Chapter 17  
Operation Zombie Paper  

After speedily re-entering Threed from the road we had previously traversed, we all decided to take a rest near the “Anti-Zombie HQ” tent in order to brainstorm some ideas on how we were to access the sarcophagus guarded by the dark zombies.

“Alright guys, let me hear what you have so far. I’ll tell you if I think it’s a good idea or not,” Paula said after a few minutes.

“Ok, so, I have a pretty good thought. What if we disguised ourselves as zombies and tricked the two guards into letting us past? All we have to do is get some costumes and act like dead people!” I suggested.

“Hmm… Eh, I don’t think they would be fooled that easily, even if we do all smell like corpses. That idea is a flop,” Paula replied.

“Here’s a conception. We could possibly go the offensive route and rush at the two crooks with an armament of catastrophic proportions! …Perhaps this is just my love of explosives speaking,” Jeff chipped in.

“Hmm… While that might work, I don’t think we have quite enough fire power for a fully offensive drive. That idea is also a flop.”

“Er, well, what if we distracted the zombies somehow, and then snuck past them when their guard was down?”

“Hmm… Good thought, but again, I don’t think these zombies are dumb enough to fall for a stunt like that. Another flop,” Paula said stubbornly. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Jeff begin to seethe.

“Oh, so if those plans weren’t good enough for you, how about this. What if we rebuilt the Sky Runner I used to travel here and flew over the zombies’ heads?” Jeff said, hands curled into fists.
“Isn’t that a bit complicated for such a simple task? It would also take forever, not to mention—”

“Oh, for Newton’s sake! This ‘brainstorming’ session has been nothing more than a massive waste of time! We have to try something, or else Threed will stay as it is and we’ll be going bloody nowhere! And we don’t even know if the place you have been babbling about is the correct way for us to go or not! If you are so adamant about this plan of yours, then how do you suggest we get through those two asinine dark zombies! Go on, I am awaiting your response,” Jeff said as he crossed his arms. Paula’s confident expression quickly devolved into a look of confusion.

“Ummmm... Well, you see... We could try, no, how about, nah, what if, uhh...” Paula began to sweat as she struggled to come up with a good idea.

“Well... Are you just going to sit there and count grains of sand, or are you going to answer me?!”

“Hey, don’t be so pushy! It, uh, takes time to come up with a sufficient plan!”

“Aha! I knew you had nothing inside of that empty vagrant mind! All you think about is rainbows, ponies, and the color pink, instead of anything actually worth a bloody cent!” Jeff spat rudely.

“Woah, what’s gotten into you? Have you been sniffing some of that fly honey you have in your pocket? At least I’m actually trying to formulate a functional strategy instead of thinking about why grass flows in the wind!” Paula retorted angrily.

“*gasp*! How dare you?! For your information, there is actually a perfectly logical explanation for why grass flows in the wind! It’s too bad that you wouldn’t be able to comprehend said explanation thanks to your daft and unfocused demeanor!”

“What the heck! You hateful punk! After everything I’ve said about you today, you turn around and throw me on the ground like I’m dirt when I’m just trying to help! I had no idea you were that kind of
person. Some friend you are,” Paula said as she turned away from Jeff.
“...H-huh? W-wait, Paula, I didn’t mean any of that! I was just-”
“Just what? Just being hateful, that’s what! Don’t talk to me; I don’t
want to hear any more of you for a while,” Paula said as she walked
away from us and sat on a distant bench.

For a moment, I just stood there, attempting to process the event
that had just unfolded before my eyes. The last time I had seen a
verbal scuffle that intense was the time when Tracy wrote on the
Minchs’ mailbox with a permanent marker; and at least that event
was funny, as my Mom looked like she was one second away from
slapping Aloysius Minch right on the cheek. This time however, I was
simply left with a grating feeling of confusion.
“Um, Jeff... Are you ok?” I asked, still shocked from the whole
ordeal.
“...I... I don’t know what happened. I have never felt a feeling so
strong before in my entire existence. It all happened so suddenly; one
moment I was calm and collected, and then I just, snapped! Ness,
chap... Do not think me a horrible person for what I said, just... Erm, I
need a few minutes to myself. I’ll, be over there, if you need me,” Jeff
mumbled as he sluggishly walked over to edge of darkened building.

As I stood and looked at both of my saddened friends, I suddenly
felt a vibration emit from inside my backpack. Wondering what the
source of the trembling was, I took off my pack and rummaged
through it until my hand came into contact with a rattling utensil. I
hastily pulled out the object and realized that it was my Receiver
Phone; the gadget that had been gifted to me by the inventor Apple
Kid several days prior. Curious as to who could be calling me, I
pressed the answer button on the device and put my head up to the
receiver.
“Hello? Who is this?” I asked. A familiar voice quickly rang out from the speaker.

“Hey there Ness! It’s been awhile, so I don’t blame you if can’t recognize my voice. It’s me, Apple Kid, the ambitious and equally poor inventor!” the recognizable voice said.

“Oh, hey Apple Kid. It has been a few days since we last talked. You’ll be happy to know that I definitely got some mileage out of your Pencil Eraser and Receiver Phone. Well, the Receiver Phone is how I am talking to you after all,” I stated obviously.

“Heh heh, excellent! I’m glad you don’t regret our meeting, because that cheeseburger was exceptionally delicious. Anyways, onto why the reason why I rang you up. Uhh, I know this may sound ridiculous, but are you having trouble with any zombies where you are?” Apple Kid said anxiously.

“Um, why as a matter of fact, I am actually having a bit of a zombie problem at the moment,” I answered honestly.

“Oh well that’s... Wait, are you serious? You actually have a zombie problem? .......Umm....... Ok, I’m just gonna come clean here. So, while I was rummaging through the weekly garbage looking for something to eat, I came across some disposed fly paper. Wondering if I could use the paper for something, I mixed together an assortment of fluids and chemicals and slathered the mixture onto the paper. The paper instantly became 1,000,000 times stickier than regular fly paper (that’s a rough estimate). However, the paper was not only sticky, but it also smelled like rotten flesh. Knowing that no one would want my disgusting creation, I wrote up this elaborate script and called you to try and trick you into taking my invention. I made up the zombie thing because the paper smells like a decomposing corpse; although, now that I think about it, you might actually be able to use the paper somehow if you really had a zombie problem.”

“If my calculations are correct, by placing a bunch of the paper on a wide-open surface, you could attract the attention of zombies for miles around, and thanks to the papers’ stickiness, you could also trap those zombies at the same time! By placing some paper in a circus tent, for example, you could basically create a massive zombie trap. Uhh, whether you
actually wanted the paper or not, I already sent my associate on his way to your location, so, enjoy, I guess. You should be able to easily identify him; look for a big red balloon. Also, I suppose I should mention that I went a little overboard with the creation process and accidentally made about 100 sheets of the sticky paper, so consider that a little bonus. Anyhow, I’m sorry for trying to fool you, but I guess I ended up helping you after all. I gotta get going now, the chemical mixture I’m cooking now could potentially set my house on fire, so I should probably attend to that. See you later, camine!"

Soon after the inventor’s voice dissipated, I heard a faint *click* and *beeeep*, indicating that he had hung up. While I tried to piece together what Apple Kid had told me, I spotted a distinct red object floating down from the sky. As the object came closer, I was able to determine that it was a red balloon with something tied to it. The balloon slowly drifted down beside of me, and I saw that the object tied to it was a grey mouse holding a cardboard package; I soon realized that this mouse was actually the one that I had seen living in Apple Kid’s house.

“Squeak squeak! (Greetings, friend of Apple Kid! My master has instructed me to find a boy in a red cap and give him a sample of his latest genius creation!) Squeak, squeak! (Master says that his new invention excels at capturing zombies, and because it also happens to be made out of fly paper, I have nicknamed it Zombie Paper!) Squeakity squeak! (Master made a lot more than one piece of this paper however, so he stuck the entire stack into this box so that I could easily give it to you! Here you are!)” the mouse cheered. Like I mentioned before, my psychic powers allowed me to understand what the mouse was saying. The mouse happily handed me the box, which was much heavier than I expected. “Squeakle squeak! (Sorry if the container is a bit hefty; there’s a good deal of Zombie Paper crammed into that small space!) Squeak! (I must be going now, master gets kind of lonely if I’m not by his side! I hope you get some use out of that
The mouse then began to flap its front arms wildly, causing the balloon to drift off back towards the sky.

After the mouse disappeared from my view, I peered down at the gift it had given me. An idea suddenly formed in my brain, like bubbles rising to the surface of a pot of boiling water.

“Hey Ness,” Paula said as she silently approached me from the side, startling me. “I’m sorry you had to witness that little emotional event earlier. I didn’t know Jeff could be so… vicious.” She took a second to look at the box in my hands. “Say, where did you get that box? What’s in it?” she asked politely.

“Oh, this? This is a box of Zombie Paper, a little something created by a friend of mine. And it’s the key to defeating the zombie menace. I’ll explain later, but for now, follow me. We need to head to the ‘Anti-Zombie HQ’ tent, which is nearby here. Hey Jeff!” I yelled to my sulking companion, causing him to look up from his fixated gaze at the ground. “Come on, we have somewhere to be! Don’t worry, I’ll elaborate in a minute!” I said as I bolted away from the scene, leaving my friends in my dust.

I speedily ran into the entrance of the “Anti-Zombie HQ” tent, nearly crashing into someone walking nearby in the process. The person in question happened to be Mayor Priscilla, whom had previously assigned Paula and I to the task of exterminating the zombie horde.

“Woah there! Who the heck are you, and why are you in such a hurry? Wait a minute, you’re that boy who that came in here yesterday! Where have you been? What did you do about the zombies? And why do you smell so awful?” Mayor Priscilla asked, clearly perplexed by my sudden appearance.

“Errr, I can explain all of that later, but for now, I need really your cooperation. I know how we can clear out the zombies from Threed!” I said, tightly clutching the sticky Zombie Paper. The mayor straightened up and assumed a concentrated demeanor as I spoke.
“Ok, you got my attention. Now, spill the beans! How do you propose we get rid of the zombies, even after everything we’ve tried?” the mayor asked demandingly. At that point, Jeff and Paula came running into tent and skidded to a halt by my side. Paula shot a hostile scowl at Jeff before turning back to me.

“Ness, what’s with the sudden urgency? Care to inform us what you want to do with that box?” Paula asked.

“Oh hey, it’s that abrasive girl from before and a random nerdy kid. Glad you could join the party. In other news, I’m still waiting for you to tell me what your plan is,” the mayor said, staring at me.

“Alright, alright. I know I’ve kept you in suspense enough, so here’s my proposal. What I hold in my hand right now is a container of Zombie Paper, an invention created by my friend Apple Kid. This paper is incredibly sticky, and it smells like rotten flesh. So it’s basically fly paper, but meant to catch zombies instead of flies. My plan involves utilizing this paper on a large scale, and goes as follows: Step 1. Clear out this tent of all its contents. Step 2. Open this package and cover the floor of the tent with pieces of Zombie Paper. And finally, step 3. Wait for the zombies to be attracted to the tent by the scent of the Zombie Paper, and watch as they get trapped by the stickiness of the paper. So, that’s my scheme. What do you think?”

“......Positively absurd. And yet, positively brilliant! Well done Ness, this could be the break we’ve been waiting for!”

“......This is the most ridiculous idea I’ve heard all day, but it’s the one I have the best feeling about! Radical ideas always appeal to me.”

“......That’s a stupid plan... But it’s stupid enough that it could work! All right kid, you’ve got me hooked. Operation Zombie Paper is a go! Everybody, let’s get this tent cleared out! What are you waiting for, move out!” Mayor Priscilla yelled. Paula, Jeff, myself, and the other members of the “Anti-Zombie” squad sprang to life on the mayor’s command and began to move all of the tent’s contents outside. After the tent was completely empty, we began phase 2 of my plan. I sat
the box I had been carrying on the ground and opened it up, revealing a huge stack of slimy yellow paper.

“Alright, on to the next step of my plan! Everybody, grab a piece of Zombie Paper from this box and start covering the tent’s floor with the stuff! Don’t stop until there’s no more paper left! Oh, and keep in mind that the paper is really sticky! Anyways, enough talk. Let’s get this show on the road!” As I finished speaking, everyone in the tent rushed forward and started grabbing Zombie Paper out of the box. We then started to place the paper on the tent’s floor, mindful not to step in it ourselves. We kept doing this until the package of Zombie Paper was completely empty and the tent’s floor was almost entirely yellow from the paper. After we were finished, Mayor Priscilla carefully stepped over to me.

“Okay chief, the entire tent’s covered in your magical paper. What now?” she asked as she wiped her forehead.

“Now, we have to play the patience game. I suspect it will take awhile for the smell of all this paper to reach the zombies, so we might as well wait until morning and then check to see if the trap worked. You guys can go back to your homes; my friends and I will stay at one of the hotels in Threed,” I explained.

“...Sounds good. Alright you guys, that’s a wrap! The kid says that we gotta wait for the zombies to fall for our trap, so for now, go home and get a good night’s rest. We will meet up here at the crack of dawn to see if we were successful. See you!” the mayor said as she exhaustedly clomped out of the tent, followed by the other members of the “Anti-Zombie” squad, and then my associates and I.

After we left the “Anti-Zombie HQ”, we began our search for a place to stay for the night. Paula and I decided to not revisit the hotel that we had previously been to and instead opted to find someplace else. Eventually, while walking down one of Threed’s many dark roads, I spotted a lit building with a sign in front of it that read “Threed Anti-Zombie Hotel; Guaranteed Zombie-Free!” Liking the sound of
what I had read, I alerted my travel companions and asked them if they wanted to bunker down at the nearby inn. After getting an okay from the both of them, I moseyed over to the glowing building and entering it through a fancy revolving door. I then paid for a night’s stay, and lead us down to the room that we had been given. We all agreed that the first thing for us to do would be to take a long shower in order to rid ourselves of the miasma of filth surrounding our bodies. Once we were all squeaky clean, we dressed ourselves in our individual night apparel and settled down in one of each of the room’s three beds. For a good while, we kept to own devices; I laid back and played on my Game Boy, Paula scribbled away in what I assumed to be her diary, and Jeff tinkered with his stun gun. Eventually, I heard a faint *psst* coming from my right, and looked over to see Jeff leaning towards me.

“*psst!* Ness! I, I need to talk to you about something chap! Lean over here, and keep quiet,” Jeff whispered softly. Heeding his request, I leaned over closer to his face.

“What is it Jeff? If it’s about that pizza you ate, I really don’t mind,” I said quietly, slightly annoyed that my gaming session had been interrupted.

“No no, it’s not that. Umm, do you remember that little, err, mishap that occurred between Paula and myself earlier?”

“I don’t think it’s possible to forget that. You were being really... vicious, to her for some reason. Why was that?”

“Although I want to blame exhaustion for my sordid behavior, it is more likely that I was simply being spiteful after all the years of being insulted myself. I feel absolutely dreadful about what I said. Umm, since you are my good friend, Ness, do you mind giving me a hand? How should I go about lifting this veil of unease?” Jeff said, clasping his hands.

“Uhh, well, it seems like you have worked your way into a state of guilt. In my years of experience with this feeling, the best cure has always been to simply say sorry,” I explained.
“Hmmm... Y-you're right Ness. I don't know how I could not have seen this solution earlier. Uhh, err, umm, I guess I shouldn't delay this anymore. I'm going to go apologize to Paula now. Right now. At this very moment. Any second now. Getting ready. Just warming up. I am preparing to go. Any moment. Ahhh, bloody bother. I'm not very good at this apologizing business, am I? Let's just get this over with,” Jeff mumbled as he hopped off his bed and began to slowly approach Paula's bed. After about 2 minutes of Jeff painstakingly inching over to Paula, she finally noticed him and looked up from her notebook.

“Uhh Jeff, what are you doing? You look like you're dying to say something, so whatever it is, go ahead and spit it out,” Paula said in a rude-ish way.

released Jeff's hand and watched him stolidly waddle back to his quarters and plummet face-first into his covers. After witnessing this passionate reunion of teenage friendship, I decided that it was time to hit the hay. I tiredly slid my Game Boy back into my pack, covered myself with my bed's blanket, and gently closed my eyes.