

PROLOGUE

The happy, blazing summer sun showers its love over the endless streets of Fortune City. A joyful heat wave settles upon the unsuspecting citizens, and these citizens would reciprocate this affection by shouting their contempt at the sky while basking beside their unsatisfying oscillating fans.

The heated light reaches over a particular freeway lining the outer edge of the vast city. Populating each lane of this wide freeway are endless rows of cars stuck in the same situation—contributing citizens trapped in their vehicles trying to get to work.

These rows of moving cars keep a constant pace similar to the dull motion of a conveyor belt set to the lowest speed. The excessive warmth in the air only makes matters worse, and drivers begin eyeing one another, hoping the other would start an altercation.

But, let's not dawdle on the monotonous rhythm of these cars. That is not significant.

Of course not.

Who cares about that.

What *is* particularly noteworthy is one rebellious pickup truck that holds neither concern for the other cars nor remorse in disrupting the quiet, solemn mood of this warm, early morning.

The truck speeds its way from the far end of the freeway toward the horizon, constantly sliding through gaps of cars and switching lanes in the most reckless manner imaginable.

The rustic old truck bears a large dent on the hood while the muffler coughs dark clouds of poisonous exhaust. It's a wonder this junkyard vehicle could even move, let alone keep up with traffic. The first sight of this monstrosity on the road would undoubtedly leave not only a bad taste in one's mouth, but also a terrible impression of the driver and its passengers. That impression would be wrong, however.

In fact, these people are actually quite well dressed.

“What band is this?”

The man sitting in the passenger seat of this reckless abomination, snidely questions the heavy metal song blasting from the speakers. He uncomfortably adjusts the knot of his black tie trying to cope with the tune. On his face is an open-mouth look of disgust, struggling to find ways to appreciate the song, but failing miserably.

Unwittingly, he glances out of the window only to make eye contact with a female driver of an adjacent car. Realizing his grimace is intensely splayed across his face, he nonchalantly reshapes his expression to a full teeth-baring grin and raises his sunglasses to reveal a winking eye.

Well played, but the woman looks away as though nothing happened. What a creep, she is probably thinking.

“Death Face,” utters Renzo, the driver.

“Death Face?” he turns away from the window. “That’s actually their name? Not even something like, Face of Death?” He pauses for a second in contemplation, then adds, “How... blunt.”

“That’s *actually* their third name. First, they were the Obituary Deliverers or... Obituary Delivery Guys... I think.”

“Too many syllables in those. Clever though, cleverer I mean.” He takes a moment to pick his teeth. “Some people just try too hard. I’m sure you meet them and they actually care more about the shade of their eyeliner than how many people they’ve killed. Know what this world needs?”

“I’m sure you’ll tell me.”

He tilts toward Renzo with a confused look. “Of course I’m gonna tell you. If you don’t know, why would I not tell you? Like I’m gonna just leave you sitting there silent and not knowing? No. What this world needs is a little less death,” he leans back toward the window, “And a lot more... style.”

“Strange, hearing that from you. You should be the last person to say that.”

He puts his hands in the air as if yelling, ‘What?!’ But instead, passionately shouts, “I care! And I have style! But I mean it. Maybe something more positive for this new generation of lost boys.”

Putting his finger on the radio dial, he goes to say, “Perhaps a hint of funk.”

The radio switches to an upbeat percussion filled hip-hop track featuring an exciting saxophone melody. Then, he knocks on the glass window behind his seat directed at the other two passengers in the bed of the pickup truck.

They sit across from each other with their legs extended out and their arms resting on the sides of the truck. Their legs are beside one another, and both try to avoid touching the dirty shoes of the other.

There is no doubt a lack of air conditioning on this primitive pollution generator they call a truck, but at least in the bed, there is a constant flow of wind. The air continuously washes over their heads providing a permanent cooling massage. After thirty minutes of being on the freeway and the breeze even becomes an invisible beating. The two can barely see nor feel their cheeks with so much wind against their faces, but neither will admit it.

One of them slides his body down until his head touches the bottom of the bed. He rests his head comfortably on his palms and stares upward at the animated sky. The cheerful rays of the golden sun highlight the pristine white clouds and outline the tops of skyscrapers with a sharp orange tint. The beautiful display almost distracts him from the two aching bullet wounds on his body.

Almost.

The man taps on the glass again.

“What?” asks the one lying down.

“Don’t get all nancy on me but... good job today.”

“Who says nancy anymore?” Smiling, he adjusts his hands under his head to a more suited position but winces from the sudden pain of his wounds. “Thanks, Kitsune.”

It’s rare to hear a compliment, but nice to feel beautiful and acknowledged.

Kitsune looks at Renzo, “Why do we feel so slow?”

“I’m hitting 83 already,” Renzo says, eyes straight and hands firmly gripping the wheel. “This thing only goes to 85.”

“Well, hit 84.”

Renzo slides the truck toward the adjacent lane and rams another car aside. The disrespected driver yells some loud, incomprehensible insult, but quickly fades with the distance as the rickety truck speeds past.

“There, 84.”

“...” Kitsune is silent with a blank stare, then smiles, “You’re a funny guy sometimes, Renzo. It scares me, how funny you can be.” Listening to the music, he starts nodding his head and rhythmically slapping the outside of the car door following the beat.

The rest of these hooligans join the session, loudly banging their hands and feet against the metal of the truck as they speed deeper into the dense city with the bright sun hovering above.

“It’s been a long night,” mutters Zylo.