

Stephanie continued following the ghost over Sodor, sometimes stumbling a little because of the wind and her new form appearance, but she soon got the hang of it and continued flying through the air.

She would sometimes land on some wooden poles to take a break for a minute but would sometimes fumble because of her lack of landing skills before taking off into the air to continue with her adventure.

The ghost returned to the same house and transformed into his human self as he was on the left side, watching Stephanie as she followed.

Notches appeared from the bushes after running to the house and looked at the sky, calling, “Take it easy, Stephanie!”

“Okay,” Stephanie called back. “I can do this, I can do this, I can do this, I-”

She realized she was diving a little too fast and emitted a bird-like yelp, flapping her wings frantically as she moved her body downward, trying to land talons first.

“Slow down, slow down!” Notches exclaimed.

“Breaks, breaks, breaks, breaks!” Stephanie panicked.

But she skidded across the ground as her necklace snapped off, causing her to revert to her human self with the Zodiac Pocket Watch in her hand.

Notches winced after Stephanie collided with the ground as the ghost winced with him.

“Ow,” Stephanie groaned as she pushed herself up, wincing slightly as her glasses were somewhat off and some of her hair tangled. “That’s going to leave a mark.”

The ghost hovered in front of her with a silent ‘Are you okay?’ expression as Stephanie pushed herself up, adjusting her glasses into place and her clothes.

“*Are you alright?*” Notches asked, approaching her with a worried expression.

“I’m fine,” Stephanie assured the two anxious adults. “Just need to practice with that landing maneuver.”

She pocketed her Zodiac Pocket Watch into her blue jeans pocket and moved her hair away from her face, accidentally getting it entangled in her fingers as she slowly stood up to her feet, some parts of her body covered with dirt.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow,” Stephanie winced as she carefully untangled her hair from her fingers. “I *really* need a haircut.”

The ghost hovered around Stephanie as she watched the ghost eyeing her, noticing his soft, sad expression as he mouthed the words ‘I’m sorry.’

Stephanie smiled and reached up to the ghost, pausing after remembering they could not feel her attempts to assure the worried spirit, so she said, “It’s okay. I’m fine.”

The ghost softly smiled after Stephanie assured the poor ghost before waiting as Stephanie adjusted everything before glancing back at the ghost.

The ghost hovered in front of the side of the house and looked around thoughtfully before phasing through the side of the house.

Suddenly, something clicked, and a *secret door* opened automatically, silently beckoning Stephanie and Notches to follow.

Stephanie hesitated for a minute as she picked Notches up from the ground and held him close to her chest, approaching the door slowly.

“*Be careful, Stephanie,*” Notches told her. “*Some ghosts may look helpful, but they can play deadly tricks you will not know that are coming towards you.*”

Stephanie nodded after Notches warned her as he climbed over her shoulder, got into her sweater’s hood, and placed his head on Stephanie’s shoulder.

Once Notches was in his favorite spot, Stephanie slowly reached up to the door and hesitated for a minute before putting her hand on it.

She slowly opened the door, revealing a different part of the house that she did not see but was dark inside.

“Huh,” Stephanie remarked. “I never saw this part of the house.”

Stephanie stepped into the secret room after opening the door and closing it behind, sealing them in the darkness.

Stephanie's eyes were faintly glowing as she stepped through the darkness, glancing around curiously and looking at the walls.

Everything looked like it was built by someone with blueprints a long time ago, and the owners had already discovered the secrets, as there were signs that it had been cleaned.

But there was that lingering feeling that something was wrong about this place.

Stephanie continued down the hallway before entering a wide room and seeing a large glass cabinet with what looked like a doll inside.

"A doll?" Stephanie blinked with confusion.

*"You can see the doll, too?"* Notches asked.

"Yes," Stephanie responded before perking. "Oh, I can see in the dark too."

Notches cocked his head with a confused expression as Stephanie watched the ghost reappear as the lights flicked on, surprising the two with the ghost's ability.

It looked over at the doll in the glass cabinet and pointed to the doll behind it before disappearing.

"He wants me to take the doll?" Stephanie blinked with confusion.

Notches stayed silent after watching the ghost point at the glass cabinet before saying, *"I don't think you should."*

"Why?" Stephanie asked, glancing at the cat.

*"Because I don't trust dolls nor that ghost,"* Notches responded.

But Stephanie walked close to the glass cabinet as Notches watched, exclaiming as he moved up from her sweater's hood but some of her hair covering his face, *"Are you insane?! Don't open the cabinet!"*



Unfortunately, Stephanie's curiosity got the best of her, and she reached up with a hand, grabbed the glass cabinet's door handle, and slowly opened it.

"Aaaannnnndddd, you didn't listen to me." Notches groaned as his ear flicked.

The doll instantly *perked* after the glass cabinet door was opened and saw it was Stephanie with Notches.

She was beautiful, with long, starlight white wavy hair, snow-white eyes, and a pale skin complexion.

She wore an 1870s blue outfit with star-like speckles, a moon-shaped crescent in her hair with stars, black leggings, a white collar with a blue necktie, and brown boots with a blue no-sleeve vest.

The doll has a silver key in her hand with a gemstone as its head, and she also wears round glasses.

"Who are you?" the doll asked, standing up on her feet from sitting on a chair and picking her key up to use as a weapon. "Where's Avril?"

"Uh, I'm Stephanie!" Stephanie lifted her hands up as Notches started to low growls as his fur ruffled. "Notches, calm down."

Stephanie gently patted Notches' head as he stared at the doll, slowly growling and giving small hisses.

"Alright, Stephanie," the doll spoke, still aiming its key at her face. "What did you do with Avril?"

"Nothing," Stephanie explained as she stayed calm, staring at the doll's eyes, but she noticed something around her neck. "Avril went missing after I-"

She stopped talking when the doll used the key to lift the Dust Whistle from around her neck, exclaiming, “Where did you get this from?”

Stephanie sighed as she reached over to the doll and gently picked her up, pinning her arms to her body as she struggled, but stopped when Stephanie started speaking, “Calm down. Avril went missing with his wife Kathleen after I had freed everyone from being statues. Sir Topham Hatt explained what had happened to Sodor when I came here using the Dust Whistle.”

The doll slowly calmed down after Stephanie explained to them and asked, summarizing everything, “So you’re saying that everyone turned into statues after Sodor’s magic was drained, Sir Topham Hatt sent out an S.O.S., and you freed everyone?”

“Exactly,” Stephanie nodded. “And Avril and his wife went missing too. I wish to show you the destroyed room, but it is wrecked, and the police are investigating it.”

The doll stared at her hard after Stephanie explained to her but sighed as she said, “Alright. I believe you. But if you are lying, I will attack you.”

Not wanting to add anything about her or make a remark, Stephanie just nodded and placed her on the table before her.

“What’s your name?” Stephanie asked.

“I’m Lucy,” the doll responded. “What’s your full name and your pet’s name?”

“Stephanie Allen,” Stephanie answered.

She glanced over at Notches while the doll looked faintly *confused* after hearing the last name ‘Allen,’ and Stephanie responded, pointing at Notches as he had calmed down, “This is Notches.”

“*Hello*,” Notches greeted.

Lucy’s key transformed into a bracelet, and she clicked it on her right wrist, saying, “Very well. Stephanie Allen and Notches, what brought you here?”

“Well,” Stephanie began. “You wouldn’t believe me, but I followed a ghost here who ‘said,’” she quotes with her fingers. “That I should be taking you with me.”

“Hmm,” Lucy hummed. “What does this ghost look like?”

“A gentleman?” Stephanie rubbed the back of her neck with a hand. “I can’t see much of his body, but he looks like a gentleman with a cap and a blue uniform.”

Lucy perked more after hearing Stephanie explain what she had seen and glanced away from her, thinking while having a finger on her chin.

“Do you know the ghost?” Stephanie asked.

“I think so,” Lucy nodded. “But I can’t be sure.”

She asked Stephanie, “What else do you have besides the Dust Whistle?”

Stephanie reached into her blue jeans pocket while explaining as Lucy looked confused, “Well, I have a piece of crap phone that barely works, some gemstones I am carrying in my sweater’s pockets, and the Zodiac Pocket Watch.”

Lucy’s eyes widened after seeing the Zodiac Pocket Watch, and she exclaimed, “Did you steal that?!”

“What, this?” Stephanie asked.

“Yes, that!” Lucy nodded.

“No,” Stephanie shook her head. “Sir Topham Hatt handed it to me to defeat the Nightmares.”

Stephanie paused and added, rubbing the back of her neck, “Well, mostly since Notches and I saved Sodor, he entrusted the Zodiac Pocket Watch to me.”

Lucy listened to Stephanie as she stepped close to her, asking, “Can I look at the Zodiac Pocket Watch?”

Stephanie nodded and showed her the Zodiac Pocket Watch, allowing her to inspect it as she mumbled, “Nothing happened outside.”

Then she looked at Stephanie and asked, “Can you flip it over?”

Stephanie nodded and did so, flipping the Zodiac Pocket Watch to its back as Lucy looked at it before taking out her key and tapping it.

The back of the Zodiac Pocket Watch opened, revealing the gemstone compartments as they were all empty except the one at the top.

“It looks like the gemstones were all used up,” Lucy noted. “Someone must’ve used it to seal something away.”

“Seal what, to be exact?” Stephanie asked with confusion.

Lucy stayed silent after Stephanie asked and responded, “Something *dangerous*. I don’t know what it is because Avril kept me here for, and I quote, ‘Safety measures.’ and ‘Meeting an old friend.’”

Stephanie cocked her head slightly after Lucy explained to her as she removed her key as the back sealed magically, explaining, “But we need to find where the Zodiac Guardians is so we can fully unlock the true powers. The diamond won’t last long if you keep using it repeatedly.”

“How?” Stephanie asked.

“Well,” she paused, thinking to herself. “Imagine using the same key for every lock, but it will be slowly eroded over time until it will snap in one of the locks.”

“Oh!” Stephanie perked. “So that will happen to the diamond *and*, if possible, the other gemstones?”

“Exactly!” Lucy nodded. “That is why we need to find the Aries, the Falcon, and the Rat Zodiac Guardians to help support that diamond.”

“Okay,” Stephanie nodded, putting her Zodiac Pocket Watch away. “Do you know where they are?”

“The top of the tallest mountain,” Lucy explained. “That’s where they are. Luckily, I have the key to unlock the gates that keep them safe.”

“Safe from the Nightmares?” Stephanie asked.

“Exactly,” Lucy nodded. “You are good at knowing your surroundings.”

“Somewhat,” Stephanie sighed. “I’m still trying to understand what Sodor is.”

“Ah,” Lucy perked. “You’re not from around here, are you?”

“No,” Stephanie shook her head, holding her hand for Lucy to climb onto. “I’m from Shining Time. It’s my first day here.”

Lucy climbed into Stephanie’s palm as she sat in the middle and clicked her bracelet on her wrist after her key transformed.

“How did you get here?” Lucy politely asked as Stephanie moved her close to her chest.

So Stephanie explained how she got here and used the Dust Whistle to free everyone from being statues, which confused Lucy, but she kept it to herself.

Stephanie walked out of the secret room of the house and closed the door, taking Lucy with her as she started walking down a path.

She was about to reach the road when a familiar blue car stopped before she and Stephanie winced, saying, “I forgot about Sir Topham Hatt.”

Sir Topham Hatt stepped out of his car and noticed her standing alongside the road, with two other men following him.

They both wore blue uniforms and had different facial appearances than each other.

“Where on Sodor were you?!” he exclaimed. “I went another bend around searching for you.”

“Sorry!” Stephanie apologized with a strange light blue blush that first confused Sir Topham Hatt before noticing Lucy in her hand. “I should’ve told you that I-”

“How did you find her?” Stephanie stopped talking after Sir Topham Hatt mentioned Lucy in her hand.

Stephanie paused for a long time after Sir Topham Hatt asked before saying, “Do you have time to listen to a story that you might think I am making up lies?”

Sir Topham Hatt cocked an eyebrow after Stephanie asked, and his hands were on his jacket's collar as she mumbled, "Of course."

She placed Lucy on her other shoulder as Notches had his chin on her right and explained as Sir Topham Hatt listened, "Okay. To start with something before I go into details, I sort of ran away because I can see the paranormal."

"You can see ghosts?" Sir Topham Hatt asked as the two guys glanced at each other with confusion as the one on the right shrugged.

"Yes, sir," Stephanie nodded. "One of them guided me around Sodor, ranging from discovering Avril's tools to how to make Gold Dust."

"Really?" Sir Topham Hatt asked as Stephanie nodded. "Do you know what he looked like?"

"I can't say much," Stephanie gently sighed. "I know he looks like a gentleman with a blue uniform and a cap."

Sir Topham Hatt *perked* after Stephanie explained to him as she could tell he *knew* about this stranger but silently shook his head.

"So this ghost helped you?" Sir Topham Hatt asked.

"Yes, sir," Stephanie nodded. "And he showed me where Lucy was," she paused as she lifted her long hair, showing Lucy. "Was kept. I think he sort of knew what to do."

"It seems like it," Sir Topham Hatt nodded. "But if you are going to follow a ghost, tell me before wandering off."

"Yes, sir," Stephanie nodded, still blushing a little.

Then she asked, "Are you mad? Or even not believing what I told you?"

"No, Stephanie," Sir Topham Hatt assured, placing his hand on her arm. "I was a little scared that you ran off. But you told me the truth about what you did, and I respected your response."

Stephanie gently smiled after Sir Topham Hatt assured her but doubted what he had told her and then added, removing his hand, "For the other things, I'm used to seeing puppets and ghosts appearing."

“Wait, really?” all three perked.

“Yes,” Sir Topham Hatt nodded. “Like I explained, we had our adventure with ghosts of the past and had help from the *Jukebox Band*.”

“Who are they?” Stephanie asked with curiosity.

“You’ll see them later,” Sir Topham Hatt assured. “Right now, where are you going now?”

“To the tallest mountain, Sir,” Lucy explained. “She must find the first three Zodiacs to stabilize the diamond.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?” the helper on the left asked.

“Even for a child?” the helper on the right asked.

“It’s fine,” Stephanie assured them. “I got my friends here and the Dust Whistle. I also climbed mountains before too.”

All three looked confused after Stephanie assured them, but Sir Topham Hatt took Stephanie to the mountain, where *Culdee Fell Railway* was.

During the car ride, the two helpers noticed Stephanie’s *hair* problem as she felt slightly embarrassed about it and decided to help her with it, though they did not have the tools to do the job.

So they instead did their best to braid it as Stephanie had a rubber band if she wanted to put her hair up.

Sir Topham Hatt kept eyeing them through the rearview mirror to check on Stephanie, noticing she had *pointed ears* as her hair was moved back and looked away... only to look the second time after that thought returned to him.

None of the humans have *that* type of ears.

...Is that *normal* for her?

Sir Topham Hatt only stayed silent after seeing Stephanie's pointed ears, deciding to keep them to himself as he returned to the road.

The drive was a little long, but since there was no traffic, it was easier for Sir Topham Hatt to quickly drive to *Culdee Fell Railway*.

Once he arrived at *Culdee Fell Railway*, Sir Topham Hatt parked his car at the bottom of the mountain... seeing the engines were taking everyone off.

Each locomotive was based on a *Snowdon Mountain Railway*, except with different faces and livery.

One of them stopped to let passengers out and noticed Sir Topham Hatt looking confused with Stephanie and his two assistants.

"Uh, Sir?" one of them spoke. "I think it's a bad time to come here."

"Why?" Sir Topham Hatt asked.

Just as he said that, a loud *monstrous* roar echoed from the top that caused more people to scatter as Sir Topham Hatt instantly went in front of Stephanie.

"What was that?" Stephanie asked as she grabbed Sir Topham Hatt's arm nervously.



Then, a gigantic goat, falcon, and rat hybrid appeared with jet-black fur, sharp claws, teeth, and arrows littered across its back and one directly in its forehead.

"That's why!" another exclaimed as everyone screamed and scrambled away from the monster as the locomotives entered their

hiding spots.

The hybrid looked around with a snort before its eyes glanced at Stephanie, seeing something as it growled before roaring.

“Stephanie, run!” Sir Topham Hatt told her.

Stephanie listened and did so, running as fast as the monster hybrid approached them.

His two helpers scattered when the hybrid stomped towards them, roaring as it approached Sir Topham Hatt and Stephanie.

Sir Topham Hatt realized the problem and instantly approached Stephanie, avoiding the monster’s stomping and catching up with her.

“Why is it chasing after me?!” Stephanie exclaimed as they went down the hill.

“I think it’s because you have the Zodiac Pocket Watch!” Lucy answered as she held her sweater’s hood while Notches held on with his claws. “It’s a Black Zodiac monster!”

The Black Zodiac monster roared again as it picked up speed, summoning black fire from its palm and shooting it, missing the two as Sir Topham Hatt picked Stephanie up.

“Quick, head for the forest!” Lucy called. “We’ll lose it there!”

So Sir Topham Hatt made a beeline and quickly entered the forest, causing it to chase after him through the woods.

Sir Topham Hatt continued running as fast as he could while carrying Stephanie in his arms, trying to escape the Black Zodiac monster as it crashed through trees and fired black fireballs.

“We need to find a way to defeat it!” Lucy called. “We can’t outrun it!”

“I wish to use my Zodiac Pocket Watch,” Stephanie explained. “But it will drain the diamond if I use it too long!”

“Then use the Dust Whistle!” Sir Topham Hatt exclaimed. “That one still has Dust in it!”

“Right, right, right, right,” Stephanie nodded, scrambling to get the whistle out from her garments.

Sir Topham Hatt was already tired from running as he felt his energy draining from each minute, but he was determined to keep Stephanie safe from that Black Zodiac monster, so he continued running.

Stephanie looked through the necklace as she turned it to Gold Dust, yelping when a rock was suddenly tossed at them as she turned it to Silver Dust.

“Here goes nothing!” Stephanie took a deep breath and whistled as Silver Dust shot out of it, surprising Sir Topham Hatt, Lucy, Notches, and Stephanie.

Suddenly, a steam locomotive bursts from the forest with startled yelps as it goes down a small hill with the Black Zodiac watching.

It skidded across the ground as its wheels were moving before bumping into a rock, going over a small bump before it turned around, skidding a few times before landing on the rails, bumping off them, and landing on the wood platforms that were keeping the rails up.

Stephanie was flung around what felt like a steam locomotive’s cab while Notches was yowling while Lucy was clinging to his back with handfuls of his fur.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!” After hearing a familiar voice, Stephanie perked as the locomotive went onto the rails with a bump and down the line.



Stephanie looked, seeing the outer part of the steam locomotive was painted with a black livery with cream-yellow-ish lines like-

“Sir Topham Hatt?!” Stephanie exclaimed with a shocked expression.

Meanwhile, the locomotive’s face, like Sir Topham Hatt’s, and based on an *LSWR 415 class* with jet-black livery with cream-yellowish lining, perked after hearing Stephanie’s voice and asked, “Stephanie, what happened?!”

Then he heard a familiar whistle and glanced forward quickly, seeing what looked like *Duck* heading right towards him.

Duck's basis is a *GWR 5700 Class* painted unlined green with black wheels and valences.

The initials 'GWR' are painted yellow and red on the sides of his pannier tanks, with the number eight painted on the sides of his cab in yellow on a rectangular black background with a yellow outline and red buffer beams.

Duck perked after noticing Sir Topham Hatt but did not think it was him because he looked so different.

"Excuse me!" Duck called. "You're on the wrong track!"

Stephanie sees Duck heading towards Sir Topham Hatt before noticing the stationhouses that Sir Topham Hatt told her about, even watching a locomotive whistle to get the stationmaster's attention when they used the tracks to travel off-road.

She looked around quickly before noticing a cord and reached up, tugging it two times as a whistle came from Sir Topham Hatt.

The stationmaster heard the whistle and instantly perked, seeing the strange steam locomotive passing by but quickly switching tracks after seeing the situation.

Luckily, Sir Topham Hatt and Duck switched tracks at the right moment, and Duck luckily missed the storming Black Zodiac chasing them.

"What was that?!" Duck exclaimed, startled after seeing the Black Zodiac.

Meanwhile, Stephanie was scooping coal into Sir Topham Hatt's firebox with the shovel while Notches was peering out of the window with Lucy on his back, watching the Black Zodiac.

"It's getting closer!" Lucy exclaimed, glancing over at Stephanie. "We can't outrun it!"

"I know!" Stephanie nodded, pausing to shovel coal into Sir Topham Hatt's firebox. "But how can I defeat that thing twice my size?!"

"*You got that string ability, don't you?*" Notches pointed out.

“Yes!” Stephanie nodded as Lucy looked confused.

“*Well, use that!*” Notches huffed. “*Sometimes you have to face things instead of running away!*”

Stephanie hesitated before nodding, placing the shovel down before carefully climbing out of the cab with Lucy holding onto her shoulder.

Sir Topham Hatt perked after feeling something moving on him, asking, “What’s going on back there?!”

“Everything will be alright!” Stephanie responded as she stabilized herself with her long hair waving behind her. “I *think* I got everything under control!”

“Be careful!” Sir Topham Hatt warned.

Stephanie pats his cab’s roof before slowly standing up, facing the Black Zodiac as it rears to fire fireballs.

Inside Sir Topham Hatt’s cab, a figure poked its head from the window and noticed it was about to be ready to fire fireballs and noticed someone was crossing, so they went back instead and hit the brakes.

Stephanie yelped when Sir Topham Hatt screeched to a halt and fell backward, sliding a little as she landed on his boiler and wrapped her arms around the funnel while Sir Topham Hatt was gritting his teeth from the screeching noise and feeling.

The Black Zodiac accidentally tripped over Sir Topham Hatt, gave a somewhat yelp, and collapsed on its front, missing Henry by an inch as he gave a scream, watching it land on the ground with a *thump!*

“Holy crap!” Stephanie exclaimed after watching the Black Zodiac fall before noticing a confused and most likely surprised Henry.

“Sorry, Henry!” Sir Topham Hatt responded, trying to keep his composure, but seemed a little embarrassed because of his different appearance in front of the number three.

Henry has a basis of an *LMS Stanier Class 5 ‘Black Five,’* and was green with red lining on his cab, splashers, tender, cylinders, and boiler and yellow lining around his windows.

The number three is painted on his tender in yellow with a red outline and has a white running board with red buffer beams and valences.

Henry was confused at first but was shocked after hearing the familiar voice of the Fat Controller from this strange steam locomotive.

“Sir?!” Henry exclaimed. “What on Sodor happened to you?!”

“I’ll explain later,” Sir Topham Hatt assured the confused number three steam locomotive.

The Black Zodiac started to push itself up as it snarled angrily, and Stephanie muttered, “Uh oh.” while Sir Topham Hatt looked afraid.

It turned around to attack when a flash of blue zipped by them and smacked it in the middle of its chest, causing it to shriek in pain as it went backward from the impact.

Sir Topham Hatt was surprised to see it was Thomas, and his basis was based on an *LB&SCR E2 class* locomotive and was painted in cerulean blue with red lining on his tanks and boiler and yellow lining around his windows.

His number one is painted on his side tanks in yellow with a red outline and has a white running board with red buffer beams and valences.

“Pick on someone your size!” Thomas huffed with determination as he gave off a whistle.

The Black Zodiac hissed and was about to attack Thomas after its hand lit on fire when something wrapped around its neck that caused it to shriek.

It flung its hand down and was about to hit Sir Topham Hatt when Thomas quickly switched tracks and bumped into Sir Topham Hatt, catching him by surprise as it slammed its hand down, missing him and Thomas as it created a small flame before digging into the ground.

Behind, a steam locomotive painted with a steel-blue color with eyes and a mouth but looking a little *cartoonish* was holding a rope in its pistons that formed into hands and was moving backward.

The Black Zodiac monster snorted and tugged forward, trying to get the locomotive and the rope to loosen, but the steam locomotive continued dragging backward.

Thomas stopped after moving Sir Topham Hatt back as Stephanie was holding onto his funnel with both hands after he started moving.

“Are you alright, Sir?” Thomas asked, glancing over from the corner of his eyes.

“I’m alright,” Sir Topham Hatt nodded. “But I need to get Stephanie close to it! She knows how to get rid of it!”

Black Zodiac shrieked as it swiped at the locomotive, causing it to squish its body slightly to miss its swipe before a rope was tossed and wrapped around its other wrist on its left hand, tugging back as it shrieked.

It was from James, as the rope was tied to his buffers with a cocky smirk on his face while looking up at the gigantic beast.

“Got it!” But the Black Zodiac started yanking its arm forward as James yelped, feeling his wheels lift for a minute before landing back down. “I don’t got it!”

Stephanie quickly slid off Sir Topham Hatt’s boiler and rushed forward, looking at the scene as the Black Zodiac tried to get rid of the two locomotives around it as Thomas protected Sir Topham Hatt.

She noticed something wrapped around its neck tightly, seeing it was a black collar with the pendant of the Aries symbol with the blend of the Rat Zodiac and the Falcon Zodiac.

It looked almost like the necklace she would wear whenever she transformed into her Zodiac forms and ripped them off to-

Stephanie perked after an idea popped into her head and took Lucy from her shoulder, placing her on Thomas’ buffer before charging forward.

“Stephanie!” Sir Topham Hatt exclaimed. “What are you doing?! Get back here!”

Gordon noticed and quickly went forward as the Black Zodiac managed to snap the rope around its neck, and a fireplace of a fire started to come from its mouth.

“Oh, bother!” Gordon exclaimed, wanting to stop but noticing Stephanie was still running forward.

Seeing no choice, Gordon quickly went forward as fast as he could, and Stephanie noticed and jumped to the side, missing Gordon as he went towards the pelvis as it was kneeling.

Gordon realized what was about to happen as he thought he would hit the chest and cringed, closing his eyes and-*crack!*

The Black Zodiac flinched with a pained expression after feeling a shooting pain through its body while everyone else winced.

“Ooh, right in the gonads.” James’ driver winced.

The Black Zodiac groaned with pain as Gordon went backward, feeling glad he did not have to experience it a little closer as his buffers cushioned his impact.

It was enough that the Black Zodiac knelt down with one hand down while its legs were together, giving small whimpers of pain.

Stephanie took this moment to get closer to the Black Zodiac and instantly reached up to its collar, grabbing the pendant with her hand.

The Black Zodiac noticed and quickly attempted to grab her, but the pain from between his legs was so much that it fumbled around like a drunk person while everyone moved back.

“Be careful!” Lucy called as it went wild, trying to shake her off its collar.

Stephanie held on as she allowed her weight to snap the necklace, hearing some cracking noises as it was slowly ripped off.

It manages to lift the cartoonish steam locomotive up from the ground and gives off a startled shriek/whistle as it is flung forward as its driver falls out.

The driver landed on the ground while the locomotive landed back on the rails but bumped into Percy as they descended the line.

Stephanie held on for a good minute before the Black Zodiac grabbed her with its clawed hand and tugged back, causing her sweaty palms to slip from the almost-off pendant.

She yelped as the Black Zodiac held her with its hand, feeling the heat coming from its palm as everyone perked.

“Stephanie!” Sir Topham Hatt exclaimed.

Stephanie flung her hands towards the pendant, and the same strings wrapped around the pendant as the Black Zodiac perked, feeling agitated and tugged hard, causing the strings to tighten around her fingers, palms, and wrists.

She turned her hands into fists and tugged back with her might, successfully snapping the necklace off as the Black Zodiac snorted with an ‘Uh oh.’

The gigantic Black Zodiac then poofed into nothing as Stephanie was dropped to the ground, landing on her front as the strings disappeared, the pendant disappearing with the enormous creature.

The rope also landed on the ground, and everyone sighed in relief as Sir Topham Hatt went forward, switching lines but kept fumbling a little because of his new appearance.

“Stephanie?” Sir Topham Hatt asked as Lucy switched from Thomas’ buffers to his. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” Stephanie nodded as she gingerly stood up. “I’m-”

She hissed softly in pain as she looked at her hands, seeing burn marks from the tightening strings around her fingers and palms, but nothing was bleeding.

“I’m fine,” Stephanie finished, tugging her sleeves over her hands as Sir Topham Hatt did not notice.

The steam locomotive’s engineer walked over to her and helped her up to her feet, and he was covered with smudges of coal, and she had fair skin with short dark brown hair.

He wore a long-sleeve dark slate blue shirt with Prussian blue gloves, Saint Patrick blue overalls with brown shoes, a red neckerchief, and a cap the same color as his shirt.

“Thank you,” Stephanie thanked, pushing her long braided hair out of her face and her glasses into place.

“You’re welcome,” the man nodded.

“You should’ve been careful.” Sir Topham Hatt started scolding her. “What would happen if you were burnt to death?”

“I didn’t think about that,” Stephanie sighed with embarrassment as she blushed a light blue as her pointed ears flicked slightly.

Then, a small light appeared from where the Black Zodiac used to be and went towards Stephanie, surprising her with the light in front of her as the man who helped her up placed his hands on her shoulders protectively.

It hovered in front of her for a minute before soaring up into the sky and disappearing.

“What on Sodor was that?” Gordon asked with a confused tone in his voice.

“I think we rescued a star,” Lucy explained as Stephanie cupped her hands to let Lucy climb into her palms. “A star that a Nightmare found and turned into a Dark Wish.”

A shudder went down Stephanie’s spine after hearing Lucy explain as she moved her to her shoulder.

Notches stepped out, walking up to Stephanie as she reached down carefully and picked him up into her arms.

“How many more of those ‘Black Zodiacs?’” Sir Topham Hatt asked as he paused a little to look at the members of the Steam Team, who were all eyeing him with confusion and bewilderment. “Are they a danger to everyone?”

“Yes,” Lucy nodded. “And we need to get back to *Culdee Fell Railway* to climb that mountain where the Zodiac Gate is. If we don’t collect all these Zodiacs, the Black Zodiacs *will* do more harm than good.”

“Oh, boy,” Stephanie softly winced. “Meaning more Black Zodiacs are roaming around Sodor.”

“Exactly,” Lucy nodded. “But we can help you train with your current powers to defeat these Black Zodiacs.”

Which is something that Stephanie has *some* hope in learning about... but she feels like it is not enough to defeat these Black Zodiacs.

“One question,” Percy spoke up as Stephanie glanced at him. “How did Sir Topham Hatt turn into a steamie?”

“Oh!” Stephanie facepalmed as Sir Topham Hatt winced. “I forgot about that!”

“Forgot about what?” Gordon asked with a tone of worry.

“Did you encounter Wendell?” Toby asked.

“Did he transform Sir Topham Hatt into a steamie?” James exclaimed.

“No,” Stephanie responded with a confused tone. “I used this.”

She reached into her garments and took out the Dust Whistle, showing it to the locomotives and the humans.

“A whistle?” Edward asked.

“No, Edward,” Sir Topham Hatt spoke, pausing after realizing he could not move much in this form. “It’s Avril’s Dust Whistle.”

“Your friend?” Emily perked. “What is she doing with his whistle?”

He then glanced over at the engineer standing behind Stephanie and said, “Henry,” he paused as he glanced over at the number three engine, correcting himself, “Linus’ engineer. Can Stephanie perhaps borrow Linus?”

“Of course,” Henry, Linus’ engineer, nodded. “Is there something wrong?”

“Very,” Sir Topham Hatt nodded. “But I want to talk to you and the others privately.”

Stephanie could tell there was something Sir Topham Hatt meant to explain to the others, following Henry to Linus as she stepped into his cab while carrying Notches.

“Aren’t you going to drive Linus?” Stephanie asked Henry.

“He’s different from the others,” Henry assured. “You’ll see.”

Stephanie looked confused but nodded as Henry walked off before feeling Linus beginning to move *on his own*.

Outside, Linus used his pistons to push himself up and carefully crawled around while his tender followed behind, using no turn table as he landed back on the rails before puffing down the line.

‘So this is what Henry meant!’ Stephanie thought with a smirk, although slightly surprised that he could move without his engineer.

During the travel, Linus asked, “Hey, what’s your name?”

“Stephanie,” Stephanie responded as she poked her head out of his window. “Stephanie Allen. This is Notches in my arms and Lucy on my shoulder.”

“Pleased to meet you all,” Linus nodded. “As you can tell of my engineer Henry, my name is Linus.”

Stephanie looked through the window as they passed by different places, watching locomotives of various kinds and basis move around and catching up to what was happening.

“How did you get to Sodor?” Linus asked, glancing behind from the corner of his eye.

“I was accidentally sent her after using the Dust Whistle,” Stephanie explained. “It was Avril’s, but he went missing long before I came here.”

“Huh,” Linus remarked. “I remember seeing Avril occasionally whenever I stopped to take a break as he usually talks to Sir Topham Hatt about what he discovered.”

Stephanie cocked her head to the side after Linus explained to her.

Linus continued puffing down the line before arriving at *Culdee Fell Railway*, seeing the once-terrified locomotives of the Black Zodiac slowly coming out of their hiding spots.

“Is it gone?” one of them with the nameplate ‘Culdee’ asked.

“Yep,” Linus nodded. “Stephanie here made it go away.”

He paused and added, “Also, her friend Lucy wants one of you to take Stephanie up *Devil’s Back* to find a ‘gate.’” He quoted the air with his pistons, which surprised Stephanie a little.

All the engines looked at each other after Linus asked them before the one named ‘Culdee’ puffed forward bravely and said, “I’ll take her. But why?”

“For getting rid of the Black Zodiacs,” Stephanie explained. “There’s more roaming around Sodor, unfortunately.”

The remaining engines from the shed moved back after Stephanie explained to them, except for the one named ‘Culdee.’

“Don’t worry,” Stephanie assured the frightened steamies as Notches climbed into her sweater’s hood. “Some are scrambled around Sodor, so it’s fine now.”

Her words did not assure the worried steamies, but Culdee assured, “They’ll loosen a little when things are back to normal. Please, climb aboard.”

Stephanie nodded and climbed into Culdee’s cab with the help of his driver, although a little embarrassed because of her short appearance compared to the driver, but stood at the cab window to watch the scene.

Culdee climbed higher on *Devil’s Back* as Stephanie watched, amazed at how careful the steam locomotive was as she looked at the slightly slanted world.

A faint slip of the rails started Stephanie and the group, but Culdee continued climbing *Devil’s Back*.

“Sorry about that,” Culdee apologized after slipping a second time. “The rails here can be a little slippery.”

“It’s fine,” Stephanie softly smiled. “It was slippery on the mountains whenever I go hiking too.”

“Really?” Culdee curiously perked. “You go hiking at a young age?”

“Yes,” Stephanie nodded with a smile. “Pretty fun finding items and learning about the wildlife with nature.”

She paused a little as she placed an arm underneath her chin with a hand on her cheek, “Though it is irritating how people don’t understand the point of enjoying nature.”

Culdee felt confused about what she meant but kept the question to himself as he finally reached the top of *Devil’s Back*, reaching a station called ‘*Culdee Fell Summit Station*.’

Once reaching the top, Culdee stopped to allow Stephanie and her two passengers, Lucy and Notches, to step off.

“Okay,” Lucy spoke, surprising Culdee when Lucy started talking as she stood next to Culdee, looking at her key as the gemstone was faintly glowing red. “We’re almost near the gate.”

Stephanie nodded as she turned to Culdee, saying, “Thank you for the ride, Mr. Culdee. We’ll come back for the one back down.”

Culdee stayed silent after Stephanie thanked him, watching as Stephanie walked off with Notches and Lucy, still flabbergasted at how a doll could *talk*.

Meanwhile, Stephanie kept in check with Lucy as she walked further into *Devil’s Back*, keeping an eye out for Nightmares while looking at Lucy.

The path through *Devil’s Back* was a little rocky, but Stephanie did not mind it as she continued walking through the mountains.

“Almost.” Stephanie walked next to a large mountain rock wall before the gemstone turned into a diamond with a gold body and exclaimed. “Here!”

Stephanie stopped after Lucy exclaimed and looked up at the rock wall, looking faintly confused but seeing if there were clues that it *was* the gate.

Suddenly, Stephanie’s Zodiac Pocket Watch from the pocket of her blue jeans started glowing, which perked Stephanie’s attention, reaching into her pocket to take the Zodiac Pocket Watch out and looked at it.

After taking out the Zodiac Pocket Watch, the Zodiac Pocket Watch’s flower glowed a little brighter, and symbols appeared on the rock wall, revealing a gigantic Native American falcon with a Chinese rat and a ram.

“This must be the gate!” Stephanie perked as she placed the Zodiac Pocket Watch away.

“That’s where I come in,” Lucy grinned as Stephanie lifted a hand to her.

Lucy stepped into Stephanie’s palm, and she held her to the door as a keyhole magically opened, and Lucy grinned.

She inserted the key into the keyhole and turned it, unlocking the gate, and the symbols glowed brightly before disappearing as a long, thin line going down the middle.

Then, two rock doors opened, revealing an empty but dark hallway, and Lucy transformed her key back into a bracelet as Stephanie looked down at her with a silent confused, and worried expression.

“You can step in.” Lucy nodded as she put her bracelet on.

Stephanie silently nodded and placed Lucy on her shoulder before carefully stepping into the darkness as the rock doors behind her back closed, sealing them inside.