

Advance Two Spaces

At first, there was nothing. Well, not quite *nothing*, but very little. He had a perception of space, some kind of horizon off in the distance. But other than that, just...white. It wasn't nothing, more like empty. Patrick didn't like it, it was boring. Getting up from whatever piece of the space that he was just then planted supine on, he began to think of ways to alleviate his boredom. Nothing came to mind. His arm began to itch. This was taking too long. As he began to wonder where the exit was in this...place, he heard something falling in from above. Although he supposed anything would catch his attention in an empty space like this. Soon enough, whatever was falling struck his head and plopped onto the "ground" next to him. He didn't feel any pain from it. As the object rolled over, he soon saw that it was, in fact, an animal. A completely black...something...in the shape of a cat. Whatever it was made of, it was translucent enough for him to just slightly see through it. As it turned around to face him, Patrick was greeted by a face with two red dots and a *very* wide, sharp-toothed grin. It was unlike any cat he'd ever seen before, although there was something vaguely familiar about it to him. He remembered it being in a cartoon he watched all the time as a kid...or maybe a stuffed animal he once had? Whatever it was, its mouth began to open and words began to come out.

“Patty Cakes! Do you wanna play a board game with me?”, it piped with a high-pitched voice, one that certainly matched its cartoon-y appearance. Patrick was uncertain if its first line was a nickname or a non sequitur. Regardless, he responded almost immediately.

“ Of *course* I will play a board game with you.” He was bored, and what better way to fix that than with a board game?

“The game we will be playing today is a new one I’ve made called ‘The Great Grand Forks Escapade!’”, The Cat proudly announced in a voice for all to hear. “You all will assume the roles of passengers in a lone car making its way back home in the dead of night through a magical, yet dangerous land known as “Grand Forks!””. Patrick suddenly realized that there were other people playing the game with him. They were making gestures, but no sounds. They all looked like The Cat, black and translucent, like human-shaped shadows. Yet they all looked vaguely familiar. His arm itched again. The Cat continued:

“In game terms, every turn you will move your car game piece across a number of spaces that you choose from 1 to 3, while avoiding the Crash Spaces that can send you off course! You have to make it to the end of the board before the turn timer runs out, which means your car runs out of gas! But going too far each turn could land you on a Crash Space pretty quickly. So you’ll have to make sure you think

carefully about how fast you wanna go! And all the while, random events can occur on the road and force you to take some risks! That's the fun of it!"

Patrick's interest was piqued. He was looking forward to how this game would go.

Some time later, the team was near the end of the board. Thankfully, Patrick's suggestion of sticking to a two space speed for most of the game was paying off. They were close to the end of the board, and with plenty of turns to spare. The only problem was their car token being down on its last life. One more crash would prove fatal. All Patrick had to do was maintain the two space speed, and they'd win. They'd be okay. As he reached to move the car, one of the other players suddenly grabbed it and moved it three spaces ahead. Patrick was confused, that would just throw them onto a Random Event Space. It was a risk they didn't need to take, why would he do that? Landing on the space, The Cat picked up one of the Random Event Cards and read aloud:

"Top Speed! You get to take an extra movement turn right now! Lucky you!"

Before Patrick could even react, the other player began moving the piece again. He was moving it another three spaces.

This would put them right on top of a Crash Space. They'd lose. Patrick's arm began to itch again. The sensation was worse this time. It was painful.

"Hey, stop! We don't need to go that fast!"

The other player just ignored him.

“Dude, slow down, we’re gonna crash!”

He didn’t react.

“DUDE!”

Michael just kept going. Patrick’s arm was on fire.

“JESUS MICHAEL STOP YOU’RE GONNA–”

The car clacked against the sharp red Crash Space, and all the other players vanished. Patrick leaned back, and looked at the board. The Cat made an exaggerated explosion noise, then laughed.

“Whoops! Looks like you lost! Poor guy *really* should’ve listened to you!”

Patrick looked around. He didn’t feel his arm anymore.

“...Why am I still here?”

The Cat’s smile disappeared.

“You know...I’m wondering that too. Guess you’re just lucky”. Patrick took one last look at the game board, at the plastic game piece that he just realized was shaped exactly like a 2007 Ford Mustang.

“...I wish *we* had only played a board game.” The Cat looked at him, and sighed.

“Yeah, I do too...”

Patrick's eyes opened, and he felt everything. The mattress on his back, the clear tubes sticking out of him, the gauze wrapped around his skin, and the weakness of his body. He felt his right arm begin to itch. He reached over to scratch it, only to find that nothing was there. It still itched.