

HELL DIFFICULTY TUTORIAL

Chapter 1 – Boring commute

I let out a small yawn, my cheek pressed against the cool bus window. For a brief moment, a street light blinds me, forcing me to close my eyes. When the light fades, another yawn escapes me.

Shifting my gym bag, I wriggle into a more comfortable position and sneak a peek toward the front of the half-full bus.

A standing boy mutters something, and his friends erupt in laughter. One of them, in particular, lets out a laugh that's... well, it's unique.

He continues to cackle without a care in the world.

Honestly, it's beginning to freak me out a bit.

Seriously, what's the deal with that laugh?

As I tear my gaze away from them, I catch the eye of a girl around my age sitting a few seats behind the noisy bunch. Annoyance is etched on her face.

Our eyes lock for a moment, and then we both nod.

Just like that, an eternal bond is forged between us, united in our annoyance by the gaggle of kids but too lazy to do anything about it.

I return my attention to the window and notice a small, nearly imperceptible grin on my reflection.

Definitely not because someone else is suffering with me.

Nope.

Through my closed eyelids, I see the rhythmic flashes of streetlights as we pass by them. The hum of the bus and the muted conversations blend into a soothing white noise, lulling me toward sleep.

And then, suddenly, chaos erupts.

Blinding light.

A sensation of falling.

Terrified screams.

The flash of light is far more intense than any streetlight.

The sensation is akin to the bus being hoisted into the air and dropped down.

Screams fill the air again, some quivering with fear, others laced with shock.

The cacophony of shattering glass and groaning metal assaults my ears. I open my eyes, only to squint as the overpowering light blinds me.

My pupils dilate in surprise as they adjust to the brightness.

Daylight?

What the heck?

I gape out the window at the blue sky and the sun peeking out from behind the clouds.

If anyone asked, I'd swear it was morning, or maybe early afternoon at the latest. But how could that be? It was late afternoon just moments ago.

"Let's calm down," the bus driver attempts to reassure the frantic passengers. His efforts are in vain, as the shouting continues.

Unlike the others who have sprung to their feet, I remain in my seat, staring out the window. My gaze travels across the sky. A cold sweat trickles down my back as it dawns on me.

Uh, what?

The hell?

Is this some kind of hallucination? A dream?

Can this really be happening?

Something like this shouldn't be possible, right?

I blink my eyes shut, then reopen them.

Nothing changes.

Well, this just got a whole lot more interesting.

Since when are there two suns in the sky?

Did I bonk my head?

Is it a prank? How would you even pull off something like that? The first sun is hiding behind the clouds, and the second... the second maybe-sun, smaller and more orange in color, beams in the sky to the left of the first one.

And where are all the buildings? Where is the road?

Okay, let's calm down.

Slow and deep breaths.

Just like this.

In and out.

Good...

I hurriedly fish my phone out of my pocket, and of course, there's no signal.

Not even a smidgen.

Now what?

I glance at the other travelers and see that the first ones are already stepping outside. A few of them check their phones but judging from their faces, they're also out of luck.

After grabbing my bag, I too exit the bus and step onto the grass... yup, grass.

"What the fuck?" I hear, and when I glance to my left, I see the annoyed girl from before gawking at the second maybe-sun with her mouth agape.

Welcome to the club.

No refunds.

Please send help.

"Sophie." A cute little girl holds the annoyed girl's hand.

"...I'm sorry."

My gaze lands on the bus driver as I survey the area. He's still trying to calm down others. Must be some weird sense of responsibility or something. About ten people huddle around him.

Then some kids, likely from the same school, stand near the bus.

A few men, already forming a group, stand off to the side.

A girl and her mini version to my left and two women nearby.

I even hear barking and spot a small corgi's head peeking out from a woman's arms.

"I have no idea what happened!" I hear the bus driver exclaim. "I don't know where we are," he continues.

Poor guy.

"Hey... hey!" I hear behind me as I move away from the bus, checking the signal on my phone.

It's the annoyed girl, and she stops when I turn toward her. I don't say anything, just wait for her to continue. She looks lost for words and simply asks, "where are you going?" while nervously glancing at the bus as if it's her lifeboat in the middle of the ocean.

"Just checking the signal," I show her the display on my phone before continuing. I also dim the brightness to its lowest setting.

She doesn't look like she has more to say, so I move on.

After wandering for a while, but always keeping the bus in sight, I give up and turn off my phone. Better to conserve my battery.

Thankfully, my battery is around 80%, but it's smarter to let others use their phones and save mine.

I glance at the second maybe-sun... yeah.

Houston, we have a problem.

A little, orange problem.

Well, if it's a sun, it isn't exactly small. It's probably larger than the planet, moon, or whatever we're on, but... I sigh and force myself to calm down.

If I pretend it's not there, it might vanish on its own.

I can hope, right?