

Developed by Frostbite IX Productions, we proudly present to you;

The Box

> *Story Mode* < *Competitive* *Settings* *Credits* *Exit*

Select a save file.

> New Save File <

Run on Fire // Chapter I OLD **2**

Speed-Run // Chapter I **14**

Run on Fire // Chapter I OLD

Loading... 34%.

Loading... 67%.

Loading... 99%.

Complete!

...

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> **Story Mode** < Competitive Settings Credits Exit

Please, select a language.

> **English** < Español Français Deutsch

Русский 汉语 日本語 조선말

On what kind of device are you playing The Box on?

PC Console > **VR** <

What kind of VR set are you using?

> **Headset + Treadmill** < Headset Only Full-body Suit VR Capsule

Would you like to create a new avatar or use your Custom ID avatar?

Create New Avatar > **Use Custom ID** <

◆ Connecting to the internet...

◆ Finding a server...

◆ Rendering assets...

Complete!

The holographic screen that hovered in front of me vanished into nothingness, leaving me alone in an abyss occasionally spotted with fuzzy orbs of light. The lights would float upwards and fade away while I stood on an invisible platform, a soft sea of glimmering lights beneath. Standing in the void, I waited for something, anything, to happen. Seconds ticking felt like minutes crawling as I tapped my foot on an invisible plane. Before I knew it, gravity began to shift to the side.

My center of mass tilted from my legs to my back. Letting gravity take over, I fell backwards but I didn't land on the invisible ground; I just kept on falling. I broke through the lights, diving past them and breaking into an atmosphere of soft blue skies spotted with fluffy clouds as rays of sunlight pierced through.

At first, my descent was gentle, almost as if I was gliding on an invisible slide... until, **it wasn't gentle anymore**. Wind violently rushed past my ears as I spun around mid-air, flailing. My free-fall turned into a plummet. I was tearing through the wind towards a field of grass. In a panic, I braced for impact, using my arms as my makeshift shield and clenching my eyes before I-

CRASH!

...



O- ow... *That hurt.* My body ached in agony and soreness as I tried to pry my eyelids open. I woke up surrounded by piles of dirt in the center of a shallow crater. Pushing myself off the ground, I brushed the dirt off of my clothes and sat upwards. Albeit a rough start, I was finally ready to play *The Box*.

Glancing around, I took notice of the scenery in the distance. In one direction, fields of luscious grass with flowers sprinkled about, decorating the hills in hues of yellow, white, pink and blue. Wildlife wandered around with birds flying tree-to-tree, cows munching on grass, foxes hopping up-and-down and wolves resting beneath the shade of trees. Despite my predicament, it was rather nice.

In the other direction was the outskirts of a medieval town, sheltered by a great, stone wall. A large gateway invited me inside along with a holographic green arrow that slid across a paved stone road, leading me to my next destination. After some short stretches, I got on my feet and began to follow the path set for me. With my hands in my pockets, I leisurely walked

alongside the arrow. At first, life was oddly barren in the town before gradually ramping up as I progressed further.

The place was bustling with people. Townsfolk walked around with some of them going home, some tending to their plants and some playing games on the side of the road. As I continued to walk, a few people passed by me and I couldn't help but notice the aesthetics of their clothing. Their clothes clashed with the vibe of a medieval setting. One of their outfits was decked out in hi-tech gear, glowing lights and all. Another had modern clothing, something I could find someone wearing outside my house. The third person's outfit was- *was that a **living snowman?** Huh?*

Curious, I looked down at my own fit. A white tee-shirt, jeans and sneakers, all of which were battered with dirt. *Man, I look awful. I wonder when I'll be able to change out of these...* After a wave of discontent, I continued to walk onwards. A few roads and corners later, I finally arrived at my destination. The arrow stopped at the feet of a woman with a long, flowing, green dress. She didn't look too different from the other townsfolk apart from the giant, glowing, green exclamation mark hovering above her head. *If there was a prime example of a quest NPC, then she would be it.*

I approached the woman, hoping she would give me directions on what to do next. Nonchalantly, I said, "hey."



Clearly scripted, she gasped at my appearance, shocked at my dirtied attire. **“Oh my gosh**, a visitor! Are you okay? You look worse for wear. Another one of those meteors fell from the sky again and it landed close to town... the rumbling from the impact broke some of the windows around the area.”

“Yeah, the thing about that is: I **was** the meteor.”

“You- you fell from the sky?” She put her hands over her mouth, “I didn’t know... if you really did, then you must be special!~ You must be the **chosen one** the legends have been talking about for ages!”

Exactly at the same time she said those words, I could pin-point at least two other players in the sky who were also falling towards the ground. *Right. The chosen one.* Trying to not break my own immersion, I played along with the NPC’s dialogue. “I’m the *chosen one*? What do you mean by that?”

The second the woman opened her mouth, I could tell that the next paragraphs to spew out would be a massive lore dump. Trying my best to stay focused, I readied my ears and attention.

“Well, over two hundred years ago, our town’s prophets foretold a great, looming evil would take over our world. This evil would terrorize the lands, seize everything the light touched and **destroy the fabric of reality** as we know... and it happened. Not long ago, the Phantom Lord cracked the skies and unleashed his armies of phantoms on us! To make things worse, other universes and realities collided with ours! We’ve made peace treaties to fight against the Phantom Lord but things haven’t been going great.”

Slowly but surely, my ears were tuning out her voice. She continued to monologue. “That was until you showed up! Alongside the evil, the prophets foretold a **hero** would fall from another reality and save us all! With your arrival, the fate of the worlds-”

I can’t take it anymore; my brain just- it turned off. I watched the NPC’s mouth move up-and-down with a dead stare. The few thoughts that echoed in my head bounced back-and-forth inside my skull. This is the worst story I’ve ever heard. Hello, Frostbite IX? I thought you were better than this. “It Ends with Me” had the best storytelling award at the 2255 Gaming Awards and you’re telling me that this game doesn’t even have a fraction of a percent of what IEWM had? Shaking my SMH head... I really hope the gameplay is as good as my friends say it is-

“I found you, **Takeshi!**” My state of mind was interrupted by a familiar voice screaming my name. The voice quickly grew louder and louder, stomping footsteps accompanying the yelling. I turned around as quick as I could before being-

BOOM!

Once again, I was face first on the ground. Pavement this time instead of dirt. Pushing myself off the floor, I shoved the guy who tackled me onto the road. He laid out on the ground, face-up and had his arms spread outwards while maintaining eye-contact with me. His messy, blonde hair splayed all over the paved flooring. His clothes were like a doctor’s outfit, a white lab coat with a surgeon's outfit underneath. His face was one I was well familiar with, including his lazy-looking eyes; although, the blue-colored irises that I knew were replaced with a bright-yellow hue with crosses for pupils.

“Dawg, where were you? I thought We were gonna meet up at the front gates but you weren’t there!” He shuffled back onto his feet, raising his sleeves past his elbows.

“Yeah,” slowly averting my eyes, “my bad. I got impatient and got here first. Anyways, what’s the deal with the tackle? Huh, William?”

“Bruh- you know I can’t be catchin’ you slacking. Look, if I ever stopped hustling, people would be callin’ me *Slopliam* instead of **Grindliam**; but they never do, cus the one button I will never stop pressing is the **grind**. It is **sanctity** that the grind never stops.”

“What?” It took me a second to register whatever Will just said before hitting me like a car. “Pfft~ Haha! What the hell? That’s the worst joke you’ve come up with in the past week. You can’t just add *-liam* to the end of everything.”

Wagging his finger at me, “nuh uh. I totally can and I totally will.”

From the corner of my eye, I could spot three more familiar faces walking towards William and I. My face lit up with glee, waving at them excitedly. “Hey guys!” My face slightly twisted into a devious grin.” **Help me!** This *psycho* is trying to kill me!” Playfully, I started to run from William and towards my friends.

“*Bruh*. Get back here!” Breaking into a dash, William chased after me. The two of us bolted towards our other friends, racing each other to see who would make it first. Obviously, I win everytime. After catching our breath, I greeted my other friends who had been waiting on me.



On my leftmost side, one of my best friends Rose glanced at us with a smile. William and I had been friends with Rose ever since middle-school. I never took her to be the gamer-girl type, since she was so preoccupied with our school's gymnastics club. Unlike William's modern attire, Rose wore a medieval rouge's outfit with a deep-red cloak to cover her naturally red hair. I've always thought her hazel eyes paired well with her hair... except, her eyes weren't hazel; they weren't even brown at all. They were **red** and her pupils were missing. *First it was William, now Rose too.*

In the middle was Kaori. At first, she was just William's girlfriend who happened to play the same games as him. Sometimes, she would join us but she wouldn't talk much. It was hard to break the ice but as time went on, I got to know her better. She's actually a really nice and kind person, just quiet and timid. Her outfit had a more fantasy-esc theme than Rose's: a large, dark cloak that covered some odd-looking clothing underneath. Her black, braided hair helped accentuate the dark-mage vibes she was giving off along with her purple eyes, hidden behind a pair of glasses.

Last, but not least, was one of my more recent friends, Goito. My older friends, Cassandra and Xander, introduced me to him after meeting Goito in college as study-buddies. He talks strange, like he's in a Shakespeare play 24/7 but I've gotten used to it. Speaking of Goito, I found out recently that he was a **developer** for The Box! I'd been hoping he would use his dev powers to give me an easy head-start, but it's against company policy and would probably get him fired instantly. His outfit fits his personality, a fancy musketeer look with a feathered cape included. His pupils were strange as well, swirling around a bronze-colored iris.

Still slightly out of breath, I chuckled. "Hey, guys. Sorry for not waiting like you asked me to. I, kind of, got side-tracked and moved on ahead."

"Oh, don't worry about it!" Rose reassured me, motioning her hand to brush it off. "I did the **exact** same thing you did when I first joined!"

"And then we found you lost in the forest twenty minutes later." Kaori interjected. "You were huddled up in a ball behind a tree and-"

"Uwah!- We- we don't talk about *that*." Embarrassed, Rose quickly hid her face underneath her hood. "An- anyways, how do you like The Box, Taki?"

Eager to divert the attention off of Rose and onto me, "it's pretty cool so far; although, I wasn't expecting to crash into the ground at mach four when I started the game." As I talked, I kept glancing at their eyes. I needed to ask the million dollar question. "By the way, I've noticed everyone's eyes look different, like William's is yellow and whatnot. What's up with that?"

"Wait, what?" William was dumbfounded by this query and immediately made eye contact with Kaori, staring into her eyes while also using the reflection of her glasses. Kaori's face blushed with confusion. After a short wave of silence, "**oh**, what!? I've never noticed! No wonder no-one wants me to team with them. I be lookin' like I'm giving them the **literal** stinky eye!"

With a slight chuckle, Goito dramatically delivered the answer I wanted. "The reason for thine iris's hue changing is due to thine class that one has chosen! Any and all classes are color coded through the lenses of your being." He tilted his hat, casting a dramatic shadow over his face.

I was not impressed. "...uh huh. So, where do I get a class or whatever you're talking about?"

Goito's facade instantly broke apart the second he heard my unenthusiastic response. "Sorry, I wanted to make an impressive first impression. But yes, thou will be able to pick a class of your choosing once thou have finished the tutorial quest." Leaning over my shoulder, Goito pointed at the green dressed woman I had talked to earlier. "She should give you your mission."

"I've already talked to her." I replied, smirking.

"Did you **finish** talking to her?"

"Uhh... *no.*" Reality shattered the confidence I had as I realized that I left on an unfinished conversation. "I zoned out when she hit me with the lore drop." I awkwardly motioned my hand, pointing at the NPC woman. "I, uh, guess I'll finish that up now."

Just before I could walk back to the woman that I needed to finish talking to, Rose stopped me in my tracks. "Wait! Before we start, I want to add Taki to the party. Just in case we lose him!"

"Oh- oh yeah! That's a good idea." William chipped in. "Plus, with Takeshi on the team, I'd actually be able to heal him. Would be kinda strange if my heals didn't do nothin."

I couldn't understand what they were talking about. "What? A party? Like, a frat party? I didn't know that me playing the game calls for celebration."

"Nonono- it's not really a party." Rose corrected me. "It's more-or-less another word for a team. If we party together, we'll be able to see each other on the map and it prevents us from hurting each other in fights!" With a motion of her finger, she swiped upwards and summoned a holographic menu in front of her. Her joyous humming and expression shifted to confusion, then to dismay. "Um, guys. I can't add Taki to the party... it's **full.**"

“Don’t fret. It’s only natural we would be unable to add Takeshi to our squadron. The system only allows four members in a party at a time.” Opening his menu as well, Goito tapped his screen multiple times and promptly swiped his menu away, vanishing on command. “I have left thine party and opened a position for Takeshi in my stead.”

Looks of shock formed on everyone’s faces. Bewildered, William thanked Goito for his act of kindness before asking, “what are you gonna to do now? I can’t heal you and if we do get in a fight, we might accidentally kill you!”

Goito nonchalantly dismayed their worries. “Don’t fret one bit! I have played this game for many hours. I can handle myself just fine; additionally, I have business elsewhere, hence I wouldn’t be able to stay for long.” Spinning around, Goito began to walk away. “Farewell and good luck! May we meet again!”

Waving our goodbyes, we watched Goito walk into the distance before turning a corner and vanishing from our eyes. Once he faded from sight, our attention was set back to the party-situation. “Well. Thanks to Gogo, Taki can join the party!” Rose’s eyes glimmered with joy again. “Erm, Taki? Can you accept the party invite? It should be a notification on the top of the menu.”

“Huh? Oh- oh yeah.” Hastily, I mimicked the movements that Rose and Goito used earlier and a menu appeared before my eyes. At the top of the screen was a small red dot, which I opened to reveal a party invite.

Party invite from: The Phoenixes > Accept < / Decline

“Phoenixes... That's a pretty good name. Did you come up with that, Rose?”

“Actually, Cassandra and Xander thought of the name. I just copied them since I didn’t know what to name our party.”

“Cassandra and Xander...” My thoughts wandered for a bit. “I haven’t seen them yet. Do you guys know where they are?”

William shrugged his shoulders. “Dunno. They said they were busy doing other stuff. Probably out there doin’ dungeons or fighting it out in the Colosseum. Anyways, let's get ‘er moving! We’ve got a quest to beat!”

Marching onwards, the three of us met up with the green-dressed NPC again. Her expression hadn’t changed at all since I left, staying stagnant with a slight smile. “Hi! Welcome back!”

I slightly waved my hand, “hey. Met up with my friends. What did I miss?”

Almost immediately, the NPC snapped back to her dramatic persona, continuing her unfinished dialogue. I couldn’t tell what she was talking about. I haven’t paid attention to her since she lost me. “We have a sage who can give the guards of our town special abilities and powers, but you’ll need a special tablet to let the sage bestow their power onto you. *Normally*, we would have enough resources to give you one, but we’ve been running short on supplies fending off the Phantom Lord’s forces. You’ll need to grab a few supplies outside our town to build your own tablet. Do you think you can go get them yourself?”

Between me and the NPC, a menu appeared. It had a name, a brief retelling of what she had said and two sets of buttons: accept and decline. My finger hovered over the screen, eager to start.

Mission No. 1: *Traveler from Another Dimension*

→ QUEST START! →

Speed-Run // Chapter I

Text

Text