightened and unable to distinguish where I was, I cried out for help.

“HELLO? CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?” I yelled. My call reverberated off of the walls of the room, creating an earsplitting echo. I was abruptly slapped by someone’s hand; that hand happened to belong to Paula, who revealed herself by lighting up the room with PK Fire.

“Ness! Was it you who made that extremely loud yell? That hurt my ears! I ought to slap you again! But I’ll refrain for now, because we seem to be in a bit of a pickle at the moment,” Paula said as she motioned to our surroundings. The light from her PK Fire allowed me to see that we were in some sort of weird cave. There was nothing in
the cave except for ourselves and a door with strange markings on it. “Oh hey, a door. That was easier than I thought. Let’s get out of here before those zombies come back.”

“Also... What were you doing following that scantily-clad psycho woman into that room? Is there something I need to know?” Paula said with a scowl.

“W-w-what? That, that was nothing! *gulp* You see, that woman must have been in cahoots with the zombies, and she flashed some red light from her eyes that put me in a trance! I couldn’t control myself, I swear! Why are looking at me like that? I told you I couldn’t control my actions! (I’m in for it now.)” I thought to myself as I nervously backed away from Paula.

“Are you positive that’s what happened? When I came out of that room, I saw a look of great desire on your face. **YOU AREN’T HIDING ANYTHING FROM ME, ARE YOU NESS?**” Paula said demonically.

“N-n-no! I’m not hiding anything! Look at my hands, there’s nothing to hide! W-w-why are you bringing this up now? We just got mugged by zombies and trapped down here in this murky cave! This is not the time for this discussion! Let’s just leave and forget this ever happened!” I said as I anxiously turned the doorknob of the exit door. To my horror, I soon realized that the door was locked. I turned back to Paula, who still had an angry look on her face. “Um, P-P-Paula... the door is locked...” As the words left my mouth, I could see Paula’s expression fade from anger to fear. She rushed forward and began furiously tugging on the doorknob. After that, she tried PK Fire $\alpha$, PK Freeze $\alpha$, and eventually resorted to smacking the door repeatedly with her frying pan. When she ran out of energy to hit the door, she collapsed on the ground and sunk her face into her hands.

“*sniff, sniff* W-w-we’re trapped. We’re stuck. I’m once again stuck in a cage without a key. *sniff* Ness... You said that you would protect me. You said that you never let me get trapped again. And yet, here we are, stuck in a cave with no way to get out. *sniff,
Paula removed her head from her hands, revealing her face, now wet with tears. I slowly approached her and sat down beside her.

“H-hey... It’s okay... Don’t cry. Remember what I said, ‘Big girls don’t cry.’ There has to be a way out of here. If we can’t unlock the door, and we can’t break it either, why don’t you try to call for help like you did before?” I suggested meekly. Paula wiped her eyes and stared at me.

“That’s easy for you to say Ness, but I’m afraid that you don’t quite understand the situation that we’re in. I need somebody who is mentally strong enough to receive my call, and they also need to actually be able to help us. We have no idea where we are and nobody can get to Threed anyways. We trapped, 100% trap-arggg!” Paula suddenly closed her eyes and clutched her head as if in pain. I reached over to try to help, but she pulled away from me. After about a minute of this, Paula released head and opened her eyes, which now shone with a brightness I had never seen before. “I’ve, I’ve got it! I know who to call! I don’t know how this thought came to me, but this might be our only chance to escape from this place! Give me a minute Ness,” Paula said, turning away from me. She hunched over and closed her eyes, becoming completely silent and still. This went on for several minutes, until she eventually opened her eyes and sat up.

“What was that about?” I asked.

“Oh Ness. I just sent a message to someone in a far away land. They are the only one that can help us now,” Paula said with hopeful eyes.

“Well, who did you call then? And if the person in question lives far away, how are they going to able to help us?” I asked, full of dread and doubt.

“The person I have called is one of the Chosen Four, just like you and me. Although he does not possess the gift of PSI, he makes up for it with astronomical intelligence. He may live far off, but with the power his mind, he will definitely be able to find a way here. Who I have summoned? Let’s call him Jeff.”