

The Witching Hour

A novel of devils and doom by Nicholas



Chapter 1

The Witching Hour

"Hoot, hoot!" the owls cried into the crisp night air as children trick-or-treated from house to house, collecting a stash of candy meant to last the whole year. As Josh neared his 100th house, he paused to inspect his loot. He had five bags completely filled with sweets!

Wait, no—that wasn't what made him stop in his tracks. He had just stumbled upon his very first haunted house. Ominous mist poured continuously from the decaying roof, curling into the dark sky.

He stepped closer to the vintage, weathered building and noticed a creaky wooden sign swaying in the wind that read: NO ONE HOME, GO AWAY! Suddenly, a freezing mist crept up his shirt. The glowing eyes of perched owls stared down at him, and strange crackling noises echoed from deep inside the house.

"Time to go!" Josh muttered to himself, taking a cautious step back.

He sprinted all the way to the local train station, but when he arrived, the platform was entirely deserted. It was the final train of the evening. As he stepped aboard and the metal doors slid shut, Josh realized he was about to be late for much more than just a train ride.

Chapter 2

The Strange Passengers

As the train picked up speed and approached a dark, hideous-looking tunnel, Josh noticed something unusual. Everyone in the carriage acted like old friends, whispering in quiet huddles and leaning into deep conversations.

Have I accidentally stepped into the middle of a gang? Josh wondered, his heart beating faster.

The icy chill from the fog crept up his skin again, making the hairs on his arms stand on end. He felt like he had walked straight onto the set of a horror movie. Wandering down the aisle, he observed the other passengers. Nobody was adjusting their uncomfortable costumes or shifting in their seats. It looked as if they wore these bizarre outfits every single day.

Or do they actually? Josh thought.

The shocking truth revealed itself when two angry passengers drew glowing wooden wands and began dueling with actual, flashing magic! Josh immediately dove behind a seat for cover. Yet for everyone else on board, the magical duel was as ordinary as watching someone drink a glass of water.

Suddenly, a strange man slid into the seat right next to Josh. "You must be new here," he rasped in a low, gravelly voice. "Those two duel every single day. It's just their thing."

"Yeah... sure," Josh replied, his eyes wide with disbelief.

Right then, the train came to a sudden, screeching halt.

"How about you come to my place for a bit, since you're just a kid?" offered the man. Josh shrugged, unsure of what else to do. "I'll take that as a yes," the man smiled, leading the way.

As they stepped off the carriage and walked up a winding path, an awkward silence grew between them. At first, the surrounding landscape looked beautiful: the trees seemed to sing in the breeze, and the afternoon sun beamed bright rays of light. But as they drew

closer, the illusion shattered. The grand house was decayed and abandoned, its windows completely smashed.

The man turned to him casually. "Oh, and by the way—I'm a vampire. You should probably run."

Chapter 3

An Unexpected Alliance

As Josh turned and sprinted for his life, his heart pounding against his ribs, the vampire burst into loud laughter.

"It's hilarious how you humans are terrified of everything!" the vampire called out. "We vampires don't even drink blood!"

"Wait, what?" Josh asked, skidding to a halt and turning around in utter confusion.

As it turned out, in this strange realm Josh had stumbled into, the creatures were actually quite peaceful.

"There's only one thing you really need to watch out for," whispered the vampire, leaning in close. "I know you want to go back to your world, and the main magical gateway only opens on Halloween night. I can help you return much sooner, but there's a catch... I turn completely rabid during a full moon after midnight."

Josh weighed his options carefully. Should he trust a dangerous creature as an ally, or remain stranded in this bizarre world for a whole year?

Before he could decide, a low, menacing grumble vibrated deep underground. A violent earthquake shook the canyon, cracking the earth open and sending them both tumbling into a deep ravine!

"Run! The Frost Queen is coming!" shrieking the vampire as they landed.

The vampire scrambled up and guided Josh into a small cave hidden behind a thick, mossy boulder.

"Who is the—" Josh started to ask, but the terrifying answer appeared above them.

A massive dragon bristling with jagged ice spikes along her back hovered directly over the canyon. As she flew past, a wave of bitter frost froze the air instantly, making the chilling atmosphere of the haunted house feel like a warm breeze by comparison.

"Well, now that we're at the bottom of the ravine, we can start my plan," said the vampire, brushing snow off his cloak.

"Which is what, exactly?" asked Josh.

"We take the hidden portal through the Underworld."

Chapter 4

The Ravine Puzzle

Standing in the depths of the ravine, their primary goal was to locate the hidden portal. To reach it, they needed to navigate a winding underground maze.

"We need to reach the deepest part of the cavern," the vampire declared, unrolling a yellowed piece of parchment. "At least, according to my scroll."

"Where did you get a scroll?" asked Josh, looking over his shoulder.

"My grandfather left it to me when he passed away," mumbled the vampire bitterly. "It was the only thing I inherited. My brothers—the two you saw dueling on the train—got thirty kilograms of gold each and a legendary wizard staff."

"Oh," Josh said sympathetically.

"Luckily for us, I know where this path leads. Follow me to the Great Hall!"

They hurried down the pitch-black tunnels, their footsteps echoing off the damp rock, until they emerged into a vast, empty stone chamber. But there was no portal to be seen.

Josh tapped his chin, thinking out loud. "Wait... the portal leads to the Underworld, right? And the Underworld is below us. So the entrance to the lowest point would technically be at the highest part of this canyon!"

The vampire's eyes lit up. "You're right! But where is the top entrance?"

"Probably back up where we fell from."

Climbing back up the rocky ledge, they searched the upper wall—and there it was: the stone archway leading into the maze. But before they could step inside, two shadowy figures blocked their path. It was the wizard brothers from the train! With cruel laughs, they lunged forward and shoved both Josh and the vampire straight down into the dark abyss of the maze!

Chapter 5

The Invisible Maze

As they plummeted down the drop, the brothers' voices echoed from above: "Gramps never liked you anyway! You were always in the way of our power!"

Josh and the vampire slammed onto the dirt floor below with a heavy, breathless thud.

"Well, we made it into the maze," muttered the vampire, dusting off his knees.

Josh looked around, thoroughly confused. "How is this a maze? The exit door is literally fifty meters right in front of us!"

"Because this maze is completely invisible," the vampire explained grimly. "Everything in here is hidden—the walls, the traps, the dangers... and us."

Before Josh could ask what he meant, he looked down. His hands were completely gone! The moment they crossed the threshold, they had become invisible to each other. The unseen labyrinth around them was packed with lethal hazards, from pit traps filled with life-draining leeches to high ceilings roosting with soul-sucking bats. Traversing it would take sharp wits and absolute focus.

"Okay, we need a secret code," Josh called out to the empty space where the vampire had been standing. "Like, one tap means step left, two taps means step right, and we count our paces forward."

"It won't work," the vampire's muffled voice called back from somewhere to his left. "Once we move from this spot, the magic of the maze completely blocks our voices."

"You mean... we're on our own?" Josh asked, a heavy knot forming in his stomach.

"I'm afraid so," the vampire replied softly. Then, absolute silence fell.

Chapter 6

Traps in the Dark

Stepping forward inch by inch, Josh felt along the unseen boundaries. Suddenly, his foot pressed against a loose floor tile. Unable to warn anyone, he shifted his weight—and the tile gave way! Beneath it yawned a deep pit filled with roaring flames. Luckily, Josh was gripping an invisible wall for balance and managed to pull himself back just in time.

Suddenly, a terrifying creature emerged from the corner of the labyrinth—a blind, monstrous horse-woman wielding a jagged blade. Lacking eyes, the beast sniffed the air, tracking movement by scent. Josh held his breath, crouching low as the monster crept past him.

Navigating around the creature, Josh felt as though the exit door was within reach—until he slammed into a dead end. He turned, only to hit another wall, and another. He realized that every loose tile marked a hidden trap. Using this knowledge, he carefully navigated through the invisible corridors.

Finally, he stood just one meter away from victory, but another invisible barrier blocked his path. Desperate, Josh remembered his Halloween costume. He was dressed as Thor, and he had a heavy toy hammer strapped to his belt! Swinging the hammer with all his might, he smashed a gap right through the magical barrier.

He scrambled through the opening and reached the exit door at last. But looking around the empty space, he realized: *Where was the vampire?*

Chapter 7

The Midnight Beast

The ground vibrated violently, and the vampire suddenly materialized out of thin air! Josh's hands trembled and sweat beaded on his forehead as the vampire charged toward him. Midnight had passed, and the full moon had taken effect!

The vampire's eyes glowed a furious red, and his fingers had transformed into razor-sharp claws capable of slicing through stone.

As the beast closed in, Josh grabbed his hammer and swung with all his strength, knocking the creature back! But the vampire quickly recovered. Pulling one of his own razor-sharp, bloodstained fangs from his mouth, he brandished it like a dagger and pounced with terrifying speed!

Josh dove to the side just in time, the monster's piercing glare tracking his every move. Behind them, the Underworld portal rumbled loudly, its purple energy pulsing wildly as if fueled by the battle.

Desperate, Josh rummaged through his heavy trick-or-treat bag and pulled out a garlic-flavored lollipop—a novelty candy so pungent it could make a rat gag. He hurled it straight at the beast's face. The vampire shrieked in agony as the garlic scorched his senses, but the pain only made him wildly aggressive!

Roaring with fury, the vampire transformed into a monstrous, werewolf-like beast. Dropping onto all fours, he lunged straight for Josh's throat. Josh raised his hammer once more and swung with everything he had...

Chapter 8

The Portal

CLANG! The hammer collided with the vampire's sharp fang, sending a shockwave vibrating through Josh's arms.

Suddenly, the portal emitted a deafening screech, freezing the beast in his tracks. The monster staggered backward step by step until he collapsed onto the stone floor like a crumpled piece of paper.

As the dark magic dissipated, the creature shrank back into his normal vampire form. Weak and exhausted, he rolled over and croaked, "I'm... sorry..."

Before Josh could reply, the blind horse-monster burst into the chamber from the maze behind them! Pulling together the last of his strength, the vampire scrambled to his feet and blocked the monster's swinging blade with his bare hands.

"Go through the portal!" the vampire yelled, struggling to hold off the beast. "Now!"

"Thank you!" Josh called out. Holding his breath, he leaped straight into the swirling purple vortex.

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Majestic beasts and horrible monsters
are alive!

When Josh goes trick or treating, he finds himself on the wrong train on the way back home! It brings him to a new mysterious world with wizards and life-eating bats. Can he make his way home with only a few bags of candy and the assist of a vampire who has a slight twist? Or will he get stuck in a land full of devils hiding in the shadows?



About the Author:

Eleven-year-old Nicholas Ma likes to read four fantasy and sci-fi books, playing with his dog, playing guitar, and gaming.

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