

Loopy Teller Studio

THE DAY OF THE LIVING INFLUENCERS 2

Virtual Chaos



bromera

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THE NIGHTMARE REPEATS ITSELF?

The desolate wasteland you see before you is our town. The streets are empty; the roads, full of abandoned cars; in the parks, the children are missing and on the football pitches there's not a ball to be seen. Chaos has invaded the city and everything is all messed up.

Yes, that's it, a big mess. In fact, I bet our Zwitch and all the games my brother and I have that you won't be able to see anyone going for a walk or simply enjoying doing nothing while sunbathing.

You can't can, you?

I thought not. But I suggest you look closely. Look inside the shops, the cafes, the cars parked in the street... can you see it now?

Can you see all those people glued to their tablets, drooling like cats over their morning jelly? I think that's a pretty accurate comparison, or at least they remind me of my Aunt Josefa's cat every time she filled its bowl with that viscous mass masquerading as tuna (yuck!). Maybe all those people don't smell as strong as that tin (although some are

close enough), but they are certainly just as stupefied and they salivate just like the kitty before its gourmet meal.

I suppose you're getting the idea of that's going on, aren't you?

Basically:

THE WHOLE TOWN HAVE BECOME LIVING INFLUENCERS.

'But how?' you will be wondering.

And if you're not wondering...it doesn't matter, I'll get you up to speed:

My name is Nazaret, I'm 12 years old and I go to Romero de los Desamparados High School, and a few months ago, it all kicked off at our school when they installed Wifi and a mysterious app appeared on our phones: Inflogram.



I'm not going to get into it, because I'm sure you remember it perfectly. How could you forget? My twin brother, Kike, and I are still traumatised by that Gen Z zombie apocalypse at school....and the final exams they gave us afterwards. Not even us transforming into

monsters hungry for selfies and lame challenges stopped *Machine Gun* and *Rrrings* evilly preparing their final exams, the shortest one being nine pages long.

And if, along with all those traumas, we throw in a bruise or two which still hurt and the little scar on the big toe of my left foot, we are left with the unforgettable memory of what we called **the day of the living influencers**.

‘You’re rambling on more than a hillwalker, Naz,’ jibes Kike, who is sitting next to me while I give you this super awesome introduction.

‘You know I love telling stories, let me carry on!’ I protest. ‘I have to get all these people up to speed.’

Ahem! Carrying on: we thought that after destroying the antenna and deleting the app, it would all be over...

But nothing could be further from the truth...

Here we are again, with the town completely infested with living *dummies*, as my friend Jaime likes to call them.

And, to understand how we got to this point, with the town full of living influencers,

we have to go back to yesterday afternoon, when we had the brilliant idea of going with our parents (who have also become zombies, woohoo!) to what promised to be the best videogame event in history: the VideoGame Party...



FRIDAY, 5pm

The whole gang (Kike, Jaime, Úrsula, Lucas, Gema and I) are on our way home from school after a detention, and I get a chill when I imagine mum waiting for us in the doorway, slipper in hand, wanting to *talk* – yikes!



But move over bad vibes; there's nothing better for the mood than a good weekend. Two whole days to lounge about in pyjamas, chill out, play a few games of FolGuys, where Kike always falls, or...

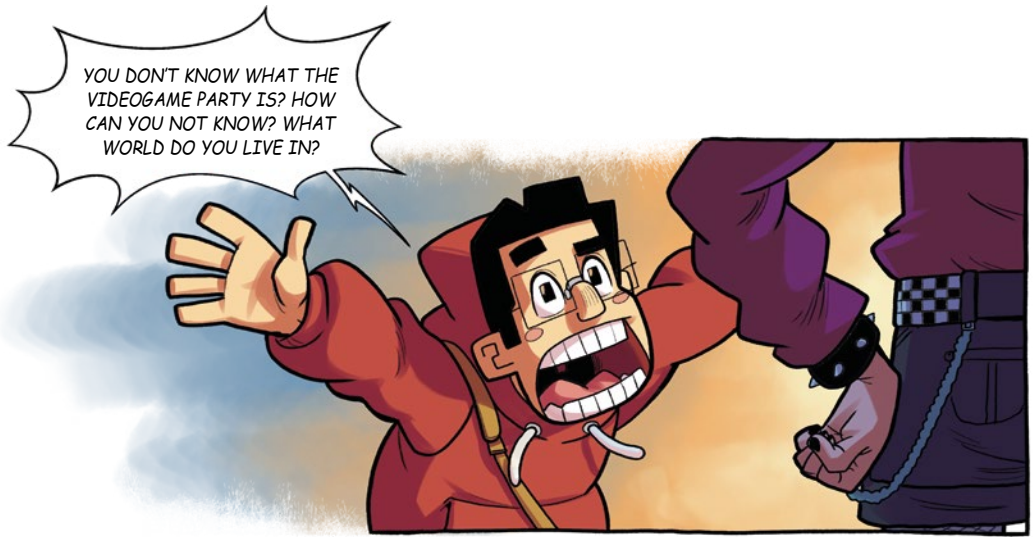
'Hey! It's the VideoGame Party this weekend!' Jaime's enthusiasm shakes me out of my daydream. 'We'll go tomorrow, won't we?'

...or attend the event which will condemn the entire town to extinction. And, what's worse, that means the extinction of our parents as well (although if it means we avoid punishment, maybe...no, Naz, you can't think that!)

'What's that?' asks Úrsula with an intrigued expression.

He pauses a moment to draw air, then:

'The VideoGame Party is an annual event which showcases the latest videogames and accessories on the market! Where famous streamers do live shows! Where there are tournaments of the most popular current games, like FiveNite, RuneCraft and FolGuys. For this edition, they've got Dubai Planos and Auronstop streaming live!'



‘Woah, Jaime, you sound like a MyTube advert. I wish I could Adblock you live and in real time...’ complains Gema as she takes some rabbit-shaped EarPods out her bag so she doesn’t hear him anymore.

‘Well this is IRL, deal with it,’ mocks Jaime, turning back to Úrsula. ‘But how can you have never heard of this amazing event? It’s unreal, bro.’

‘I like videogames, but I’m not like obsessed,’ Úrsula justifies herself, shrugging her shoulders.

‘Maybe because she has a life, Jaime,’ snaps Gema, defending Úrsula.

How our Gema has changed! She then presses play on her iWatch and becomes an NPC, which is to say: she’s walking alongside the rest of the gang, but she’s in her own world with her music.

‘Unlike some people...’ adds Jaime maliciously, but Gema is already completely ignoring him.

‘I’M IN! Naz, we have to convince mum and dad. Do you think...?’ exclaims Kike.

‘Yes, always,ahaha! The plan is simple: if we go and come back in time for dad to sit down and watch the Turkish soap opera he’s hooked on, we’re all good.’ Not gonna lie, I’m also kind of interested to find out if Emir survived the forklift accident in the end and if he’ll win Aynur back.’

‘We’ll go with our parents and yours, won’t we, J?’ asks Kike.

‘Si! When we get there, we can leave them at a food truck and make our own way around. Anyone else in?’

‘Ugh, I can’t see it, bro. My parents are away this weekend and I have to look after my kid brother. I’ll just lay down and play on the console,’ moans Lucas while miming using the controller with his hands.

‘Bring him to the Party. You might discover he has a gift for videogames and can even take on the mighty Luka-Games, hehehe,’ jokes Kike, punching the air.

‘Chill, bro. You only beat me by one point and with a buzzer beater. I’m sure it was because I had some lag,’ Lucas fires back, annoyed. ‘Are you keeping track of our wins and losses? What is it, 167 to 1?’

‘But that one counts, doesn’t it? Let me flex a bit,’ says Kike.



We reach the zebra crossing where our paths diverge, in theory, until Monday.

‘So, Úrsula, you like the plan? You in?’ Jaime insists, trying to get as many people as possible to come.

‘It doesn’t look bad, but I’ve got no money and I feel bad asking my grandparents for more,’ says Úrsula.

‘Aw! Our parents cut our pocket money after we failed that last maths test,’ adds Kike, in annoyance. ‘You trust your sister is going to revise and give you the answers and then she goes and gets a whopping 49%. We’re identical alright.’

‘Hey, it’s Machine Gun’s fault, he’s got it in for us! He thinks our heroic endeavours to save the school were actually a scheme to avoid doing his homework,’ I reply to my brother, who always tries to pin the blame on me.

‘That’s a shame. If I had money, I’d pay for you.’ Good naturedly, Jaime, visibly blushing, searches his pockets for a spare coin or two, but all he finds are old bits of fluff and blackcurrant chewing gum wrappers.

‘I mean, obviously you’ve got nothing left if you spend all your pocket money on sweets, silly.’ Gema rejoins the conversation, having taken off her headphones to say goodbye to the gang.

‘You’re not coming, are you? I suppose you’ve got some new tutorial to upload to your TokTok! What is it this week: a tour of your dressing table? Your must-haves of the weekend? A new haul from Shine?’ replies Jaime mockingly while imitating Gema’s gestures from her videos.

‘You seem very up to date for someone not interested in my content, Jaime. Thanks for subscribing!’ Gema hits back and blows him a kiss while winking. Jaime goes so red he looks like he’s going to explode.

Gema heads off down the path to the left, but has one more dig before she goes.

‘Oh, and no, by the way, I’ll pass on going to that weirdo fest. I have a reputation to maintain. I mean, can you imagine the great Gemixii07 among the LED lights, Monstarrs, sweat, raised voices and eye drops for strained retinas? No chance!’ A shudder runs all the way up Gema’s spine.

‘You claim you’re a fashionista, but you’ll miss out on trying the latest VR glasses they’re bringing to the event!’ replies Jaime, now regaining his usual paleness, pride slightly wounded.

‘Try on someone else’s sweaty glasses? Yuck! Disgusting!’ she says in a singsong voice. ‘I’d rather delete my TokTok and MyTube accounts than put that on my face. I’d probably get a rash or something.’ Gema pinches her nose while giving poor Jaime the most disdainful look we’ve ever seen from her. ‘Well, I’m off. Have a good weekend, nerds!’

‘This is me, too, guys. I think I’ll use the weekend to catch up with the *Raruto* anime or get stuck into *First of Us III*,

WHAT A DISGUSTING THING TO IMAGINE!



which I've put to one side a bit,' says Úrsula as she takes another path.

'But you'll miss the cosplay competition!'

'It is what it is, you know. My family's not loaded and I spent this month's pocket money on mangas (and some Funko stuff),' says Úrsula quietly. 'On Monday you can tell me all about it and let me know if Jaime is the new king of videogames, okay?'

'Okay!' Jaime, my brother and I reply in unison.

As we say bye to Gema and Úrusla, we see *Pedro Brush* drive by with *the Torturer* in the passenger seat. The janitor acts as her chauffeur every day (her mind tricks work on anyone!) because the Torturer at the wheel of a lethal machine in a place packed with kids... would be too tempting.

Can you imagine? Nah, I'm joking. To be honest, I reckon she's never had a car or a driving license; she longs for the days when you went everywhere on a donkey, I reckon.

Or in a zeppelin.

'To the newlyweds!' jokes Lucas, laughing. Obviously they're not a couple, although I wouldn't bet on it. Might the Torturer have feelings? Might pigs fly one day? The answer to both questions is the same.



‘Anyway...what are those glasses, Jaime?’ Lucas circles back, rather interested.

‘The new Oculus MaxDestroyRetins. Virtual Reality glasses! They say it’s like being inside the game. Can you imagine? Not much is known about them yet, but it’ll be proper sick to try them.



I MEAN, COME ON! WHAT'S THIS 543 SPEND ON SLEEPING BAGS? DO I LOOK LIKE DORA THE EXPLORER?

I KNOW, I KNOW YOU CAN'T SEE ME, BUT I'VE NOT BOUGHT ANYTHING, IT MUST BE A MISTAKE.

AND HOW AM I MEANT TO KNOW THAT? WHAT COOKIES? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? ARE THE COOKIES SOME KIND OF BAND OR WHAT?

'Ah, they sound sweet! Can't wait to hear about it. I'm off. Have a good weekend!' says Lucas with a wave as he walks away.

Lucas heads towards his house and now it's just Kike, Jaime and I sorting out the details for what will be a crazy weekend, in every way.

'Tomorrow morning at ten? The first to arrive get a Monstarr that's about to be released and a cap,' says Jaime enthusiastically.

'You're going to make us get up early for a Monstarr and a hat?' we ask, rolling our eyes. We are 0.0% up for an early start, even if it is to play videogames.

‘Obviously,’ replies Jaime, making puppy eyes.

‘Ach, go on then, fine! Initialising Operation Triple P,’
I say, decisively, turning to my brother, who understands
my look perfectly.

‘Operation Triple P? I’m p...p...puzzled...’ says Jaime.