

The day went by so fast as Stephanie sat in her spare room after finishing creating Dust and filling the Dust Whistle with the ones she had collected.

She was right when she told Dowager Hatt about the Copper Dust as the symbol for copper, and each container from Gold to Silver was filled.

After seeing that it was all full, Stephanie reminded herself that she needed to collect more once she had time to return to *Muffler Mountain*.

She spent time with the rest of the Hatt family, with Notches and Lucy, getting to know Sir Topham Hatt and Sir Lowham Hatt's grandkids, Stephen and Bridget Hatt, and their mother, Saralee Hatt.

They were curious after seeing Stephanie's pointed ears and blue hair, as Stephanie was on her best behavior, but they liked her difference from them.

And to Stephanie's confusion at their words of curiosity and compliments, she thanked them for their praise.

At the very least, it was strange for Stephanie to hear words of kindness from them and see how curious they were about her.

But Stephanie was very calm and allowed them to inspect her long hair and ears, seeing how they twitched from their fingers gently rubbing against them.

Stephen commented that they were like a horse's ears, which puzzled Stephanie, while Sir Topham Hatt was a little embarrassed.

But Stephanie thinks it is funny how her ears can do that, and she was somewhat startled when Bridget started to play with her long hair.

Thankfully, Bridget was careful and started to put them up in twin braids, showing off her ears and putting them in cute styles.

Stephanie felt like a *Barbie* doll to Bridget, but she allowed her to play with her long blue hair because they were very kind to her.

Dinner went well, too, and Stephanie added to the conversation with Dowager Hatt about her adventure with her, which Sir Topham Hatt asked about.

Shyly, Stephanie explained the Dust Whistle and its power, including the Copper Dust she had discovered during her trip to *Muffler Mountain*.

Dowager Hatt added her input whenever Stephanie paused to allow her to speak, complimenting her on how well she was going down the line and being very apologetic.

Stephanie's cheeks and the tips of her ears were so blue that it made her look like a *Smurf* because of all the compliments from the family, while Bridget and Stephen giggled at her blushing.

But Stephanie started to *like* the compliments and thanked Dowager Hatt for helping her when she was in her locomotive form, surprising Sir Topham Hatt.

Stephanie explained to Sir Topham Hatt and the others that the whistle does not only work on one person but also the user.

This curious audience listened as Stephanie told the Hatt family what she had discovered, even telling them that she had finally found an emerald to charge the Taurus Zodiac.

It worried Sir Topham Hatt and the others because she had not trained the rest of her abilities, but Dowager Hatt calmed her eldest son down with the assurance that Stephanie could practice no matter what.

It gave Stephanie some relief about cramming everything on her schedule over what to do and how to get accustomed to Sodor, but there were some lingering doubts.

Once dinner went by, Stephanie answered both Stephen and Bridget's questions about what *Shining Time* was like and Stephanie would respond, telling them how many shops had changed.

While there were new shops, the old ones stayed because of memories of the past, which all interested Stephen and Bridget.

Sir Topham Hatt walked up to Stephanie after talking to Stephen and Bridget about their time at Sodor, telling her she needed to speak to the adults privately.

She wishes to take Notches and Lucy with her, but Notches is currently busy talking with Gracie, Sir Topham Hatt's cat, and Lucy is talking with Dowager Hatt and Lady Hatt.

So Stephanie allowed them to talk with the others instead of carrying them around like toddlers.

Stephanie understood what he was saying and went to the spare room Sir Topham Hatt gave her, even though she was curious about what they were saying to each other.

But Stephanie did not want to stay around to listen to their conversation and entered her room, deciding to unwind from all these questions by writing them down.

Even though she did not have any journals, Stephanie decided to use the current items in the room but was glad that Dowager Hatt handed her the things she needed that were not there in the first place.

So Stephanie started writing down questions and reminders for herself on a spare piece of paper with bullet points after learning how to use the ink pen, which goes:

- *Ask Sir Topham Hatt if she could find a place to stay and if it was alright with him.*
 - *If such a thing is allowed on Sodor, Look at other ideas for living by yourself if that doesn't work.*
- *Explain to the others how she kept appearing as a steamie that you passed by earlier in the day.*
- *Find a way to get to the Zodiac Dimension to learn how to use powers.*
 - *And do not stay up all night trying to perfect an ability, either!*
- *Find somewhere you can get money.*
 - *I am still trying to figure that out. I don't want to get stuck in the limbo of working 24/7.*
- *Find the Taurus Zodiac to defeat it.*
- *After learning how to control the Zodiacs before running into danger and getting injured or killed.*
- *Get a diary to write down your adventures.*
 - *Get one that you can lock so you don't have anyone looking at what you have written or drawn.*
- *Get a map of Sodor to know where you are going and map out where you found the Dust Crystals.*
- *Get notebooks to write down what you discover and draw out what they are.*
- *Get some clues about Sodor by asking anyone about their experiences.*
- *Go back to Shining Time to find some missing people.*
 - *C. Junior (?)*
 - *Mr. C (?)*
- *Go to Ulfstead Castle to look at Sodor's history.*

- *Take a look at the Sodor Museum at Ulfstead Castle.*
- *Ask if there is a library around the castle.*
- *How dangerous is Sodor?*
 - *Am I in danger with all this?*
 - *How lethal is it?*
- *How long have Dust Crystals been in history?*
 - *Does anyone know what their powers are?*
 - *Who else discovered each of their powers?*
- *How many ghosts roam Sodor?*
- *How many people are missing on Sodor?*
- *Return to Muffler Mountain and look around for clues into what lies behind the mountain.*
- *Train yourself to use your steam locomotive form and refill yourself.*
- *What else lies underneath Sodor's history?*
- *Who is 'Avril'?*
- *Who is 'Mr. C'?*
- *Who was in that shed at Tidmouth?*
- *Who was the ghost I kept seeing?*

A sudden knock snapped Stephanie out of her writing engrossment, and she gasped out of startlement as she glanced over her shoulder at the door.

“Who is it?” Stephanie called over her shoulder.

No response.

Stephanie felt confused as she hopped off her chair after putting her papers in the desk's thin drawer and walked over, her bare feet walking across the carpet floor.

“Erm, Mr. Hatt?” Stephanie politely spoke. “Mrs. Hatt?” she paused and mumbled, “Wait, which Mrs. Hatt? Maybe I should call the other ‘Mrs. Dowager’ instead.”



She walked over to the door, paused a little, and listened to the knock, wondering who was behind the door, but she still had a nervous gut feeling.

‘That does not matter!’
Stephanie shook her head.
‘It’s just the Hatt family!’
There’s nothing to be afraid

of!’

But after taking a deep breath, Stephanie gripped the doorknob with her hand and slowly turned it, hearing her door unlock.

After Stephanie unlocked the door, she slowly opened it and peered through it, perking when she suddenly saw nothing but *darkness*.

Everything from the doorframe to the distance was entirely black; even the floor was black, and Stephanie could not tell if there was any ground.

Curiously, Stephanie moved a foot out and placed it outside the frame, landing on a solid floor as it felt cold underneath her feet.

Stephanie perked up after her foot touched something solid before looking into the distance, wondering what had happened.

“Hello?” Stephanie called as her voice echoed. “Is anyone out here?”

She stepped away from the doorframe and kept it open to know where to return, noticing no hallway, staircase, or pictures.

“Sir Topham Hatt?” Stephanie called, and she started to feel nervous as she walked through the darkened place in her long-sleeve shirt and comfortable, tight black pants with the ends drooping over her heels. “Mrs. Dowager Hatt? Mrs. Lady Hatt? Is anyone around here?”

There was no response to her question as she continued walking through the pitch-dark place, walking further away from the door as her bare feet made noises against the floor with a *clap*, *clap*, *clap*.

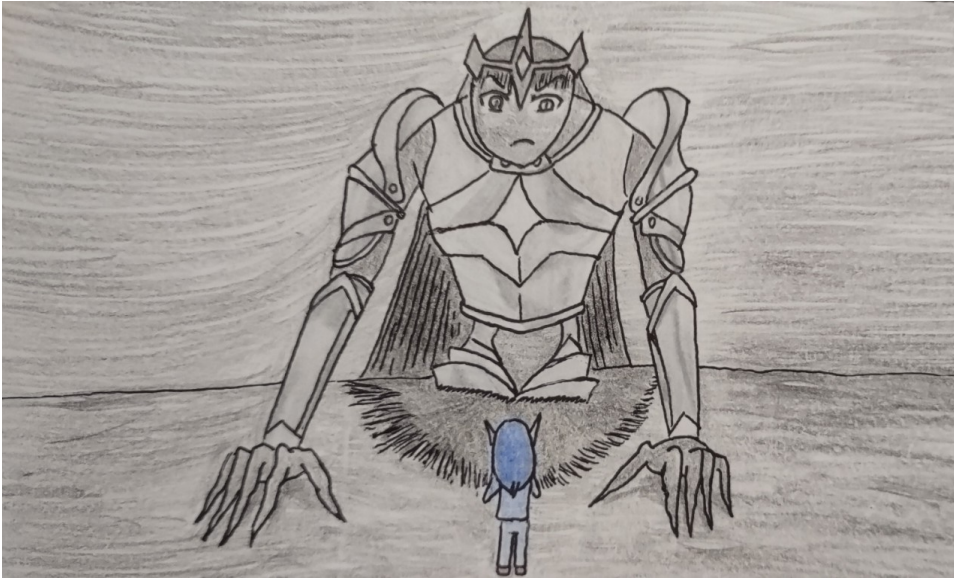
She suddenly had a bad feeling that someone was watching her, causing her to stop walking as she glanced around, seeing no one anywhere except for her.

“...Hello?” Stephanie nervously called.

Suddenly, something black and shadowy appeared behind Stephanie and slowly rose from the surface, towering over her at twenty feet before slowly forming into a shape.

Stephanie felt someone standing before her and instantly turned around, seeing a gigantic humanoid form appear behind her, blocking the way to the door.

Its skin was black, with sharp claws on each finger, long shadow-like hair that waved in the darkness, a crown on its head, gray armor, and a long pointed tail with a cape and a flowing sash with strange symbols.



Stephanie stared at the gigantic beast as it slowly took on its shape before two eyes appeared with white irises and pinprick pupils underneath the long jet-black hair.

And it was looking down at Stephanie with a frown.

Stephanie shrieked after seeing the gigantic being and

scrambled backward before the ground started moving.

She tumbled around, trying to keep her balance, but fell on her bottom instead as she stared at the gigantic being.

The monster-like creature knelt as its lower body sank back into the ground, staring at Stephanie, and she instantly froze while staring at its eyes as it placed its hands on the ground for support.

“P H x I R M A x N ?” the monster asked. “P H M R M X I M A x N < x M M I R x M ? H x P X I M A x N X M I
I I x M A X I M M I H I x I ?”

“I-I-!” Stephanie stammered with fear, petrified while staring at the gigantic irises.

The monster looked confused after hearing the two single letters coming from Stephanie’s voice and knelt a little closer, causing Stephanie to give a little “Meep!” as the eyes stared closer at her.

It then wrapped its hand around Stephanie’s upper body, and Stephanie shrieked when its hand wrapped around her before staying silent as her eyes clouded with pitch-black darkness that filled her eyes.

After her eyes were clouded with darkness, the monster's eyes turned from white to Stephanie's azure blue, staring down at her with its hand wrapped around her upper body but not suffocating her.

A few minutes passed, and the monster removed its hand from Stephanie's upper part of her body, her eyes returning to normal after a blink as it did the same.

"Hmm." Stephanie flinched when it spoke as it placed a clawed finger against its chin.

"Strange. You don't look like you came here to fight me."

"Of course not!" Stephanie exclaimed before looking confused. "Wait, how can you understand what I was saying?"

"Simple," it grinned, showing sharp teeth that made Stephanie nervous. ***"All I did was look into your mind and learn about what you learned. And I perhaps got too curious and discovered more than I could bargain for."***

It knelt further to Stephanie's height as its body sank into the ground, 'lying' its chin on the floor to stare at her curiously while Stephanie sat in front of its head.

"How can a small, young human like you learn all this knowledge?" It asked as its hands were near its chin. ***"It's impossible for a mortal to study all this at such a young age."***

"Well," Stephanie began, as she was slowly calming down but was on the edge of worrying about making it angry. "My grandpa taught me everything I needed to know, and I was great at learning from what they showed me and doing it in return."

She paused uncomfortably as she crossed her arms over her chest, almost hugging herself.

"But my foster parents wanted better out of me after seeing it," Stephanie explained. "So they put me into learning difficult things and learning from them. I kept struggling because they went through it fast, and," she shook her head. "No, I don't want to talk about it."

The monster cocked an eyebrow after Stephanie shook her head with a murmur before responding, changing the subject, "Ah, never mind about that! Who are you?"

“Right, right, right,” Stephanie nodded. “Um, I’m sorry for accidentally stepping into your dimension. All I did was hear someone knocking while I was writing something. So I went over to look and opened it to this world.”

Erebus glanced over his shoulder to see the open door, saying, jabbing a thumb over his shoulder, “*That door?*”

“Yes, that door!” Stephanie pointed as she instantly stood up. “I appreciate you not eating me and-”

“*Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, hold on, Dot.*” Stephanie flinched when Erebus’ clawed hand came into view and stopped, glancing up at him. “*As much as you are freaked out about this, you can’t just leave without me telling you something.*”

“Like what?” Stephanie asked as he removed his hand.

“*Well,*” Erebus began. “*First, you can’t leave the door open without closing it. You’ll let something dangerous out, like me, and have the world destroyed.*”

Stephanie’s stomach twisted nervously after Erebus explained it to her, realizing that if she had left that door open in a different dimension, it would lead to many disasters.

“*Also,*” Erebus added. “*Since I can look through some memories but not all of them, I can tell you needed to be somewhere to practice your Zodiac powers.*”

Stephanie flinched after Erebus explained, realizing he had somewhat seen some of her memories about her mythical items, and responded, “Ah, I appreciate your offer, but I don’t trust you.”

“*Hmm, true.*” Erebus nodded. “*But you still don’t know how to find a way to get the Zodiac Dimension.*”

‘Crap, I hate how he is right!’ Stephanie huffed to herself.

“Well, alright,” Stephanie sighed. “I suppose you know how to get to the Zodiac Dimension?”

“Hmm, somewhat.” Erebus nodded. ***“The common one is a special pentagram, the only way to get to the Zodiac Dimension. But that pentagram is only used for celestials to travel to their dimensions, and there aren’t any around here to help you.”***

“Wait,” Stephanie spoke. “Can the student ask some questions?”

“Yes,” Erebus nodded.

“Okay,” Stephanie nodded. “Who were the Celestials?”

“The Celestials are Aelius, the Celestial of the Sun,” Erebus explained. ***“Luna, the Celestial of the Moon, and Andromeda, the Celestial of the Stars.”***

“Just those three?” Stephanie asked.

“Yes,” Erebus nodded. ***“And all of them are in their dimensions, which is impossible for me to contact because I am stuck in the Shadow Dimension, which is too far.”***

“Ah,” Stephanie nodded. “Makes sense.”

“But,” Erebus smirked. ***“Your Zodiac Pocket Watch is another part of going to the Zodiac Dimension without having to draw a pentagram.”***

“Really?” Stephanie perked. “How?”

“If I am right,” Eberus spoke as he tapped his chin with his claw. ***“The Zodiac Pocket Watch has a secret compartment that will give you the key to unlocking the gate to the dimension.”***

“Like the one Lucy has?” Stephanie asked.

Erebus looked down at Stephanie and exclaimed, ***“Really?! So you have the Gateskeeper with you and didn’t tell me?!”***

“Sorry!” Stephanie exclaimed. “I have the Gateskeeper with me, but she’s busy talking with the adults. Mostly because I was listening to you differently instead of using Lucy.”

Erebus rolled his eyes after Stephanie apologized and said, ***“Well, alright, fair point. But I didn’t know you had the Gateskeeper with you since I didn’t see who she was through your memories. So what else do you have?”***

“Well,” Stephanie began as she pushed her sleeve down, showing the bracelet around her wrist. “I’ve got a magic staff around my wrist.”

“**Show me.**” Stephanie summoned the bracelet from her wrist, which transformed into a staff, surprising Erebus as she showed it sideways without pointing the gemstone at him. “**Where did you get this?**”

“From the Zodiac Dimension,” Stephanie explained. “The pool that allows them to see the world to give birthdates and Zodiacs was darkened, and I felt it was *calling* to me.”

“**It called you?**” Erebus asked as he listened.

“Yes,” Stephanie nodded. “And I touched the pool’s surface, and it turned back to normal, gifting me this staff.”

Erebus stared at the staff curiously, knowing he had seen that somewhere before but could not put his clawed finger on it.

“And this Dust Whistle,” Stephanie explained, showing the whistle around her neck.

“**Strange,**” Erebus remarked as Stephanie put the necklace away. “**Maybe that pool sees potential in you and gives you the staff. But I think it is best to be careful when showing them off. Someone will steal all your items and use them against you.**”

“Meaning I need to be careful with who to trust?” Stephanie asked as her staff transformed into her bracelet, and she put it back on.

“**Exactly.**” Erebus nodded. “**Sodor might be a magical place where everything is perfect, but not all people are trustworthy and are dangerous.**”

Stephanie glanced away from Erebus after he explained it to her, starting to feel suspicious about Sodor and the people.

Are they like the people she meets?

“**Now, back to the Zodiac Dimension,**” Erebus spoke as Stephanie glanced up at him. “**Lucy was thought to be the only one who could get to the Zodiac Dimension, right?**” Stephanie nodded.

“Right. I might have repeated this before, but the writer didn’t specify.” Stephanie gives a confused look at the reader. ***“A secret compartment on the pocket watch will give you an entrance to the dimension. I don’t know if it’s right, but that’s another way to get there.”***

“Okay,” Stephanie nodded. “Thank you for helping me, Mr. Erebus.”

“You’re welcome, Dot.” Erebus nodded as Stephanie approached the open door. ***“Also, remember to close the door whenever you enter a different dimension. Don’t let anything out, alright?”***

“Right,” Stephanie nodded as she stepped into her room. “Thank you so much!”

With that, Stephanie closed the door as Erebus sighed, muttering, ***“She’s too sweet.”***