

Roomies: HARROW



At **One More Multiverse**, I doubled as a writer for multiple character storylines and as the lead editor for my teammates' work. Our cast of characters existed in the same universe, yet each appealed to different genre tropes. For Harrow, our aim was a slightly morbid paranormal romance with a sullen, dry, slightly scary love interest. The goal was to add just enough levity and dark humor that it would still be a light read, while still touching on heavy subject matter and developing a genuinely engaging lore. The first chapter was delivered to me pre-written, and I was asked to continue the story and refine the plot from there. In total, Harrow's story spans 15 chapters and completes a full narrative arc, from meeting him, to falling in love, to resolving the plot surrounding his mission on Earth.

This branching narrative format was limited to 90 characters per line. Included here are samples of Chapters 2-4.

HARROW, CHAPTER 2:

You study a familiar skull-shaped mask on the wall of the history museum.

The wearer is sweeping through a battlefield in an ancient Roman tableau.

The scene is bloody and grim, full of agony and despair.

But the last time you saw it, someone in that mask saved your life after a lightning strike.

And that someone didn't seem human at all.

-> Check the plaque for more info.

You: Thanatos claiming lives in battle, 1320, artist unknown.

You: Thanatos... I know that name...

Child: Scuse me. I wanna look at that next, please.

You're the one who's supposed to be guiding this museum tour—

But you can't bring yourself to focus on anything but the masked man.

You: No problem. I'll step over here. Ask me if you have any questions, okay?

You pull out your phone and do a quick search on "Thanatos."

The results hit you like a gut punch.

You: Thanatos is the Greek God of Death! The actual Grim Reaper!

You: Did I..? Was I about to...?

-> Call your boss over to ask further questions.

You catch Professor Barnes as he moves through the halls swiftly.

He's giving lectures on each exhibit to groups of schoolkids.

You: Hey Prof, know anything about this mask?

Professor Barnes: Ah, yes. Thanatos, the Greek God of Death. A dark specter indeed.

Professor Barnes: It's only natural you'd find the Grim Reaper in a war scene, though.

Your jaw drops. Your blood turns to ice-water.

You: The— what?

Alarms blare! Everyone looks around, startled.

You make eye contact with your boss across the room—

The museum is being robbed!

You should run, but the museum is full of children on their school field trip.

Your body acts before your mind can consider the danger.

You shield each student until they're all safely through the fire exits.

You: There. Last one.

You turn to check for danger, but it's already found you.

A shadowy figure, wrapped in black, points a gun directly at your head.

-> Duck!

You dip low and cover your head just as the gun cocks.

-> Plead with him.

You: Please, you can take whatever you want from here.

You: A theft charge is way less than murder, and I'm just an intern.

-> Tell him to stand down for his own sake.

You: Look, everyone who's messed with me lately has dropped dead.

You: So I wouldn't point that at me if I was you.

The gun cocks and your whole body goes cold.

Just then, the lights start to flicker. In the dark, your assailant screams.

In the next flash of light, he's gone altogether.

One by one, each of the robbers is struck down by a force moving as fast as light itself.

-> Squint to see more clearly.

The intruders' bodies are warped and long. There's no way they were human.

With their true forms revealed in death, you see what they really are.

-> Take cover!

You slide behind the nearest exhibit, laying low along the wooden base.

As the next body hits the floor, it seems to shudder.

It reforms itself from the shape of a man to something... monstrous.

You: We're being robbed by giant snakes pretending to be human. Am I losing my mind?

When the lights stabilize, there's a familiar figure standing tall in the center of the massacre.

Harrow: So, I notice you're trying to die again, \$playerName.

Harrow: Could you consider doing anything else with your time?

Harrow: Knitting? Pottery, maybe?

-> Are you Thanatos?

Harrow: Are you really picking now to interrogate me? You are a strange one.

-> Who are you, exactly?

Harrow: I'm the one who keeps you safe. Not that you make it easy.

-> Why are you protecting me?

Harrow: Someone has to.

Harrow: Though you're the first human to survive a near-miss from one of Jupiter's Lightning Bolts.

Harrow: That has to count for something.

Before you can ask more, a blindfolded, snake-haired being emerges from the shadows.

Medusa: Stay out of this, Reaper! I'm to kill that human you're guarding.

Harrow: You're not in much of a position to make demands, Medusa.

Harrow: Not when I've just slaughtered your whole entourage.

Harrow: In fact, let me just...

The masked man gestures to the pile of fallen minions. His gloved hand twists upward.

Glowing spectral orbs rise up from the bodies and then zoom off through the walls.

-> What are those?

Harrow: The snakes are Medusa's servants. The orbs are their souls.

Harrow: I've just scattered them off to the Underworld.

-> What did you do to them?

Harrow: Reaped their souls. As one does in my line of work.

Medusa screeches. Each snake in her hair hisses in sync.

Medusa: The deal was simple. I kill the human \$playerName, I get my art collection back.

You: Her art collection? What?

The masked man scours the room, then seems to understand.

Harrow: Ah, your statues. The museum credits those to human artists.

Medusa: The fools! I made my art eons ago, out of all the men who dared seek to slay me.

-> I can't give you those. I'll lose my job!

You look to your defender for guidance. He only shrugs.

Medusa: Then I'll add your statue to my collection! Look upon me, child!

-> Take them! Just let me go.

Medusa: And return to my benefactor empty-handed? Never!

Medusa: A deal is a deal, as you well know, Reaper.

Medusa's sharp-clawed hand moves to her blindfold, ready to tear it loose!

You know from your studies what will happen— you'll turn to stone instantly!

You: No! Wait!

Suddenly, a glowing Roman sword— a gladius— appears in the masked man's hands.

Harrow: Seems negotiations have fallen through. Too bad for you, Medusa.

He slashes through her in an instant, both halves of her grotesque body falling on either side of him.

Medusa's glowing soul orb hovers in the air between you.

-> What will you do with that soul?

Harrow: Send it back to the Underworld where it belongs.

-> Where do the souls go when you reap them?

Harrow: To the Underworld, naturally. Where else?

-> Why did she come after me?

Harrow: Like she said— someone told her to. Someone powerful.

You step closer to the masked man. His sword is still clenched in his fist.

He taps it to the soul orb and the orb whooshes through the floor, gone forever.

-> Are you here for my soul?

-> Does the mask come off?

Harrow: Not today.

He looks at you curiously. At least, as much as empty eye sockets can portray.

You: So I was right. You're Thanatos, the Greek God of Death.

There's a low sound from behind the mask. A laugh?

Harrow: No. My name is Harrow.

Harrow: Thanatos was one of a kind. I'm one of many.

Harrow: After the Roman rebranding, my kind were forged— Reapers.

Harrow: 99 soldiers filling the large shoes Thanatos left behind.

Harrow: Not gods, but warriors in the service of the Underworld.

Harrow: And soul-collectors, as you've seen.

-> You work for Hades? Or the Roman version, Pluto?

Harrow: Pluto, yes. I serve the God of the Underworld.

Harrow: But right now, you can consider me at *your* service instead.

-> Why have you been killing everyone who threatens me?

Harrow: That's an interesting way to say "thank you."

Harrow: Call it a gift. From someone invested in your welfare.

His low voice sounds straight from the grave. And yet, it's kind of hot.

You: So... what happens next?

Harrow: You've seen me. I don't have to hide in your shadow any longer.

Harrow: Until the gods stop trying to kill you, it's my job to keep you safe.

Harrow: So whether or not you're happy with this arrangement...

Harrow: I'm going to continue living in your apartment.

You: Continue!? What the hell?

The Reaper shrugs.

Harrow: I thought you'd notice sooner. You didn't.

Harrow: Nice to formally meet you, Roomie.

HARROW, CHAPTER 3:

It's been some time since the break-in at the museum where Harrow saved you from Medusa.

You're walking to the local sushi restaurant for an after-work social.

It's a great time for an intern to mingle with the museum's top brass.

But the cold chill down your spine tells you that you have other company.

You: Harrow, I know you're back there. If you're going to follow me, just say so.

He coalesces into view, striding alongside you, tall and imposing.

Harrow: Most mortals can only see me as a Reaper when they're near death themselves.

Harrow: Any other human would simply perceive me as a nondescript, regular man.

-> Guess I'm not most mortals.

Harrow: ...

-> Are you a regular man? Without your mask?

Harrow: Who's to say.

-> It's just too creepy when you lurk around!

Harrow: That is the idea.

Harrow hasn't exactly been forthcoming... about literally anything.

You only know his name— Harrow. No last name.

His job— Reaper, a deadly warrior who collects the souls of the living.

His mission— to protect you from a god who wants you dead.

And his master— Pluto, God of the Underworld.

-> Ask more about his master.

You: So Pluto... What's his deal? What does he have you do for him?

-> Ask more about his personal life.

You: So, do you have a family? Friends? Were you ever a human yourself—

-> Ask more about his job.

You: What exactly does being a Reaper entail? Do you just kill whoever—

You're interrupted by an alarm blaring from a watch on Harrow's wrist.

Harrow: Ah, look at the time. I have a client to meet.

You: A client? For what...?

Harrow: You know.

He mimes a slice across his neck. You shudder.

You: You're reaping human souls?

-> That's horrible. I don't know how you do it every day.

Harrow: It's a living. Until it's not.

-> That's fascinating. Can I take some research notes?

Harrow: Absolutely not. Death is dangerous business.

Harrow whistles. A bone-white motorcycle with no rider rumbles up to park alongside him.

You: You ride?

Harrow: No more questions. You go to your work meeting, I'll go to mine.

You: What? No! Take me with you. I have to see this.

-> What if I get attacked while you're gone?

He's quiet a moment. His hollow eye sockets burrow into your gaze.

Harrow: Fine. Get on.

-> Pleaaaaase? Pretty please? With a cherry on top?

Harrow: I'm not familiar with this form of bargaining. But, if you insist...

He scoots forward on the motorcycle and pats the seat behind him.

As you throw your leg over, the bike seems to jerk. It revs up hard.

Harrow: Easy, boy. \$playerName is a friend.

-> You talk to your bike?

Harrow: He's a bike to your eyes. But to mine, Aethon is a stallion.

-> So we're friends, hm?

Harrow: Aethon doesn't accept just any rider. I have to assure him he can trust you.

Harrow: In the mortal plane, this being appears as a motorcycle.

Harrow: But in mine, you can see his true form— a pale horse of the Underworld.

Harrow: Aethon and I like to keep a low profile while dealing with humans.

Harrow tugs each of his leather gloves tighter on his wrists, then grabs the handlebars.

Harrow: Hang on tight.

You oblige, wrapping your arms around his back. He's ice-cold to the touch.

You're moving fast, faster than the city streets can handle.

You clutch Harrow tighter as Aethon clears 120 miles-per-hour and continues to soar.

You: We'll hit something!

-> Tell your "horse" to slow the hell down!

-> Let me off! I changed my mind!

Harrow: Just watch.

You breeze through every traffic light... and then, every building.

You pass through solid matter like a ghost moving at lightspeed.

When you stop, you're in a totally new landscape.

Harrow: Not a bad ride. Bit bumpy at the end.

-> You could have warned me...

Harrow: You could have gone to the restaurant like you were supposed to.

-> What just happened to us?

Harrow: Aethon can travel through anything. He's a very talented horse.

-> Aren't there easier ways to get around?

Harrow: Don't listen to \$playerName, Aethon. You've done a fine job.

You survey the area. You're on some kind of bloody battlefield.

The land around you is mountainous, but barren. Explosions have pockmarked the earth.

You: I don't know this place.

Harrow: You wouldn't. We're across the world from your city.

Still, it feels strange. The world is somehow so much bigger and more brutal than you ever knew.

Civilians and soldiers run in every direction, guns blazing, screams echoing.

None of them seem to perceive the two of you.

-> They can't see us?

Harrow: Or touch, or hear you. Not as long as you stay close to Aethon or myself.

-> Are you just going to reap them all?

Harrow: No. Only the ones I've been assigned to.

Harrow brings a gloved hand up and checks his watch again.

Harrow: 3...2...1... and...

An explosion strikes nearby! It shakes the ground. You duck and cover your head.

-> Watch out!

Harrow: No need.

-> Is that what you're here for?

Harrow: Yes. Right on time.

Harrow is unphased by the explosion. He rolls his shoulders, then vanishes into the smoke.

As it clears, you catch a blurry sight of him through the flames and suffering.

He's removed the glove on his right hand and is moving freely through the crowd...

Scooping souls from bodies like a child playing with bubbles.

He gently bounces each glowing orb in the air as the corpses hit the dirt.

After a second of hesitation, the orbs drift away on an unseen breeze.

You: It's...

-> Almost beautiful. Like he's freeing them from all this.

You: Their faces look relieved, even in death...

-> Terrifying. He's ripping the souls right from their bodies.

You: I've never seen so much death and destruction...

-> Intriguing. He's so precise and meticulous about it.

You: It's like watching an artist at work...

You should be terrified watching Harrow reap souls from living bodies.

But something in you feels drawn to the Reaper.

When he appears at your side again, pulling his glove back into place, you gasp.

-> That was amazing. What did you do to them?

Harrow: Set them on a journey.

-> How do you know which ones are your "clients"?

Harrow: The watch gives me the time and location. I can sense the rest.

You: So, you take the souls and guide them to where they should go in the Underworld?

Harrow: That's not for me to decide. All I do is untangle them from their bodies.

Harrow: Where the souls go next is up to their deeds in life.

Harrow looks over the battlefield. There's a strangeness in his inky gaze.

Does he have a distaste for places like this?

You: And you don't even know why you reap them?

Harrow: No. Fate weaves human lives on her loom, and measures to where she sees fit.

Harrow: I've never known why some threads need a Reaper to make the final cut.

Harrow: ...

Harrow: Let's go. Aethon is chomping at the bit. Besides, you have a dinner to get to.

He extends a gloved hand in your direction.

-> Take it. Harrow is someone you can trust.

You wrap your fingers around his. The grip is deathly cold.

There's a tweak of his mask. Like his facial muscles are tensing.

You: Hey, are you smiling under there?

Harrow: You'll never know.

You laugh as he tugs you onto the motorcycle.

-> Shy away for now.

You: I can pull myself up. Thanks, though.

You rest your head against Harrow's broad shoulders, steeling yourself against the bitter wind.

Aethon speeds through the mountains and trees, breaking all the laws of physics at once.

But all you can think about is Harrow's gloved hand.

What would it feel like to have it dance along your collarbone?

To cup your cheek longingly?

Does he have lips under that mask of death? What color are his real eyes?

You stay distracted all the way back to the restaurant.

HARROW, CHAPTER 4:

You're on your way to the sushi restaurant for yet another afterwork meeting.

But this time, it's the museum's monthly check-in.

Every month on the same date, the whole staff gets together.

They propose new exhibits and hand out accolades for jobs well-done.

Today, you're hoping to have a special exhibit of your own design green-lit.

Harrow: You're running late.

He's not trying to goad you, just making an observation.

-> So take me there on your motorcycle!

Harrow: Aethon is for Reaper duty only. He's not a taxi.

Harrow: Besides, you hurt his feelings last time. I'm not sure he likes you.

-> I know, I know. Can you help me carry my bags?

Harrow: Do I look like a servant?

You: No, you look like an overpriced Halloween decoration.

Harrow: Now I'm really not helping.

You rush out the door, panicked and sprinting.

Harrow matches your pace, his long legs striding smoothly without a hint of strain.

As you step into a crosswalk, Harrow turns back abruptly.

Harrow: Hold it.

He dives out towards you, narrowly saving you from being splattered on the road by an 18-wheeler!

You: Oh my God— he was gonna hit me! I almost—

It's only now you realize Harrow shielded you with his body.

He towers over you on all fours as you lay splayed on the sidewalk.

Is a Reaper supposed to smell... good? Because he does.

Harrow: Are you well?

-> Am I well? I nearly freaking died!

Harrow: Nearly isn't dead. You should be pleased.

-> I'm great, thanks to you.

Harrow: You're supposed to look both ways. So you know.

-> Good timing. I guess I owe you one?

Harrow: If we were keeping track, you'd owe me sixteen. But sure.

He climbs off slowly, then hauls you to your feet. To him, you seem weightless.

Harrow: 25 minutes late. They've definitely finished the appetizers.

You groan in frustration and start to jog again.

When you catch sight of the restaurant, you finally relax.

Harrow: Taking a break?

Harrow: Or maybe we can turn around, go back to your nice, safe apartment?

Harrow: Before one of the gods takes a potshot at you?

-> I need to be presentable. How do I look?

He studies you head to toe.

Fleshy. Soft. Alive. I'd like to keep you that way, but you make it very hard.

-> I wanted to thank you properly... with a kiss.

Harrow holds up both gloved hands to ward you off.

Harrow: Let's not be hasty. You don't know if—

Your lips press to the cheek of his bony, frigid mask.

It's cold, but soothingly so. Like an iced treat on a sweltering summer day.

Harrow seems frozen— with fear? Rage? Shock? You can't possibly tell.

When you pull back, he presses a hand to the warm spot your kiss left behind.

Harrow: You have no idea what kind of danger that might have put you in.

You: I'm not worried. I have you to protect me, don't I?

Harrow: It might be me you need protection from.

Just then, a scream breaks through the night air.

Harrow springs to alert. His gladius sword appears in his hand.

Harrow: It's the restaurant. Someone's lit it on fire. An assassination attempt.

You: Shit! They're after the museum's board?! Or the curators?

Harrow: They are after you, \$playerName.

-> Let's get out of here while we still can!

Harrow: Too late. We've got company.

Harrow nods. You spin around to see a man emerging from the flames.

-> We need to go in and rescue anyone still inside.

Harrow: There's no one inside. Look.

Harrow points to a crowd of first responders and victims. Relief washes over you.

Just then, a lone man emerges from the flames.

-> Let's face the enemy head-on, then!

Harrow: Seems we'll have to.

Harrow nods. You spin around to see a man emerging from the flames.

Arsonist: You! There you are!

Arsonist: Why weren't you at your meeting, huh? I torched that whole joint for nothing!

You steel your nerves and walk forward, ready to face whatever the gods have thrown at you.

You: Okay, last time it was Medusa and her snakes who came for me.

You: So what silly fairy tale monster are you, huh?

-> The bull-headed minotaur guy?

-> Some half-lion, half-goat chimera?

-> A 12-headed hydra dragon?

The arsonist swings his hand out, brandishing a dagger—

But in that same instant, a black blur slices his arm off in a fountainous arc of blood.

Arsonist: Aurghh!

The man collapses to the ground, clutching his dripping stump.

Harrow: Just a human.

Harrow: How pitiful.

Arsonist: P-please! Let's talk this through. It was a mistake. I'll—

With the next swing of Harrow's blade, the man can only sputter and gasp.

He appears to be in utter agony. He reaches for you, begging to die.

-> Please take his soul. He doesn't need to suffer any longer.

Harrow: Fair enough.

You expect Harrow to remove his glove, gently free the soul, and bounce it to the afterlife.

But instead, Harrow's gladius squelches through the man's head in one deft motion.

You: Wait, but—

Harrow draws the blade out, soaked in blood, and you try not to puke.

-> Take the last strike. I want to be sure the threat is gone.

Harrow: Gladly.

Harrow's gladius squelches through the man's head. It's silent now.

Your stomach lurches at the sight. You stumble back as the pool of blood spreads.

You: I... didn't know you killed humans.

Harrow: You've watched me kill humans.

You: Not like this. Those people were already dying.

You: This man could have gone to prison. Answered for his crimes like humans do.

-> Why does it feel like you enjoyed killing him?

-> How can I be sure you won't harm other humans? Or me?

Harrow is silent, studying you with his hollow, black eye sockets.

Harrow: I don't know what you want to hear.

Harrow: Human lives are short. His was made much shorter by being a coward.

You: He didn't seem cowardly. He seemed...

-> Desperate. Like he needed to do this or else.

-> Overwhelmed. Like he took a job way above his pay grade.

-> Surprised. Like someone lied to get him here.

Harrow picks up the arm he severed, not hesitating to wrap his gloved hand around it.

Harrow: You see this tattoo? It declares this man a cultist of Pluto.

Harrow: This slime threw away what small, insignificant life he had—

Harrow: Just to be a pawn in one of the God of the Underworld's little games.

Harrow sounds angry, bitter... and deadly. On reflex, you shrink away from him.

Harrow: I didn't need to collect this soul.

Harrow: Anyone who makes a deal with Pluto goes straight to Tartarus, no escort needed.

Harrow: And they deserve it.

Harrow turns and walks away. You're almost afraid to follow.

Isn't Harrow also a servant of Pluto?

If his job is to protect you, why did his boss just try to have you killed?