

Prompt: Dare You Go Out? (2023)

Characters: Zii (CITIZEN-00185) & Ogro Poga (NPC-00312)

Location: Voltlund Coast

WC: 1852 (Not counting header + title + footnote)

Tidal Terrors HAPPY HALLOWEEN!!!!

Zii had recently returned to Voltlund Coast to pass through. The daring adventurer had little reason to return to their homeland, for they believed they had seen everything there was to see. This assumption, however, was incorrect; they learned this during their stay at an explorer's campground out in the dunes of Voltlund's beachfront. Sitting around the fire with their fellow adventurers, young and old, Zii learned about a few haunting urban legends- one such legend detailed the mysterious Ogro Poga, a violent spirit that protected an ancient treasure: an ancient treasure that lay in this very place.

So, here they were. The sun was setting over the ocean's roaring waters, painting the skies all sorts of oranges, reds, and purples. The moon was visible in the sky above, and the brightest stars twinkled in the twilight. The waves were far from calm, and the waters were biting; this time of the year, night swimming could quickly become a dangerous activity. Waves roared louder than any cry, and crashed with enough force to pull anyone unwary into the riptide. Few creatures had eyes sensitive enough to break through the darkness of the sea, especially without the sun. Though Zii was a freshwater popokee that had grown up in streams, they retained the sharp night vision of their ancestors. Though their color vision was limited in the dark, they were ready to take on its challenge. Zii had been warned that Ogro Poga attacked boats, so their plan was simple: swim.

Zii stood on the beach as the sun disappeared, their hooves digging into the sand. Finally, they overcame their nerves and trotted into the water, seafoam surrounding them as the waves crashed down. Zii kicked off the ground and propelled themselves into the brine, their powerful tail doing the brunt of the

work. Zii was slim, similar to the otters their head resembled. This meant they could speed through the water like a rocket, and only needed to breathe every few minutes. Their small ears squeezed shut to keep the water out, and their sensitive whiskers picked up the vibrations of anything swimming nearby.

Zii remained near the surface as much as possible. They stayed below the waves, but within a comfortable distance between them and life-giving air. They swam for what seemed like years without anything eventful occurring; they occasionally sensed small pools of fish, or accidentally swam into patches of algae, but the infamous Ogro Poga was nowhere to be found. Zii began to doubt the stories of the explorers- was it all just a tall tale to scare young adventurers during the time of The Fear? Zii hoped not. They would have come all this way, and for what? Even with their thick fur, the sea's chill was biting, and they were beginning to tire.

Just as Zii contemplated turning around, they noticed something in the distance as they surfaced. There was a faint shape in the horizon, almost like a mound- an island?! So it was real! In their burst of glee, Zii nearly missed a looming shape in the corner of their eye- just as they caught notice of it, it was gone. By this time, the sun had long set; the only source of light was the moon and stars above, which offered limited vision. Zii shrugged it off as a wave, took a deep breath, and dove back into the sea. They continued onwards with newfound fervor until they neared the shelf of the island, where they suddenly faltered.

For most of their journey, Zii had not seen the seafloor; even though they were not too far from the continent's shore, the ocean off Voltlund Coast had a steep drop. Therefore, it was quite a dive to the bottom, one that only the seafaring popokee braved. Around islands such as this, the shelf reappeared; this one, however, was unlike the typical shelf. Rather than sand, shells, corals, anemones, or other signs of life, it was decidedly a graveyard. Old scraps of fragmented wood dotted the seascape, and the shattered hulls of lost ships dug into the sand. Barnacles were aplenty and seaweed covered the ground, but other than the

occasional crab there was no other life. For a moment, Zii swore they saw a bone- but their shock was interrupted by vibrations picked up with their whiskers.

They had heard something, too; the vibrations were caused by sound, a *roar*. Something was moving *below* them, something *big*, and it was approaching *fast*. Zii suddenly remembered that a big part of this ghost story was the fact that *no one had reached the island before*, and the weight of this hit them like a cart. If the *island* was real, the *Ogro Poga* was real, and if the *Ogro Poga* was real, *it probably ate people*. Panicked, Zii beelined for the surface. They felt something shift the water below them as they surfaced, and moments later something erupted out of the water right next to Zii. It was a towering monster, the front half of one- massive finned arms that ended with hooves crashed into the waves, connected to powerful shoulders. The neck of the monster was incredibly long and adorned with fins, ending with a short-snouted face. The beast's neck had a strange, translucent effect to it like a ghost, and for a brief moment Zii could see part of their spine. It had bright neon markings alarmingly similar to Zii's own, and a gaping mouth filled with bone-crushing teeth.

Its small eyes locked on to Zii and it let out a terrible roar. Zii took a quick breath and dove into the water, attempting to swim past the beast. They felt something crash into the water after them, causing a wave that propelled them forwards. They felt the monster right behind them, surging forwards with powerful fins, but they didn't dare look back. Zii put all of their energy into swimming as fast as possible, and soon enough they made it to the island. They staggered ashore, panting from fatigue but not yet able to rest. They ran at full speed, hooves digging holes into the sand. They heard the monster behind them even still, roaring again as its own hooves thundered after Zii.

The island was very small, and as a result there were not many places to hide. It had a sandy beach on all sides, while the center of the island had thin grass and the occasional palm tree. There were sandy patches dotted about- potential treasure locations- but Zii was not concerned with the location of the treasure. Actually, they had not really come for the treasure, anyway; if anything, they just

wanted to be able to say they'd *tried* to find it, or seen the island, or seen the Ogro Poga. Zii could easily say they'd done all three of those things, but unfortunately they were not sure if they would live to tell the tale. The Ogro Poga was still hot on their tail, and after a long swim Zii was not sure how much longer they could run.

The answer was not very far, because they were forced to skid to a stop when the waves of the ocean became visible again. It turned out that one could only run in a straight line on a small island for so long; Zii's sudden stop dug deep trenches into the sand which were kicked up as Zii spun around to meet their doom. The Ogro Poga skidded to a stop as well, towering tall over Zii- they were monstrously sized, and Zii now saw their back half, too. All four of their legs had massive fins and hooves, and their tail had flukes like a dolphin, and... leaves... like a... popokee? Zii's train of thought was stalled by the Ogro Poga slamming one of its massive hooves into Zii, throwing them aside as if they were nothing more than a wooden doll. Zii slid as they fell, sand sticking to their damp mane. They struggled to lift themselves back to their feet at first, but managed to leap out of the way as the Ogro Poga slammed down on the ground.

Zii looked around wildly, for any options: unfortunately, it seemed there was nothing of use on the island. No hiding spots, weapons, anything- they just had to *keep running*. Maybe if they left the island, the Ogro Poga would stop chasing them? They were the guardian, after all! Zii broke into a run again, stumbling at first but picking themselves back up. The Ogro Poga roared as Zii fled yet again, and quickly followed in pursuit. Zii glanced back, and their eyes widened in terror as they saw the hulking beast stampeding after them. Zii regretted looking back immensely, and kept their eyes directly in front of them from there on out. When they reached the water they dove in without pause, swishing their tired tail as fast as it could go. They didn't hear the Ogro Poga dive in after them, but it was difficult to hear *anything* with the waves crashing. Zii just kept swimming, and swimming, and swimming...

Eventually, Zii slowed down. When they glanced behind them, the Ogro Poga was nowhere to be seen, and they didn't feel anything swimming behind them. Zii rolled over on to their back, allowing themselves to float on the surface. The waves were still rough, but they needed to rest, even if only for a few minutes. The salinity was *terrible* for their tree, but so was fainting from exhaustion in the middle of the ocean. Zii looked up at the stars as they rested, the lights of the night twinkling softly. The moon was high above, glowing as brightly as the stars; it was a perfect circle, a full moon. Huh... maybe that's why the ghost story came true?

Eventually, Zii continued their long journey to the mainland and finally made it to shore. They clambered onto dry land, dragging their hooves as if they weighed a hundred pounds¹. Every part of their body ached, their tree's leaves drooped, and the shoulder that had been struck by the Ogro Poga formed a bruise. Zii was thankful they came out of the ordeal mostly unharmed, but the fatigue of swimming to an island, running across it twice, and then swimming all the way back all in one go was hitting them harder by the second. Zii stumbled and fell, crashing into the sandy dunes of the coast, and closed their eyes. They were so tired, and past the high tide line... they could use the rest.

When Zii returned to the camp the next morning, the few explorers still present welcomed them with open (and worried) arms. They told their story as they remembered it, recounting the terrifying Ogro Poga, its size, the shipwrecks and bones- some explorers noted their doubts, while others believed Zii wholeheartedly and reminded them of how lucky they were. Regardless, they were offered a blanket, some soup, and a tent to rest in; overall, the experience was worth it in the end.

¹I'm not European