

Chapter -48

“So, what now?” Bee asked.

“We head towards Downtown.”

“Gambit...” Panda said, as though in warning.

“Shut up,” I told him.

“What’s Downtown?”

“He’s going to search for the Mayor,” Panda said.

“I just want to see if he’s alive. And if so, I’ll make sure to fix that. Plus, there’s the Police Chief I need to find as well, and I want to see if my apartment is still intact.”

“They must’ve burnt all your trash long ago,” Panda said. “You were in the Asylum forever.”

“Didn’t feel that long,” I told him.

“I didn’t know you were in an Asylum,” Bee told me, but didn’t seem surprised.

“You don’t watch the news?” Panda asked her.

“Do I look like a boomer?” she asked, clearly taking offense to the question.

“Ah, I forgot, your generation gets all your facts from TikTok and YouTube.”

“Why are you talking like a disgruntled fifty-year-old?” I asked him.

“But seriously! You never heard about Gambit on the news?”

“No,” she replied firmly. “And what does it matter. It’s all fake anyway.”

I nodded. “Finally someone gets it.”

“Bee,” Panda started, his voice grave. “You don’t want Gambit agreeing with you on this one, trust me.”

“Are you some government plant, Panda!?”

The Plushie sighed. He was back to sitting on Bee’s shoulder, but I couldn’t for the life of me remember when he’d crawled over there. “Let’s just get going so you can see that your delusions are baseless.”

“They’re Skinstealers, I’m telling you.”

“Sure, sure, whatever you say.”

I narrowed my eyes at his remarks.

“Downtown is pretty far though,” Bee commented.

“Let’s hitch a ride then,” I replied with a grin.

“Gambit... don’t you dare.”

“*I need a Taxi.*”

REQUEST RECEIVED!

A ‘Taxi’ has been dispatched to your current location.

“My gods, you’re actually such a total moron.”

Bee apparently saw the message as well, because she turned to look at me and asked, “Does a Taxi qualify as Public Transportation? And why is it in quotation marks?”

“I have no idea,” I said with a grin.

A warbling scream pierced the air, its ululating voice a mix between agony and glee. Ghastly-green lights bounced up over the rooftops a couple streets over, distinctly visible despite the fact that it was midday. Then we heard a voice as the sounds of the abandoned cars were shoved aside violently, screeching on their metal chassis.

[OH BOY! OH BOY!]

“Ah, fuck...” Panda muttered.

“Perhaps this was a mistake,” I realized.

“You’re a moron.”

“Panda, don’t be mean.”

“Yeah, well, when you two are being chewed to death by a sentient taxi, remember what I said...”

From one moment to the next, a large car-sized shape broke through the intersection about sixty yards in front of us, before swerving and heading straight in our direction. I quickly pulled out my Looking Glass and scanned it.

Level 31	'Taxi'	World Boss ^x
<i>“[OH BOY!]”</i>		
<i>All Public Transport is of a common ancestor and thus they share distinct elements, such as the fact that they grow stronger with each person they consume. Their methods of consumption vary, but they generally always use their eyes to manipulate potential victims into ‘entering’ them.</i>		

Killing a Public Transport Boss is trickier than you might think, but we highly encourage you to try it, because your death might make it onto our highlight reel.

Of all the Public Transport entities you will encounter, the Taxi is the least dangerous and still serves its original purpose, while Busses, Trains, and Metros no longer do. And don't even get me started on Ships and Planes...

It was shaped vaguely like a taxi, in the same way the Humanbus had been vaguely bus-shaped. Its body was covered in what looked like stitched-together skin, and a gaping mouth sat where the grill and license plate should've been. The headlights were round and contained a life within them, not to mention the fact that they let out an ethereal glow that cast unnatural shadows from anything it illuminated. The way the eyes looked at us as it came closer was deeply unnerving.

The cab interior itself was obscured by frosted glass windows in the front and sides, but there were handprints of varying sizes pressed against it, as though condensation made it possible to leave marks. One person had written 'RUN' at the bottom of the left passenger seat window.

I prepared my gauntlet, squeezing the balloons.

“I'm fakkin ready!?” Brock said excitedly.

Instead of seeming intent on eating us like the Humanbus, the 'Taxi' swung to a stop on the road a few yards away, before popping open its passenger doors.

[COME! COME! LET ME TAKE YOU FOR A RIDE!]

Bee gave me a weary glance.

“I guess we might as well give it a try,” I said.

“Are you out of your fucking mind!?” Panda protested.

“My mom always told me to try everything once.”

“Bee, I'm pretty sure that only applies to food...”

“Don't be such a buzzkill,” I told him. “It said in the scan that it still serves its original purpose, i.e., it's still a transport. And Downtown is like ten miles.”

“You totally glossed over the part that mentioned it consumes people.”

“Let's just try it,” Bee said, also attempting to convince him. “If it looks bad, Gambit will just punch it to death like he always does.”

“One day he'll meet something he can't just punch to death,” Panda replied ominously.

Bee and I walked up to the open doors. I got in the left side and she got in on the right. The interior was surprisingly-normal, and even had a Wunder-Baum air-freshener scent.

[WHAT IS YOUR DESTINATION?]

“Downtown Castleburg,” I said.

[OH BOY! QUITE A TRIP WE WILL HAVE!]

REQUEST RECEIVED!

Your ‘Taxi’ will take you to:

Downtown Castleburg

Distance to destination:

7.2 miles

Estimated ride duration:

40 minutes

[OFF WE GO!] said the ‘Taxi’ cheerfully.

Then the doors slammed shut.

The temperature suddenly dropped down to 40 degrees Fahrenheit and a strange swirling-green mist came up from the floor and seats of the taxi. The front two seats were blocked off by a frosted glass panel, but suddenly a hand slapped against it, leaving an imprint.

Vibrations emanated through the floor as the vehicle began moving, and the first few bumps made themselves known, as it began traversing the gridlocked city roads.

“Not the worst taxi ride I’ve had,” I said.

“Me neither,” she replied. “And the driver isn’t trying to get us into any kind of MLM or cult, which is a bonus.”

The seatbelts snaked out of their housings and secured us tightly to our seats. I got the sense that I wouldn’t be able to remove it until we arrived.

“I must admit, this isn’t so bad,” Panda conceded. “If you can look past the temperature and creepy ghost handprints on the glass.”

Weirdly, the prints kept appearing, slapping against the front seat divider and the outside windows, as though the haunting spirits were trapped in the glass itself, rather than floating around within the car.

Several of the ghostly hands tried to write messages, but never got very far.

Then a chime like that of an intercom played through the cab interior, before a voice came out through the speakers.

Thank you for choosing to use your local ‘Taxi’ service!

It is now time to play “Who Wants to Survive the Ride?”

You have three lives combined and ten questions you must answer before you reach your destination.

Once your lives are used up or you arrive at your destination without answering all questions, your bodies will be devoured by the seats.

Player Abilities and Passives are disabled for the duration of the Mini GAME.

Good luck!

“Ah, crap,” Panda groaned.

“This sounds like fun,” I replied, ignoring the fact that our lives were now on the line.

“I’m pretty good at trivia,” Bee boasted.

I patted Panda on top of his soft head. “What’s the worst that can happen?”

“You really have to stop saying things like that...”