

The Volkswagen bus that pattered down the highway was an unusual sight indeed. The top half was a faded green, and the bottom half faded yellow. On all accounts, one might expect a crippled Scooby Doo to come hobbling out of the back when the machine parked, but the lanky youth behind the wheel was no skittish beatnik, and the animal that sat in the seat beside him was certainly not a Great Dane. With the one hand on the steering wheel, the driver drummed out the rhythm to “Spinning Wheel” as it played on the radio. He tapped the roof of the bus with the other hand as the air from the open window tickled his skin. Below the brim of a wool cap, bright red hair stuck out in all directions, then cascaded down the sides of the driver’s face in the form of loud sideburns. Freckles dotted his face, surrounding his protruding beak of a nose.

“Hob!” The ferret in the passenger seat spoke.

“Talk about your troubles, it’s a cryin’ sin. Ride a painted pony, let the spinnin’ wheel spin,” the driver sang.

“Hob!” The ferret yelled this time.

He shook the seatbelt, which was almost larger than he was, with his furry paws. His beady black eyes slanted in a scowl, and the whitish hair around his face bristled. His tail, the same brown as the rest of his slender body, beat impatiently on the seat.

“What, Jasper?” the driver said with a slight frown.

“Do we have to listen to this?”

“I’m driving, so yes.”

“That’s not fair. I can’t drive.”

“The downfalls of being a ferret, I’m afraid.”

Jasper shook the seatbelt with his paws. “Come on, can’t we listen to something with a little more power.”

“This is good driving music.”

“I wouldn’t know, I’m a ferret.”

“Would you quit complaining if I let you change the CD?”

“That’s all I ask.”

“Fine,” Hob conceded, then under his breath, “Nagging Puca.”

Jasper slid out from under the seatbelt and disappeared into the center console. After a moment of loud rummaging, he returned holding a CD with a very mean, scaly looking eye on the cover which he quickly shoved into the player after flinging Blood, Sweat, and Tears into the back of the bus.

“Be careful with my stuff!” Hob commanded.

“Now this is real *driving* music,” Jasper said, ignoring Hob.

Jasper air-guitared in the passenger seat through a long, metal intro, and Hob sighed, gripping the wheel with both hands as Dragon Force broke into “Fire and Flame.”