

Ghosthiking

For as long as there have been private automobiles, there have been stories about people picking up hitchhikers at night, traveling with them for a while, then *discovering that the hitchhiker was a ghost!* Sometimes the driver figured it out while the ghost was still in the car. Sometimes the driver found out afterwards. These are spooky stories, of course: people heard them and thought *There are ghosts out there, and sometimes someone like me will meet one.*

However, at some point a **ghost** heard this story and thought, *Hold on. I can be **driven** places? In **cars**?*

You sort of drift into the ghosthiking lifestyle -- well, you do if you're a human. You start off by knowing somebody who is already doing it, and that person then invites you for a ride-along. Just to see if you're the sort to lose your cool over meeting a ghost (people do freak out, you understand). Once you decide you can handle it, word gets around in the specter community that you're willing to give rides.

Then the ghosts start showing up. Generally the rule is that the ghost goes where you drive the vehicle (a **lot** of

truckers pick up ghosthikers), but most people don't mind going a bit out of their way for a drop-off, anymore than they would a regular hitchhiker. Then again, some retirees will load up the minivan with a half-dozen spirits and go on a nice moonlit wander, because it's more interesting than anything else they had planned that evening. There aren't really many formal rules to ghosthiking, except that everybody respects everybody else's personal space and imago, of course. That's a cold iron rule.

Why ghosts ghosthike: Many ghosts have difficulty moving too far away from whatever it is that's keeping them locked to this plane of existence. This problem is extremely mitigated when the ghost can voluntarily enter a living human's metal-framed car and be taken somewhere else. Sure, once the ghost leaves it'll eventually snap back to its earthly locus, but with a little bit of practice the ghost can manage to stay in its current location for hours or even a day. That's plenty of time to catch a movie, go to a play, check out the new exhibit at the Met... many ghosts like to do the morning commute into places like NYC and then pop back 'home' when they're done touring the city. It's so nice to have a place out in the suburbs, yes?

Why humans pick up ghosthikers: Companionship, altruism, it's pretty cool on general principles; some people just enjoy the lifestyle. Even the ones that are personally neutral on the concept still appreciate the presence of somebody who will help keep you awake and alert on long drives. And, well: there are spooky things out there that *aren't* very nice. They tend to stay away from ghosthikers, though. Particularly the ghosthikers that aren't very nice themselves, but have been hitherto behaving themselves because the aforementioned cold iron rule.

This happens rarely, but causes long-term problems even more rarely. There's just something fascinating about watching a banshee suddenly erupt from the backseat to deal with a carjacker, when you know perfectly well that the banshee isn't there to deal with **you**. It's *scary* but not *horrible*, right? Well, at least from your point of view. The carjacker would probably disagree in between all the screaming, but then: **him**, you didn't invite into your car.

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