

J_Mod_Mystery

My online friends visit me on Fridays, stay for Saturdays, then leave on Sundays. Even though they can't drive, they still manage the 45-minute trip to my University by metro or, in J_Mod's case, by Dad Uber. This time, though, Dad Uber drove us to the discovery of J_Mod's corruption...

So, AMQ and Gojo had joined me for dinner one Saturday. I was eating leftovers from my fridge, Gojo had fended for themselves and gotten takeout, and AMQ nibbled on a thin slice of stale bread (he was saving his money for Bumble Premium.) Unable to continue the mind-numbing dopamine rush of playing Puzzle League while the three of us ate, we instead had a conversation. After our socially awkward "So, uhh..." and our boring "How's the weather," I finally hit a topic when I brought up the bro who was missing from the table.

I asked, “He couldn’t make it this time, but J_Mod will be here next weekend, right?”

“Yeah,” AMQ responded blankly as he scrolled through Twitter.

Gojo raised their finger. “He’s dodging us, though.”

“How so?”

“He’s gonna be gone for all of next Saturday,” AMQ shared and Gojo seconded.

A whole day out of our weekend together, he’ll be gone? Raising my eyebrow, I asked, “What’s he doing that day?”

“He’s heading into D.C.,” Gojo said. D.C. is right next to my University; both D.C. *and* my University are equally far away from the hometown where J_Mod resides.

I asked, “Why?”

“Not sure.”

For anyone who knows the J_Mod / Gojo / AMQ trio, alarm bells go off here. J_Mod isn’t back in school yet, he works from home, and he sulks routinely about not having a girlfriend or any other typical social engagements. His areas of expertise are limited, so D.C. is strange territory for him. *Especially* if Gojo and AMQ, his partners in crime, don’t know what he’s up to.

With nothing better to do but indulge in my growing curiosity, I pushed further. First item on the J_Mod's Interests checklist: "Is he going to a Yu-Gi-Oh tournament?"

"Nah." Of course not. Gojo and AMQ play, too, so they'd have been invited to the event.

"What about an SSBU tournament?"

"Nope," same deal.

"Is he meeting up with a customer?" J_Mod's job: he fixes and customizes procons. Painting controllers paints him in a picture bereft of women, but it's honestly a commendable trade. He's made a lot of money off of it.

But alas, "J_Mod wouldn't go to a customer like that," Gojo pointed out. "He'd make *them* come to *him*."

AMQ shook his head, continuing his Twitter scrolling. "He's just doing something with his family."

One thing about J_Mod is that he's a family man. Between golf with Dad, the grocery store with Mom, and whatever mysterious adventures on which he tags along with his sister, he's often too busy with someone or other to voice chat with us.

What he doesn't do, though, is drive.

"J_Mod," I explained, "is coming to visit next Friday. His dad usually brings him here so he can avoid riding the metro."

"Okay..?"

“Sure.”

“And he’s going to D.C. on Saturday. ‘With his family,’ you say.”

“Right.”

“Yeah.”

That’s an issue. I said, “Why would J_Mod’s dad spend so long taking him to University on Friday, only to make that long drive back down here to go to D.C. with him the very next day?”

“... Gooooood question,” Gojo murmured. The table went silent for a moment.

We’d hit something unusual. I asked, “So he *isn’t* doing something with his family?”

“No, he is,” AMQ said without looking up.

“How do you know?”

“I don’t know. Just a feeling. Ha-ha!”

I shook my head. This was a *real* mystery. Something was up.

So I continued. “What evidence is there for J_Mod being with his family on Saturday?”

The other two put fingers to their chins.

AMQ spoke up first. “You know how, whenever J_Mod can’t call, he only says that he’s ‘busy’? Until we push him to explain, that’s all he ever says when he’s doing something with family.”

Gojo objected: “But why wouldn’t his dad just take him to University *after* D.C. then?”

I suggested, “Maybe his dad feels guilty that J_Mod’s a shut-in this semester, so he’s being extra nice to him?”

No, J_Mod is too polite; he’d have insisted his dad save the gas money. We all knew that.

So what reason would he have to, instead of state his plans, leave us with a vague ‘I’m busy’?

“Maybe he’s buying controller parts?”

“He’d just order them online, or he’d have mentioned it to us in the first place.”

“He’s going to a card shop.”

“We’d be invited to that.”

“He’s hanging out with other friends.”

“*What other friends?!*” And so we were stumped.

At that moment, AMQ’s phone made anime girl noises: his ringtone. Of course, all of us looked over at it. On his lock screen was a Bumble notification; he seized the phone immediately.

“No way you got a match,” Gojo said.

AMQ had a maniacal grin on his face, but it quickly dissipated. “No,” he responded, “just another ad for Premium.”

“How much is Premium, anyway?” I asked. “Lowkey, I might need to hop on...”

Gojo said a number that stopped my consideration in its tracks. They chuckled. “Yeah,” said Gojo, “only J. Kim could afford something like tha—”

Gojo and I, eyes wide and exasperated, gave each other a look of realization.

AMQ knew what we were thinking, too. He said, “guys, don’t say anything...”

It was too late, though; Gojo already had J. Kim’s number pulled up on their phone. He answered immediately. Gojo put him on speaker:

“Hey guys, what’s up?”

With a smirk, Gojo said, “We know what you’re doing next Saturday.”

“... AMQ, I told you to keep it a secret!”

“I did!”

“Yeah,” Gojo added, “we figured it out. You absolute gooner.”

“Paying for Premium?” I said, shaking my head.
“Pathetic...”

The next Saturday, J. Kim went out with the girl he’d met online. The mystery of how he managed to land the date can be saved for another day...